

Assault by H.M.S. Anthony and R.M. Detachment from H.M.S. Ramillies.

30. Rear Admiral Syfret had agreed to the direct assault by a destroyer with 50 Royal Marines from the *Ramillies*.

Orders reached this detachment at about 1430 hrs. and three-quarters of an hour later they embarked in *H.M.S. Anthony* which then proceeded at high speed around the Cap D'Embre to reach the entrance to the harbour in time for Zero. Sometime about 2000 hrs. *H.M.S. Anthony* came under fire from the batteries guarding the entrance of the harbour which she returned with all weapons. By Zero she was alongside the quay and the Royal Marines disembarked under fire from the town, and dockyard. Good luck also attended this venture. Expecting to meet the Commandos, she mistook a blue flashing light for their recognition signal, but saw the error just in time and went alongside stern first. A French 75 mm. manned by a Capitaine Clavel failed to register a hit, a fact that this officer still disbelieves. The dockyard was still burning and it was difficult to do much more to create a diversion there. The detachment therefore advanced into the town, occupied the Artillery HQ and started some fires in the area. Leaving a guard at Artillery HQ, it continued to advance and arrived at the Naval barracks where it was fired upon. After some grenades had been thrown, a large number of prisoners headed by the Commandant of the barracks surrendered and British prisoners found in these barracks were released. The detachment was now fully occupied dealing with the very numerous prisoners until contact was made with the British troops, 2 Royal Welsh Fusiliers, who had entered the town from the South.

This attack added greatly to the ease with which the final occupation was carried out and assisted in the avoidance of street fighting, in which casualties might have piled up and the town been severely damaged.

COMPLETION OF THE OPERATION—7TH MAY—D3

31. I entered Antsirane shortly after daylight and took over from Brigadier Festing. All resistance had ceased in the town, but the two forts were still holding out and firing at traffic on the roads between them. My next urgent problem was to capture the Orangea or Ankorika Peninsula, which was still preventing the Navy from entering the harbour. I had originally intended that 29 Independent Brigade should continue with this task when 17 Infantry Brigade had captured the town. As, however, 29 Independent Brigade were fully occupied in the town, I decided that the 17 Infantry Brigade Group should do it. I therefore sent orders to Brigade HQ., which was now just South of the native village, to commence the advance to Orangea as soon as possible, and placed the remaining tanks under its command. Brigadier Tarleton reported that the head of his column could pass Bellevue fort at 1200 hours. I therefore arranged for a preliminary Naval and Air bombardment of enemy positions on the peninsula to take place between 1000 and 1200 hours; and for Naval supporting fire to be controlled by Forward Observation Officers for the advance of the brigade into the peninsula. This advance was also to be assisted by all available air support.

Meanwhile Lieutenant-Colonel H. C. Stockwell commanding 2 Royal Welsh Fusiliers, and Lieutenant-Colonel B. H. Hanaut, had made contact with French officers, who conducted them to the garrison commanders in the Orangea peninsula, with a view to negotiating a surrender. As soon as I heard of this, I asked for the bombardment to be countermanded, but a few rounds were fired before the message got through. It was a tense moment. The Royal Navy and the Fleet Air Arm were straining at the leash to give all they had got to Orangea peninsula, and with the opening of the bombardment by the *Ramillies* I fully expected everybody on both sides to join in.

Fortunately the cease fire signal got through quickly and negotiations continued. At the same time negotiations for the surrender of Caimans fort were opened by the French with the troops in contact with it.

From marked maps which were now in my hands, I was able to see that the French had prepared positions facing South and protecting the Orangea peninsula from land attack. Before reaching these, 17 Infantry Brigade Group, had first to capture Fort Bellevue, and then to overcome an enemy post at Ambatolamba, where the road around French Bay passes through a very narrow bottleneck. The total distance to be marched to Orangea Point was about 12 miles by a very bad road. I was most anxious to arrange a surrender of the garrison of this peninsula, as I foresaw that an operation to capture it might last for several days (and probably entail at least 300 casualties) especially in view of the limited support which was available and the difficulties of supply with limited transport from the now distant Blue beach.

In order to avoid recurrence of fighting while negotiations were in progress, I ordered 17 Infantry Brigade not to advance past fort Bellevue. 13 Infantry Brigade however was moved up from Blue beach, sending a detachment to take over the airport, and the remainder of the brigade concentrating East of Anamakia. By about 1400 hours the surrender of Bellevue and Ambatolambo had been arranged; 17 Infantry Brigade therefore advanced to a position about 2 miles South of the enemy defences in the Orangea Peninsula. It paid honours of war to the garrison of Bellevue and Ambatolambo as they passed. By the evening, I had been able to make arrangements for the final advance to Orangea to take place at 0700 hours the next day, May 8th. *H.M.S. Ramillies* entered harbour just before dark and I went on board to discuss arrangements for final surrender. Arrangements were made for a meeting with the three senior French officers, Colonel Claerebout (Officer Commanding Defences, Diego Suarez), Capitaine de Vaisseau Maerten (Naval Officer in Charge, Madagascar), Capitaine de Vaisseau Simon (ex Commanding Officer of French sloop *D'Entrecasteaux*) all now prisoners of war, on board the flagship at 0915 hours 8th May. This was to be followed by a conference on shore about 1015 hours with certain other French officials.

It was not easy. Claerebout and Maerten had only surrendered in person, and the Garrison Commander with whom the armistice was arranged was Colonel Rouves. Therefore the terms that I had arranged with Colonel Rouves affected only the troops that were still fighting and not those who had already surrendered.