

281. It was during this period that the Burma National Army, now renamed the Patriot Burma Forces, began to take an active part in the operations. The Japanese had raised the Burma Defence Army of some 3,000 men, and this force had come over to our side in March. From this date they fought the Japanese in co-operation with our troops, particularly our Force 136, and the degree of co-operation improved steadily as time went on, reaching its climax in the battle of the break-out in July. During May these organizations operated courageously and successfully in a guerilla rôle east of the Sittang. They were particularly successful when they worked in co-operation with 221 Group, R.A.F., attacking enemy headquarters, dumps and stores, and damaging communications. Their efforts were by no means to be ignored, and the results attained were a fit reward for the arduous conditions under which they lived and in which the R.A.F. pilots flew. Their presence compelled the Japanese to abandon their attempts to escape in small parties, and forced them to adopt the alternative of a concentrated break-out, which ended so disastrously for them.

#### SECTION XVII (paras. 282-291) THE FINAL BATTLES

Reorganization of the Allied Land Forces: Formation and tasks of Twelfth Army: Operations in the Irrawaddy Valley: The Lower Sittang Battle: The Battle of the Break-out: Conclusion of operations.

282. Continuing the narrative of events, it was towards the end of May that it became necessary to reorganize my forces in order to carry out the operations planned to take place against Malaya. These plans I will describe in a later section, so here it is but necessary to state that they involved the removal to India of Headquarters, Fourteenth Army, and certain formations and units. In India General Slim was to be responsible for the planning and preparations for the new venture, while Burma became the responsibility of a new Army—Twelfth Army, under the command of General Stopford.

283. On the formation of Twelfth Army (28th May, 1945), 33 Corps ceased to exist. The formations allotted to Twelfth Army were (by the 2nd June, 1945) 4 Corps (consisting of 5, 17 and 19 Indian Divisions), 7 and 20 Indian Divisions, 82 (West African) Division, 255 Indian Tank Brigade, 6 British and 268 Indian Infantry Brigades, 26 Indian Division and 254 Indian Tank Brigade were in the process of moving back to India, but the guerilla forces mentioned in paragraph 281 remained to operate under Twelfth Army. To deal with internal security, 505 District and No. 1 Area were formed, with their Headquarters at Meiktila and Rangoon respectively. Besides administrative units, they had at their disposal a total of eighteen infantry battalions.

284. My directions to General Stopford were to complete the destruction of the Japanese forces remaining west of the Sittang, and to liberate that part of Burma (including the Tenasserim Civil Division) which Japanese forces still occupied. He was also charged with the introduction of the Civil Affairs Ser-

vice (Burma) into the country, the maintenance of law and order, and the re-formation of the Burma Army.

285. In order to carry out my orders, General Stopford instructed 4 Corps (disposed between the Sittang and the Pegu Yomas) to block any attempts the Japanese might make to break out of the Yomas, to advance along the Taunggyi road and the Mawchi road, and to maintain a brigade opposite the Sittang crossing near Mokpalin. Meanwhile 7 Indian Division (with 268 Indian Infantry Brigade under command) were to clear the Allanmyo—Kama—Prome area of Japanese stragglers, and operate with offensive patrols into the Pegu Yomas from the west. 20 Indian Division were to act likewise in the area to the south of the Yomas, and 6 Infantry Brigade and 255 Indian Tank Brigade were held in reserve in Rangoon, with the task of forming a mobile column in the event of an enemy thrust towards Rangoon, and in addition to operate water patrols in conjunction with the Navy in the Irrawaddy Delta.

286. The operations under control of 7 Indian Division in the Irrawaddy Valley around Allanmyo proceeded as planned, and many Japanese raiding and foraging parties were destroyed. Patrols probed the Pegu Yomas and met increasing resistance, until by mid-June it was apparent that the valley was clear and that the Japanese in the Pegu Yomas were preparing an attempt to break out eastwards through 4 Corps' area. Of this Corps, 5 Indian Division was about to leave to join Fourteenth Army in India, and therefore 7 Indian Division was switched to 4 Corps, leaving 268 Indian Brigade, now joined by 22 (East African) Brigade, in the Irrawaddy Valley.

287. The relief of 5 Indian Division in the area between Pegu and the Sittang by 7 Indian Division coincided with a counter-attack by elements of 18 and 53 Japanese Divisions across the Sittang from Mokpalin. This was a determined drive towards Pegu, designed to assist the Japanese in the Southern Pegu Yomas to break out eastwards by pinning down 7 Indian Division. The country in which the battle was fought was one large lake, overlooked by the Japanese artillery position in the hills east of the Sittang. Conditions were such that at times it was impossible to use the Gurkha battalions owing to the depth of water on the "land" over which they were to operate. Our lack of artillery was made good by the magnificent efforts of the R.A.F., and 7 Indian Division was able to stem the attack. A battalion (4/8 Gurkha Rifles) was at one time surrounded at the end of a peninsula, but fought its way out through the Japanese lines, and by the end of July the situation was restored to what it had been before the Japanese attack. Owing to lack of co-ordination the Japanese efforts did not assist their comrades in the Pegu Yomas, and resulted in their sustaining casualties much larger than those of 7 Indian Division.

288. Operations on the Mawchi road continued throughout June and July. 19 Indian Division made slow but steady progress despite Japanese resistance, and dreadful climatic and topographical difficulties. On the Taunggyi road the Japanese resistance was less, and by the 25th July Taunggyi itself was in our hands.