

referred to in more detail in the next section of the Despatch. This depletion of our strength occurred at a critical juncture. The magnitude of the air effort involved in the move can be judged by the fact that between the 22nd and 28th December alone the numbers transported were 8,423 Chinese troops, 95 United States personnel, four jeeps, 12 75-mm. guns and 701 animals. This of course represented a very serious loss in lift by transport aircraft, which would have been invaluable elsewhere on the front.

47. Nevertheless, when the original Phases of Operation "Capital" are considered, it will be seen that the advance of Northern Combat Area Command was lagging behind that of Fourteenth Army, which had completed Phase Two with great speed.

48. Further east, elements of the Chinese Expeditionary Force made progress in December down the Lungling-Namhkam road, reaching a point eight miles north-west of Wanting. The Chinese Expeditionary Force was not, of course, under my command but their movements at this time affected my operations.

49. Finally, although the planning and details of the operations in Arakan are dealt with in a later section of this part of the Despatch, the main events should be noted. On the 9th December, 81 (West African) Division crossed the Kaladan River. On the 15th December, Buthidaung fell to 82 (West African) Division. In the coastal sector, the advance of 25 Indian Division had been very rapid. On the 23rd December they reached Donbaik and on the 26th they were at Foul Point looking across the water at Akyab Island. Akyab itself was occupied on the 3rd January.

#### SECTION IV (paras. 50-69) THE READJUSTMENT OF PLANS IN DECEMBER

The diversion of resources to China and its adverse effects : The enemy's dispositions : The poor quality of Intelligence about the enemy : Fourteenth Army's plan for the battle of the Mandalay Plain : Comments on the plan.

50. While operations for the completion of Phase II of Capital were thus, in December, going extremely well, other events had necessitated a considerable readjustment of plans for the achievement of Phase III—the capture of the Mandalay area ; and as these were the plans which resulted in the final destruction of the enemy forces in Burma, their development deserves a full account.

51. The first event which affected all our plans, imposed considerable delay on our subsequent advance, and had other serious effects, had its origin in another theatre of war. Owing to the deterioration of the military situation in China, General Wedemeyer, Chief of Staff to Generalissimo Chiang Kai Shek, had asked for the transfer of troops from Burma to China. As a result of orders received from the Chiefs of Staff at the beginning of December, the Supreme Allied Commander ordered me to transfer 14 and 22 Chinese Divisions to China, and instructed the Allied Air C.-in-C. to lend the necessary transport aircraft for their support. One Chinese Division was flown out from the Myitkyina area to China between the 4th and 15th December and the second

followed about a week later. This transfer involved some 1,300 Dakota sorties. This was serious enough, but on the 10th and 11th December some 120 transport aircraft, 75 of which had already been allotted to Fourteenth Army maintenance, were also removed to China. These were in addition to the temporary diversion of aircraft for the fly-out of the two Divisions mentioned above.

52. Now it had been obvious that the rapidity of Fourteenth Army's advance must become increasingly dependent on adequate air supply, as our troops reached out into Central Burma and outran their land lines of communication. This sudden and unexpected reduction in transport aircraft therefore seriously complicated our already difficult administrative problem, thus inevitably hampering our operations. The loss of air-lift involved curtailed our freedom of action, and severely limited the degree of exploitation which our forces were able to carry out. General Slim calculated that Fourteenth Army's operations were retarded by at least two weeks. The Japanese thus gained valuable time in which to react to our moves. This, by itself, would have been bad enough, but the weakening of Northern Combat Area Command by the loss of two Chinese divisions had another adverse effect on our strategy. I was now forced to accept a slower advance by Northern Combat Area Command. 36 British Division was directed on Mongmit, one brigade to cross the Irrawaddy at Tigyaing and the other at Kantha. 50 Chinese Division was directed to relieve 22 Chinese Division in the Siu area and advance towards Lashio, their initial objective being Namtu. 30 and 38 Chinese Divisions were ordered to advance on the axis Namhkam-Lashio, the latter to support the former by outflanking operations. The Mars Brigade, directed initially on Mongwi, was to form the link between 36 British Division and 50 Chinese Division, operating in the gap between them. General Sultan, with whom I discussed the above plan, was convinced that the Japanese would fight hard for the Burma Road and anticipated a long and severe battle for Lashio and Namhkam. He considered that the enemy's resistance on this front would be unaffected even by the capture of Mandalay, since the Japanese troops could still be maintained by the direct route from Indo-China.

53. On the other hand, my principal problem was to ensure that Northern Combat Area Command continued to contain all the Japanese forces opposing it. This could only be done by maintaining the strongest pressure, but I was now being forced to accept a weakening of this pressure. Northern Combat Area Command never fully recovered from this depletion of its strength. The advance lost its momentum, thereby releasing further enemy troops for operations against Fourteenth Army. Principally owing to the loss of aircraft, Fourteenth Army's lower crossing of the Irrawaddy actually took place about 14 days later than the planned date. This meant that 19 Indian Division, which had crossed the Irrawaddy north of Mandalay, had to hold on in their bridgehead against a greater concentration of enemy for 14 days longer than was originally expected. The result was that the Division became involved in very bitter fighting and suffered severe casualties. I have given some