

however, a disquieting report was received indicating that the enemy had grasped the implication of the Kangaw landing the previous day and was about to evacuate at least part of his forces *via* the Lemro River. It had always been intended that, as soon as Myohaung had fallen, 82 (West African) Division should relieve 81 (West African) Division and effect a crossing of the Lemro River. It was not possible immediately to cut the enemy's projected escape route east of Myohaung from the north, since he held strong positions protecting it, but it was feasible to attack him from the north and the west.

182. Urgent orders were issued to 1 Brigade of 82 (West African) Division, which was now near Kanzauk (on the Yo River), to move south to Yotarok (12 miles south of Apaukwa) and then to advance on Myohaung and the road Myohaung—Minbya, from the west. Simultaneously, 2 (West African) Brigade, engaged in protecting the Forward Maintenance Area at Buthidaung, was directed to hand over this responsibility to 22 (East African) Brigade and to rejoin 82 (West African) Division in the Myohaung area. Both these Brigades moved with great speed, 1 Brigade arriving to take part in the final phase of the Myohaung operations on the 24th January, on which date 81 (West African) Division completed the occupation of all the commanding features north of the town and east of the Lemro River, while 82 (West African) Division (1 Brigade) seized a dominating feature five miles south of the town, after an air attack. What remained of the garrison disintegrated during the night, and the ancient capital of Arakan was entered on the 25th.

183. Major-General F. J. Loftus-Tottenham and 81 (West African) Division had thus completed their task. The Division was now withdrawn to Chiringa, north of Cox's Bazaar, where it was concentrated until its final withdrawal. For more than four months the Division had advanced through most difficult country, against continuous opposition. The enemy had been obliged to weaken his Mayu and Akyab garrisons in an attempt to stem this threat to his Minbya L. of C., which served all his forces in Arakan. With no land lines of communication, and little physical contact with the outside world, 81 (West African) Division (which it must be remembered only consisted of two brigades), had out-maneuvred and out-fought parts of the Japanese 54th and 55th Divisions and cleared the greater part of the Kaladan Valley.

184. 82 (West African) Division (Major-General H. C. Stockwell, who had succeeded Major-General Bruce on the 12th January) took up the advance south of Minbya encountering only slight opposition. The situation on the 30th January was that one battalion of 53 Brigade (25 Indian Division) was operating west of the town, the remainder of 53 Brigade having been transferred to Myebon. 82 (West African) Division had its Divisional Reconnaissance Regiment and its Anti-Tank Regiment west of the Lemro River, and these were investing the town from the north. The rest of the Division, east of the river, was advancing on Hpontha. But the garrison at Minbya did not wait to be assaulted. The major portion withdrew south on the night of the 30th,

the remainder stayed till the 2nd February—by this date the road south had been cut, but they managed to escape to the south-west.

185. Minbya was occupied on the 2nd February. Forward elements of 82 (West African) Division were now in contact with the enemy from Zibingyi to Hpontha, 20 miles north of Kangaw. Here the Divisional Commander divided his forces, pushing south from Hpontha on the 3rd February. 1 and 4 Brigades were directed on Kyweguseik in order to intercept the Japanese forces withdrawing from Kangaw. I will deal later with this phase of the operations. 2 (West African) Brigade pushed south on to the Kangaw block, overcoming considerable opposition. As already recorded, they passed under command of 25 Indian Division on the 9th February, when within nine miles of Kangaw. By the 14th February, they were driving the enemy from the high ground north of the road; and the junction of the two geographical divisions of the Arakan campaign had been effected.

#### SECTION XI (paras. 186-211). THE EXTENSION OF THE ARAKAN CAMPAIGN

Reasons for the extension of the campaign: The capture of Ramree and Cheduba: New instructions to the Commander, 15 Indian Corps: The new plan and its subsequent modification: The withdrawal of 25 Indian Division: The Letpan landing: Occupation of Taungup.

186. After the capture of Akyab and Myebon, we had reached our original objectives. The clearing of the Minbya area was only a matter of time. As was described in the last section, we were exploiting these gains to the maximum, but, nevertheless, the campaign as originally planned was virtually completed. A new situation, however, had been created by the speedy and successful advance of Fourteenth Army in Central Burma. A decisive victory in the Mandalay Plain would make the prize of Rangoon a possibility. Everything had to be concentrated on helping on Fourteenth Army. Other operations in Burma became subsidiary. The first and major way in which Fourteenth Army could be helped was by directing all possible means towards increasing the supply tonnage which they received, and since all other supply lines were working to fullest capacity, this meant increasing their supply by air. By their advance, Fourteenth Army had left their main air supply bases, which were in the Imphal and Chittagong areas, far behind. By the establishment of new and closer supply bases, giving a shorter journey, the tonnage could be materially increased for the same number of available aircraft. Akyab, and Ramree Island to the south were the best available places for these new air supply bases, as, in addition to giving a shorter flying distance, they were reasonably easy of access by sea. There were, however, a number of difficulties, which will be discussed later. The first task of 15 Indian Corps was therefore to develop to the maximum these air supply bases. The second way in which 15 Indian Corps could assist Fourteenth Army was by containing the maximum number of troops in the coastal sector, including those further south in the Taungup, Sandoway and Bassein areas. This meant continued offensive action. At the same time the original object—the withdrawal of