

As regards Ramree Island, unless separate shipping for an assault on this locality was to be allotted, this would either have to be taken by a surprise attack immediately after the capture of Akyab, or the attack would have to be postponed to a date three to four months later and then carried out by two assault brigade groups and one built-up division.

Fuller details of these plans including estimates of possible Japanese strength in Akyab and Arakan were cabled to the Chiefs of Staff on the 2nd July, 1943.

In the meantime, however, further and more detailed examination of the project for operations on this coast was taking place, and I found it necessary to amend my views. On the 22nd July, therefore, I cabled to the Chiefs of Staff a revised plan. The salient points of this were as follows:—

(a) In view of the special difficulties of an assault on Akyab, the following would be required:—

Three assault brigades.

One follow-up brigade.

One floating reserve brigade.

The following shipping and craft would be required in addition to that allotted or already asked for:—

Three Landing Ships Infantry, each with twelve Landing Craft Assault and crews.

Six Landing Craft Infantry (Large), complete with crews.

Twenty-one Landing Craft Tank (Support), complete with crews.

(b) It was clear from the above that we should not have sufficient resources to assault both Akyab and Ramree simultaneously.

Moreover, if Ramree was strongly held, this would require two assault brigades, and the interval between the assaults could not be less than 3 months; e.g., if Akyab was assaulted on the 1st January, the assault on Ramree could not be before the 1st April, and probably later. This would be very near the monsoon, and the practicability of the operation was doubtful.

(c) A surprise attack consisting of a quick follow through by one brigade group from Akyab could not be done. The only possibility, therefore, if opposition at Ramree was expected to be slight, would be to use the shipping again of the Akyab assault-troops to embark one fresh brigade group from east coast ports of India for an assault about a month after the Akyab assault. With the resources available, this brigade group could not be fully trained, but it would be possible to have it ready trained and waiting, if the additional craft and shipping demanded could be made available.

(d) The garrison of Ramree would have to be one division during the monsoon, plus a large force of naval craft to watch the approaches to the island. It was unlikely that we would be able to construct an all weather airfield before the monsoon broke.

The possession of Ramree island would:—

(i) Give depth to air defence.

(ii) Help air operations against Burma, Malaya and Sumatra.

(iii) Constitute a threat to Taungup which might contain enemy forces.

At this stage of planning the flood breach on the main East Indian Railway line upset our calculations. It was seen that, as a result of this calamity, land operations in Arakan were likely to be delayed, and the assault on Akyab might therefore have to be postponed to mid-February. On the 13th August I considered a suggestion that had been submitted to me by my Force Commanders that the plan for the attack on Akyab should be by means of "staggered assaults". I directed that an alternative plan should be framed embodying this principle.

The decisions of the Quebec Conference were now received on the 26th August. In so far as operations on the Arakan coast were concerned, preparations were to continue for an amphibious operation in the spring of 1944. Pending a decision on the particular operation to be carried out, the scale of these preparations was to be of the order of those contemplated at Washington for the capture of Akyab and Ramree. This and other operations in the South East Asia Theatre were to be considered in their relation to one another. In the meantime I had come to the conclusion that the capture of Ramree Island was not essential in connection with the other operations contemplated for the coming dry season of 1943-44. The reasons for this (which did not apply to Akyab) were cabled to the Chiefs of Staff on the 29th August, 1943.

They were as follows:—

(a) Ramree Island was not considered essential for other operations in 1943-44. It was only valuable in conjunction with other movements further down the coast.

(b) There was no time to complete an airstrip to all weather standard.

(c) The above was not applicable to Akyab which would be of greater assistance to obtain air superiority.

(d) In view of the decision to break up the 70th Division to form long range penetration forces, there would only be five assault brigades in India (i.e., the 2nd and 36th Divisions). All these were required for Akyab.

On the other hand the military advantages of the capture of Akyab alone (and contrasted with Ramree) were definite. I cabled them to the Chiefs of Staff on the 4th September. They were:—

(a) The removal of the Japanese threat to Chittagong.

(b) The number of troops required for the North of Akyab would be reduced, as also the maintenance tonnages.

(c) We would gain advanced airfields for attacks on enemy communications in Burma.

(d) The air warning system would be improved.

(e) An attack on Akyab would force the Japanese Air Force to fight.

Further examination of the Akyab and Arakan operations by my staff and force commanders continued. It was established that the personnel lift would not be less than 50,000, and the Chiefs of Staff were advised accordingly. They agreed to make personnel ships available for 50,000; but asked that efforts be made to confine the lift to this figure; as shipping for more could only be provided at the expense of other operations.