

such a move would be feasible, and, on the 18th November, 4 Corps were allowed to direct the whole of 19 Indian Division, which had moved forward from Imphal to the Tamu—Sittaung area, on to Pinlebu. In addition to reconnoitring routes east of this place, 19 Indian Division was given the task of discovering whether the roads from Pinlebu southwards could be opened for a further overland advance. By this means, coupled with the operations of 33 Corps, the possibility of completing Phase II of Capital without airborne operations was to be investigated. The two leading brigades of 19 Indian Division began to cross the Chindwin at Sittaung and Thaungdut in the third week of November and, by the end of the month, had occupied Nanbon and Paungbyin against minor opposition.

Meanwhile, in the middle of November, 4 Corps took over 268 Indian Brigade—an independent formation composed of five battalions—from 33 Corps. The leading elements of this Brigade were, at this time, disposed on the east bank of the Chindwin, opposite Sittaung. 7 Indian Division (Major-General F. W. Messervy) which was also to form part of 4 Corps, was still resting in the Kohima area. It was not to be committed across the Chindwin, as, at this period, it was expected it might be required later to be flown into the Shwebo area as a reinforcement.

In Northern Combat Area Command, 36 British Division (Major-General F. W. Festing) on the 30th November captured Pinwe, six miles north of the important railway junction of Naba, after the village had been fiercely defended by the enemy for over two weeks. The Japanese left behind many dead and much equipment. 38 Chinese Division had occupied Myothit, 16 miles north-east of Bhamo, and pushing on had encircled Bhamo itself and the air-strip east of the town, despite strong enemy counter-attacks. Other Chinese troops were advancing down the Bhamo-Namhkam and Bhamo-Mongmit roads.

24. Bearing in mind the undoubted fighting qualities of the Japanese soldier, and the fact that the enemy was operating on interior lines, his strength of ten and two-third divisions (with auxiliary troops) appeared formidable. The question was how much of this force could be concentrated against Fourteenth Army, or, in other words, how many divisions we could force the enemy to employ against Northern Combat Area Command and in Arakan, in order to weaken this concentration.

Northern Combat Area Command comprised 5332 ("Mars") Brigade, which was the equivalent of an American light division, and five Chinese divisions. The latter had little administrative tail, as the Americans provided much of the administration, and were smaller than Indian divisions. They also varied a good deal in their state of training. While it was unlikely that the Japanese could be induced to send more troops to this front, provided that the pressure by Northern Combat Area Command did not weaken, they might at least be expected not to withdraw any substantial force from it. There were two enemy divisions in the coastal sector, including Bassein. It was hoped that, in spite of the advantages of terrain and communications which the Japanese defence enjoyed, they would not be able to

reduce this force by more than a regiment or two. In the south of Burma, our deception schemes were framed with the object of tying down the garrison there, which amounted to rather less than two divisions.

Thus I hoped that Fourteenth Army might not be opposed by a force greater than five Japanese divisions, one independent mixed brigade, a tank regiment and approximately 50,000 L. of C. and auxiliary troops.

25. The Commander, Fourteenth Army, had at his disposal six and two-third divisions (2 British Division, 5, 7, 17, 19 and 20 Indian Divisions), 268 Indian Brigade, 28 (East African) Brigade, and two Indian tank brigades (254th and 255th). But our transportation resources, air and road, were limited and it appeared impossible to maintain more than four and two-third divisions and two tank brigades beyond the Chindwin.

To launch an offensive, across a great river (the Chindwin) and with precarious communications, with only four and two-third divisions against five and one-third, even though some of the latter had been badly mauled, was to take a risk. But it was a calculated risk. Our troops had already shown themselves to be superior to the enemy and, once we reached open country, our superiority in armour, fire-power and mobility would tell.

26. I relied also upon two other great assets in particular—our complete sea and air supremacy. As will be seen from the narrative of operations, it was thanks to sea power that we were able to capture and then to stock and operate the great air bases on Akyab and Ramree Islands, upon which the air supply of Fourteenth Army so much depended. Sea and air power enabled us to deliver the final assault on Rangoon.

27. The factor of air supremacy was of the highest importance. In jungle fighting, tactical mobility is afforded by air transport. Air supply allows the carrying out of the out-flanking manoeuvres necessary to pin enemy resistance, by-pass it, and isolate or destroy it. By the use of air lines of communication, as with sea lines of communication, not only are the tenuous and limited overland routes supplemented, but one checkmates the Japanese technique of establishing road blocks in one's rear; the advance can continue unchecked and the enemy detachments are left to starve or are mopped up in due course.

Supply by air formed a large and vital part of the whole gigantic transportation effort which the prosecution of this campaign entailed. The full details appear in the Administrative part of this Despatch. It is enough here to say that during the peak month of April, 1945, when Fourteenth Army was racing for Rangoon, over 68,100 tons were delivered by air, over 11,000 men were brought forward and nearly 10,000 casualties evacuated. The stores carried by air included engines and other essential material for the building of the Inland Water Transport fleet at Kalewa, which was to operate the inland water transport supply link to Myingyan, and the light locomotives which were to operate on stretches of railway east of the Irrawaddy.

Throughout the campaign, the availability of aircraft for supply and transport was a major influence on the course of operations.