

and to them I allotted both operational and administrative responsibility between the Dalet Chaung and Gwa. I also instructed General Stockwell to patrol east of the Taungup—Prome road to establish contact with 33 Corps as the monsoon conditions made it impossible to move the whole Division on this route.

277. 4 Corps operations during May, 1945: 5 Indian Division was ordered to open the road from Payagyi to Mokpalin and also clear the area between Pegu and the southern end of the Pegu Yomas of enemy. 9 Indian Infantry Brigade opened the road as far as Waw against determined Japanese resistance, and then continued towards the Sittang River. The heavy rainfall, however, rendered the deployment of tanks and artillery difficult if not impossible, as the west bank of the Sittang is flat and, during May, flooded. With the enemy overlooking them from jungle-clad hills on the east bank and without adequate river-crossing equipment it was not possible to launch an attack to capture Mokpalin, or do more than patrol across the Sittang River on a wide front, until after the monsoon.

Meanwhile 123 and 161 Brigades were engaged in widespread patrols under appalling climatic conditions, seeking out the numerous Japanese in the area to the south of the Pegu Yomas. Throughout the month their toll of Japanese dead mounted; the enemy became desperate in their attempts to escape, and on occasions would deliver fierce attacks upon our patrols.

Meanwhile 17 Indian Division was disposed between Penwegon and Nyaunglebin, and spent the whole month in most active patrolling, designed to kill the enemy wherever found and to prevent a concentrated attempt at a break out. In this they were highly successful, and proved conclusively their superiority to the Japanese in this type of operation. As an example, at Konin on the 21st May a patrol of 99 Brigade in one encounter killed 148 Japanese at a cost to themselves of 4 wounded.

19 Indian Division from Toungoo had by the 10th May advanced 5 miles along the road to Thandaung, but 98 Brigade, the leaders, were being strenuously opposed. On this date 62 Brigade, with tank support, took over the lead and fought its way forward in the face of extensive mining of the road and determined resistance from prepared positions on the high ground dominating the area. On the 25th May 98 Brigade took over again, and three days later captured the road junction at Thandaung, though pockets of the enemy continued to hold out in the surrounding hills.

278. It is convenient at this juncture to deal with 64 Indian Infantry Brigade and the operations on the Thazi—Taunggyi road. On the 10th May it relieved 36 British Division, which was due for withdrawal from operations after a year's hard fighting from Myitkyina in the north to Thazi. The Brigade met most determined resistance in the locality known aptly as "The Staircase", 12 miles north of Kalaw. Here 56 Japanese Division, probably the least battered formation left in the Burma Area Army had a well prepared defensive position supported by artillery. However, after prolonged and bitter fighting "The Staircase" fell to

our troops on the 31st May and Kalaw was entered a week later.

279. 33 Corps operations in May: The operations of 33 Corps in May consisted initially of an advance south by 20 Indian Division on the east of the Irrawaddy to meet 26 Indian Division marching from Rangoon north to Prome, and thereby to seal off the enemy forces, which consisted of elements of 54 and 55 Japanese Divisions, and 72 Independent Mixed Brigade, to the west of the Irrawaddy. At the same time 7 Indian Division, 268 Indian (Independent) Infantry Brigade and the Lushai Brigade, were driving the enemy south before them down the west bank of the Irrawaddy, and so closing the net. The link-up between 20 and 26 Indian Divisions was made on the 15th May at Taikkyi, 60 miles north of Rangoon, and 26 Indian Division then came under command of 33 Corps.

As had been anticipated, the enemy now attempted to concentrate on the west bank of the Irrawaddy in the general area Thayetmyo—Kama, and to force his way across into the Pegu Yomas. General Stopford accordingly directed 7 Indian Division to operate against his crossings on the west bank of the river between Allanmyo and Kama, while 20 Indian Division consolidated the Prome—Rangoon road and railway axis and prevented the enemy establishing escape gaps across the river into the Pegu Yomas. 20 Indian Division was also ordered to push west on the Prome—Taungup road to make contact with patrols of 82 (West African) Division and so cut off stragglers from 55 Japanese Division.

In early May under the increasing pressure of 7 Indian Division, the Japanese began their attempts to break-out east over the river. 54 Japanese Division succeeding in establishing a bridgehead at Zalon, 10 miles north of Prome while one regiment of 49 Japanese Division and 2 Japanese Brigade actually succeeded in crossing just north of Prome and making good their escape.

General Stopford, faced with the problem of trying to prevent all escape crossings over some 50 miles of river with the limited number of troops available, decided to concentrate against the Zalon bridgehead. First 80 Brigade of 20 Indian Division and later 33 Brigade of 7 Indian Division were directed against the bridgehead and throughout the remainder of May both 7 and 20 Indian Divisions were involved in much bitter fighting against the enemy concentrations on the west bank and against the crossings.

Most of these crossings were destroyed or beaten back, but some small parties were able to slip across the river.

Very heavy casualties were inflicted on the enemy during this period and by the end of May the fighting in the Zalon area had reached its conclusion. The west bank was virtually clear of the enemy and those who had succeeded in crossing were being hunted into the foothills of the Pegu Yomas. 268 Indian Infantry Brigade was left on the west bank to mop up the stragglers.

280. Bassein was occupied by a battalion group of 6 Brigade without opposition on the 25th May, our troops receiving a joyous welcome from the local inhabitants.