

attempt ended in complete disaster. Thirty-six vessels were intercepted and sunk by our light naval forces. Four actually got through, but were sunk on the return trip with all hands. By the 15th February, all organised resistance on Ramree Island had ceased, but mopping up continued for some time.

193. Earlier, on the 25th January, I had issued orders to the Commander, 15 Indian Corps, extending his tasks in accordance with what has been discussed earlier in paragraph 186.

I directed him now to:—

(a) Clear the Japanese out of Northern and Central Arakan.

(b) Establish a bridgehead at Taungup.

(c) Open the road from Taungup to Prome if possible.

(d) Develop the air bases at Akyab and Kyaukpyu.

The last task had precedence over the others and I laid down that their accomplishment was not to interfere with this commitment.

As already pointed out, the construction had to include both fair-weather airfields to meet our present needs, and all-weather fields to allow air supply to continue during the monsoon. These requirements not unnaturally conflicted. The target for all-weather construction was accommodation for three transport squadrons at Akyab by the end of April and three at Kyaukpyu by mid-May. In fact we managed to get three squadrons working from all-weather bases in each place in early May. The fair-weather bases were wanted as early as possible and by the 20th March there were two transport squadrons working from Akyab, with two more eleven days later. During April, half a squadron operated from Kyaukpyu for the supply of troops in Arakan only. I make no apology for going into this matter of airfields in some detail, as the responsibility for their construction, as of the great majority of the others in the theatre, rested with the Army, as did their stocking and subsequent supply.

194. It will be noticed that in the instructions given in the preceding paragraph, the Commander, 15 Indian Corps, was ordered to open the Taungup—Prome road if possible. This looked an attractive-enough project on the map, as it appears to give direct access from the sea to the Irrawaddy Valley. In practice, however, it was a very doubtful proposition. It was only a fair-weather road, the greater part passing through the thickest bamboo jungle. Taungup, the sea terminal, was no port, merely a village up a narrow winding creek, with a landing place on a bend in the creek. Ships bringing supplies would have to anchor a long way off and the passage up the creeks would be made by lighters and other harbour craft. The latter were not available in the quantity required, after the needs of Akyab and Ramree had been met. The road itself required very extensive engineer work and the time factor alone precluded the road paying any dividend before the monsoon; moreover unless the road was made all-weather before the rains, it would be closed for the whole period of the monsoon. In actual fact, our troops did not pass over this road until after the 1945 monsoon. Finally, if the road was

to be opened, the operations necessary to do this in a reasonable time had to be given some air supply; this we could not do.

195. By early February, the Japanese main forces had been split up into two groups. The Northern Group was in the Dalet Chaung—An area, covering the An Pass. The Southern Group was in the Taungup area, covering the Taungup Pass. The enemy also had troops in the Sandoway area, in the Bassein delta, and in the Prome—Henzada area, which were within reach of the Arakan front. Our own troops at this time (early February) were located as follows. 25 Indian Division was engaged on the general line Kangaw—Myebon, with 82 (West African) Division driving the enemy south on to this line. 3 Commando Brigade was concentrated in Myebon, after five weeks hard fighting. 26 Indian Division, with 22 (East African) Brigade under command, was clearing up Ramree Island, and, in addition, raiding the Japanese road communications between the An Chaung and Taungup, with a view to ascertaining the intentions of the Japanese garrison in that area.

196. As indicated above, the operations of 15 Indian Corps were directed, not merely to clearing Arakan, but to containing the enemy and to preventing them from crossing the Yomas and interfering with the advance of Fourteenth Army. It was, by this time, almost certain that the Japanese were using the An Pass road and that they intended to withdraw their Northern Group (54 Division) by that route. General Christison's task was, therefore, to frustrate this plan, and, also, to threaten the Taungup Pass to prevent the enemy's Southern Group (55 Division) being diverted to fight Fourteenth Army. In this task, the R.A.F. were to assist by intensive bombing of the Taungup—Prome road with the object of producing landslides in certain vulnerable mountain sections of it. I may add here that this was successfully achieved, the road being rendered impassable for long periods.

197. My intention was that 15 Indian Corps should destroy 54 Japanese Division in the An area and contain 55 Japanese Division by thrusting inland from Taungup on the axis of the Taungup—Prome road. Unfortunately, as will appear later, the plan to destroy 54 Japanese Division had in the end to be abandoned owing to shortage of transport aircraft. Encircling operations—the only type which could successfully destroy the enemy in the thick Arakan jungle country—were only possible if supplied by air, which would enable our forces to be independent of a land L. of C.

198. General Christison decided first to destroy the Northern Group, in the Dalet Chaung—An area, by a pincer movement of 25 and 82 Divisions, then to eliminate the Southern Group, in the Taungup area, by a similar pincer movement of 82 (West African) Division from the north and 26 Indian Division from the coast. The exploitation up the Prome road could then follow. To ease the maintenance problem and assist the vital build-up of air bases, 81 (West African) Division and 50 Tank Brigade (less two squadrons) were to leave Arakan at once, and a provisional programme for the evacuation of other formations was prepared.