

had to be delayed until the enemy attack had been defeated. This took some four weeks, but when it was finished the attack on our original objectives was continued.

29. This Japanese counter-attack merits attention, both on account of the boldness of its conception and also on account of the firm stand made by 7 Indian Division which was surrounded and attacked from all sides. The Division was supplied by air and thus did not have to retire when its lines of communication were cut. This was the main cause of the defeat of the Japanese counter-attack.

30. In the last week of January, identification of a fresh enemy regiment was obtained. On the 1st February, documents ordering the J.I.Fs. (Indians fighting for the Japanese) to concentrate east of the Mayu Range at once for an operation were captured. I was in Fourteenth Army area at that time and discussed the position with the Army Commander. We concluded that these moves indicated a counter-attack by the Japanese, but were unable to decide upon the exact form it was likely to take, though it seemed probable that an attempt to outflank 15 Indian Corps was the most probable. We agreed that if 5 and 7 Indian Divisions held their positions against a frontal attack, while at the same time preparing an all-round defence to meet attacks from the flank or rear, it would be possible to destroy any Japanese outflanking detachment with the reserves. I placed 36 British Division, which had arrived at Chittagong for another operation, at General Slim's disposal and he ordered one brigade of this Division, together with 26 Indian Division, which was in Fourteenth Army reserve in the Comilla area, to move south at once. He ordered all formations in the forward areas to hold their ground. He made arrangements for the packing for air transport of three days' rations, ammunition and medical stores and with the R.A.F. for their delivery by air to 7 Indian Division, if called for. These preparations had a far-reaching effect on the battle.

31. When the enemy's blow actually fell on the 4th February, it so happened that preparations for transferring our offensive from the west to the east of the Mayu Range were in progress. One infantry brigade of 5 Indian Division had moved over to the east of the range to free one brigade of 7 Indian Division for this operation; thus 15 Indian Corps had available at that time a reserve infantry brigade and a tank regiment east of the range, which was the flank menaced by the Japanese threat.

32. The Japanese plan, captured early in the battle, was to pass through and round the left flank of 7 Indian Division, take Taung Bazaar from the east, and cut the Bawli Bazaar—Razabil road. This move completed, the Japanese intended to attack 7 Indian Division from the rear and drive it through the Ngakyedauk Pass. This would isolate 5 Indian Division which would in turn be mopped up and the remnants driven over the Naf River. So certain were they of success, that the Tokyo radio announced victories at the appropriate times, according to their pre-arranged timetable, regardless that this time-table bore no relation to the facts.

33. The attack against 7 Indian Division began with the appearance in rear of its left flank

at Taung Bazaar of an enemy regiment, with elements from two others, which had passed partly round our left flank through the jungle and partly through the positions held by 114 Brigade. Almost simultaneously, strong frontal attacks were made by two regiments in the area north and north-west of Buthidaung. A brigade of 7 Indian Division, which had been relieved by 5 Indian Division, but had not yet been committed to their new task, was sent north to check the enemy advance southwards from Taung Bazaar. In this it partially succeeded, but, owing to the closeness of the country and the enemy's numerical superiority, was outflanked by a party of the enemy which overran the Headquarters of 7 Indian Division in the early morning. The Divisional Commander, however, regained control of the operations that evening. Brigades and divisional troops had been ordered to prepare positions capable of all round defence as soon as the enemy's presence in Taung Bazaar had been discovered. 9, 33 and 114 Brigades, therefore, dug in on their positions, while another defended area which contained Divisional H.Q., part of 89 Brigade and Divisional Troops was hastily prepared in the area of Awlanbyin and Sinzweya. These areas were called "boxes" during the battle.

34. The enemy cut the Ngakyedauk Pass and closely invested these boxes. One Japanese battalion also crossed by the Maunghnama Pass further north and began to harass 15 Indian Corps Headquarters and the rear of 5 Indian Division from a position in the hills on the east of the road. But they made no further headway, although on the 9th February the situation in 7 Indian Division's defended area (Sinzweya) was difficult and continued so for several days. 26 Indian Division, which had been moved up to Bawli Bazaar by 15 Indian Corps, now began to make its presence felt, but it was evident that its operations, in conjunction with those of 5 Indian Division from the west to clear the Ngakyedauk Pass, would take time.

35. Supply dropping to the various boxes began on the 9th February, and an airstrip for the evacuation of casualties was ready by the 12th at Taung Bazaar, which had by then been cleared of the enemy.

36. In spite of continuous attacks, supported by the fire of 150-mm guns and by fighter bombers, the enemy were unable to reduce any of our strongholds. On the 12th the Commander, 7 Indian Division issued orders to take the offensive to prevent any further hostile infiltration and the escape of any enemy already in his rear. The enemy was now "in the bag" and it was the task of 7 Indian Division to keep him there until destroyed.

37. Severe fighting continued with the Japanese trying to stem the advance of 26 and 5 Indian Divisions and overcome what their orders described as "the hysterical defence" of the areas of 7 Indian Division. Hysterical or not, it may one day be called historical as it was the first successful reply to Japanese large-scale infiltration tactics in jungle country. The bitterness of the fighting is illustrated by the remark made by a veteran of Dunkirk, who spent two days on the beaches; he stated he would willingly have spent a fortnight at Dunkirk if he could have been let off with two days in 7 Indian Division's defended area.