

SECTION XXIII (paras. 366-371) PLANS FOR DEVELOPING RANGOON

Assembly of Force Commanders: The splitting of the reconnaissance party: The alternative convoy plan.

366. Experience in Africa and Europe had shown repeatedly the importance of really good planning and organization where the reopening of a captured port was concerned. In the case of Rangoon we were more than ever working against time, since the monsoon was almost on us and it was essential to relieve the air transport system of the heavy load it was carrying, as this load was being carried partly at the expense of aircraft serviceability.

367. The project for the reopening of Rangoon and the development of the Advanced Base was known as operation "Stanza." An administrative appreciation was prepared at my Headquarters and in March it was handed over to the Commander, No. 1 Area, South-East Asia Command, who had been designated for the Rangoon Advanced Base Area. The Advanced Base Commanders of all three Services together with essential staff had been assembled in Calcutta. It was agreed that planning should be co-ordinated by the Army, in the person of the Commander, No. 1 Area, as Rangoon was from the administrative angle predominantly the Army's concern.

368. When it was decided that a seaborne expedition would be put in to assist Fourteenth Army in their advance to Rangoon new complications arose. In all plans for the development of a port and advanced base it is essential that the reconnaissance party gets in immediately after the place is captured. But in this particular instance it was going to be impossible until a few days before the event to forecast whether Fourteenth Army or 15 Indian Corps would enter Rangoon first. There was a strong possibility that either formation might be held up short of the city itself while the other got in from the opposite direction, and that the occupation of the city by one would not necessarily open the way at once for the other. If the reconnaissance party was committed with what turned out to be the wrong formation, it might not be able to function during the first few vital days following the fall of the city, which would inevitably result in dislocation of the rehabilitation plans.

369. It was therefore decided to split the reconnaissance party into three groups. First there was the Road Party. This was the main reconnaissance party and consisted of such staff and administrative services as would be needed to carry out the detailed reconnaissance for depots, etc. Its task was to organize the opening of the port as soon as the first ships arrived. This party left Calcutta early in April and, travelling by road via Manipur Road and Imphal, succeeded in catching up 4 Corps in time to enter Rangoon with them from the north, after the link-up with 15 Indian Corps had been effected.

370. The second group of the reconnaissance party was the Sea Party. This was envisaged as the substitute for the Road Party, and its composition was sufficiently strong to enable it by itself, to carry out the same tasks. It was held in readiness to go in with one of 15 Indian

Corps' convoys as soon as it was clear that the fall of the city was imminent. Finally, there was the Air Party, consisting of the three Service Advanced Base Commanders each with his senior staff officer. This party remained behind to complete the final details, and then was flown in as soon as the Rangoon airfield (Mingaladon) was clear.

371. The second main problem which arose was how advantage could be taken of an early fall of the city. If 15 Indian Corps met heavy opposition—and it had to be assumed that it would—build-up convoys, including the follow-up division would be required. If the city fell quickly or if it fell to Fourteenth Army, the most urgent requirements were all the units and stores for the quick development of the Advanced Base. It was therefore essential to have a Stanza (Advanced Base Development) convoy, containing the necessary transportation and engineer stores, together with the units, for the immediate reopening of Rangoon Port, ready to replace one of the later Dracula operational convoys, should it be found possible to reduce or defer the Dracula build-up. This naturally involved considerable manipulation of the shipping and stores concentration programmes; but this Stanza convoy was successfully prepared, and did in the event go in on D plus 21 in place of one of the later Dracula convoys.

SECTION XXIV (paras. 372-393)
AIRFIELD CONSTRUCTION

The organization of Air Forces: The airfield engineer organization: Work on Base airfields, airfields for air supply and the China lift: Forward airfield construction: Fourteenth Army's advance: Airfields in Arakan: The development of Akyab and Kyaukpyu.

372. The airfield construction work carried out under the control of my Headquarters was so extensive and varied that it deserves treatment in a section to itself. This operational commitment of the Army has proved to be a major factor, both strategic and administrative, in any theatre of war. In such an undeveloped theatre as South-East Asia, where air transport was used on an unprecedented scale the commitment was correspondingly even greater.

373. The presence in the theatre of both British, including Dominion, and United States Air Forces with widely varying functions resulted in a highly complicated organization. Until the end of November, 1944, Fourteenth Army was supported by 3 Tactical Air Force, and the Headquarters of both formations were at Comilla. When 15 Indian Corps was separated from Fourteenth Army and came under my direct command, the R.A.F. Groups with these formations (221 Group with Fourteenth Army, 224 Group with 15 Indian Corps), became in effect separate tactical air forces. At the same time 3 Tactical Air Force ceased to exist as such, its operational echelon being merged into Headquarters, Eastern Air Command (which, as I have mentioned before, was an integrated operational Headquarters formed from Headquarters, U.S.A.A.F., India/Burma Theatre and elements from Air