

obtaining observation. There were only five serviceable tanks left, the majority of which were Tetrarchs.

With over 18 miles to the beaches by a sandy track, with indifferent bridges, and few passing places, it was most desirable that the force should be in Antsirane by D3. The personnel of 17 Infantry Brigade had completed landing but were still marching up the road. Provided they could stick the heat, dust, and sniping, the majority of the infantry, say two and a half battalions, could reach the forward area about 1800 hours, while the landing of 13 Infantry Brigade Group had just commenced at daybreak. Adequate tank and artillery support were not available for a daylight attack. The enemy position was about 1200 yards away and reconnaissance of the intervening ground was very difficult owing to the bush, the lie of the ground, and the enemy sniping. However it was fairly well confirmed that there was no wire.

I therefore decided that a silent night advance and assault by 17 Infantry Brigade assisted as necessary by 29 Independent Brigade, should be made during the period of darkness between sunset and the rising of the almost full moon at 2300 hours. I ordered Zero for 2000 hrs. (it had later to be postponed to 2030 hrs.) and arranged for the maximum harassing fire from artillery and the air during the remainder of the day. I issued orders for the attack to Brigadiers Tarleton and Festing and then left to see the Combined Commander. I wished to try to arrange for a destroyer to force the entrance of the harbour and land a party of Royal Marines in the dock area, thus making a direct assault on the town from the rear. This, even if the destroyer was lost, would draw the enemy's fire, create a diversion, and give the main night attack the best possible chance of success. In addition an officer was sent to No. 5 Commando asking them to collect any small boats available at Diego Suarez North and co-operate in this assault. (This was found to be impossible.) As the *Ramilhes* was then anchored with the convoy to refuel, I had to leave at once to catch her and the detailed planning was continued by the two Brigadiers.

28. During the day, 19 Field Battery from the *Bachaquero* came into action on the Andrakaka Peninsula and shelled the enemy position from the rear; it was however handicapped by difficulty in knowing where our troops were in the open scrub on the plateau. This Battery had previously been fired upon by a French Sloop, *D'Entrecasteaux*, and had returned the fire until, with the assistance of the Royal Navy and the Fleet Air Arm, who also claim her, she caught fire and sank. 28/76 Field Battery (9 Field Regiment, 17 Infantry Brigade Group) was landed from the *Mahout* on Blue beach and came into action in the forward area at 1400 hrs. giving harassing fire until dark. During the remaining daylight hours of D2, enemy shelling and sniping continued, but air attacks, which were made at frequent intervals by fighter aircraft going off patrol, and our increasing artillery strength gradually diminished enemy activity.

Meanwhile 29 Independent Brigade reorganised and cleared their area which had become infested with snipers. However, owing

to the large number of men still isolated close to the enemy positions, their companies remained very weak. 17 Infantry Brigade was moving up the main axis to the forward area. 2 Northhamptons which had been ordered overnight to secure the rear of 29 Independent Brigade from an attack along the road from the South, and had captured about 200 prisoners coming in from this direction, was also moved across for the night attack. Late in the afternoon 2 Royal Scots Fusiliers, who had been released from beach defence on the arrival of the leading battalion of 13 Infantry Brigade, and 6 Seaforths who were the last battalion to land, arrived in the area after their 18 mile march. Carriers including signals had been used to lift some of them, but in these battalions few men could have had more than an hour for rest and reorganisation before moving for the start line.

#### NIGHT ATTACK BY 17 INFANTRY BRIGADE 6 May—D2

29. It became dark at 1800 hours and the moon rose at 2310 hrs. Owing to the late arrival of many of the troops in the area and owing to the difficulties in observation, very little effective reconnaissance had been possible. 17 Infantry Brigade formed up on a start line formed by a track just over the crest and about 1,200-1,400 yards from the enemy trenches. 2 Northhamptons were on the right of the Westernmost road and 6 Seaforths on the left with one company 2 Royal Welsh Fusiliers under their command, as they were still under strength.

In order to coincide with the destroyer's attack, I had had to postpone Zero until 2030 hrs., this information only reached the forward area at about 1900 hrs., but was passed down to the troops in time. At Zero, the two leading battalions went forward astride the road on a front of about 600 yards passing between the two forts. This was a sheer piece of good luck. The positions of the forts were not known, although they were built when Marshal Joffre was Governor of Diego Suarez in 1910. The leading infantry in the dark by-passed the strong points within 200 yards without being aware of their existence. There was a considerable amount of firing but the advance continued steadily although casualties occurred in the trench system and at the pill boxes. These battalions reached their objectives, which were the far side of the Native village 3,000 yards from their start line and about 1,800 yards beyond the main enemy position, at 2300 hrs. and fired their success signals. Brigadier Tarleton then ordered forward his reserve battalions; 2 Royal Scots Fusiliers and 2 Royal Welsh Fusiliers, the latter having been placed under his command for the attack. These two battalions pushed right through to the main town of Antsirane with little or no opposition and reached the main harbour. Brigadier Festing now pushed forward 29 Independent Brigade and the remaining tanks to assist in mopping up the town. He entered the Residency at 0100 hrs. and assisted by Brigadier M. S. Lush, Chief Political Officer, at once commenced to take over the town.