

if successful, would cut the only escape route for the wheels and guns of all their forces in the north. The Commandos were heavily shelled and continuously counter-attacked throughout the next 48 hours. They suffered considerable casualties, yet yielded no ground. On the night of 23rd-24th January, 51 Brigade of 25 Indian Division landed, and one battalion pushed through the beachhead. The enemy resisted fiercely from extremely strong bunker position, and continued to build up against us.

175. Starting on the 25th January, a three days' air offensive was arranged to soften up the main hill features commanding the road. The bombing was well concentrated and accurate, and 51 Brigade attacked on the 28th. One battalion reached and captured an under-feature near Kangaw Village, but was later called off by the Brigade Commander as the feature proved to be completely dominated from the east. Another battalion secured a precarious footing on a small feature further east, and held on despite strong counter-attacks. On the 28th January alone, the enemy fired about 1,000 shells into our restricted positions, using guns of all calibres, including 150-millimetre and 25-pounders, the latter presumably captured in Malaya. Considerable casualties were inevitable, including some divisional troops.

176. It had become evident that the enemy defences protecting the road were stronger than originally anticipated. It was, therefore, decided to abandon further attacks on the hill features north of the road and concentrate our forces on the right flank, where, by securing Kangaw Village and the hills to the east of it, the object of effectively blocking the road could be achieved. A strong enemy counter-attack on the night 28th-29th January was repulsed with loss. On the 29th, we drove the enemy from Kangaw Village and captured the small hill which dominated it, and from which any movement on the road could be prevented by fire. On the early morning of the 31st January, the Japanese launched the most desperate attack of the whole Arakan campaign, but gained no ground and received severe punishment. It was now eleven days since the initial assault on Kangaw had been made, a period in which our field, medium and Naval artillery, together with the Thunderbolts and Spitfires of the R.A.F. had hammered the enemy without intermission. The capture of Kangaw and of an important hill to the east of it which had followed on the 1st February, marked the turning point of the battle; the enemy's escape road from Myohaung and Minbya had been finally cut. 51 Brigade then secured a dominating position north of the road, which effectively prevented any possibility of a break-through from the north. As will be seen later, 82 (West African) Division had already begun their task of driving the Japanese up against this block. This result could not have been achieved without the work of Naval craft and beach parties, which continued to land supplies under heavy fire.

177. I have dealt with this action in some detail both in justice to the gallantry and endurance displayed by our troops and in view of its strategical importance. It provides a striking illustration of the principle, that, if you wish to bring a retreating enemy to battle, you must hit him where he is most sensitive. This

we did, by cutting the only road escape route for all the Japanese forces to the north. In their struggle to regain this vital area the Japanese threw in three regiments, as well as Divisional and Army troops. They suffered at least 2,000 killed and lost 16 guns, 15 large motor craft, and quantities of other equipment. Against this, our casualties were under 600 and the morale of 3 Commando Brigade and 51 Indian Infantry Brigade, after six days of the most gruelling hand-to-hand fighting, was very high.

178. On the 1st February, part of 74 Brigade crossed the Min Chaung from the neck of the Myebon Peninsula, and, after establishing themselves on the east bank, launched operations against the Japanese positions two miles north-west of Kangaw. Faced with encirclement by the rapid advance south of 82 (West African) Division (which I will shortly describe), the enemy began to withdraw into the mountains to the east. By the 8th February, the leading brigade (the 2nd) of 82 (West African) Division was in contact with the enemy nine miles north of Kangaw, but the Japanese continued to resist as the jaws of the trap closed. On the 9th, 2 (West African) Brigade passed under command of 25 Indian Division and a series of co-ordinated attacks were made on successive enemy positions. It took another nine days before the whole area was cleared. The toll of captured guns rose to 26, but the enemy threw all their remaining artillery into the chaungs, and gun muzzles protruding from the water bore silent witness to the magnitude of the Japanese disaster.

179. 51 Brigade of 25 Indian Division and 3 Commando Brigade were now withdrawn from operations, as part of the phasing-out programme of 15 Indian Corps, which was to take place before the monsoon. 53 Brigade, after completing its task of clearing the chaung country between Akyab and Minbya, had already been concentrated in Myebon. Thus 25 Indian Division was left with two brigades in the area, the 53rd and the 74th.

180. While operations to close the Japanese escape road at Kangaw were in progress, the West Africans were engaged in driving the enemy in the Kaladan Valley south on to the Kangaw block. It will be recalled (*vide* paragraphs 157 and 158) that by the 10th January, 81 (West African) Division was fighting in the hills about 15 miles north-north-west of Myohaung, with 4 Brigade of 82 (West African) Division under command, at Apaukwa, which lies on the Kaladan River 16 miles north-west of Myohaung. Care had to be taken at this stage to avoid forcing the enemy into making a too early withdrawal before the trap was closed by 25 Indian Division in his rear. The Kangaw landing was timed for the 22nd January, and it was therefore decided to clear Myohaung by a determined drive on the 25th.

181. Operations southwards towards Myohaung began on the 15th January. By the 19th, Teinnyo had been occupied, and our forward troops were established six miles north of Myohaung. Opposition continued stubborn for the next four days, particularly east of the road, and there were no signs of the enemy resistance weakening, though we continued to press forward. Early on the 23rd January,