

exterminated. Their 53 Division attempting to occupy its allotted defence zone west of Pyawbwe was struck in the flank and severely mauled before it ever got there. During the fighting in and around the town itself, 18 Japanese Division lost 2,200 killed, and we captured 31 guns, eight tanks and much transport. The tactical handling of 17 Indian Division by Major-General D. T. Cowan in this fighting was excellent. The enemy were expecting an attack from the north and they were attacked by infantry from this direction, but what surprised and disrupted their defence were the armoured columns operating from the south. The whole battle was a massacre by tanks, guns, infantry and aircraft. 33 Japanese Army was shattered.

237. The advance from Pyawbwe was taken up by 5 Indian Division, which passed through 17 Indian Division on the 11th April. 123 Brigade Group reached Yamethin on that date and our armour contacted the enemy seven miles to the south. During the night, an enemy detachment some 400 strong, with an anti-tank battery, entered the town from the east and occupied buildings and trenches commanding the road. This detachment fought to the last man and it took two days to eliminate them, the process being considerably hastened by accurate air strikes. In the meantime, a by-pass road was constructed west of the town to allow our unarmoured vehicles to get forward. On the 12th the Japanese achieved a minor success in one of their rare air attacks, 16 vehicles of a petrol and ammunition convoy being destroyed by them.

238. While Yamethin was being finally cleared, an armoured column and 161 Brigade Group had advanced and contacted the enemy on the 15th, astride the road and railway on the general line of the Sinthe Chaung, 27 miles from Yamethin and three miles north of Shwemyo. While this portion of the enemy was being subjected to successful air strikes which caused them heavy casualties, an armoured column operating west of the road and railway crossed the Sinthe Chaung and broke into Shwemyo itself, which it completely cleared the same day (16th April). Meanwhile the engineers, though harassed by enemy artillery fire from the Shwemyo Bluff, bridged the Sinthe north of Shwemyo and bulldozed a by-pass over difficult ground. This enabled 161 Brigade Group to outflank the Japanese positions north of the town, and harbour south of it for the night 16th-17th. In their efforts to establish a bridgehead across the Sinthe Chaung the next day, however, this Brigade was held up.

239. 123 Brigade Group, ten miles north of Shwemyo, were preparing for an attack on the Shwemyo Bluff, while 9 Brigade Group concentrated in the Tatkon area, four miles north-west of the entrance to the Shwemyo Bluff defiles. This Bluff is a steep feature rising to 700 feet, dominating the road and railway on the east side. It was expected that the Japanese would hold this strong position, and they did, but they did not anticipate an attack from the jungle-covered hills east of the Bluff, which was the line of advance selected by 123 Brigade. This assault on the 18th caught the enemy in flank and rear and was completely successful. 123 Brigade were

then relieved in this area by 99 Brigade of 17 Indian Division, to free them for a further advance.

240. Early on the 18th April, 161 Brigade succeeded in forcing a crossing of the Sinthe Chaung and repaired the bridge. They then, in conjunction with 255 Indian Tank Brigade, inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy over a wide area well south of Shwemyo, destroying three guns. By the evening of the 18th, the armoured column was only twelve miles north of Pyinmana, despite mined road blocks and demolitions, which were covered by enemy detachments concealed in the thick country on either side of the road. The airstrip near Shwemyo was taken over on the 18th April by the air-transportable brigade which had moved up by road, leaving the rest of 5 Indian Division free for their next bound forward.

241. Our tanks reached Pyinmana on the 19th April. Finding it held, they by-passed it and captured the valuable Lewe airfield, just to the south of the town, on the 20th. By nightfall, they had reached Yeni, 43 miles from Toungoo and 218 miles from Rangoon. 161 Brigade took over the defence of Lewe airfield after its capture by the armoured column, preparing it for the glider fly-in of aviation engineers. They also cleared the northern part of Pyinmana, the Japanese garrison still resisting stubbornly in the southern sector. Meanwhile 123 Brigade passed rapidly through 161 Brigade and reached Thawatti, almost catching up with our armour three miles further south. Continuing their rush south, both our tanks and our infantry reached a village 15 miles north of Toungoo on the 21st April. On this date, the enemy in Pyinmana were finally liquidated.

242. The last lap of the race for Toungoo was now being run. There were three competitors. 5 Indian Division were driving hard down the axis of the main road. The enemy columns, which had been driven off the main road were attempting by forced marches, along jungle tracks on both sides of the main road, to reach Toungoo ahead of us. These columns were being looked after by our aircraft, but, we too, had our difficulties in the shape of mines, demolitions, and heavy rainstorms—the first two delayed our tanks on the road, while the third hindered their movement off it. The third competitor was 15 Japanese Division, which was moving by motor transport parallel to 5 Indian Division, and some 60 miles to the east of it, down the Taunggyi—Loikaw road, which turns west at Kemapyo, via Mawchi, to Toungoo. We owe it to the Karen guerillas, under their British officers, and to the airstrikes by the R.A.F. directed by these same British officers, that this enemy division lost the race. Ambush after ambush, demolition after demolition, airstrike after airstrike, delayed its advance and, although a forward element got within artillery range of its objective, it was too late.

243. After a sharp action on the 22nd April by our tanks in a village eight miles to the north, our troops swept into Toungoo itself. The leading light tanks of 123 Brigade column ignored the traffic signals of an indignant Japanese policeman in the centre of the town, and ran him down. Subsequent enemy resistance in the western half of the town was