

UNCLASSIFIED

Australian Army History Unit

016 90022014



AUSTRALIAN ARMY JOURNAL



C

No. 15 AUGUST, 1950

Notified in AAO's for 31st July, 1950.

MILITARY BOARD

Army Headquarters,
Melbourne,

1/7/50.

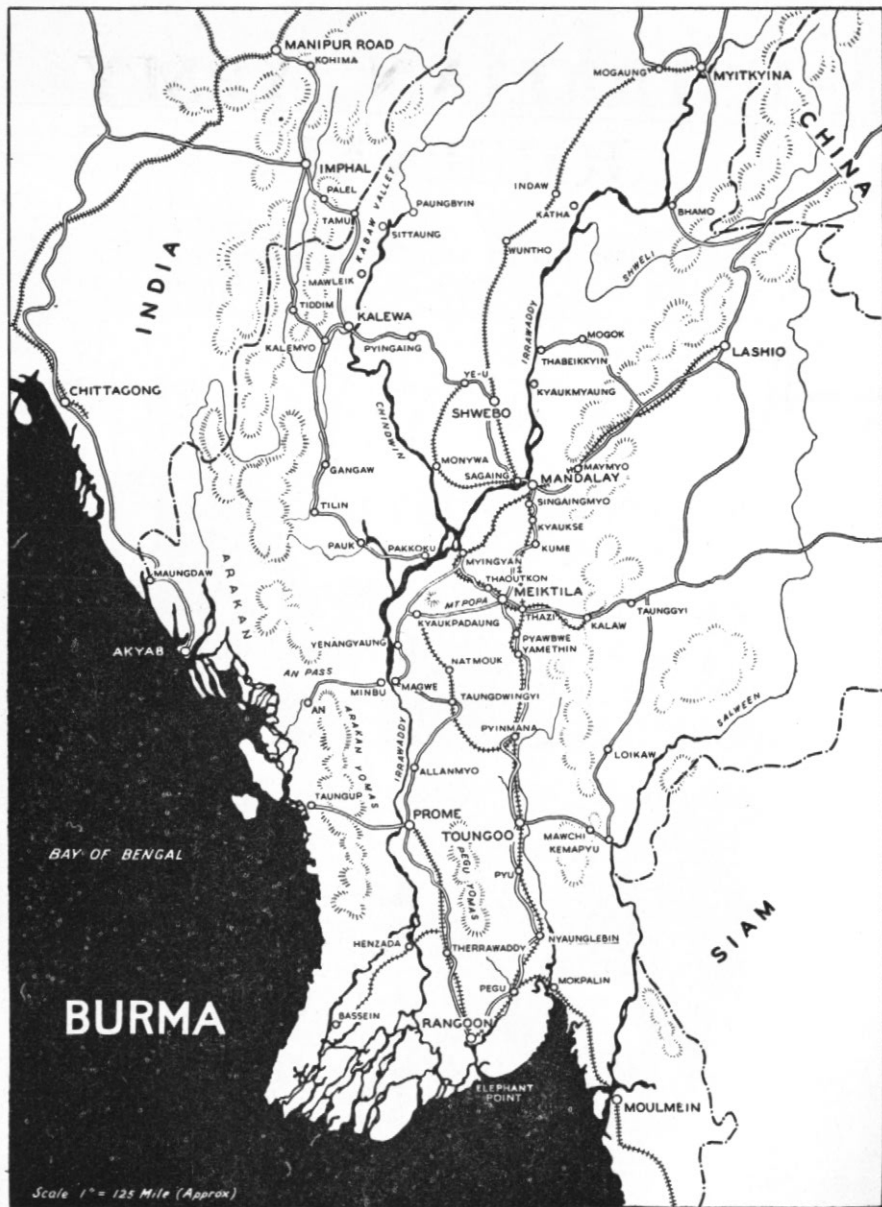
Issued by Command of the Military Board.



Acting Secretary to the Board.

Distribution:

One per Officer and Cadet Officer.



AUSTRALIAN
STAFF COLLEGE LIBRARY

AUSTRALIAN ARMY JOURNAL

A Periodical Review of Military Literature.

Number 15.

August, 1950.

CONTENTS

The Campaign of the Fourteenth Army, 1944-45

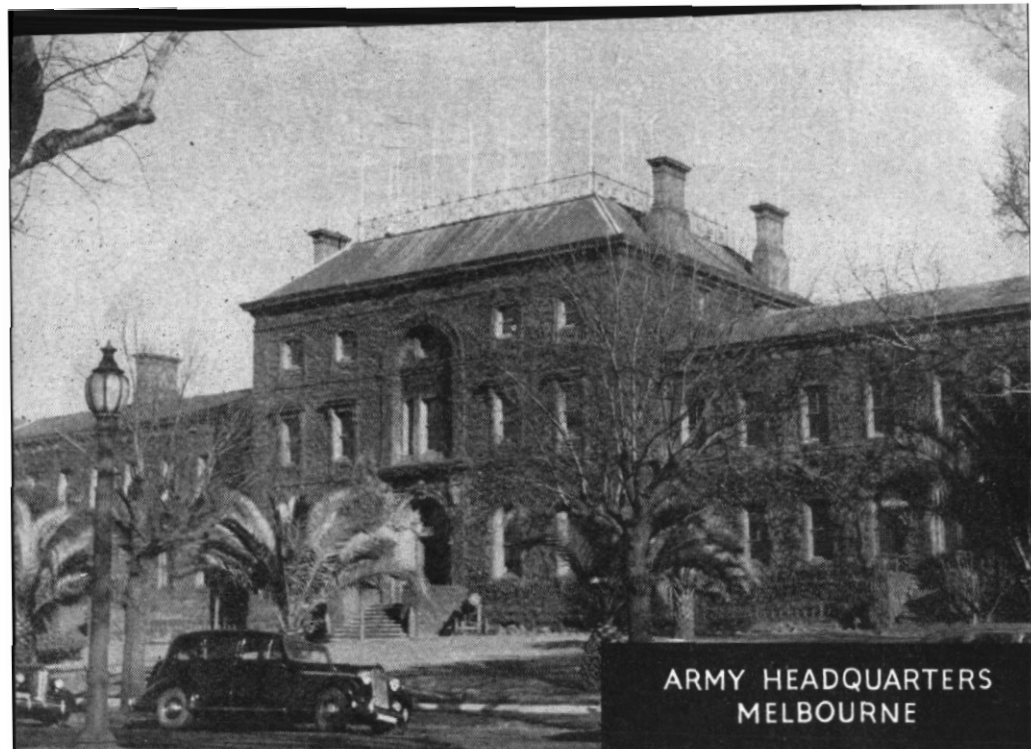
Field Marshal Sir William Slim, GBE, KCB, DSO, MC.

This study of the campaign of the Fourteenth Army in Burma in 1944-45, written by the Army Commander, Field Marshal Sir William Slim, was originally published in pamphlet form by the Printing and Stationery Services of ALFSEA Command. It is reprinted in the Australian Army Journal by permission of the Field Marshal and the controller of His Majesty's Stationery Office.

RESTRICTED.

UNCLASSIFIED

The information given in this document is not to be communicated, either directly or indirectly, to the Press or to any person not authorized to receive it.



ARMY HEADQUARTERS
MELBOURNE

AUSTRALIAN ARMY JOURNAL

Editor:

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL E. G. KEOGH, ED (R of O)

Staff Artist:

MR. CYRIL ROSS

The AUSTRALIAN ARMY JOURNAL is printed and published for the Directorate of Military Training by Wilke & Co. Ltd. The contents are derived from various acknowledged official and unofficial sources and do not necessarily represent General Staff Policy.

Contributions, which should be addressed to the Director of Military Training, Army Headquarters, Melbourne, are invited from all ranks of the Army, Cadet Corps, and Reserve of Officers.

CAMPAIGN

OF THE

FOURTEENTH ARMY 1944-45.

I. Situation in September, 1944.

Results of the Battle of Imphal.

In the bitterly contested and long drawn out battle of Imphal the Japanese Army had suffered what was, up to then, the most disastrous defeat in its history. Thoroughly out-manoeuvred and out-fought on the battlefield, having suffered terrible losses in men and equipment, it began a retreat through the jungle-covered hills at the height of the monsoon. Thanks to air supply and their own indomitable resolution, 5 Indian and 11 East African Divisions pressed hard on its heels, and gave it no respite. It was a disorganized, diseased and almost starving remnant which scrambled to what it hoped was safety on the east bank of the Chindwin. But our troops followed, and, by 3rd December, we held three bridge-heads across the river, at Sittaung east of Tamu, at Mawlaik, 50 miles to the south, and at Kalewa.

Orders from 11th Army Group.

On 29th July, 1944, 11 Army Group had issued a directive ordering Fourteenth Army to:—

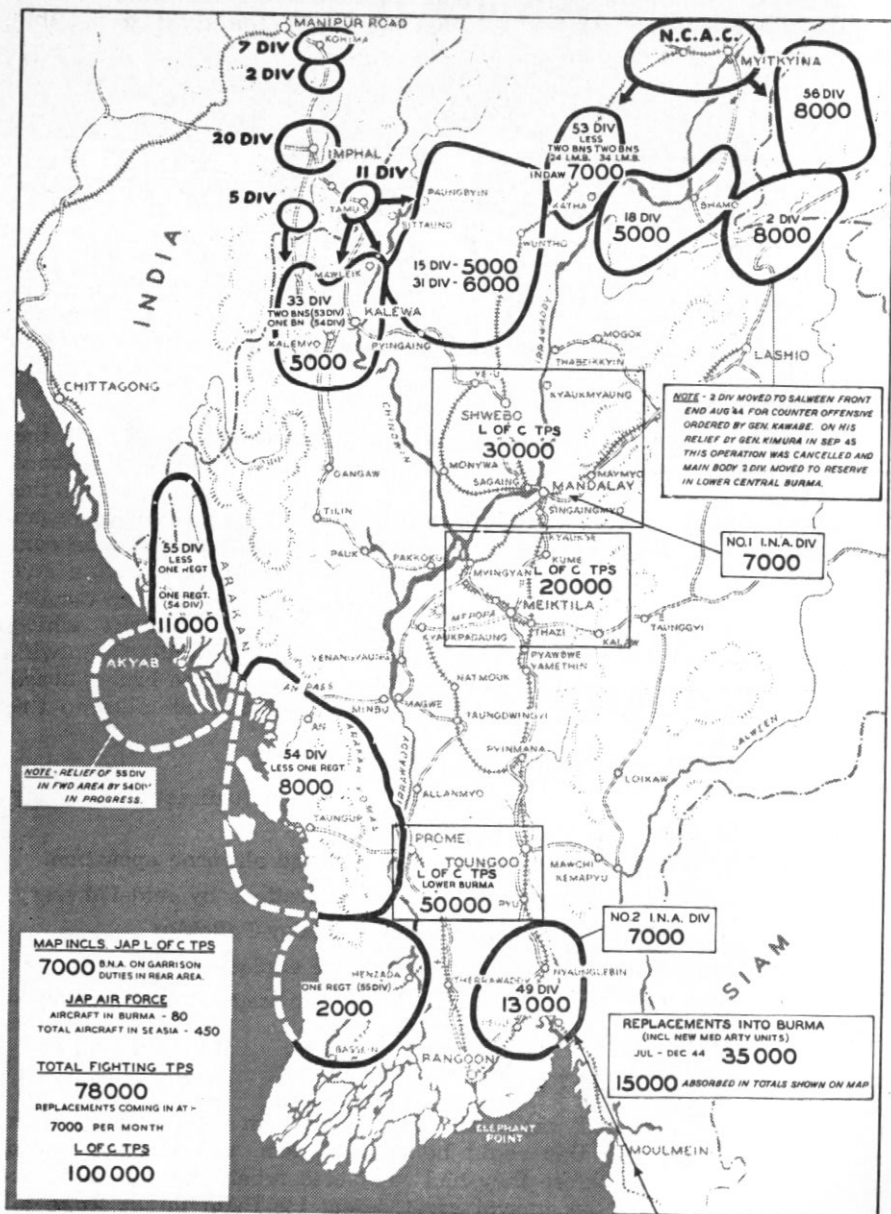
- (a) Seize Kalemmyo-Kalewa by an overland and airborne operation.
- (b) Capture Ye-u by land and airborne operations by mid-February.
- (c) Occupy Central Burma to a line Mandalay-Pakokku.
- (d) Consolidate on this line and if possible exploit to the south.

By the beginning of December the first task, the occupation of Kalemmyo-Kalewa, had been completed.

Possibilities of Exploitation.

The Japanese needed, above all, time to re-form and re-equip their shattered divisions. If this could be denied them, and another major battle forced on them before they had completed rehabilitation, our prospects would be bright. A second great defeat for them might leave all Burma at our mercy.

The first aim was, therefore, to bring about such a battle, and, from the moment the Imphal struggle was ended, Fourteenth Army began to plan and work to overcome the immense physical obstacles that appeared



MAP 1.—SITUATION SEP., 1944.

to forbid the concentration and maintenance east of the Chindwin of a force large enough to destroy what would be the most formidable Japanese Army yet encountered.

The Enemy's Intentions.

In September, 1944, the enemy completed the re-alignment of his armies. In the north opposite the American-Chinese Forces and the Chinese Salween Army, he had 18 and 56 Divisions forming the 33rd Army, whilst 2 Division had been temporarily lent to that army, but was to return to reserve. Then to the west, the 15th Army with four Divisions, 15, 33, 31, 53, held the Railway Corridor, the long line of the Zibutaung Range across the Irrawaddy to join up with 28th Army (54 and 55 Divs.) in the Arakan and on the South Burma coast. 49 Division had just arrived in South Burma, bringing the Burma garrison up to ten divisions and two independent mixed brigades.

His intention, having failed to hold us on the Chindwin, was to deny us north-central Burma, specially the Shwebo plain, the Mandalay area and the oilfields. This is the "Dry Belt" of Burma. If he could hold us outside this until the next monsoon, our Army would then inevitably waste away, owing to the lack of an all-weather L. of C. and he might hope to stage a renewed offensive. The Jap is, luckily, an incurable optimist, but he had some reason to think he would be able to re-condition his divisions before we could mass against him. In spite of widespread bombing, he had kept his communications, road and rail, going to a surprising extent. He had never yet failed to move his formations inside Burma as and when he wanted. Reinforcements were coming in, and supplies of all kinds were plentiful in innumerable dumps scattered over Central Burma.

Behind a long line of covering troops running roughly north of the line Lashio-Shwebo-Myingyan-Letse-An-Taungup, Kimura, the Japanese Commander in Burma, began reorganizing, reinforcing his Armies, collecting reserve formations and building up stocks. (See Map 1.)

Our Dispositions, September, 1944.

5 Division was operating south on the Tiddim Road; 11 (E.A) Division south down the Kabaw valley. NCAC, with under command 38 Div, was operating SW from Mogaung down the Railway Corridor and south from Myitkyina along the Bhamo Road. 20 Division was resting in the Imphal area; 2 and 7 Divisions in the Kohima area. (See Map 1.)

II. Re-organisation of 11 Army Group.

General Giffard, commanding 11 Army Group, had decided that, if it was to fight a campaign in Central Burma, Fourteenth Army should be relieved of its many other commitments and left free to devote itself to the decisive theatre. This was a wise decision, as it would have been

well-nigh impossible for a single Army Commander to control a rapidly-moving offensive battle on the front I had had in the earlier campaign.

The American-Chinese NCAC had passed from my command in August, and it was arranged that the whole rear area of the Army should be formed into an L. of C. Command directly under 11 Army Group, thus relieving me and my staff of an immense administrative burden which had compelled us to look backwards as much as forwards. 15 Corps in the Arakan, which was to all intents a separate front, also passed from my command. These changes were to take effect in November, when 11 Army Group would change its title to Allied Land Forces South East Asia (ALFSEA).

Early in November, also, to our great regret, General Giffard, gave up command of 11 Army Group. He had seen us through our efforts to become an Army and through our first and most desperate battles. The Fourteenth Army owed much to his integrity, his judgment, his support and to the universal confidence he inspired.

He was succeeded by Lieut-General Sir Oliver Leese, who had commanded the Eighth Army in Italy.

III. Plan of Campaign.

Object.

My object was to destroy the enemy's main forces in Central Burma. It was not the occupation of any particular place or area; that would follow automatically.

Enemy Strength Against Fourteenth Army.

The total enemy strength in Burma was roughly:—

Ten Japanese Divisions and two Independent Mixed Brigades.

Some 100,000 Japanese L. of C. troops.

One Japanese Tank Regiment.

Two "Indian National Army" Divisions.

Seven battalions of the "Burma National Army."

Of these, some of the Japanese Divisions had not yet regained their full strength; the L. of C. troops, while not as skilful as those in Divisions, could be relied on to fight at least defensively with the usual Japanese desperation. Japanese morale, while not quite at the supreme pitch it had been before the Imphal defeats, was still of the last cartridge and the last man standard. The individual Japanese soldier remained the most formidable fighting insect in history. The I.N.A. Divisions (about 6,000 each) had poor fighting value, but were apt considerably to confuse the battlefield by their similarity to our own Indian troops. The B.N.A., judging from our experiences in 1942, was likely to be a more serious nuisance.

This total was a considerable force, but it was, of course, not to be expected that the whole of it would oppose Fourteenth Army. I relied on NCAC (one British and three Chinese Divisions) and the Salween

Chinese to hold two Japanese Divisions in the north, 15 Corps to keep one and a third Divisions in the Arakan, and the SEAC and ALFSEA deception schemes to tie down a further one and a third Divisions and one I.M.B. in the south. This would leave against Fourteenth Army, five Japanese Divisions plus one Regiment, one I.M.B., one Tank Regiment, some 40,000 L. of C troops, two I.N.A. Divisions and the bulk of the B.N.A.

Our Strength.

I had available for use six and two-third Divisions (2, 5, 7, 17, 19, 20 Divisions, 268 Brigade, 28 EA Brigade), two Tank Brigades (254, 255) and, of course, the immense advantage of overwhelming air support. The fly in the ointment was that, scheme as we might, it did not appear that our transportation resources, air and road, would maintain trans-Chindwin more than four and two-third Divisions and two Tank Brigades. We should be operating at the end of a road L. of C. from railhead of four hundred miles, of which two hundred and fifty miles were earth only and would have to be built to an all-weather standard before the monsoon. Our air lift was limited, and the farther we advanced the less it would become, until, when we passed the two hundred and fifty mile radius from our airfields it would begin to drop rapidly.

Four and two-third British-Indian Divisions with which to attack five and one-third Japanese, across a great river and at the end of a precarious L. of C. was not the odds that I should have liked. However, with our air supremacy, our superiority in armour, our greater mobility in open country, and above all the higher training and fighting value of our troops, I was prepared to risk it. Moreover, with the American successes in the Pacific I calculated that few reinforcements would now be coming to Burma, and the enemy would be hard put to it to replace any losses in men or equipment that we could inflict on him.

I relied on the Japanese standing to fight with their main forces in the Shwebo plain, north of the Irrawaddy, so as to secure the airfields area, Mandalay, and their communications with the forces opposing NCAC and the Chinese. I hoped also that they would, true to form, stick to this plan till too late.

It will be noted, therefore, that my plan was based on three factors:—

- (i) A definite air and road maintenance lift.
- (ii) The ability of other forces to hold off from us some four and two-thirds Japanese Divisions.
- (iii) The firm intention of the enemy to fight with his main forces north of the Irrawaddy.

Original Plan.

My object was to bring the main Japanese force to decisive battle on ground favourable to us. The Shwebo plain, which would allow us freely to manoeuvre, and which had the formidable obstacle of the loop of the rivers Chindwin and Irrawaddy behind it, would be ideal.

I proposed, therefore, to concentrate both Corps in this loop and there fight an Army battle. 33 Corps (2 and 20 Divs with 268 Bde and 254 Tank Bde) was to cross the Chindwin in the Kalewa area and advance on Ye-u. 4 Corps (7 and 19 Divs) was to concentrate in the Imphal area, ready to seize by an airborne operation air strips in the Ye-u-Shwebo area or to fly into them after they had been seized by 33 Corps, 255 Tank Bde would then join 4 Corps through 33 Corps. The Lushai Bde and 28 EA Bde would be available to protect 33 Corps flank and L. of C. on the west bank of the Chindwin, south of Kalemvo. Orders to this effect were issued on 1st October, 1944.

Modification to Plan.

I had always hoped that it would be possible to concentrate at least part of 4 Corps in the Shwebo area without an airborne operation. Such operations would be attended by considerable risk, and if they could be avoided there would be a great increase in air-lift available for maintenance. A careful study was therefore made of the feasibility of moving at least one division of 4 Corps into the Shwebo Plain by routes which crossed the Chindwin considerably to the north of Kalewa in the Sittaung area. It was also very desirable to make a junction with 36 Division, the right flank of NCAC, which was pushing steadily south down the railway toward Katha.

Reports and reconnaissances of the routes between the Chindwin and the railway were favourable enough to warrant an attempt to pass a considerable force by them into the northern end of the Shwebo Plain, and it was decided to do so.

IV. Preparations for Offensive.

Roles of Divisions.

Formations had already been allotted to Corps for the trans-Chindwin operations; 2 and 20 Divisions, 268 Bde and 254 Tank Bde to 33 Corps, and 7 and 19 Divisions, and 255 Tank Bde to 4 Corps. 28 East African Brigade was moved to the Kalemvo area to secure the Gangaw valley against any Japanese counter-thrust on the west bank of the Chindwin. 11 East African Division and the Lushai Bde were to be taken out to rest in India and join 23 Division in ALFSEA reserve. This would leave 5 Division (which had by now been withdrawn to rest) in the Kohima area and 17 Division in Ranchi, India, available for exploitation.

It was hoped to use these two Divisions in a very mobile role in Central Burma and their organization was, therefore, changed from that of standard Divisions to one in which the Division, less a Brigade Group, was completely mechanized and one Bde Group was air transportable. This entailed a great deal of juggling with the none too plentiful M.T. resources available, and the fact that it was successfully accomplished in time reflected the greatest credit on the Divisional staffs and the services concerned.

For two years Fourteenth Army formations had fought in jungles and amongst hills. They were now about to break out into open country, largely flat, with unobstructed view, and in parts almost desert-like. Not only would the laborious tactics of the jungle have to be replaced by speed, mechanization, and mobility, but commanders and troops would have to adjust their mentality to the changed conditions. As much training as possible to meet these new demands was put in hand, and it says much for the energy and skill of Corps and Divisional Commanders that in the short time available, and in spite of constant moves and operations, so much was accomplished to fit the troops for their new role.

Air Supply Organization.

The air-fields and supply depots from which air maintenance would be carried out were no longer within the Fourteenth Army area or control. However the staffs which had proved so successful during the Imphal battles were expanded into the C.A.A.T.O. (Commander Army Air Transport Organization) under the direct command of ALFSEA. After some preliminary teething troubles, due mainly to a lack of services representation in the organization, C.A.A.T.O. functioned with marked success. Such difficulties as occurred were caused chiefly by delays in signal communications. When the distances concerned, the paucity of equipment, and climatic conditions are remembered, they were much less than might have been expected.

An essential for any rapid advance, whether airborne operations were included or not, was the immediate construction of both fighter and transport air strips as soon as territory was occupied. With the aid of the Combat Cargo Task Force arrangements were made for the rapid fly-in, by glider and Dakota, of Indian and American air-field engineers.

Roads.

The shortage of Engineer resources, notably excavatory machinery, made it impossible to construct or maintain more than one all-weather road. The Tiddim road was therefore completely abandoned and a project to build an all-weather road to Sittaung also reluctantly dropped. All energies were concentrated on making the road Tamu-Kalewa all-weather before the monsoon. As the necessary road metal could not be transported, even this would have been impossible had not my Chief Engineer, Brigadier Hasted, put his faith in the up-to them untried Bithess.

V. Opening Moves.

Forward Concentration of 4 Corps.

On 1st November Headquarters 4 Corps opened at Imphal. On 6th November the Corps was ordered to seize Pinlebu with at least one Brigade Group and to reconnoitre routes from the Chindwin to the Railway with a view to the move of larger forces on this axis. Reports on these routes both from ground and air sources were increasingly

favourable, and on 18th November permission was given to 4 Corps to commit the whole 19 Division in operations towards Pinlebu. 7 Division was not to be engaged east of the Chindwin without the sanction of Army Headquarters as it was still expected it might have to be flown into the Shwebo Plain.

19 Division moved from Imphal, crossing the Chindwin in November, its leading Brigade starting the advance eastwards on 4th and 5th December. The northern Brigade followed a track on the axis Wetkawk-Sinla-Maung; the second Brigade followed a more southerly line through Paungbyin towards Wayongon and Pinlebu, while the third Brigade moved behind the first along the northern track. This was the first time 19 Division had been in action, but the troops advanced with the greatest dash against scattered, but desperate opposition of Japanese covering parties. On 12th December 19 Division Headquarters was at Sinlamaung. On 14th December the leading troops of 19 Division were six miles from Pinlebu, and on the 17th they captured the town, while by the 23rd they had reached Kokoggon, 25 miles south-east of Wuntho. This advance of 192 miles in 20 days was an astonishing achievement, not so much because of the enemy opposition overcome, though that was by no means negligible, but because of the difficulty of the country. There was no road. A track built by the Japanese for the invasion of Assam meandered through precipitous jungle-covered hills, and the Division had to winch their vehicles over some of the worst slopes. Moreover, the monsoon had washed away long stretches of this track, and 19 Division with little mechanical equipment had to cut its own road and at times manhandle its guns and lorries for miles. At one place the only way to get the track round a cliff was to cantilever it out on timber supports. But 19 Division had waited long for a chance to get at the enemy and nothing was now going to stop it. Meanwhile, Headquarters 4 Corps had moved to a location north of Tamu; 7 Div with 255 Tank Brigade was concentrating in the same general area, ready either to fly into the Plain or to follow 19 Division.

Advance of 33 Corps.

33 Corps began its advance by a Brigade of 20 Division crossing the Chindwin at Mawlaik on 3rd December. The remainder of this Division completed its crossing in the Kalewa area by 18th December. A day later 2 Division passed through the advance line of the 11 East African Division and the southern advance had really begun.

Japanese Resistance.

The enemy resistance to 4 Corps' advance was not as strong as I had expected or as the nature of the country would have allowed, and 19 Division had pushed on with surprising rapidity, destroying the small Japanese covering forces which tried to hold the defiles. It became increasingly evident that the enemy had been taken by surprise, not only by the speed and strength of our sweep, but by the fact that we had been able to stage such an effort so soon and so far north. His covering

forces had not completed the preparation of their defensive positions, nor had his formations in rear yet moved up to their battle stations. His whole defensive system covering the Shwebo Plain began to crumble before our daring and mobile thrusts.

VI. Change of Plan.

Japanese Change of Plan.

Realizing that we had broken through the Zibutaung Range, his barrier to the east, and were already in the Shwebo Plain, the Japanese commander abandoned his original intention and decided to pull out of the river loop, get back behind the Irrawaddy, and hold the line of the river from Twinngge in the north to Chauk in the south. In this he was wise—wiser than the Germans in similar circumstance on the west of the Rhine. Kimura was showing a greater sense of realities than his predecessor, Kawabe, had at Imphal.

The Japanese plan was now firm and they acted vigorously to put it into force. 53 Division took up positions east of the Irrawaddy in the northern sector; 15 Division withdrew to the south into the Mandalay area. 31 Division was disposed in a strong bridge-head west of the river based on the natural bastion of the Sagaing Hills. This not only gave the enemy a sally port from which he could deliver counter-attacks on our forces as they approached the river, but, by occupying the only high ground on the west bank, denied us observation over his positions and dominated ours. West of Mandalay, 33 Division was responsible for the defence of the river line from Myinmy to Pauk. There 15 Army, which controlled all these divisions, linked up with 28 Army to whom Kimura had entrusted the Irrawaddy Valley. This Army built up in the Yenangyaung oilfields area a strong force, which included the recently formed 72 Independent Mixed Brigade of four battalions and one Regiment of 49 Division brought up from South Burma. A little later two Regiments of 2 I.N.A. Division were also moved into the Nyaungu-Kyaukpadaung area. Major-General Yamamoto, an old and tough opponent of the Imphal battle, was given command of this force. 2 Division was moved into reserve in the area south of Pyinmana, where it was well placed to be switched to any sector of the front.

Effect on the Fourteenth Army Plan.

It was now clear that one of the three main foundations on which I had built my plan—that the Japanese would stand and fight for the Shwebo Plain—had crumbled under me. Their covering forces were wriggling out of the river loop and their main forces were grouping in defensive positions in depth behind one of the world's greatest rivers. If I continued with my plan to concentrate the whole Army about Shwebo, I should have no alternative to a direct frontal assault on superior forces across this great obstacle. My object remained the same—the destruction of the enemy's main forces—but I was not likely to achieve it that way.

An adjustment in plan was indicated. Luckily it was not too late to retrieve my mistake.

The New Plan.

Quite obviously we must get a force somehow behind the main Japanese concentration along the river about Mandalay, while we attacked from the north. I abandoned the tempting idea of a large-scale airborne landing because it would have had to take place in the midst of the Japanese reserves and would absorb more air maintenance lift than I could have spared.

Instead, I decided to swing 4 Corps from the left to the extreme right flank, move it secretly down the Kabaw Valley for over 320 miles, gain a bridge-head about Pakokku, and then strike with a mechanised, armoured and partially airborne column at Meiktila, the nodal point of all Japanese communications to their 15 Army and their chief air-field centre. Secrecy and speed would be the essence of the operation. Some time before the blow at Meiktila, 33 Corps, to whom 19 Division would be transferred, was to force the crossings of the Irrawaddy, threaten Mandalay, and attract to itself the greater part of the Japanese forces in Central Burma, which would then be caught between the Meiktila anvil and the hammer descending from the north.

The re-allotment of formations to Corps was thus:—

4 Corps.

- 7 Division
- 17 Division (mechanized and airborne)
- 255 Tank Brigade (Shermans)
- Lushai Brigade (temporarily)
- 28 East African Brigade.

33 Corps.

- 2 Division
- 19 Division
- 20 Division
- 254 Tank Brigade (Lee-Grant and Stuart)
- 268 Brigade.

Reserve.

- 5 Division (mechanized and airborne)

Orders to this effect were issued on 19th December, 1944. In this Operation Instruction also was first announced the intention we had held for some time at Army Headquarters, that we would follow up the battle by a dash for Rangoon. This appeared to many—not in Fourteenth Army—to be wildly optimistic and was a more ambitious project than the directives we had received required of us. However, I felt we had an opportunity so to destroy the Japanese main forces that, after the battle in the Mandalay-Meiktila area, we might, if we were quick enough, go anywhere.

The intention was, therefore, given as:—

- (a) In conjunction with NCAC to destroy the enemy forces in Burma.
- (b) To advance to the general line Henzada-Nyaunglebin.
- (c) To seize any opportunity of capturing a South Burma Port.

Rangoon was not specified, because, while Rangoon would ultimately be necessary, I was inclined to consider that Moulmein was a better initial strategic objective.

4 Corps was accordingly ordered to capture Pakokku, seize a bridge-head over the Irrawaddy, strike at and hold Meiktila with an armoured, mechanized and airborne column, and thence advance south on the axis Myingyan-Henzada. i.e., down the Irrawaddy Valley.

33 Corps was to capture Monywa, cross the Irrawaddy, take Mandalay and advance south on the axis Mandalay-Nyaunglebin, i.e., down the Sittang Valley.

It was essential that both the blow that was coming to him from Pakokku and its strength, must be concealed from the enemy. A scheme was, therefore, put into operation which, it was hoped, would persuade him that 4 Corps was still concentrating in Shwebo Plain on the left of 33 Corps and that any movement in the Gangaw Valley was merely a demonstration by a minor force to distract his attention from our attempt to take Mandalay. The enemy was completely deceived. He believed the whole 4 Corps was operating north of Mandalay, until to his confusion he discovered it was in Meiktila.

Administrative Risks of Plan.

It was obvious that the new plan would strain all administrative resources to the utmost.

First was the actual move of 4 Corps from Tamu to Pakokku, a distance of 328 miles by an earth road which in rain was impassable mud and in dry weather almost impassable dust. To move a Corps of two Divisions and a Tank Brigade over this tract, to build up the resources for a major river crossing at the end of it, with the petrol and ammunition required for the dash to Meiktila, all within less than two months, required no mean effort of skill and determination.

The whole operation had to be supplied and all casualties evacuated by air. This meant the construction of numerous landing strips capable of taking the heavy C 46 transport aircraft and others for the fighters which gave essential close support.

The crucial factor was of course, as always, the adequacy of air supply. If all went according to plan our air lift would be enough to maintain both Corps and to build up the minimum reserves of ammunition, equipment, etc., required for the river crossings and the battle. This made no allowance for enemy interference or weather, both factors, as we already knew to our cost, very liable to upset all air supply calculations. We suffered some embarrassment from both these, but our greatest disaster was completely unexpected. On 10 and 11 December, without warning, three squadrons of Dakotas (75 aircraft) allotted to Fourteenth

Army maintenance were removed to China. The supply loads in the aircraft were dumped on the airfield, and the first intimation Army Headquarters had of the administrative crisis bursting upon it was the noise of aircraft taking off for China.

This threatened for a time to bring operations to a standstill, but, thanks to the great efforts of ALFSEA and SACSEA, eventually the lift was restored from various sources, but not until there had been a serious retardation in our plans. What this actually meant in delay to operations it is hard to say, but a fair estimate would be from a fortnight to three weeks. The effects of this were felt throughout the operations for two reasons, first, this slowing-up gave the Japanese extra time to react to our moves, and, secondly, it left less time before the monsoon for the final advance to Rangoon.

While the air was our main method of maintenance, for the foremost formations alone it could not possibly suffice. It had to be supplemented by every other available means—road, water, rail.

As far as roads were concerned, we were compelled by paucity of engineer resources to limit all-weather construction to one road only—that from Tamu to Kalewa. The intention to extend this road to Ye-u had to be abandoned. The roads to Tiddim and to Sittaung had already disappeared from our plans.

We held the Chindwin river and hoped to hold the Irrawaddy. Apart from the difficulties of navigation, especially on the Chindwin, there was one very serious obstacle to their use as an L. of C. We had no boats. Dumb craft could be provided. There was the river and there were unlimited trees. That was enough for Fourteenth Army engineers, and soon they were turning out boats by the hundred. They were not graceful craft, but they floated, and carried ten tons each. The real problem was provision of power craft. Even this was solved by the ALFSEA/I.W.T. construction companies, who flew in, not only outboard engines, but landing craft and small tugs in parts which they put together on the river bank. Tank transporters brought motor launches from railhead at Manipur Road and extensive mass production shipyards sprang up around Kalewa. The target was five hundred tons a day by mid April from Kalewa. Two Royal Navy gunboats, mounting Bofors and Oerlikons were built, launched, and commissioned on the Chindwin. This is believed to be the first time the Army has constructed warships for the Royal Navy. Terminal ports at Kalewa, Alon and Myingyan, capable of transferring hundreds of tons daily from lorry or aircraft to boat, or from boat to lorry or railway, had to be built from nothing. These were in themselves major engineering projects. One of the most spectacular feats of the I.W.T. service was the salvaging with most inadequate equipment of many comparatively large vessels, Japanese landing craft, heavy steel flats, tugs, and even small steamers, which had been sunk either by the enemy or by our air attacks. These formed a considerable proportion of the I.W.T. tonnage available.

The Japanese railways which we hoped to take over would be badly damaged from our own bombing and from enemy demolitions. We were unlikely to get many serviceable locomotives. However, in spite of

bombing, the Japanese were working the railways, and preparations were made to restore any lengths of line we captured at the earliest possible date. It is not easy to fly in, or bring by road, railway locomotives, but a few were so brought, and for the rest the incomparable Jeep, converted to rail, had to serve. It was planned to concentrate on getting the lines Alon-Ava and Myingyan-Meiktila into operation.

The L. of C. therefore, apart from direct air, was to be:—

- (a) All-weather road Manipur Road to Tamu—206 miles.
- (b) Fair-weather road (later to be all-weather)—Tamu-Kalewa—112 miles.
- (c) Fair-weather road Kalewa to Shwebo, thence all-weather (very bad) to Mandalay—190 miles.
- (d) Inland Water Transport from Kalewa to Myingyan—200 miles.
- (e) From Myingyan by partially all-weather road and (it was hoped) rail to Meiktila—59 miles.

These administrative difficulties affected all formations, but fell most heavily on 4 Corps. The fact that they were all overcome is evidence of the outstanding determination, resource and skill of the Commanders and Administrative Services and Staffs.

VII. Progress of New Plan.

Advance of 33 Corps.

2 Division, after passing through 11 East African Division bridge-head at Kalewa to begin its advance towards Ye-u, met its first serious opposition from strong well dug-in rear guards in the gorge west of Pyingaing. There was a hold-up of a few days here, but the block was cleared by a column from 20 Division, which, coming south-east from Mawlaik through the jungle, took the Japanese in rear and in a very brisk action routed them, inflicting heavy casualties. 2 Division then advanced rapidly, taking Pyingaing on 24 December and Kaduma, at the entrance to the Shwebo Plain, on the last day of the year.

Meanwhile 19 Division, pushing on in record-breaking style from Pinlebu, captured Wuntho on 19 December and Kawlin on the 20. On the same day another Brigade of the Division made contact with 36 Division on the railway at Rail Indaw, and for the first time we had a continuous front with NCAC. 268 Brigade advancing by jungle tracks from Yuwa on the Chindwin through Pantha and Oil Indaw in the wide gap between 2 and 19 Divisions, broke through the Japanese screen in the foothills into the Plain.

On 26th December this Brigade and 19 Division passed to the command of 33 Corps.

There ensued a race for Shwebo between 2 and 19 Divisions. 19 Division, after breaking strong Japanese rear-guard resistance at Kanbalu on 2 January, won by a short head, reaching the town on 7 January.

2 Division had by a brilliant dash on 31 December secured the Kabu Weir, which controlled the irrigation of a vast area of the Shwebo Plain, just in time to forestall the Japanese demolition party. The destruction of this weir would have had most serious consequence on the civil population, and would probably have led to a wide-spread famine. 2 Division entered Shwebo on 8 January, while 19 Division still held only the eastern outskirts. It was cleared after stiff fighting against a Japanese suicide rear party.

By 8 January 19 Division had reached the Irrawaddy at Thabeikkyin and was dealing with stubborn Japanese pockets still holding out on the west bank. 2 Division continued its sweep south into the river loop against tough, but disjointed resistance.

While these events had been taking place on the left and in the centre of 33 Corps, 20 Division on the right had been conducting a series of exceptionally well executed operations. On Christmas Day the main body of the division had, after a rapid march across difficult country, occupied Maukkadaw on the Chindwin. Then, advancing with light forces on the west bank of the river it had by 6 January surrounded the strongly-held enemy communication centre of Budalin. The town fell after some days of bitter fighting, the Japanese garrison resisting to the last man.

Advance of 4 Corps.

As soon as it was decided that 4 Corps was to advance on Pakokku, 28 East African Bde and Lushai Bde were ordered by 4 Corps to push on south up the Gangaw Valley ahead of the rest of the Corps. At this stage 11 East African Division was brought out, partly by road and partly by air to rest after its strenuous monsoon. 7 Division then began its long move, and by 6 January the bulk of the division was in the area south of Taukkyan, almost one hundred miles from Tamu.

On 12 January the Lushai Brigade completed one of the most strenuous fighting advances in history by capturing Gangaw after a most effective strike by bombers of the Strategic Air Force. The Brigade was then flown out to India for a remarkably well-earned rest. As an example of effective Long-Range Penetration through "impossible" country its operations had never been surpassed.

7 Division now took over the lead, and in a skilfully executed flanking movement through the hills, drove the Japanese out of their very strong positions at Pauk on 27 January. The track from Tilin to Pauk proved much worse than was expected and only the most strenuous efforts of 4 Corps engineers made it passable.

28 East African Brigade was then sent south from Pauk into the hills to cover the right flank of the Corps.

Every effort was now being made to bring forward 17 Division and its move had priority over all other operations. The unexpected loss of aircraft to China made this somewhat hazardous administratively, but air-lift was rising again, and the division was operationally essential—so it came. By the co-operation of the Staff of ALFSEA and L. of C. Command,

the re-organisation of this division and of 5 Division had been completed in record time by stripping 11 East African Division of every serviceable vehicle. 17 Division was thus able to move largely by ferrying with its own transport. It now began, with 255 Tank Brigade, to concentrate in the Gangaw Valley.

5 Division.

The strength of the Japanese and the fact, becoming more obvious daily, that they were moving formations from the other two Burma fronts to reinforce the opposition to Fourteenth Army, made me very anxious, even if only for the period of the forthcoming decisive battle, to increase my strength from five to six divisions. My proposal to bring in 5 Division was, however, a nightmare to the Army Administrative Staff. It was in fact theoretically impossible to maintain it. However I had complete confidence in asking Major-General Snelling and his staff to accomplish the theoretically impossible. They had done it so many times before. I felt the necessity for this division would be so vital that I decided it must be brought into the battle and added another grave administrative risk to the already formidable total.

VIII. The Crossing of the Irrawaddy.

The Irrawaddy.

The frontage of the Irrawaddy now being approached extended from Twinngé (seventy-five miles north of Mandalay) in the north, to Pagan in the south—a distance of two hundred and twenty-five miles. From Twinngé southwards for forty miles the river flows through thick forest and jungle, twenty-five miles of its course being a gorge. Thence to Pagan the Irrawaddy runs mainly through arid country broken by the cultivated plains of Mandalay and Myingyan. Its breadth changes constantly from a minimum of five-hundred yards through the gorge to a maximum of four thousand four hundred yards at its confluence with the Chindwin. The current varies from one to two miles an hour in the dry season to five to six miles an hour in the rains. The difference in the water level at Mandalay is as much as thirty-one feet, and, in March and April, the river is subject to sudden rises. In the narrower parts of the river the banks shelve steeply, while in the broad stretches, where the banks are low, the river is frequently obstructed by islands and by sand banks, which change position after each monsoon. Navigation is therefore extremely difficult and the greatest care was needed in selecting crossing points.

The Timing of Crossings.

On the 33 Corps front I agreed completely with General Stopford's intention to seize a crossing, by surprise if possible, at the earliest opportunity. The question of the timing of other crossings had to be decided—whether these crossings should be simultaneous in both corps or whether

one Corps should cross before the other, and if so, which. After discussion with both Corps Commanders it seemed best to phase the main crossings simultaneously, some time after the first crossing by 33 Corps. We calculated that a crossing in the north, combined with the obvious build up on the north bank about Mandalay, would convince the enemy that our major effort would be there, and he would dispose his forces accordingly. The Japanese react slowly, and, even if they realised that the 4 Corps crossing was the more serious threat, he would delay moving troops from 33 Corps front. Moreover it was necessary to secure the 4 Corps bridge-head in good time as passing through the Striking Force for Meiktila might be a lengthy business.

Responsibility for Crossings.

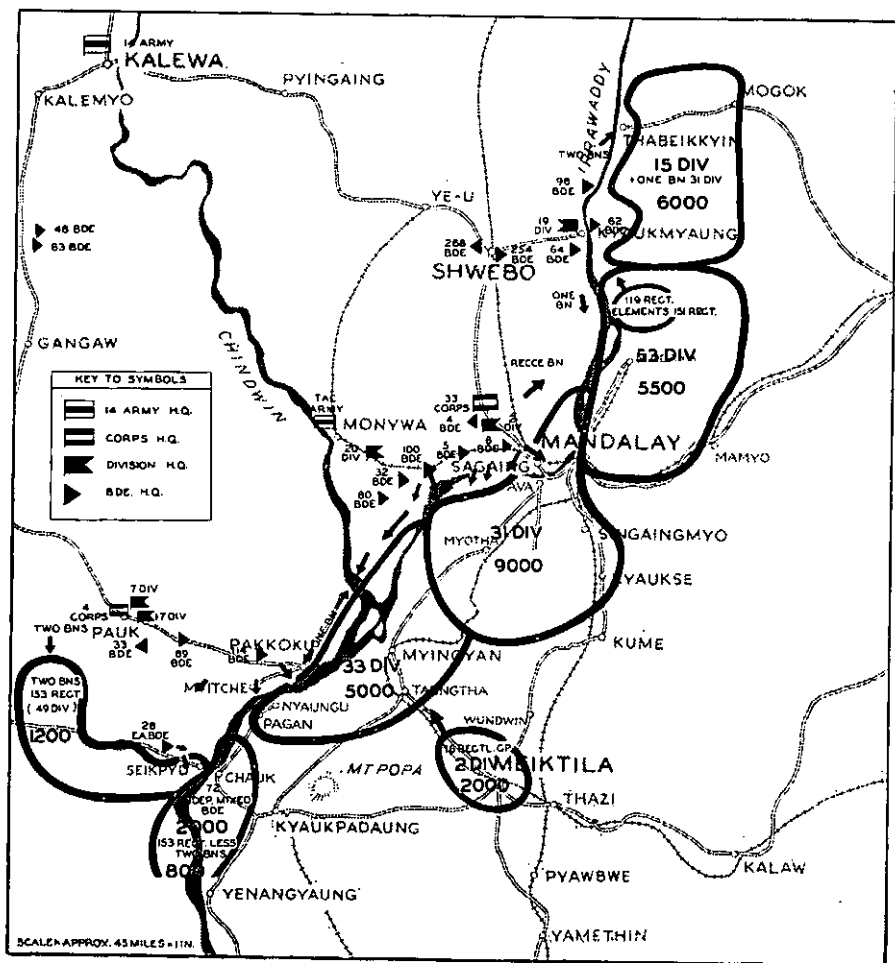
The whole of the planning for the actual crossings and the selection of their sites was left in the hands of Corps and Divisional Commanders. Army Headquarters confined itself to providing all the help it could in the form of equipment, technical units, etc. This was by no means as much as I should have liked, or, indeed, as Corps Commanders might reasonably expect. Many of the boats and much of the rafting stores available were obsolete in pattern and very much part worn. The portage over hundreds of miles of bad roads had caused a great deal of damage. There was a serious shortage of out-board engines. Most of those available were under-powered for the task expected of them, and some unreliable. Our own equipment was eked out by a considerable number of pontoons captured from the enemy, but these were of a poor type for anything except bridging.

The Enemy.

The enemy knew we were about to attempt crossings, and, realizing it was impossible for him to hold effectively two hundred miles of river bank, concentrated his defences at the most likely crossing places, watched the intervening spaces, and held his reserves, especially artillery and tanks, mobile and well back. He also organized "suicide penetration units" to operate on our bank, and, by interfering with our preparations, to delay and confuse us. Generally speaking his dispositions to meet attack, especially from the north, were suitable, and Kimura after his tour of inspection probably felt that, while he might not be able to stop us crossing in places, he would be able to destroy rapidly such forces as did manage to get over. His shortage of air support was of course a great handicap, but he made arrangements to use what he had more boldly and more freely.

19 Division Crossing.

On 9th January, 19 Division, without wasting a moment, snatched a surprise crossing against light opposition at Thabeikkyin, and thus gained the honour of being the first across the Irrawaddy. They followed this on the 12th by a crossing at Kyaukmyaung further to the south. Both these bridge-heads were almost immediately counter-attacked, and



MAP 3.—JAP. DISPOSITIONS.

Build up on Irrawaddy after 19 Div's crossings North of Mandalay, End Jan., 1945.

it became a race between our build-up in them and the Japanese concentration against them.

Japanese Reaction to 19 Division's Crossing.

As I had hoped, the Japanese commander of the 15 Army—Lieut-General Katamura—appreciated that 19 Division's crossing was to be followed by the whole of 4 Corps, which he still thought was on that flank. He was probably strengthened in this belief by the gradual advance of 36 Division towards Thabeikkyin, which seemed to indicate, in combination with the supposed 4 Corps, a heavy offensive down the east bank on Mandalay. He decided that the first step to breaking this up was to destroy the 19 Division before it could consolidate its bridge-head, and he acted with vigour.

He concentrated the bulk of 15 and 53 Divisions against the Kyauk-myaung bridge-head, added a strong force of army artillery—he even drew on the artillery of 31 and 33 Divisions—and a detachment of his tanks. Covered by the heaviest artillery concentration our troops had yet endured, the Japanese put in attack after attack, sometimes by infiltration, sometimes by direct suicide assault. These they kept up almost daily and nightly for nearly a month. 19 Division not only stood firm, yielding no ground, but, in spite of heavy casualties, slowly expanded its bridge-head. Gradually, as the enemy dead piled up, the edge was taken from his attack and it was plain that the bridge-head was secure.

20 Division Crossing.

On 17 January 20 Division, pushing on from the capture of Budalin, was only five miles from Monywa, an important town, which, although now only a shell, remained the chief Japanese port and administrative centre on the Chindwin. The enemy resistance here was fanatical, but after some days of rather costly fighting, the troops of 20 Division, magnificently supported by 221 Group Royal Air Force, stormed the last Japanese strongholds in the Jail and on the Rifle Range on 22 January. On the same day other troops of the Division reached the Irrawaddy at Myinmu, forty miles west of Mandalay. Here, before the village was taken, there was close and bitter fighting. A large body of Japanese withdrawing before our advance was caught as it attempted to cross the river. It was practically annihilated; the last platoon, putting on its full equipment, marched into the river under the amused eyes of their Gurkha conquerors.

For the next ten days the Division carried out reconnaissances for the crossing, and, with the greatest daring, continuously pushed patrols across the river, which maintained a reign of terror and thuggery among the Japanese posts on the southern bank.

The actual crossing took place near the village of Allagappa on 12 February. Here the river was some fifteen hundred yards wide, with a strong-flowing current. That night the remainder of the leading brigade got over and by dawn two villages had been captured after confused fighting and a bridge-head formed. The crossing had been screened by diversionary attacks and feints which distracted and drew off the Japanese, and it had been made on the boundary between two Japanese Divisions, thus adding to their confusion. By nightfall on the 14 February, after

considerable fighting, the bridge-head was six miles wide by two miles deep.

7 Division Crossing.

The 7 Division crossing was an outstanding example of how such an operation should be done. For some time before a well-planned and executed deception scheme was at work. There were simulated preparations at Pakokku, and Yenangyaung was "sold" as the main objective of operations in this area. On the day of the actual crossing a convincing feint was made at Chauk by the 28 East African Brigade which had fought its way to the river bank.

The crossing began at Nyaungu on 13 February, a day later than the 20 Division crossing further north. Here the river was thirteen hundred yards wide, but it had to be crossed diagonally, which entailed for some troops two thousand yards of water. The approaches on the west bank were long and very open; the landing places on the eastern bank were a number of small beaches among steep cliffs which gave complete observation across the river. It was therefore the least likely place that would be chosen. Evidently the Japanese thought so, as its defence had been largely entrusted to detachments of an I.N.A. Division with only a small Japanese stiffening. Moreover, Nyaungu was on the boundary between the Japanese 17 and 28 Armies.

The first troops crossing on the night of 13/14 February met with difficulties from the failure of many of their outboard motors to cope with the strong current, but by 1030 hours two companies were over and the beach-head secured almost without opposition. During the day a brigade and some tanks joined them and, after some fighting, captured Pagan. On the west bank another Brigade pushed towards Pakokku and by 20 February was clearing part of a large island south of the town. Enemy forces now began to appear on the southern flanks of the bridge-head and local counter-attacks commenced, but prisoners informed us that the Japanese commander regarded the landings as merely diversions in little strength.

Meanwhile 17 Division, less its airborne brigade, which remained at the Palel airfield, and 255 Tank Brigade were concentrated south of Pauk waiting for the order to cross. Behind them again 5 Division, also less its airborne brigade, was moving down the Kabaw Valley, and thence on to Nyaungu via Ye-u and Monywa. For some time plans had been made to use this Division with 17 Division at Meiktila and to the south.

2 Division Crossing.

The last of the 33 Corps crossings, that by 2 Division, was made at the village of Ngazun, between Mandalay and the 20 Division bridge-head, on 24 February.

This crossing unfortunately did not gain the advantage of surprise to the extent that the others had done. The first flights put off across fifteen hundred yards of water at 2200 hours. Two battalions from the Myinzi area landed on Ngazun Island, a large sandbank in the river, where

they came under heavy mortar, machine gun and artillery fire; another battalion attempting the full crossing was discovered, a large number of its boats holed and sunk, and the survivors compelled to return to the north bank. For a time it appeared the crossings had failed. However the Divisional Commander and his staff were not discouraged. While re-organizing the returned troops, an alternative scheme for the crossing was brought into effect. The fact that this alteration was successfully made in the darkness and despite the inevitable confusion of the first failure, was an outstanding feat of control, staff work and discipline. By 25 February a brigade, less a battalion, was firmly established on the south bank, with a third battalion in possession of Ngazun Island. Next day two brigades complete were over.

After his first resistance on the beaches the enemy was strangely passive on this front. Unlike his reaction at the other bridge-heads, he put in little or nothing in the way of counter-attacks during the following days and only interfered with our build-up by considerable shelling and some minor air action.

On 27 February, an ALFSEA Operation Instruction was issued directing Fourteenth Army to destroy the Japanese forces in the Mandalay area and to seize Rangoon before the monsoon. As orders, based on the Fourteenth Army Operation Instruction of 19 December, to effect these objects had been issued to Corps some time previously, no changes in our plans or dispositions were necessary.

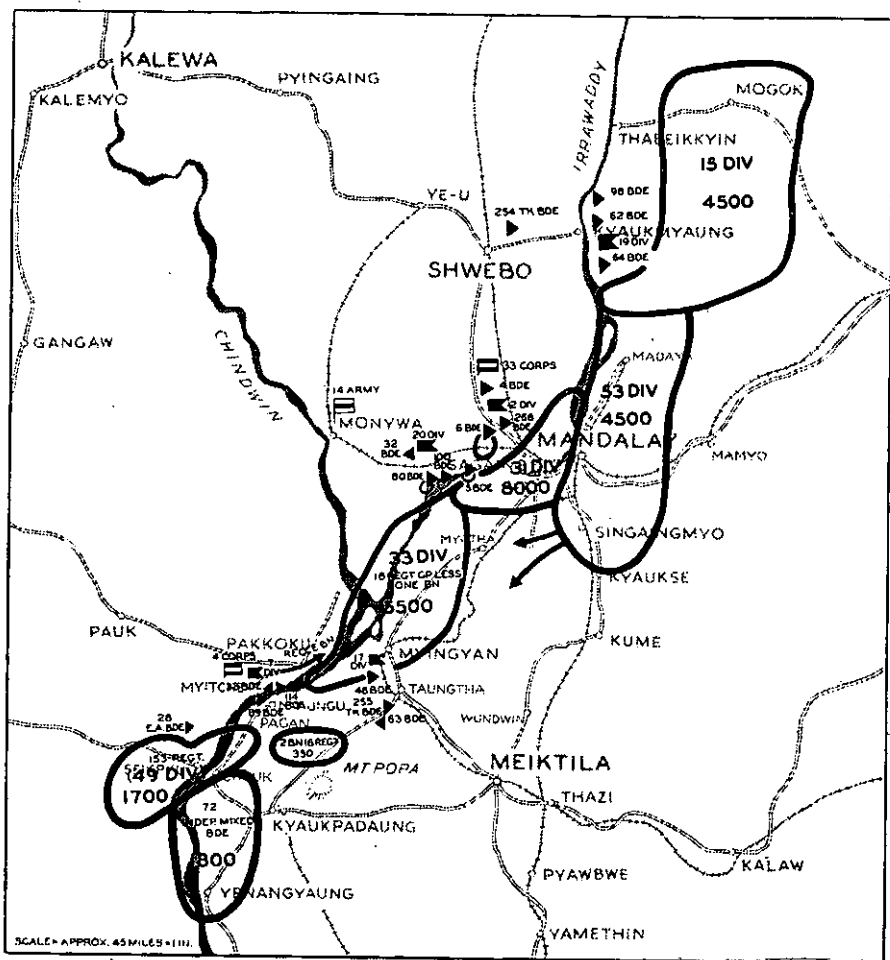
Success of the Irrawaddy Crossings.

Four Divisions and a Tank Brigade had, intact, and with unbelievably small losses been established in firm bridge-heads across one of the world's greatest rivers, defended by a numerous, prepared, well-equipped and fanatically courageous enemy. This was an achievement of the greatest magnitude. Moreover, I do not believe a river crossing on such a scale had ever been attempted, let alone succeeded, with such meagre equipment.

This outstanding success was due first to the skilful planning and resolute leadership of Lieut-Generals Stopford and Messervy and of their Divisional Commanders, who had been entirely responsible for the whole of the tactical handling of the crossings. Secondly, it was due to the magnificent dash shown by the troops in the crossings and their stubborn defence during the grim struggle to hold the bridge-heads against the fiercest attacks.

Enemy's General Reaction to Crossings.

Kimura, the Japanese Commander-in-Chief, had by now realized that the crossings to the north and west of Mandalay had jeopardized his whole plan for Central Burma. Believing still that 4 Corps as well as 33 Corps was in the Mandalay area, he regarded the threat at Pagan as a slight one which could be dealt with easily by Yamamoto's force. The situation called for drastic measures and he took them. His plan was a bold one. He saw that the fate of Burma was about to be settled around and south



MAP 4.—ENEMY SITUATION, 20 FEB., 1945.

Immediately After Crossings (By 20 Div., 7 Div.) of Irrawaddy.

of Mandalay, and everything must be sacrificed to bring the greatest possible strength into that vital area. He decided at one stroke to withdraw the bulk of all the forces he had on other Burma fronts and to crush the Fourteenth Army while it was still pinned in its bridge-heads. To achieve this the loss of Lashio and of the Arakan would be a trifle.

He ordered 15 and 53 Divisions to hold 19 Division, and a detachment to delay 36 Division north of Mandalay. From opposite NCAC 18 Division less one Regiment, one Regiment of 49 Division and one Regiment of 2 Division were to move at the greatest speed to the Mandalay area, leaving only 56 Division and one Regiment of 18 Division to delay the three Chinese Divisions of NCAC and the Chinese Salween forces. From the Arakan, 54 Division was to be brought to the Irrawaddy Valley north of Yenangyaung, dropping behind it stops on the Taungup-Prome Road and at the An Pass to prevent our 15 Corps breaking through after them. From South Burma, ignoring the bogey of sea-borne landings, 49 Division (less the Regiment already committed north of Yenangyaung) and one Regiment of 55 Division were to concentrate by road and rail to the south of Mandalay. Even one Regiment of 2 Division which had reached Pegu on its way to join the Divisional Headquarters in Siam was hurriedly counter-marched and railed north. Considering the difficulties of his communications after two and a half years of Allied bombing, and that he had to move almost entirely by night, Kimura carried out this large-scale redistribution of his forces with astonishing speed.

The result was that the Fourteenth Army would now have against its six divisions in the decisive battle the equivalent of another three Japanese Divisions, or a total of seven and two-thirds Japanese Divisions, to say nothing of two I.N.A. Divisions. In fact the last of the three main factors on which I had based my original plan had gone after the other two. I congratulated myself on the fact that in spite of gloomy prophecies I had insisted on bringing in 5 Divisions. With only five Divisions I should have been very doubtful of my ability to destroy the enemy. Six was not the odds I should have liked, but with such Divisions, with their training, their proved fighting value, their high morale, and their picked commanders working as a team, we should, I was confident, do it.

All the same, I should welcome all the help I could get, and I asked that 36 Division be placed under my command, that deception measures to hold the Japanese forces on the south-west coast and in Moulmein district should be redoubled, and that 15 Corps from Taungup should thrust with the largest maintainable strength towards Prome. To help in the last operation I was willing even to give up sixty tons a day of my precious air lift.

Expansion of the Bridge-heads.

The fighting in the 20 Division bridge-head, like that in the 19 Division, was prolonged, bitter and often hand-to-hand. The enemy had concentrated to destroy it. Casualties in this close fighting were heavy on both sides, but the balance was very much in our favour, and, as so often happened, the Japanese Commanders recklessly expended their men in

constant piecemeal local assaults instead of using them in fewer better-prepared, stronger, and more effective attacks. The stage had now been reached when 20 Division could pass from the defensive to the offensive. The enemy opposing them had grown tired and the new reinforcements as they came up were being flung hurriedly into the battle.

On 16 February the village of Alethaung was captured after savage close-in fighting. The Japanese retaliated by fierce counter-attacks, especially against an isolated position on the west of the bridge-head. There followed severe fighting which led to the capture of Gaungo, Kanlan and finally, on 26 February, of the important village of Tabingok. The bridge-head was now eight miles wide and two and a half deep. In this week over five hundred enemy bodies were recovered in this sector alone.

During this period 19 Division in hard fighting gradually extended its hold on the east bank, capturing Singu to the south, and the high ground about it. Troops and transport were steadily passed over the river and preparations began for a drive on Mandalay.

2 Division was left almost in peace, it being evidently the enemy's intention merely to contain it while destroying 20 Division. Our build-up continued with little interference and the bridge-head was slowly extended.

7 Division was having a very active time. One brigade thrust eastwards along the south bank against increasing opposition. Another struck southwards from Pagan towards Singu and the communication centre of Kyaukpadaung. This advance produced several strong counter-attacks, all of which, after hard fighting, were flung back with very heavy loss.

On the west bank clearing up around Pakokku continued, while 28 East African Brigade probed south. A column of the Chin Hills Battalion and the Lushai Scouts operated in the hills south of Pauk and gradually pushed back the Japanese screen in a series of minor actions.

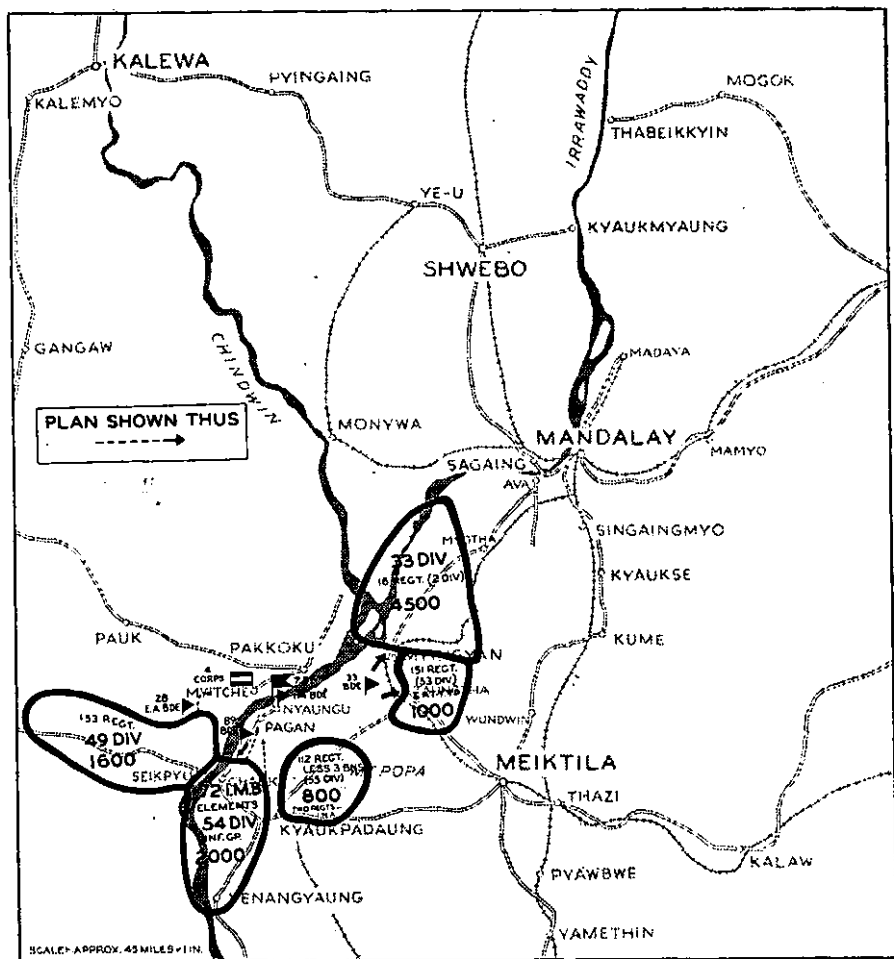
IX.—The Decisive Stroke.

The Enemy Situation.

Kimura's great drive against 33 Corps was beginning. From all sides his forces were converging on the vital area, while those already in position fought hard to contain our bridge-heads about Mandalay. The nodal point of all their communications was the Meiktila-Thazi area, through which passed all the main road and rail routes, not only to Mandalay, but to Myngyan and the north west, and through Kalaw and Maymyo to Lashio and Siam. In this area, too, were the chief Japanese supply dumps, hospitals and air fields, for the whole of North and Central Burma.

17 Division Break Out.

By strenuous exertion and a splendidly organized ferry service, 17 Division, less its air-borne Brigade, and 255 Tank Brigade, were concentrated



MAP 5.—"YAMAMOTO" COUNTER OFFENSIVE PLAN.

Situation on 7 Div. Front First half of March (Orders of 6 March).

in the 7 Division bridge-head, complete by 22 February. The day before a mechanized and armoured column had pushed out and had burst into Hnawdwin, fifteen miles on the road to Taungtha. This drive was of good augury for the major ones to follow. It was the first time massed armour had been used against the Japanese in open country, combined with the improved technique of the aerial "Cab Rank" by which flights of aircraft circle the battlefield and are instantly directed on to opportunity targets by radio telephony from control centres with the ground commanders. The morale of the troops was high even for 17 Division. They were out for blood and they got it. The Japanese, completely surprised by this mechanized avalanche, were hustled out of their positions and slaughtered in the open.

The remainder of the Division and Tank Brigade, less a Regiment left with 7 Division, followed during the succeeding days. The deep dry chaung crossings beyond Hnawdwin proved very difficult for the mechanized force, but, splitting into two columns, it converged on Taungtha. Here, the Japanese, hurriedly collected from a dozen units of all kinds, resisted desperately, and there was a good killing. The town was captured on 24 February and with it a very large dump of supplies, equipment and ammunition of all kinds. Taungtha proved to be the maintenance centre for the 33 Division and all troops to the north-west.

The advance continued without pause, brushing aside hastily organized resistance, through Mahlaing, until, on the morning of 26 February, the first of the group of airfields, Thabutkon, was over-run. Troops worked on the strip all night and at 1200 hours on 27 February the fly-in of 17 Division's air-borne Brigade from Palel began. The rest of 17 Division had by then pushed on astride the Meiktila road and was approaching the town. The Japanese in some force made a determined attempt to hold a road-block, but a series of strikes from the cab-rank, closely followed up by infantry and tanks, smashed through.

The Assault on Meiktila.

On the last day of February the assault on Meiktila began. The commander of the garrison, Major-General Kasuya, had had some days to prepare and put his defences in order. He displayed the greatest energy, collecting administrative units, improvising infantry companies from odds and ends, ceaselessly digging defences and organizing his perimeter into sectors. Every available man was put into the fighting line. Even those patients in the hospitals who could stand were taken to an ordnance depot, issued with LMGs and put to hold defences. The strength of the Japanese proved much greater than we had anticipated, partly because the bulk of one Regiment of the 49 Division had just arrived there on their forced march to reinforce 15 Army. In addition there were two air-field defence battalions, anti-aircraft batteries, and a host of administrative units. The actual strength return of General Kasuya's force, captured later, showed the considerable total of 3,500 men and a large number of guns. These, dug in under houses, in the banks of lakes, in concrete and timber strong points, sometimes strengthened by piled-up rice sacks, sitting among their supply and ammunition dumps, presented a formidable nut to crack. On

the analogy of Myitkyina and Bhamo they could expect to hold out for weeks, long before which relief might come to them.

On 28 February the attack began. One Brigade advanced straight astride the main Mahlaing Road; another came in from the west, while two Battalions and 255 Tank Brigade pushed in from the east and north-east. The broken country, the narrow passages between the lakes, the houses and irrigation channels, made the deployment of armour difficult, but a dominating hill feature, Pt. 859, was captured, and the town, one of considerable size, surrounded.

Throughout 1 March and the following night there was hand-to-hand fighting as savage as any yet experienced in a theatre where close-in fighting is the rule rather than the exception. House by house areas were cleared and the railway station and the main air-field captured. For the next three days and nights the dog-fight went on. It reduced itself to a series of bloody struggles between platoons of our men supported often by a few tanks, and desperate Japanese, almost every man with an automatic weapon clinging to the last to their cellars, dug-outs and fox holes. But the British, Indian and Gurkha troops of 17 Division were not to be denied. They had old scores to pay. They shot, blasted, bombed and hacked their way into the Japanese defences and bayoneted the defenders to the last man.

During 2 and 3 March the fly-in of the air-borne brigade of 17 Division to Thabutkon was completed and it moved into Meiktila to take part in the battle.

By early morning 4 March the whole of North Meiktila was in our hands. To the east and west of the lake isolated Japanese suicide parties still held out viciously. Over two thousand bodies had been counted in the area of the town alone. Forty-eight guns had been captured and forty-seven prisoners, mostly wounded, taken. During the next few days the remaining small parties and snipers were liquidated.

Immediately Meiktila was secured mobile columns of infantry, guns and armour pushed out along the roads radiating from the town; in some places they met hastily organized Japanese road-blocks; in others parties of reinforcements, guns and transport making for Meiktila. Everywhere the Japanese were confused, their action unco-ordinated, and, while usually they fought with their accustomed desperate valour, the combination of skilfully handled infantry, armour and aircraft was too much for them. The fighting in many of the engagements at the time was slaughter, and our casualties bore no proportion to those of the Japanese.

5 Division.

On 5 March 5 Division began its move from Jorhat, seven hundred miles from Meiktila. It had been a feverish rush to reorganize and equip it and it only completed its vehicles by taking over those of 28 East African Brigade in the forward area. By 15 March its forward concentration was complete, with the bulk of the air-borne brigade at Palel and one battalion already landed at Meiktila.

X. Japanese Reaction to Capture of Meiktila.

Surprise.

The seizure of Meiktila was a terrible surprise to the Japanese Commander. He had been completely misled as to the location of 4 Corps, which up to this moment he had thought in the north. At first he had no idea what this force which had struck such a grievous blow at his vitals was, but he did realise at once the fatal danger he would be in if he could not quickly recover Meiktila. The plan to concentrate all resources against 33 Corps was abandoned. The reinforcing formations moving to the Mandalay area were either put into reverse or diverted to Meiktila. Even some of the troops already fighting that Corps were pulled out of the fight and turned against the new danger. All were urged to greater speed and every method of transport strained to move them quickly.

In addition to the direct attack on Meiktila, Yamamoto's troops in the Irrawaddy Valley, reinforced by a more rapid withdrawal from 54 and 55 Divisions in the Arakan, were ordered to stage a converging attack on both sides of the river against 4 Corps' bridge-head and to seize the river crossing, thus cutting our L. of C. to Meiktila.

These sudden changes, the bombing of his Headquarters, which we were increasingly able to locate, and the depredations of our roving armoured columns began to affect the enemy's communications and control. From now on his commanders began gradually to lose control of their formations and of the battle. We intensified our attacks on such objectives.

The Build-Up Against Meiktila.

The force assembled against Meiktila on the north consisted of 18 Division (less one Regiment) moved rapidly from the NCAC front, one Regiment of 53 Division from the reserve south of Mandalay and one Regiment of 33 Division hurriedly pulled in from the Pakokku area. Both these Regiments were placed under command of 18 Division. To the south of the town came 49 Division (less one Regiment), the bulk of which had travelled by road and rail two hundred and eighty miles from Pegu in under a fortnight. In addition Army units, medium artillery and what was left of the Tank Regiment were added.

The Japanese Commander, as was evident from captured documents, in spite of the loss of Meiktila, had no intention as yet of withdrawing his forces to the north of it. He still meant to continue what he called the "decisive battle of the Irrawaddy Shore" and hoped that the strength he had brought against it would regain Meiktila. As a precautionary measure, however, he began to improve the cart tracks running parallel to the main road from Mandalay so as to by-pass Meiktila and Thazi and thus provide him with a new L. of C. to the north.

XI. The Irrawaddy Battle.

7 Division.

7 Division in expending its bridge-head to cover the passage of 17 and 5 Divisions had been dangerously stretched; Yamamoto at Yenangyaung seized the opportunity to launch his counter-strike. He planned by simultaneous attacks on both banks to destroy 28 East African Brigade, thus seizing the west bank of the crossing, and to break into Nyaungu by a two-column attack from the south and east. The offensive was, however, badly co-ordinated; the INA Division, which was to form the northern pincer on the east bank, showed no desire to push matters to extremes. Attacks were unco-ordinated, piecemeal and costly. The only success attained was against 28 East African Brigade, which after heavy fighting was driven back some thirteen miles to the Letse area. Here hurriedly reinforced by an Indian battalion and some Field Artillery of 7 Division it held its ground against a series of infiltration attacks. On the east bank an attack near Singu was forestalled by our troops, who assaulted just as the Japanese destined to attack them had arrived in the assembly position and routed them.

19 Division.

In the first week of March, 19 Division broke out south from its bridge-head. The speed and fierceness of its onrush and the way in which its leading columns were ready to by-pass and leave behind them strong Japanese pockets of resistance badly rattled the enemy 15 and 53 Divisions. In a series of aggressive thrusts opposition north of Mandalay on the east bank was brushed aside, and the enemy was not given time to fall back on his carefully prepared positions about Madaya—19 Division arrived on them ahead of him.

By 8 March the leading troops were approaching Mandalay Hill, the great pagoda-crowned rock which dominates the city from the north-east. Throughout the next day and night the fiercest hand-to-hand fighting went on as Gurkhas and British stormed up the precipitous slopes and bombed and tommy-gunned their way into the concrete buildings. The Japanese stood to the end, until the last defenders, holding out in a deep tunnel, were destroyed by petrol rolled down in drums and ignited by tracer bullets. The north of the city was then entered, and in street fighting cleared up to the walls of Fort Dufferin. By March 14 the whole of the city was cleared except for a few snipers and Fort Dufferin invested. A gallant but rash attempt to rush the eighty-yard water-filled moat and scale the immense thirty-foot walls failed. The siege that then began closely resembled that of Delhi Fort in the Mutiny. Medium guns were brought up to a few hundred yards to breach the walls, storming parties were formed, attempts were made to enter by great pipes running into the moat. An innovation was the skip bombing and rocket attacks by aircraft. Even these failed to do more than crumble the masonry face of the walls; the forty-yard wide earth embankment behind remained. The

Fort could without doubt have been taken by assault at any time, but there was no need to pay the heavy cost in life this would certainly entail.

On 11 March, after a rapid move by jungle tracks across the hills, a brigade of the Division had astounded the Japanese by appearing at Maymyo, the summer capital of Burma, north-east of Mandalay, thus cutting the road and railway which were the only direct communication with Lashio and the troops still opposing NCAC. Japanese convoys and trains were still running on the road and railway when our troops arrived, and losses were inflicted on them.

XII. The Battle for Central Burma.

Opportunity.

The battle for Central Burma was now fully joined. The Japanese were fighting stubbornly, first to destroy our Meiktila force and secondly to hold back our bridge-heads about Mandalay. They showed every intention of fighting it out. This I had hoped they would do, as we now had the advantage of position, greater mobility in open country, and overwhelming air superiority. If only we could really smash the Japanese 15 and parts of 33 and 28 Armies which confronted us, the way to the south should be comparatively open.

The Meiktila Battle.

The enemy pressed fiercely his attacks to regain Meiktila and to cut all communications to it. He realized that this was the decisive sector of the battle for Central Burma. The "tail" of 17 Division and 255 Tank Bde, some five thousand "soft" vehicles, could not come through as the road was blocked by a strong Japanese force, which had, after our column had passed, re-occupied the dominating hill massif at Taungtha. The leading Brigade of 5 Division, passing through 7 Division bridge-head, began the necessarily slow process of clearing them out and opening the road.

The pressure on Meiktila itself increased; the enemy's chief aim was to take the air strip, some two miles from the town, on which all our supplies were landed. Could he succeed in denying this to us for a period our situation would be precarious. Meanwhile armoured and infantry columns of 17 Division still pushed out in all directions, beating up Japanese forces wherever met and capturing many guns.

The fly-in of the air-borne brigade of 5 Division began and was completed by 17 March. Part of this brigade was landed while the air strip was under direct Japanese artillery fire, and it said much for the gallantry of the American Air Commandoes that every sortie was completed even though machines were being destroyed on the ground after landing. The losses in troops during this operation were surprisingly small. Soon after, the Japanese by a great effort actually occupied the

strip. All landing ceased and the only supplies that could be brought to 17 Division had to be dropped, thus entailing a large reduction in the daily delivery. Replacements for casualties or reinforcements could not arrive and wounded could not be evacuated except by light aircraft from the small strip in the town.

It was imperative to regain the use of the main strip. North of it, where the Japanese were strongly dug in, was difficult and broken country, with deep chaungs which were tank obstacles. In addition, the enemy had brought up many anti-tank guns and was using mines freely. The grimness of his defence was shown by his use of the human tank mine. A man, having between his knees a 100-kilo aircraft bomb, would crouch in a fox-hole, holding poised above the fuse a large stone. When the attacking tank passed over the almost invisible hole the man dropped the stone—then bomb, man, and, it was hoped, tank, all went up together. Luckily the device was not very effective and accounted for more Japanese than tanks.

In spite of the fiercest resistance our infantry, supported when possible by tanks, and almost always by fighter-bombers placing their loads within one hundred yards of the advancing troops, drove the enemy from the air-field. His guns, however, still dominated it as point-blank range, and it was not until 29 March that, after the fiercest hand-to-hand fighting, the enemy was driven out of the broken ground. His scattered remnants fell back, leaving most of their guns in our hands, and having suffered disastrous casualties.

Fighting West of Meiktila.

While 17 Division and 255 Tank Brigade with the air-borne Brigade of 5 Division were fighting the grim battle to hold Meiktila, the remainder of 4 Corps was not idle.

7 Division was pressing hard to expand the area it held. A Brigade pushing back rear-guards came up against well-prepared positions, strongly held, covering Myingyan from the south, and it was not until 23 March that the river town was captured after stiff fighting. Simultaneously the area enclosed by the confluence of the Chindwin and the Irrawaddy was cleared of stubborn enemy parties. It was urgent to get possession of Myingyan as it was required as river head for I.W.T. from Kalewa and time was short in which to develop it as a port, and, if possible, to get the railway from it to Meiktila working. Its capture caused a sigh of relief from the administrative staff of the Army, and wharf construction and repair of railway bridges began feverishly almost under fire.

A tough struggle went on for the Taungtha hill feature which fell on 29 March to a brigade of 5 Division, which next day was relieved by a brigade of 7 Division. The road was open and the "tail" of 17 Division, followed by 5 Division, swept through without opposition to Meiktila, completing their concentration there on 3 April.

On the west bank of the Irrawaddy in the oil fields area, Yamamoto's men were pushed back by 7 Division, and Lanywa, the first of the oil fields, occupied on 31 March. On the east bank strong patrol actions,

almost invariably in our favour, went on in the Singu area to the south and towards Kyaupkadaung in the east.

At this stage it became necessary owing to the strain on air supply again to reduce the number of troops in 4 Corps. The fly-out of 28 East African Brigade was therefore begun.

Fighting in the North.

The offensive by 33 Corps, the hammer for the Meiktila anvil, was in full swing. 19 Division cleared the last portions of Mandalay city and an area to the south and east. Pressure against Fort Dufferin was increased and on 20 March it fell, the remnants of the garrison trickling out the previous night through the ruins around the south-east corner. Many were intercepted and killed, but a few small parties escaped. About one hundred and sixty civilian internees, European and Anglo-Burman, were rescued from the Fort and a very big haul of Japanese ordnance stores taken. Since crossing the Irrawaddy on 9 January 19 Division had counted over six thousand Japanese corpses on its front.

20 Division, after sustaining some of the heaviest attacks of the whole campaign on its bridge-head, passed to the offensive and on 2 March linked up with 2 Division bridge-head to the east. The tempo of the advance quickened. One brigade broke out to the south-east, and by 10 March against strong opposition, had made Magyinal, three miles on; another brigade had captured the village of Gyo, ten miles on, whilst the third was driving rapidly south. Japanese resistance, while as desperate as ever, was becoming more disjointed and uncontrolled. On 12 March, the important road centre of Myotha was taken and many Japanese killed. On 19 March Singaingmyo fell and a brigade was approaching Kyaukse, the Japanese rallying place and maintenance base on the main Rangoon-Mandalay road and railway, against ever-increasing resistance. By 23 March a Brigade of 20 Division was fighting hard only two miles west of Kyaukse and, after a week of stubborn fighting, the town fell on 30 March. The Japanese had fought so hard for it, partly to save some of the vast quantities of stores of all kinds it contained, and partly as a covering bastion behind which to rally their troops retreating now in disorder from the north and west.

This break-out and advance to Kyaukse were spectacular feats which only a magnificent Division, magnificently led, could have staged after weeks of the heaviest defensive fighting.

From 20 Division a small mechanized column of a Brigade less a battalion, and two armoured car regiments, each less a squadron, had been formed with orders to sweep south, disorganize enemy communications, destroy any forces met and make touch with 17 Division in the Meiktila area. The column was brilliantly handled, and moving with great rapidity, it captured Pyinzi on 20 March, Pindale the next day, and Wundwin on the following. On the 24 March it seized Kume, where a large number of Japanese were taken completely by surprise and slaughtered. The effects of this daring raid were immense. Not only

did it inflict heavy casualties, capture guns, destroy administrative installations, but it helped greatly to throw out of gear the Japanese system of command, already at breaking point.

2 Division's advance was slower, although it met less opposition than 20 Division, but by 23 March, after capturing the Ava Fort and joining 268 Brigade at the Ava Bridge, it had reached the banks of the Myitnge River south of Mandalay and was dealing with the Japanese streaming back in front of 19 Division. A brigade of 2 Division advanced southwest from Pyinzi and entered Mahlaing to the west of Meiktila on 31 March.

NCAC Front.

The three Chinese Divisions of the First Chinese Army had taken Lashio by 7 March, and, having accomplished their limited mission, were unlikely to take much further part in the campaign. Their future activity was confined to a limited advance south of Lashio, where they halted. Watching them the Japanese left part of 56 Division while the remainder of their troops pulled out by the cart tracks running south to take part in the main battle.

36 Division, which, after a stiff action at the Shweli River was still advancing on Mogok, was placed by ALFSEA under command Fourteenth Army. This could, however, be only a temporary arrangement as the American transport aircraft maintaining the division were to be withdrawn by 1 May and the division would, before that, have to be flown out to India. In order to make what use was possible of this division, orders were issued on 30 March that it should:—

- (i) Come under command Fourteenth Army on reaching Kyaukme.
- (ii) Fly one Brigade into Mandalay in maintenance aircraft as quickly as possible.
- (iii) Concentrate the whole Division, relieve 19 Division, and take over control of operations in the area Mandalay—Maymyo—Myittha—Ava.

The Japanese Accept Defeat.

With his forces at Meiktila being driven back with such heavy casualties by 4 Corps, and having lost so much of the Mandalay Plain to 33 Corps, the Japanese commander, having, as usual, left it till too late, accepted defeat and began a general withdrawal.

His object now was to collect the whole of his forces and re-organize them in two groups, one to prevent our further advance down the Mandalay-Rangoon railway axis, and the other to hold us as far north as possible in the Irrawaddy Valley. For the first, 33 Army was given 18, 49 and 53 Divisions; for the second, 28 Army had Yamamoto's force, being steadily increased by arrivals from 54 Division in the Arakan, the detachments in the Popa-Kyaükpadaung area, and 2 INA Division. 33 Army especially needed time to get into position, re-organize and dig in. The Japanese

losses in guns had been heavy and were to handicap them very much in defence, while the amount of their MT, captured or destroyed, restricted their mobility and drove them more and more to bullock carts.

XIII. Problems of the Advance to Rangoon.

Situation at Beginning of April.

All three Divisions of 33 Corps were now pushing the remnants of the Japanese 15 Army into the foothills east of the main Mandalay-Thazi road. 4 Corps had concentrated 5 and 17 Divisions and 255 Tank Brigade in the Meiktila area. 7 Division was clearing up on both sides of the Irrawaddy. The monsoon was anything from five to seven weeks away. While the Japanese 15 Army was dispersed and scrambling back through the foothills, 33 Army and 28 Army were still effective fighting forces, but most of their formations had been badly knocked about and had lost much artillery. Generally speaking none of the Japanese Divisions was in good shape, but as always they would recover if allowed time.

Our own divisions, although they had all been fighting strenuously and continuously for a considerable period, were in the greatest heart. Our casualties had not, considering the amount of close fighting, been unduly heavy, and as far as Indian units were concerned had been to a great extent replaced. British battalions were, as always in this theatre after a few months' operations, growing weak in numbers. We had of course lost no guns.

The whole Army was determined to go all out for Rangoon.

The Risks.

The Japanese still had large numbers of men left; they were fighting as stubbornly as ever. They had on each line of advance an organized and considerable force under an Army Headquarters. Other forces were, we knew, being formed and collected in rear.

Moreover, the most serious factor of all was, as usual, maintenance. We had at the moment seven divisions. One of these, 36 Division, must go soon before its American Air Transport was removed. Another also would have to go or it would be impossible to advance south of Meiktila and Yenangyaung. This would leave only five divisions and of these only three could be maintained in a rapid advance far to the south. It was quite possible that the Japanese could concentrate superior strength against the comparatively small striking forces we could form. Again maintenance forbade an advance in strength down both axes, so it had to be decided that the main thrust would be on only one. If the Japanese guessed which, he might concentrate against it.

Then there was the monsoon looming up closer daily. If we failed to

take Rangoon before it arrived, we were likely to be in for a major disaster, with the roads gone behind us, the air-strips unserviceable and flying conditions for dropping as bad as they could be. It was now that I so bitterly regretted the three weeks' delay caused by the removal of the squadrons to China in December. Those extra three weeks would have relieved me of half my anxieties. However, it was clear that if we were to get to Rangoon we must move fast—at an average of ten or twelve miles a day. This against the scale of opposition expected and the demolitions on the road was asking a lot; moreover if we moved fast, it meant there would be no time for elaborate attacks. Positions which could not be taken quickly, would have to be bypassed and there could be no pause for mopping up. Large masses of Japanese would be left behind in our rear.

However, formidable as the risks were, we had accepted greater and we were winning. The troops were out for Rangoon, and anyone who was with them and had seen them fight could not doubt that they would get there. The exhilaration running through the Army was a tangible thing that could be seen and felt.

I was nervous that the Japanese might attempt a suicide defence of Rangoon city with a fairly large force. This might keep us outside the Port after the monsoon had started, when our maintenance and health position would become rapidly precarious. I had therefore pressed strongly for a sea-borne landing, synchronized with Fourteenth Army advance. I had always advocated a landing at Moulmein, which, by closing the only Japanese escape route would not only cut off any retreating forces, but would compel him to draw out the Rangoon garrison to re-open it. However, naval difficulties to the Moulmein operation were too great and the C-in-C ALFSEA decided to land south of Rangoon, thus attacking the city from both sides.

Plan for the Advance to Rangoon.

We had been studying plans for the capture of Rangoon since early December, and as early as 19 December, 1944, I had in an Operation Instruction to Corps included in my intention the capture of a South Burma port. My original idea had been an advance in about equal strength down both axes, the Irrawaddy and the railway. The Japanese would not, I thought, be able to produce enough strength on both lines to stop both forces. One would be held; the other could advance. However, maintenance soon put a stop to that plan. We should have to concentrate our main effort on one axis. The question was, which?

The river line had certain attractions, but the monsoon decided that the essential thing about the advance must be speed. That presupposed a mechanized force. It was necessary therefore to choose the better route for a completely mechanized Corps. The strength of the striking force must be at least two divisions, and a Tank Brigade. It must not be thought that either of these axes was in any way ideal or comparable

to the desert or Europe for rapid thrusts by mobile and armoured force. On each there was one single road off which it was often difficult to deploy even tanks. The open motorable country of the Central Burma plains had been left behind. Once the rains set in, movement of wheels off the roads on both axes would be impossible. For the northern half of the two axes there was little to choose, but the farther south on the river axis the more the water crossings increased, all bridges would be blown, and unless an inordinate quantity of Bailey were carried serious delay must be expected there. The second factor was that the farther east we cut through the Japanese, the more of them would be left to cross the two Yomas, those jungle-covered jagged hills blocking their way either to Siam or South East Burma. My aim was to reach Rangoon just before the monsoon. The Japanese west of the railway would then have to struggle out during the monsoon—a second retreat similar to that from Imphal to the Chindwin with, I hoped, the same consequences.

Originally I had planned for 33 Corps to advance straight from Mandalay down the railway, but it was 5 and 17 Divisions of 4 Corps which had had the opportunity of reorganizing on a mechanized and air-borne basis. 4 Corps, in addition, with its fresh division was concentrated in the area Meiktila fifty miles south of the general location of 33 Corps. 4 Corps was therefore obviously the one to take that axis. In addition there was a large area Mandalay-Thazi-Kyaukpadaung-Chauk-Myingyan in which strong parties of Japanese would be holding out. This area would have to be combed because the roads and railway running through it must be free for L. of C. transport, and the only way to ensure that rapidly was to pass considerable numbers of troops across that area. I thus decided on a "Union Jack" manoeuvre, which entailed bringing 5 Division from north-west to south-east and 2 and 20 Divisions from north-east to south-west into the Irrawaddy Valley. 7 Division already there, would pass from 4 to 33 Corps. The "Union Jack" was a rather complicated movement by large formations which would require tricky staff work. I was however quite confident that the divisions were so highly trained in rapid movement that there would be little confusion. 19 and 36 Divisions would be directly under Fourteenth Army to clear up and hold behind Corps.

All troops south of Toungoo on the railway axis would be completely on air supply; those north of it on road, and if possible, rail. For 33 Corps on the river there would be air supply for one Division, but the rest would have to manage on road and I.W.T.

The method of the railway axis was a bound forward, as rapid as possible, to seize an air strip or a site for one, the fly in of airfield engineers, in gliders if necessary, and the quick follow-up of the air-borne brigade. Then, while that brigade held the air base, the rest of the Division would make its next bound. Air strips would be required at least every fifty miles. Each division would advance in turn, reach its objective, halt and let the other pass through.

It would be necessary the moment Rangoon was secured to turn back the troops in their tracks so as to deal with the very large numbers of enemy left behind.

Orders for the Advance South.

On 18 March an Instruction was issued to Commanders which divided the operation into three phases,—the present battle; the interim stage for re-grouping; and the actual advance south.

The main points of this Instruction were:—

Intention:—On completion of task of destroying Japanese Forces in Central Burma, Fourteenth Army will:—

- (a) Capture Rangoon at all costs and as soon as possible before monsoon.
- (b) Capture Yenangyaung, Magwe, Prome.
- (c) Secure area Myingyan-Mandalay-Maymyo-Chauk and road and railway axis Meiktila to Rangoon.

Interim Stage.

4 Corps—255 Tank Brigade—8 Cavalry—5 and 17 Divisions to secure Pyawbwe, strike at Japanese forces and concentrate for thrust South.

33 Corps—to clear Mandalay-Maymyo-Kyaukse, to operate 20 Division south and then south-west—operate 2 Division south-west—move 19 Division south to follow up and take over from 4 Corps up to Meiktila.

Advance South.

14 Army with 19 Division will secure Mandalay-Thazi-Meiktila.

4 Corps will capture Rangoon at all costs before monsoon.

33 Corps will capture Seikpyu and Chauk, first containing Yenangyaung, then capture in turn Magwe, Yenangyaung, Prome and finally Rangoon, if possible before 4 Corps.

XIV.—Re-Grouping.**Cleaning Up.**

In accordance with the "Union Jack" manoeuvre 268 Brigade and 2 Division swept west and south-west from the Kyaukse area in several columns, and, in a number of minor actions, destroyed or scattered many Japanese parties who were either trying to get out, or often left without orders, were still dully and grimly holding out. The area Myingyan-Myohta-Pyinzi-Mahlaing-Welaing was cleared in a few days. The most serious resistance was around Mount Popa, an extinct volcano rising abruptly 4000 feet from the plain. Here a party of five to six hundred Japanese with several guns, including mediums, held out most tenaciously

on the slopes of the mountain. They were engaged by converging columns of 2 and 7 Division and 268 Brigade. The elimination of this pocket went slowly and caused considerable delay. One reason for this was the lack of unified control over the detachments of three formations. Eventually the enemy was winkled out and all his guns captured. A considerable party, however, evaded our troops by night in the broken country and made off south.

7 Division.

7 Division advanced south with a brigade each side of the Irrawaddy, driving the enemy before them, while the third Brigade struck at Kyauk-padaung, a focal communication point which was taken on 12 April. Singu and Chauk, the second oilfield town, fell on 18, Seikkymayu on 20 April. On that day a brigade was fighting through the oil derricks and burnt-out tanks of the main oil-field, Yenangyaung. At the end of the next day the whole oil-field area was once more in British hands. In all these actions the toll of Japanese casualties mounted, guns were taken and much booty.

20 Division.

On conclusion of the operations in the Myittha-Wundwin area, 20 Division rapidly organized two brigades on a motorized establishment and began the move over to the Irrawaddy axis. This is one instance of several in this campaign when formations rapidly in the midst of action changed from an animal to an M.T. or air-borne establishment, smoothly and successfully. With well-trained infantry and transport units this is not as difficult as Staff Colleges imagine.

2 Division.

At this stage maintenance difficulties compelled the reduction of 33 Corps by one division, 2 Division was flown out to India in returning supply planes between 11 and 25 April. Its vehicles were used to increase the mobility and supply radius of 33 Corps formations, especially of 20 Division.

XV. The Advance Down the Irrawaddy.

The Seizure of Magwe.

The Japanese 28 Army Commander had made a fatal under-estimate of the speed at which we could move. The vital point on his communications from the east to his forces in the Yenangyaung-Magwe area was Taungdwingyi, and he garrisoned it with only INA troops, concentrating his Japanese formations at places nearer to the British and on their more direct lines of advance. On 10 April there were no British within sixty miles of it. On 13 April a mechanized Brigade of 20 Division had it. The Japanese were so taken by surprise that for some days after they were

still sending in convoys via Taungdwingyi to the great profit and enjoyment of 20 Division. A second brigade had followed to Natmawk, halfway to Taungdwingyi. A two-pronged attack with a brigade from each place then went in on Magwe, which was captured on 19 April after slight resistance from bewildered Japanese administrative personnel. Again much booty was taken, and Japanese convoys running into Magwe from the north were promptly and efficiently received.

Advance from the Oil Fields Area.

The Japanese had a considerable force west of the Irrawaddy opposite Yenangyaung consisting of the bulk of Yamamoto's force, part of which had been operating on that bank and part of which, with the fall of Magwe, had been compelled to cross the river from the east. One brigade of 7 Division was already advancing down the west bank while another crossed and linked up with it. Both then pressed on the unfortunate Yamamoto, hooking round him and driving him off the roads on to tracks where his movement grew more and more difficult, as he attempted to edge south to the river again in hopes of re-crossing.

20 Division Push On.

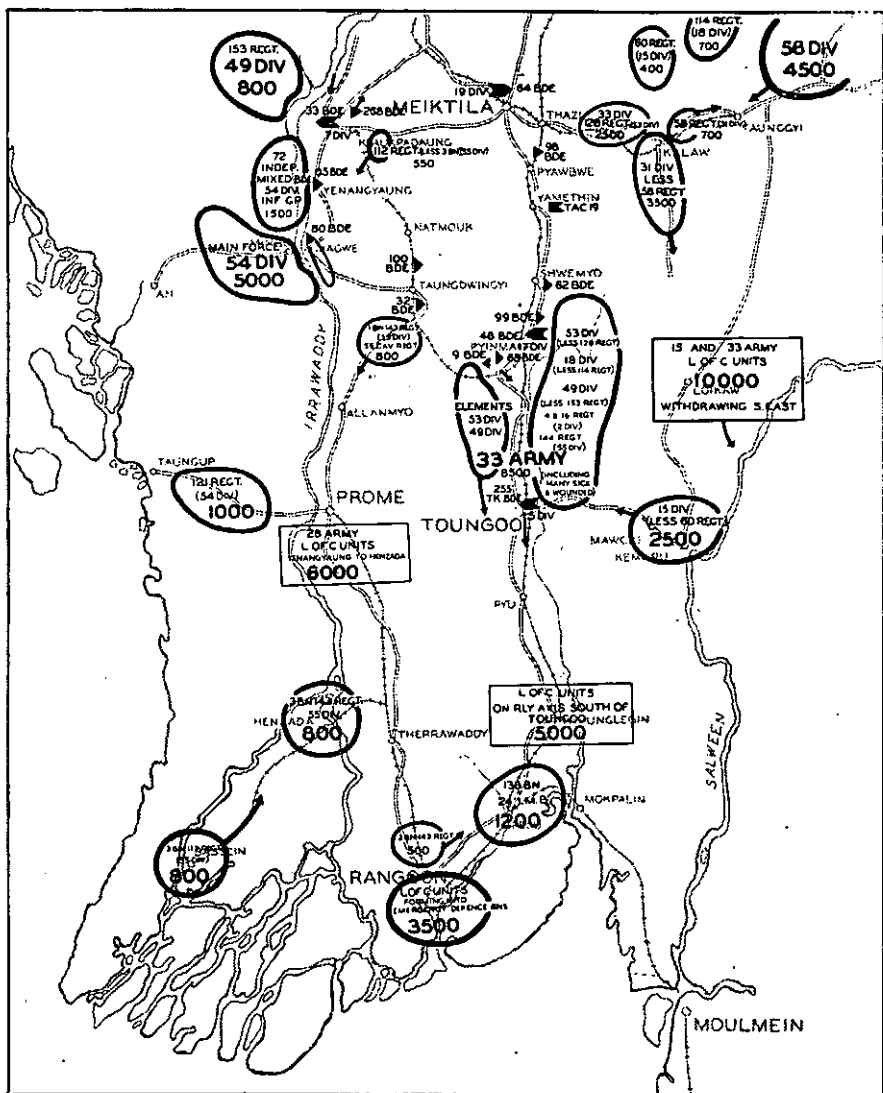
On 27 April 20 Division cleared Nyaungbintha forty miles south-east of Magwe. Next day, killing many Japanese on the way, they were in Allanmyo, 252 miles from Rangoon. At this stage ambushes were paying a big dividend as parties of the enemy tried to cross the river and break for the eastern Yomas. The advance continued. On 2 May Prome, once the biggest river port on the Irrawaddy, but now only a shell, was taken. Two days later Paungde was rushed and on 10 May Minhla, 92 miles from Rangoon, was reached.

XVI. Advance on the Railway Axis.

The Battle of Pyawbwe.

The commander of 33 Japanese Army hurriedly grouped his three divisions for the defence of Pyawbwe where he had a good tactical position in which to hold our advance south from Meiktila. 18 Division with its attached troops, fell back through Thazi to take up positions north of the town. The already battered 49 Division was given the role of delaying our forces coming along the Meiktila-Pyawbwe road. 53 Division was to withdraw west of Meiktila and turn in to take up the defences west of Pyawbwe.

But 17 Division was too fierce in its onrush for the Japanese commander. 49 Division would give no ground until its defenders were exterminated. Every village of tactical value was the scene of fights without quarter. So skilled at this in-fighting and the use of armour and air, however, were 17 Division troops that the enemy suffered casualties in men and guns out of all proportion to the delay imposed. At Yindaw, the strongest and best-prepared village in their path, the 17 Division columns by-passed



MAP 8.—SITUATION AT CAPTURE OF TOUNGGOO, 22 APRIL, 1945.

the main strong points and attacked suddenly from the rear against less well prepared positions. So quickly had our troops broken through 49 Division that 53 Division, marching hard to take up its positions west of the town, was struck in flank and thumped and banged out of the ring before it reached them.

The final battle for Pyawbwe, which the Japanese commander had ordered to be held to the last, was a brilliant piece of tactical handling by the Commander 17 Division. A direct assault would have been bloody and slow. Instead he put in his attacks from north and west co-ordinated with a deep enveloping drive from the south-west by a powerful armoured column whose surprise blow was decisive. The battle lasted three days, 8 to 10 April, and was most fiercely contested. The Japanese died where they crouched in their fox-holes and bunkers. This was the most costly defeat the enemy had suffered in a single one of the series fought in this campaign. After the battle, two thousand two hundred Japanese bodies were counted in the town and its environs; thirty one guns, eight tanks and a quantity of M.T. were captured. The Japanese 33 Army was now shattered. The enemy broke contact in disorder during the night 10/11 April and withdrew south.

5 Division Takes the Lead.

According to plan, 5 Division passed through 17 Division at Pyawbwe on 11 April. Yamethin was quickly reached and an armoured column pushed south. During the night a Japanese suicide unit, some three to four hundred strong, with anti-tank guns, infiltrated from the east into the town and dug in among the houses. They commanded the only road down which wheeled vehicles could pass and were extremely difficult to dislodge. It was not until 14 April that the last of the intruders was exterminated and soft vehicles could pass freely through the town. To make up for lost time 5 Division pushed on rapidly. Shwemyo village was captured on 16 April, but stiff opposition was encountered, as was expected, from the Shwemyo Bluff, which completely dominated the road and railway where they ran through what was almost a gorge. By 18 April, however, by a quick outflanking march through hills and jungle the Bluff was taken in rear and cleared. That night the leading troops harboured two hundred and sixty miles from Rangoon. The air-borne brigade was moved up to Shwemyo by road and took over the air base in that area.

On 19 April the Armoured Group in the lead reached Pyinmana, found it held, bull-dozed a by-pass road round it and seized the Lewe airfield, a more important prize than the town. Leaving a brigade to clean up Pyinmana another brigade and the Armoured Group of 255 Tank Brigade swept on south.

The situation at this stage had an element of the comic in it. 5 Division was charging down the main road and railway, while, driven off these, in the hills on each flank, faint but pursuing, enemy columns were marching hard in the vain attempt to reach Toungoo first. If the Tokyo radio had announced "Our forces are pursuing the enemy rapidly in the direction of Rangoon" it would have been nearer the truth than usual.

Racing for Toungoo, also, came the Japanese 15 Division, ferrying fast in M.T. by the fair-weather road through the hills to the east via Taunggyi-Loikaw to Kemapyo and on to Mawchi. If this division reached Toungoo in time, it could hold us up for several days, while other forces rallied behind it. Luckily, we had sent orders to the Karen Guerillas, a force organized over a long period for this day by British officers parachuted into tribal territory, armed and supplied by air and under the tactical control of Fourteenth Army. The 15 Japanese Division driving hard through the night down the jungle road ran into ambush after ambush; bridges were blown, foraging parties massacred, sentries sniped, staff cars shot up. Air strikes directed and observed by the British officers inflicted great damage. The division, fighting its way, moved slowly forward, but west of Mawchi it was held up for several days by road blocks, demolitions and ambushes. It lost the race.

On 22 April our leading armour after a rapid dash entered the outskirts of Toungoo. Surprise was complete—the signals of the Japanese military policeman on point duty were disregarded and the first tank went over him. The Japanese in the town panicked and fled after fifty had been killed. The best part of a JIF Division, the commander, one hundred and fifty officers and three thousand men surrendered—and were glad to. They were just in time to work on the air-strips of which there were several and which were a main reason for Toungoo's importance to us. From there fighters could cover Rangoon, now only one hundred and sixty-six miles away.

Covering twenty-three miles the next day the important bridge at Pyu was seized. On the 24th 17 Division was due to pass through and take the lead at Toungoo, but 5 Division went on to take intact the bridge at Penwegan. The Japanese demolition party was on the brigade asleep when our first Armoured Car crept up. They never woke. Consternation battled with indignation in 17 Division, when 5 Division thus over-ran their mark.

Japanese Failure to Fight at Toungoo.

Toungoo was the last place before Pegu where the Japanese could make a real stand to save Rangoon. It was where the road from the north from Taunggyi turned west via Mawchi to join the main Rangoon road. Down this road were streaming the remains of 15 Army. The group of airfields was the most important aviation centre until Rangoon was reached.

It was not that the Japanese 33 Army Commander did not realize the importance of holding Toungoo. He had issued the usual optimistic orders for its defence to his formation commanders and was in Toungoo establishing his Headquarters when our troops reached the outskirts. He narrowly missed capture and his Headquarters did not function again for several weeks.

Japanese Reaction to the Loss of Toungoo.

With the loss of Toungoo on 22 April, Kimura realized that the

situation in South Burma was critical. He was probably out of touch with two of his Army Commanders, 15 and 33, and he had little left in the way of reserves. He must have come to the conclusion at about this time that he could not hold Rangoon, but whether he meant to make a last attempt to do so, or whether his only idea was to withdraw what he could from Burma across the Sittang, it was obvious that he must hold Pegu and the road and railway that ran through it—his only escape route, except by sea, to Moulmein. His first reaction was to attempt to accelerate the move of 15 Division west from Mawchi so as to hold the entrance into the hills of the Toungoo-Mawchi road. This, by applying pressure against 4 Corps about Toungoo would not only delay or divert our troops, but would cover the escape of the remnants of 33 Army still struggling south in the area north of Mawchi. His next step was to concentrate every available man and unit to hold Pegu. 24 Independent Mixed Brigade of three battalions, disregarding threats of a sea landing, was hurried north from Moulmein to the Pegu-Mokpalin area. Two new "scratch" forces, each approximately of brigade strength and commanded by a Major-General—one later became 105 Independent Mixed Brigade—were hastily formed from various units of the Rangoon garrison, including shore-based naval personnel and even some hurriedly conscripted Japanese civilians and fishermen. These two "brigades" were moved to Pegu on 27 April with orders to "destroy the enemy north of Payagyi and Waw." One of these "brigades" was commanded by the Rangoon AA Defence Commander, who ordered all his guns to Pegu to be used in an anti-tank role. The small garrison of Elephant Point, guarding the mouth of the Rangoon River, was at the same time brought into Rangoon "to cover the demolitions" and to be evacuated on completion of this task. Thus from 28 April onwards there were practically no Japanese troops in or south of Rangoon, the whole garrison had moved out to defend Pegu.

On 24 April, Kimura and his Headquarters Burma Area Army withdrew hurriedly to Moulmein. With them went the rump of Ba Maw's puppet Government, and Subhas Chandra Bose, the Dictator of "Independent India" and Supreme Commander of the INA. He left some five thousand of his men in Rangoon, with his deepest regrets that high political considerations prevented his staying with them, but with orders to fight as they had fought in Central Burma. They did. They surrendered to the first of our troops to enter Rangoon and provided a most useful source of labour.

The Advance to Pegu.

As the Striking Force of 4 Corps pushed rapidly south, behind it the brigades of 19 Division took over as far as Toungoo. There, pushing up the Mawchi road to the east 19 Division met the Japanese 15 Division trying to come west. The enemy went to ground in very strong positions within artillery range of Toungoo and the main road. Here they were a considerable nuisance, and behind them large numbers of fugitives from the north began to collect. 19 Division, spread out over a considerable area, held them with a brigade, and even made small tactical gains.

On 26 April the leading troops of 4 Corps were one hundred and twenty eight miles from Rangoon. They were already on reduced rations, having given up food for petrol and ammunition, but the weather was good and enthusiasm tremendous. It was known that the sea assault on Elephant Point was timed for 1 May and that the race between Fourteenth Army and 15 Corps would be a close one. Betting at this stage was three to one on 4 Corps, but even the most optimistic of its supporters would have liked a 31 April in the calendar.

17 Division now took the lead and by the evening of 27 April, brushing aside light opposition, had reached eighty miles from Rangoon. Next day, the road was infested with mines and booby traps, and with parties of Japanese covering the blocks. The mines were lifted, the enemy driven out of their positions and slaughtered in the open. Nineteen miles were covered that day, remarkable going, considering the opposition, mines and demolitions.

On 29 April a brigade of 17 Division with tank support rushed Payagyi against opposition, and pushed on to the outskirts of Pegu. At the same time an armoured column was sent on a hook round the great Moyingyi Reservoir, which lies close on the eastern side of the road, and cut the main escape road from Rangoon to Mokpalin and Moulmein. With three days to the amphibious assault, 4 Corps were just over fifty miles from Rangoon. But between them and the city was the last main Japanese defensive position, astride the wide Pegu river, which must be forced before the advance could be resumed. The whole of the Rangoon garrison and large numbers of men from 33 Army were in this position with orders to hold to the last—orders which they would obey. The battle for Pegu was the battle for Rangoon.

The Battle of Pegu.

There were three bridges over the Pegu River, which runs across the main line of advance; the road, the main railway and a diversionary railway. The Japanese held both banks with strong positions which they had been feverishly preparing for several days. 4 Corps, on its present form would, however, have made short work of them had not a great misfortune overtaken it. On the afternoon of 29 April a very heavy rain storm burst over Pegu, followed by other deluges at intervals throughout the night—a foretaste of the advancing monsoon. The country at once became water-logged. Neither wheels nor tracks could move off the road, all air strips went out of action, and, worst of all, the Pegu River, up to then fordable in places with difficulty, rose in spate. 4 Corps was at once placed on half rations.

During 30 April, our infantry splashing through the mud, cleared the east bank in a series of dog fights. The Japanese blew the bridges and held the west bank, while reckless parties of our men probed for a crossing. A Company of Indian infantry, crawling under fire over the wrecked girders of one of the bridges succeeded most gallantly in collecting on the west bank. By a bayonet charge they took the nearest Japanese strong point and

the rest of their battalion followed them, crawling over the bridge or swimming. A bridge-head had been established.

It was on this day that the first British and American prisoners of war to be recovered in this theatre were rescued. Some four hundred had been marched out of Rangoon for Moulmein and hustled along, some of them bare-foot, all in rags, and all half-starved, by their Japanese guards. The news that their escape road east of Pegu was cut, was too much for the already exhausted and depressed escort. Abandoning their prisoners, they scattered, many of them only to be mopped up by our advancing troops. Among the rescued were some men of the 17 Division captured in 1942 who now found themselves back in their old formation.

Throughout 1 May, there was very heavy rain; even the piers of the wrecked bridges were washed away. The assault on Pegu was launched in spite of the state of the ground and the height of the river. One brigade attacked from the north on the west bank, while 255 Tank Brigade, slipping and splashing, found a way into the town on the east bank. Very heavy fighting went on all day, but by evening the Japanese positions had been over-run, the town was clear except for snipers and a few suicide parties, and our leading infantry, soaked, hungry, but full of ardour were south of Pegu, forty miles from Rangoon.

XVII. The Capture of Rangoon.

15 Corps, which for the landing was not under command of Fourteenth Army, began its attack on 1 May by an excellent drop by a Gurkha Paratroop Battalion at Elephant Point. They wiped out a small Japanese party of about thirty, the only opposition encountered, and found the defences abandoned.

On 2 May, the sea-borne landing took place unopposed. The sea was rough and rain had made the country a swamp which was practically impassable to vehicles. In spite of this 26 Division carried out an admirable landing and at once pushed infantry on towards Rangoon, which had been reported empty of Japanese.

While 26 Division waded slowly up from the south, 17 Division was making desperate efforts to come down from the north. Pegu had been finally cleared on 2 May, but the bridges were down and a continual spate made replacement most difficult and held all vehicles on the east bank. Infantry on their feet, however, pushed on, clearing mines and swimming chaungs.

If the honour of taking Rangoon is to go to the first troops entering the city then the R.A.F. must receive it. On 2 May an R.A.F. pilot seeing signals from the ground and a Union Jack flying over the Jail landed at Mingaladon airfield. He was greeted by friendly townspeople, drove into the city, contacted our prisoners in the Jail, and then went down river in a country boat to meet 26 Division and give them the news. It was an

almost exact repetition of the capture of Akyab by an artillery officer in an air O.P.

On 3 May, 17 Division was in contact with Japanese rear-guards, covering scattered parties of their troops getting away to the east, at a spot thirty-two miles from Rangoon. Here they were held up by a wide tidal chaung. Undaunted the infantry swam across and made a small bridge-head, but all vehicles were far behind, cut off by swollen streams and demolished bridges.

That afternoon troops of 26 Division, steamed up the river to land at Monkey Point in Rangoon itself. There was no opposition, but a hearty welcome on the quays from crowds of Burmans. Rangoon was ours. Something had been accomplished that few people had thought possible four months before.

XVIII.—Casualties in Operations to Date.

A feature of this campaign was the heavy losses inflicted on the enemy in comparison with our own. As is the custom in Fourteenth Army, an enemy is not claimed as killed until his body is in our possession. It therefore follows that the actual number killed must be more than the figure claimed as many will have died and their bodies been burnt or buried by the enemy or unrecovered by us. Wounded are not taken into account. It would be impossible accurately to estimate them—seriously wounded probably number considerably less than killed in the Japanese Army.

Enemy bodies counted since 1 January, 1945, to 14 May, 1945, numbered 28,700. Our casualties were just under 13,000, of whom less than 2,800 were killed; a ratio of killed to the enemy of one to ten. It is interesting to note that this ratio rose in the later stages of the campaign, i.e., after 10 April, to one to thirty—a very satisfactory figure. Only six hundred and seventeen prisoners, exclusive of JIFs, were taken, an indication that Japanese fanaticism still persisted.

In addition to his losses in men, the enemy suffered very heavily in material. From 1 January Fourteenth Army captured or destroyed 430 guns, a very large proportion of the total Japanese artillery. Even in the Imphal battle we took only 250 guns. We lost no guns to the enemy.

XIX. Burmese Share in the Liberation of their Country.

Wherever it appeared Fourteenth Army was welcomed by the people of Burma, and this welcome was obviously genuine. It may well be that they were gladder to see the last of the Japanese than to see us again, but they were glad and showed it in the way they helped, even at considerable risk, with information and co-operation of all kinds.

There was however an innovation in this campaign. That was the

help we received from armed bodies of Burmans, organized in Burma while the Japanese were in possession. These were of two kinds:—

- (a) Irregulars, enrolled, trained, armed and supplied clandestinely. These were officered by British officers, a considerable number of whom had been introduced behind the Japanese lines. They were kept supplied, like regular troops, by air. They fought out of loyalty to the British and numbered several thousands.
- (b) The Burma "National" Army, a Quisling organization, officered by Burmans with Japanese "advisers" and raised, equipped and trained by the Japanese. This force consisted of some seven "regular" battalions, with training units and a vague number of irregulars, who were sometimes difficult to distinguish from dacoits. They supplied themselves, too often it is to be feared, by requisition from their countrymen, and their motives for deserting their Japanese masters and siding with us were certainly not undiluted loyalty to the British.

Our own levies led by their British officers were a most valuable asset and had a real influence on operations. They were tactically controlled by wireless from Army Headquarters, told when to rise, the objectives they should attack, and given specific tasks. They could not and were not expected to stand up to the Japanese in pitched battles, but they could, and did in places, hary them unmercifully. Their greatest achievement was the delaying of 15 Japanese Division in the Loikaw-Mawchi area, thus enabling 4 Corps to reach Toungoo first, but they have rendered several almost equally valuable services. They had an excellent jitter effect on the Japanese, who were compelled to lock up troops to guard against attacks on the L of C.

Our troops were a little surprised on first crossing the Chindwin and Irrawaddy to meet parties of men in Japanese uniform who marched up in good order and whose officers stated they had reported for duty with the British forces to liberate Burma from the Japanese. They stated they had orders from their Commander-in-Chief to do so. They were regarded with considerable suspicion at first, but proved definitely useful in a secondary role and in dealing drastically with small parties of Japanese stragglers.

XX. After Rangoon.

The Japanese Situation.

The war in Burma did not end with the occupation of Rangoon. There were still considerable numbers of Japanese, over fifty thousand, at large. These were in three main groups:—

- (a) **West of the Irrawaddy**, consisting of 54 Division, one Regiment of 49 Division, some one thousand troops of 55 Division and 72 Independent Mixed Brigade. A total of about eight thousand, five hundred.

- (b) **Between the Irrawaddy and the Sittang**, including 55 Division (less one Regiment) Headquarters 28 Army and Army troops, naval and L of C troops—some twelve thousand men in all.
- (c) **East of the Sittang:—**
- (i) Formations over-run on the railway Axis—18, 49 and 53 Divisions, two Regiment of 2 Division and one Regiments of 55 Division, about seven thousand two hundred men.
 - (ii) Formations east of Railway Axis—15, 31, 33 and 56 Divisions, one Regiment each from 18 and 53 Divisions, and Headquarters both 15 and 33 Armies with their Army troops, some twenty-three thousand two hundred men.

The object of the eight or nine thousand Japanese who were west of the Irrawaddy was, first, to cross the river and gain the Yomas to the east, get through the hills to the railway, and then over the road into the hills east of the Sittang. They moved, not very fast, as their transport with the loss of most of their M.T. was bullock cart. Those, some twelve thousand, between the Irawaddy and the Sittang had the same object but were spared the Irawaddy crossing. Both these groups were likely to suffer increasingly, as the monsoon developed, from exhaustion, lack of supplies and sickness.

The large group or groups east of the Sittang, about twenty-three thousand, were in a much less precarious position. Their intention was probably to move south to the Moulmein area under cover of rear and flank guards. They may also, especially in the Toungoo-Mawchi area, have hoped to stage some sort of offensive to cut our main road and rail L of C from Meiktila to Rangoon. If this were staged in co-operation with a strong break-out east of the forces coming through the Yomas it would have inconvenienced us seriously. As their withdrawal route to the south did not include an all-weather road, and as most of the rest were little better than mere tracks, when the monsoon came seriously, they would have found it difficult either to maintain or to move themselves.

Japanese Formations Committed Against 14 Army.

During the course of the campaign, a total of nine Japanese divisions (2, 15, 18, 31, 33, 49, 53, 54 and 55), one independent mixed brigade (72) and part of another (24), two "scratch brigades" and one tank regiment had been committed against Fourteenth Army. Thus, of the total Japanese forces in Burma, the only formation which had not actually fought against Fourteenth Army up to the fall of Rangoon was the 56 Division from NE Burma, but one Regiment of this formation was already moving west to take over the rearguard positions on the Taunggyi road. By this time, all the formations encountered were very severely mauled. A good example of the state to which they had been reduced is provided by a captured report made by a senior staff officer of HQ 28 Army to HQ Burma Area Army. 72 Independent Mixed Brigade is described as "very nearly disrupted and its HQ is losing all semblance of control over its units." Even the tough Maj-Gen. Yamamoto, who had hoped by bold

counter-attack to wipe out 7 Division north of Yenangyaung, was by this time losing his grip as the same report states that he "always exaggerated enemy prowess."

Our Situation.

26 Division came under command Fourteenth Army on 6 May and on that day its patrols joined up on the Pegu-Rangoon road with the leading infantry of 17 Division, who had just swum and rafted themselves over the swollen Hlegud-River.

20 Division continued to push south towards Tharrawaddy.

5 Division was in the Pegu area.

In effect the general position was that our forces were strung out over several hundred miles on two roads, the Mandalay-Rangoon and the Yenangyaung-Rangoon. We held the main centres on these roads, but there were great gaps between them which could only be patrolled at intervals by armoured cars or lorry-borne infantry. Spread out on both sides of these roads were disorganized, but considerable groups of Japanese, those to the west of the railway axis making their way east to escape into the hills or over the Sittang River. On our eastern flank their chief centres of resistance were on the Thazi-Kalaw roads, on the Toungoo-Mawchi road and in the Mokpalin-Moulmein area. Of these the concentration east of Toungoo might become an offensive threat to our L of C. Moulmein was obviously the main rallying centre, defended by the line of the Sittang.

The monsoon proper had not started, but rain was already heavy and frequent enough to have put out many river crossings and seriously to reduce air supply. Rangoon Port would not be working to any great capacity for some time.

Operations After Occupation of Rangoon.

The problems were, first, to intercept as many as possible of the enemy attempting to reach the east bank of the Sittang; second, to prevent their concentration in the Moulmein area; and third, if possible, to advance on Moulmein to destroy the bulk of the remaining enemy force.

Orders were accordingly issued:—

To 4 Corps:

To capture Mokpalin.

Destroy enemy crossing Pegu Yomas from west to east.

Capture Thandaung, east of Toungoo (19 Division had reverted to 4 Corps).

To 33 Corps:

To open road and railway Prome-Rangoon.

Destroy enemy in Irrawaddy Valley and the Delta.

Capture Bassein.

To 26 Div:

To secure Rangoon area and effect junction with 20 Division.

To 36 Div:

Fly-out to India to be completed by 15 May.

These operations were in progress when regrouping for forthcoming campaign in South East Asia became necessary. HQs of a new Army, the Twelfth, was formed and took over command of the formations remaining to complete the liberation of Burma. HQs Fourteenth Army was withdrawn to India to plan and prepare the next great blow against Japan—the invasion of Malaya.