

= Battle of Elephant Point =

The Battle of Elephant Point was an airborne operation conducted by a composite Gurkha airborne battalion that took place on 1 May 1945 . In March 1945 , plans were made for an assault on Rangoon , the capital of Burma , as a stepping @-@ stone on the way to recapturing Malaya and Singapore . Initial plans for the assault on the city had called for a purely land @-@ based approach by British Fourteenth Army , but concerns about heavy Japanese resistance led to this being modified with the addition of a joint amphibious @-@ airborne assault . This assault , led by 26th Indian Division , would sail up the Rangoon River , but before it could do so , the river would have to be cleared of Japanese and British mines . In order to achieve this , coastal defences along the river would have to be neutralized , including a battery at Elephant Point .

This task was given to 44th Indian Airborne Division , but the division was in the middle of a reorganization , and as such a composite battalion was formed from two Gurkha parachute battalions . The battalion assembled and then trained throughout April , and then early in the morning of 1 May was dropped near Elephant Point . As it advanced towards the battery one of the battalion 's companies was attacked by American bombers , causing a number of casualties . Despite this , and torrential rain , the battalion successfully assaulted Elephant Point and neutralized the battery there after a fierce firefight . It remained around Elephant Point until 2 May , when 26th Indian Division conducted its amphibious assault and secured Rangoon .

= = Background = =

On 22 March , as the joint battles of Meiktila and Mandalay were drawing to a close , a conference was held at Monywa in Burma , attended by senior Allied military figures including Admiral Lord Mountbatten , the commander in chief of the Allied South East Asia Command , and General William Slim , commander of Fourteenth Army . The object of the conference was to discuss future Allied strategy in South East Asia in the aftermath of Meiktila and Mandalay , including the reconquest of Burma and the retaking of Malaya and then Singapore . In order to secure these objectives however , Rangoon , the capital of Burma , would have to be captured before the onset of the monsoon rains , which would impede any Allied advance over land ; the Allied Chiefs of Staff worked on the assumption that this would occur before June . After Rangoon had fallen , a force of between four and five divisions would be landed in Western Malaya in an operation code @-@ named Zipper , which would itself be followed by Mailfist , the capture of Singapore .

To accommodate all of these goals , Mountbatten insisted that Rangoon be taken by May . Slim had initially planned to take the city in a pincer movement , with XXXIII Corps advancing towards the city down the east bank of the Irrawaddy river via Hlegu , and IV Corps taking a shorter route along the Sittang River valley to the east . Slim believed that the Japanese had insufficient forces to block both thrusts , and one of the corps would therefore be able to capture Rangoon . However , Mountbatten was unsure that a purely overland advance would be successful , and that a joint airborne @-@ amphibious assault would therefore be the better option . Slim and others , such as Slim 's superior , General Oliver Leese (commander of Allied Land Forces , South East Asia) , initially opposed such an operation , fearing that it would divert vital resources from Fourteenth Army . By the time of the meeting at Monywa , however , Slim had come around to Mountbatten 's way of thinking , fearing that a purely overland advance would meet fierce Japanese resistance , as it had at Meiktila , and be delayed at the end of an overextended supply line . As such , a combined airborne and amphibious assault would be ideal as Fourteenth Army neared Rangoon , Slim arguing that it would be " a hammering at the back door while I burst in at the front . " On 2 April orders were issued for the operation to go ahead , with the proviso that Rangoon be in Allied hands by 5 May at the latest .

= = = Planning = = =

The joint operation was christened Dracula , and its schedule was decided by the Royal Navy ,

under the command of Admiral Arthur Power , who was responsible for the amphibious portion of the assault on Rangoon . Several problems had to be overcome during the planning for the operation . The first , and the least likely , was that the amphibious assault would be intercepted by elements of the Imperial Japanese Navy as it neared Rangoon . To ensure that the amphibious elements would remain unmolested , 21 Carrier Squadron , commanded by Commodore G.N. Oliver was attached to provide fight cover for the landings ; the squadron consisted of four escort carriers , two cruisers and four destroyers . Operating further out would be 3rd Battle Squadron , commanded by Vice Admiral Walker , which was formed of two battleships , HMS Queen Elizabeth and the Free French battleship Richelieu , as well as another two escort carriers , four cruisers and six destroyers . Two days prior to Dracula taking place , this " massive naval screen " bombed several ports and airfields , and also engaged a Japanese troop convoy transporting more than one thousand Japanese troops to nearby Moulmein , sinking all the vessels . The Royal Air Force would provide support in the form of two RAF long @-@ range fighter Wings , and the United States Army Air Forces with eight B @-@ 24 Liberator and four B @-@ 25 Mitchell bomber squadrons .

More of a concern to Dracula 's planners , however , were the land @-@ based threats to the landing craft carrying the assault troops of 26th Indian Division . Air support was deemed to be vital to the operation 's success , and a number of Japanese airfields around Toungoo were captured in the days leading up to Dracula . There was also the problem of the defences in and around the River Rangoon , up which the landing craft were to sail . The river itself was heavily mined , a result of Japanese defensive measures as well as RAF offensive operations earlier in the conflict , and it would have to be swept and cleared of mines before any amphibious assault could take place . Before this could occur , however , the coastal defences along the banks of the river would have to be neutralized ; a particular worry was the presence of an artillery battery at Elephant Point on the west bank of the river . The geography of the area ensured that the battery could not be destroyed through artillery bombardment or airstrikes , and weather conditions precluded an early amphibious assault . As such , it was decided that a day before Dracula began on 2 May , a parachute battalion would be dropped near Elephant Point with the task of assaulting and destroying the battery .

The task was given to 44th Indian Airborne Division , but this presented several problems . The division was in the middle of a reorganization , and many of its officers were on leave , as were two Gurkha airborne battalions ; another , the 3rd Gurkha Parachute Battalion , was about to transfer to 77th Indian Parachute Brigade . With no one unit available , a composite force was put together for the operation . The Headquarters Company was formed of men from 2nd and 3rd Gurkha Parachute Battalions , and each battalion provided a further two companies ? A and B from 2nd Gurkha Parachute Battalion and C and D from 3rd Gurkha Parachute Battalion . A mortar platoon and machine gun platoon augmented the ad hoc formation . The battalion was formed in early April , and came under the command of Major Jack Newland . After its initial formation it transferred to Chaklala , where its strength was augmented by Field Ambulance and Indian Engineers sections and it undertook training for the operation . When this was completed it was transported to Midnapore , where for ten days it assembled its equipment and conducted a rehearsal exercise . Finally , on 29 April it was flown to Akyab on the Burmese coast , approximately 200 miles north of Rangoon , and was soon joined by a 200 @-@ strong reserve force formed of men from both Gurkha battalions and the 152nd Indian Parachute Battalion . The battalion would be transported in 40 C @-@ 47 Skytrain transport aircraft belonging to 1st and 2nd United States Air Commando Group .

= = Battle = =

At 02 : 30 on 1 May , a C @-@ 47 of 317 Tactical Control Squadron USAAF departed for Rangoon carrying a twenty @-@ man pathfinder team , followed by a CCG plane carrying a pair of VCP , to mark and defend the landing zone at Tawhai . The rest of the composite battalion boarded thirty @-@ eight Dakotas and took off thirty minutes later , and at 05 : 45 jumped over the drop zone ; there were only a few casualties , one being a medical officer attached to the battalion . It encountered no Japanese opposition , and after it had rallied , advanced towards Elephant Point and the artillery battery . It halted 3 @,@ 000 yards in front of the battery to allow B @-@ 24

Liberators from the USAAF to carry out a preliminary bombing attack on the battery . Unfortunately , despite officers and other ranks wearing yellow recognition panels and carrying orange umbrellas to identify themselves , C Company was bombed and strafed by the bombers , causing a number of casualties . As a result , a Forward Air Controller attached to the battalion ordered a halt to all further bombing runs on the battery .

After moving through torrential rain , the battalion reached Elephant Point at 16 : 00 , and close @-@ quarters fighting then took place , with flame @-@ throwers being used against several Japanese bunkers guarding the battery . About forty Japanese soldiers and gunners were killed during the assault , and the battalion also sustained several casualties . After the battery had been secured the battalion dug in around Elephant Point and awaited the arrival of the relief force , which landed at Thaungang at 15 : 30 , with a supply drop following it several minutes later . As it neared the position of the battalion , the surgical team accompanying the relief force was accidentally fired upon by the Gurkhas , causing four members of the team to be wounded . The battalion remained where it was through the night , although high tides submerged a number of trenches and forced the battalion to higher ground . By the dawn of 2 May , after it had cleared a number of nearby bunkers , the battalion was able to watch as minesweepers cleared the Rangoon river for the columns of landing craft following behind them .

= = Aftermath = =

Operation Dracula was a complete success , as Japanese forces had actually vacated Rangoon several days prior to the amphibious landing ; 36th Indian Infantry Brigade was able to occupy the city without encountering any Japanese opposition . Shortly after Rangoon 's occupation Japanese forces called for a cease @-@ fire , and plans for the amphibious landing in Western Malaya and an advance into Singapore were cancelled . Instead , British and Commonwealth forces landed unopposed and liberated those areas , and also temporarily occupied Thailand . On 3 May the composite battalion moved to Sadaingmut , and two days later , leaving one company behind , it was transferred to Rangoon where it conducted anti @-@ looting operations and also searched for Japanese stragglers remaining in the city . It left the city on 16 May and travelled to India by ship , where it rejoined 44th Indian Airborne Division . It had been the division 's first major airborne operation . The 2nd Air Commando Group 's C @-@ 47s , which had transported the parachute battalion , returned to Kalaikunda and then moved to Comilla . The 317th Tactical Control Squadron spent the next two weeks supplying XV Corps who were engaged with Japanese forces northeast of Rangoon and returned to Kalaikunda on 19 May . The group 's fighter squadrons provided air cover for Rangoon until 9 May when they too returned to home station .