Pegu, May 21: Only a civilian and working as a barber at the HQ of the 5th Indian Division, Shah Mohamed of village Jindala, district Gujrat, has shared all the campaigns of the Division in North Africa and Burma. He is proud of the achievements of his Division wherein he has cropped the head of several Generals.

This sturdy 50 year old Punjabi carries no weapon except his box of clippers, comb and scissors. But he has many an interesting anecdote to relate just like men who have been in actions. With his toothless smile, he would tell you the story of how in the desert enemy shells landed all around him within 30 yards and how he trusted in his kismet. And officers and jawans gather round him to listen to his stories but he is most exhuberent and loquacious when he is giving you a haircut.

Shah Mohd. joined the Division in Sep.'40 and Gadarif, Cyprus, Keren, Asmara, Benghazi, Tobruk, Arakan, Manipur, Tiddim, Meiktilla and Pegu are not mere names of places to him but experiences through which he has been like any other soldier in his Division and although he has studied no geography and maps, he would tell you accurately the distance from Benghazi to Tobruk with a description of the topography. He is no soldier but would efficiently discuss with you the tactics of Rommel. Nor is he paid by the Army; he is paid out of a fund raised by the officers and men of HQ of the 5th. Indian Division. Every soldier contributes 10 annas a month towards his salary while the officers pay as much as they like.

"We are the best Division and I am proud to belong to it which I hope to serve as long as I live", said Shah Mohd. to me.

ends
PEGU; MAY 1: Indian troops of a famous Indian formation which fought the renowned rear-guard action in Burma in 1942 have captured Pegu. The Japs are still in occupation of some portions in the south end of the town, and an attack is in progress.

Till last evening the Japs were resisting fiercely with machine guns but the crack came this morning with a Japanese suddenness. After blowing off a portion of the bridge over the Pegu river which splits the town in two, the Japs removed several of their guns at about midnight to the railway station area where the fighting is now taking place.

Gurkhas and Baluchis were the first to enter the town and a Gurkha platoon killed nearly 37 Japs in an action last night. They captured five guns and Jem. Lai Bahadur Limbu of East Nepal led his platoon to the bridge against heavy enemy machine gun fire and himself killed a large number of the enemy.

Though the town is demolished in parts, most buildings remain in tact.

ends
Pegu, May 22: Six Indian Divisions have closed the rat-trap around the Japs in Burma. Dark heavy monsoon clouds hang low over Southern Burma and every peal of thunder strikes the death-knell of the 15,000 Japs who had once hoped to march to Delhi.

Our troops sit and wait but extensive patrolling goes on both by day and night. The patrols return after killing four or five Japs and on occasions with a few prisoners. More than that is the information that these patrols flash back on their wireless. "Hello, Wolf, hello, Wolf, 400 Japs in the nullah to the east of point 12488 with few LMGs, Over" is the message received at their HQ in an instant. Within five minutes, an artillery observation post and an RAF visual control panel get busy on the job. And one hears the pounding of shells and the peals of the airstrike. Next one sees dense clouds of smoke and fire rise from the ground to intermingle with the low watery clouds. The R.A.F. pilots who strafe and bomb are doing a magnificent job unimpeded by the thick clouds and are always quick to the call.

The Japs are not idle. They are actively probing for a way across the trunk-road into Moulmein and Indo-China but our troops have screened every way of exit and every track is under continuous observation. As every day passes with a marked increase in the intensity of the monsoon, a big clash with our forces is likely to occur very soon as the enemy makes a desperate effort to join his comrades near Moulmein and beyond. With 150 inches of rain during the next five months and no protection against malaria and very much short of food and ammunition, his continuance in Burma for the monsoon presents a dark and dismal picture to him. Hence he would make an all-out effort to get out.

At present, the Japs are mostly in the forests. Some live in villages either ejecting the villagers or removing their bashas to make their own elsewhere. Theyraid and loot villages for food and clothing and Burmese guerrillas take reprisal and make the Japs wade through inundated woods where the Jap officer is reported as being carried by his men in a sedan chair! Very soon he may be floating, either dead or alive.

This is the present phase of the war in Burma and the fate of these trapped Japs would be decided during the course of the next few weeks.

ends
Pegu, May 22: With a distinguished record in escaped the Middle East, Arakan, Kohima and Tiddim, the oldest battalion in the Indian Army has played an equally worthy role in the liberation of Burma. This is a battalion of the 1st. Punjab Regiment sharing in all the glories of the 5th. Indian Division. The battalion has for its Colonel-in-Chief Gen. Sir Claude Auchinleck has served with them for 26 years. In the 1914-18 war, he commanded a company of this battalion.

Their season in Burma commenced on the banks of the Chindwin which they reached in the middle of March, ’45 where they were told that their objective was Rangoon.

Their first contact with the enemy has been their biggest battle in Burma. Taungtha, 40 miles across the Irrawaddy was an enemy stronghold. Here there was a 1300 ft. high feature overlooking the entire country to the west. Except for the feature it was pretty open country and the feature itself was bald and without any vegetation. Crowned by a big pagoda there were several flights of pagodas making ideal observation posts for the Japs.

Given the job of clearing the feature, on the 26th March soon after dusk, Punjabi Muslims and Rajputs put in an attack supported by heavy artillery and mortars. Climbing along the paths leading to the lower pagodas, half-way on a steep ridge they met opposition in strength. Enemy machine guns and mortars came down from the higher slopes. Undaunted they climbed further but found themselves in a highly vulnerable position. They were now on a flat area of the ridge from the rock again rose steeply straight for about 30 feet and once again opened out into a flat area before rising again. The Japs were in the top flat and the Punjabis and Rajputs in the lower and the height could be climbed only by cutting step-holds into the rock. Naturally our progress could not be but slow and the enemy threw down grenades at them in very quick succession. The mortars fired from behind were also raining on our troops.

The battle lasted for eight hours during which Subedar Mohd. Abbas of village Badnian, district Rawalpindi, was always with the leading platoon organizing and encouraging them in the confusion and when they withdrew under harassing fire from the enemy, he was the last to withdraw and organise the withdrawal efficiently. It was decided to withdraw as by that time it was felt that it required a much larger force to storm the Jap stronghold. Sub. Abbas also carried out a recce to climb the height and attempted to climb the height exposing himself to the fire let loose by the enemy.
The next day our artillery and the "cabrank" engaged the stronghold and the Japs cleared out of the position leaving behind a large number of dead. It is reckoned that at least 60 Japs were killed by the Punjabis.

Near Meiktila, to the east and north of Thazi, with a battery of guns, they blocked a track running north and south which was the escape route for the Japs running away from Mandalay and Kyaukse. Unaware of their company blocks established at various points along the track, the Japs came riding on their motor transports and the Punjabis had a good kill. The haul was over 50 dead Japs. After that commenced a period of intensive patrolling towards the foothills of the Shan States and quite a large number of Japs were bayonettled as our troops chased them across the countryside.

On the 9th April began the dash for Rangoon when they were 340 miles from the capital. After an uneventful march, they met with opposition again at Shwemyo Bluff. After patrolling, they bypassed the Bluff and emerged on the main road again four miles to the south. Other Indian troops coming behind mopped up the Bluff.

Before Pyinmana, the Punjabis detoured across the countryside and marched by night nearly 25 miles to cut the road at M.S. 227 while our armour engaged the Jap 33rd Army HQ in Southern Pyinmana. They engaged a party of Japs and killed 12. A further 20 were killed near the Leew airstrip.

Near Pegu, patrolling extensively and screening the large remnants of the Jap Army from escaping into Moulmein and Indo-China, this battalion is constantly on the watch for the enemy. A daylight patrol of Rajputs, acting on local information, killed 10 Japs, including one Captain, and five sergeants. Often on these patrols, our troops jump out of their vehicles with their bayonets and chase the Japs.

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Pegu, May 22: With a distinguished record in Eritrea, El Alamein, Arakan, Kohima, the oldest battalion in the Indian Army has played an equally worthy role in Burma. This is a battalion of the 5th Indian Division, which has for its Colonel-in-Chief Gen. Sir Claude Auchinleck and with whom he has served for 26 years.

Reaching the banks of the Chindwin in the middle of March, they were told that Rangoon was their objective. They made their first contact for the season with the enemy at Taungtha, 40 miles across the Irrawady.