

dates by bombing and cannon fire proving most helpful.

85. Kohima was relieved by 6 Brigade of 2 British Division on the 20th April. This Division had hard fighting before it was able to break through the defences which the enemy held astride the Dimapur—Kohima road and gain touch with the garrison which by that time had been driven on to one small hill called Summer Hill in the centre of the area.

86. I have dealt with this comparatively small operation in some detail, not only in justice to a gallant defence, but because the holding of Kohima was of great importance, and its successful defence proved to be the turning point in the campaign.

The Relief of Imphal.

87. H.Q. 33 Corps reached Dimapur on the 8th April. The general outline of the Commander's plan was as follows:—

(a) Cover the Manipur Road base.

(b) Capture Kohima area as a starting point for offensive operations.

(c) Operate offensively on the general axis of the Dimapur—Imphal road, as soon as the concentration of his forces permitted.

88. The Japanese held the Kohima area in strength except for Summer Hill. Their strongpoints were nearly, although as it proved not quite, inaccessible to our tanks: but Kohima was cleared of the enemy by the 2nd June by 2 British and 7 Indian Divisions, after some weeks of severe hand-to-hand fighting in which the Japanese lost heavily. Our casualties were not light. By the 6th June, we had captured the Aradura Spur, which covered the road some two miles south of Kohima.

89. While these operations were in progress, columns of 23 Long-Range Penetration Brigade of Special Force were clearing the country north-east and east of Kohima, and moving southwards by the jungle tracks on Jessami.

90. The capture of Kohima and the clearing of the difficult and hilly country which lies immediately to the east and south of it, marked the first step in our counter-offensive. The Japanese offensive against our base at Manipur Road had been driven back with very heavy losses to the enemy, and the threat to our road and rail communications in North-East Assam had been removed. There remained the urgent task of re-opening the road to Imphal.

91. Our dispositions at this time were:—

268 Indian Lorried Infantry Brigade (33 Corps): Holding Kohima.

23 Long-Range Penetration Brigade: Clearing Jessami area and moving southwards parallel to the Kohima—Imphal road.

2 British Division: Advancing south down the Imphal road from Kohima in pursuit of the retreating enemy.

7 Indian Division: Less 89 Brigade (still under 4 Corps), but with 161 Brigade (5 Indian Division) under command, operating on the left flank of 2 British Division.

92. The advance south from the Aradura Spur entailed severe fighting and our progress, especially that of our tanks, was hindered by

minefields covered by Japanese artillery; but, by the 21st June, the leading elements of 2 British Division had reached Milestone 102. As forward troops of 5 Indian Division from 4 Corps at this time were in the vicinity of Milestone 111, the gap between the two Corps had been reduced to nine miles.

93. 7 Indian Division, which had been operating through very difficult country east of the road, had naturally been unable to keep level with 2 British Division astride the road; but they had contributed greatly to its advance by capturing several enemy positions on the Japanese lines of communication leading east from the Imphal road, and had thus compelled the enemy to retire.

23 Long-Range Penetration Brigade operating further east, wide on the left flank of 7 Indian Division, caused further interference with the enemy's communications by cutting the Kharasom—Ukhrul track and other tracks to the southward.

94. At about 1245 hours on the 22nd June, 2 British and 5 Indian Divisions met at Milestone 109 from Dimapur (twenty-nine miles from Imphal) and the road to Imphal was open. 31 Japanese Division, which had been allotted the task of capturing Kohima and the base at Dimapur, had been severely defeated, and was shortly to meet with virtual annihilation.

95. I think the somewhat confused fighting may be more easily followed if I here briefly summarise the phases of the battle for the Imphal Plain. The main stages were:—

(a) The fighting withdrawal of 17 Indian Light Division and 20 Indian Division.

(b) The Japanese attack on Kohima.

(c) The rearguard action by 50 Indian Parachute Brigade from Ukhrul, and the making of a defensive position north-east of Imphal by 5 Indian Division.

(d) The further withdrawal by 20 Indian Division to shorten the southern front and thus enable troops to be released for the attack on 15 Japanese Division north-east of Imphal.

(e) The transfer of effort to the south to deal with 33 Japanese Division, and thus to clear the threat to Imphal from that quarter before launching a major offensive northwards, in co-ordination with the drive south by 33 Corps, to clear the Imphal—Kohima road.

(f) The operations to open the road, combined with the subsidiary operations to capture Ukhrul, which was the vital point on the lines of communication of 15 and 31 Japanese Divisions.

96. The elimination of the threat to our lines of communication in North-East Assam and the opening of the road from Kohima to Imphal ended a definite phase of the campaign. 31 Japanese Division had been so roughly handled that it had practically lost all fighting value. Similarly, the offensive value of the enemy's 15 and 33 Divisions had been greatly reduced by the very heavy losses they had incurred. A conservative estimate of the enemy's casualties in killed alone amounted to 13,500, which excluded losses by our air action. To this, of course, must be added their wounded.