

268 Indian Brigade (Brigadier G. M. Dyer) now consisted of six battalions. The two leading battalions, advancing from the Chindwin, via Pantha, reached Indaw and an area 15 miles to the east-north-east by the 15th December. They then pushed on a further 20 miles, through the Japanese advanced elements, and occupied two villages east of the escarpment, thereby blocking the road south-west from Pinlebu. The remainder of the Brigade crossed the Chindwin and followed up this advance, operating in the gap between 2 British and 19 Indian Divisions. It was transferred back to 33 Corps on the 26th December.

38. 19 Indian Division (Major-General T. W. Rees) advanced from the Sittaung bridgehead, through Wuntho. 62 Brigade, advancing rapidly from the bridgehead, occupied Pinlebu on the 17th December after overcoming some opposition along the escarpment nine miles west-south-west of Pinlebu. Wuntho, on the Myitkyina-Mandalay railway, was reached on the 19th, and Kawlin on the 20th December. Further north, 64 Brigade, passing through Pinbon on the 15th December, made a rapid advance of over 60 miles in seven days and occupied Banmauk on the 17th, making contact with 36 British Division and thus establishing a continuous front with Northern Combat Area Command. After concentrating about Wuntho, 62 and 64 Brigades conformed with the main southerly axis of advance, and, by the 23rd, they reached Kokkagon, 25 miles south-east of Wuntho.

39. This advance of 192 miles in 20 days was a wonderful achievement for troops who were in action for the first time. Not only did they overcome the scattered but desperate opposition of enemy rear parties, but they surmounted tremendous physical difficulties, cutting a road through steep, jungle-covered hills, and manhandling their guns and vehicles over long distances. On one occasion, they even had to cantilever the track out on timber supports round a cliff face. Two of the three columns were accompanied by their motor vehicles, though it was often necessary to winch them up the hills. In spite of all these difficulties it is much to the credit of the R.E.M.E. mobile workshops that these two columns only lost 29 vehicles between them. This loss was compensated by the addition to the divisional motor transport of 47 broken down and abandoned Japanese vehicles which we successfully repaired.

40. On the 26th December, the Division passed under command of 33 Corps, with 62 and 64 Brigades in contact with the retiring enemy on a 20 mile front. 64 Brigade pushed on, smashing an enemy rearguard at Kanbalu on the 2nd January, and, with 2 British Division, assisted in the capture of Shwebo on the 10th January.

41. 7 Indian Division (Major-General G. C. Evans, who had succeeded Major-General Meservy on the 12th December) which had been rehabilitating at Kohima, was now entering the forward zone. Its leading brigade relieved 98 Brigade of 19 Indian Division, which had been employed on road construction along the Thanan-Tonhe track, in the middle of December. By the end of the month, 7 Indian Division was concentrating six miles south-west of

Tamu, ready either to be flown in to the Schwebo area or to follow 19 Indian Division.

42. 28 (East African) Brigade concentrated in December near Sunle on the Tamu-Kalewa road. When the change of plan described in the next section took place in the second half of December, this Brigade was ordered south up the Gangaw Valley, in rear of Lushai Brigade. By the end of December, it had reached Myintha, 29 miles north of Gangaw.

43. On the Northern Combat Area Command front in Northern Burma, 36 British Division had been advancing down the Railway Corridor. Following on the capture of Pinwe on the 30th November (already mentioned in para. 23), Naba, Indaw and Katha were occupied in quick succession by the 10th December, and consolidation of the area proceeded without enemy interference. The situation at the end of the month was that 29 Brigade was concentrating at Tigyaing on the Irrawaddy, while 72 Brigade had crossed the river south of Katha and reached a point 25 miles south-west of Shwegu, on the south bank of the Shweli River. At this time 26 Indian Brigade joined 36 British Division and moved up to Indaw. Up till now, the Division had comprised only the two British Brigades mentioned above.

44. Two regiments from 50 Chinese Division proceeded from behind 36 British Division and crossed the Irrawaddy to concentrate at Kontha, 24 miles south-east of Mawlu. By the 30th December, one regiment had reached Shwegu and the other a point 30 miles south-east of it. 5332 (United States) Brigade ("Mars" Brigade) was operating over a widely separated area from Bhamo to the south-east of Shwegu. 38 Chinese Division captured Bhamo on the 15th December after a siege of four weeks. The remnants of the Japanese garrison, some 300 strong, succeeded in breaking out south of the town, but suffered severe casualties in doing so. After mopping up in the Bhamo area, 38 Chinese Division supported 30 Chinese Division in the advance on Namhkam. On the 28th December, one regiment crossed the Sino-Burmese frontier and occupied Loiwing (five miles north-north-east of Namhkam), together with its two all-weather airfields.

45. 30 Chinese Division met vigorous opposition 20 miles north-west of Namhkam in its initial advance down the Bhamo-Namhkam road, but, with the assistance of 38 Chinese Division and elements of Mars Brigade, it fought its way to within seven miles of Namhkam by the 31st December. The Japanese had recently reinforced this front and it was evident that a determined effort was being made to check our advance in this area, to permit of the withdrawal of their 56 Division from Wanting towards Hsenwi and Lashio.

46. 22 Chinese Division, advancing south from the Bhamo area, occupied Siu, 48 miles to the south, on the 10th December, and captured Tonkwa, seven miles to the south-west, on the 12th against determined resistance. After this, 22 Chinese Division was concentrated in the general area of Sikaw, and began its fly-out to Kunming on the 22nd December. The removal of this Division, and of 14 Chinese Division which had preceded it, will be