

But in addition to air supply, our air superiority gave our land forces many other advantages. Our bases, rear areas and land communications were secure from air action, while these vital parts of the Japanese army were under constant attack by the Allied Air Forces. The close support of bomber, fighter/bomber and fighter squadrons was denied the enemy, while our own army reaped the benefit of tactical air support. Air transport gave mobility and flexibility to Allied troops while this was not available to the Japanese owing to their inferiority in the air. The use of an air L. of C. released the large number of troops necessary to defend a long land L. of C. Finally, the Allied Air Forces provided regular air reconnaissance, which was denied to the enemy by our command of the air.

SECTION III (paras. 28-49) OPERATIONS IN DECEMBER

The abandonment of the airborne operation:
The decision to advance on a two Corps front:
33 Corps operations to the capture of Shwebo:
4 Corps operations: Operations by Northern Combat Area Command: The capture of Bhamo: Note on operations in Arakan.

28. An account of the operational situation of our troops at the end of November has been given in paragraph 23. In this section I propose to give an account of operations up to the virtual completion of Capital, Phase II, that is, the securing of the Ye-U and Shwebo areas in the dry belt area of Central Burma. In the original plan for Capital, the advance of 33 Corps to Ye-U and Shwebo was to have been assisted by an airborne operation. It soon became obvious, however, that the specially trained and equipped troops, essential for such an operation, were not going to be available. It is worth, therefore, at this point reviewing the situation as regards airborne troops in the Command, or available for it, generally.

29. On the 1st November, 1944, just before I assumed command, H.Q., 44 Indian Airborne Division had been formed from elements of the recently disbanded H.Q., 44 Indian Armoured Division. The organization and training of this Airborne Division was to be the responsibility of the Commander-in-Chief, India, who, however, kept in close touch with me, through the Supreme Allied Commander, in regard to matters of policy. It was agreed that the Divisional H.Q. and Divisional troops were to be concentrated for training by the 1st January, while the remainder of the Division was to be concentrated in the Bilaspur-Raipur area by the end of March. The Division as a whole was to be ready for war by the 15th October, 1945, that is, in time for immediate post-monsoon operations. The existing 50 Indian Parachute Brigade formed the nucleus of this new Division, and this formation was the one which had been originally earmarked to take part in operations in Burma to assist 33 Corps. It had, however, been used in an infantry rôle in the Imphal battle and had suffered severely. It had not been fully reconstituted and so was not now available. A second parachute brigade was to have been formed from Special Force, but as sufficient

volunteers were not forthcoming, recruiting was extended to other units in India, and to A.L.F.S.E.A. units which were not involved in operations. By mid-1945 the Division was more or less complete except for the Signals element, which could only be made up when forces were redeployed from Europe after the German defeat. The provision of aircraft for the training of this Division was a perpetual worry, since they could only be supplied at the expense of the more immediately pressing needs of air supply for the Burma battle.

30. Failing any part of the Airborne Division proper, the only other troops I could hope to be able to call on for an airborne operation were Special Force. This Force had suffered seriously from disease, especially malaria, during its 1944 campaign. When I inspected it in December, 1944, I formed the opinion that, despite its splendid achievements and fine *esprit-de-corps*, it was no longer battle-worthy and that it could not be used for the Capital airborne operation. Moreover I considered that there was no longer a justifiable rôle for a force such as this, which, like all forces of this nature, was particularly expensive in overheads such as Headquarters and Signals. I therefore recommended its disbandment, and later, on the 23rd February, was informed by India Command that the War Office had approved my recommendation.

31. I was thus compelled to abandon the plan of an airborne landing as part of Capital, Phase II. I was also forced, reluctantly, to give up the idea of reinforcing the Northern Combat Area Command front by flying-in another division. I had hoped to move 7 Indian Division, which was resting at Kohima, into the Pinwe—Wuntho "railway corridor" by air, but examination showed that our air transport resources would be inadequate without prejudicing the maintenance lift required for the advance of Fourteenth Army. Instead, therefore, I instructed the Commander, Fourteenth Army, to direct 19 Indian Division on to Indaw (less the brigade already advancing on Pinlebu). General Sultan for some time had been worried about his right flank. I was therefore glad to close the gap between him and Fourteenth Army.

32. General Slim now recast his plan and decided to advance with two Corps up. This decision fully accorded with my own views, as, to maintain the strongest pressure on the retreating enemy, it was necessary to do so on as broad a front as possible.

33 Corps remained directed on Ye-U and Shwebo, but he moved up 4 Corps on their left, directed initially on Pinlebu. The orders issued to Commander, 4 Corps, on the 7th December were:—

(a) Advance as rapidly as possible to make contact with 36 British Division in the area Indaw—Wuntho.

(b) Capture Pinlebu as quickly as possible and exploit towards Wuntho with a view to cutting the railway behind, and destroying any Japanese forces to the north.

(c) Take over part of the sector of 36 British Division, thus enabling General Sultan to employ this Division in operations further to the east.