

1945 monsoon. The airborne and air-transported part of the operation, which was considered essential owing to the difficulties of a purely seaborne assault on Rangoon, was to be mounted in the Chittagong area and a big programme of building of fair-weather air strips, with all the necessary ancillaries such as fuel installations, had been approved. In order that these could be ready for a post-1945-monsoon assault, I was directed to continue the construction required. These pre-monsoon preparations were naturally at the cost of resources I wanted for my current operations.

The scale and concept of Dracula in its original form should be borne in mind when the way in which Rangoon was captured is described at the end of this part of the Despatch. The difference between the projected operation of early October, 1944, and the actual operation of May, 1945, is the true measure of the development of the operational situation in Burma between those dates.

12. As soon as it was known that the air and sea invasion of Rangoon (Dracula) could not be carried out before the 1945 monsoon, a fresh operation (Romulus) was planned in Arakan. The situation there was unsatisfactory, as we had four divisions locked up by the Japanese threat of an advance up the Kaladan Valley. This threat, which was by a force much inferior in numbers to our own, could best be liquidated by the capture of Akyab Island, Myebon and Minbya. With this achieved, the Arakan garrison of four divisions could be reduced to one of four brigades during the coming monsoon, and valuable divisions thereby released for further operations, thus partially offsetting the non-arrival of formations from Europe.

13. To recapitulate in brief, the tasks of the formations under my command at the time I took over were as follows.

Northern Combat Area Command to recapture and secure the trace of the Burma Road from its junction with the new road from Ledo and to hold the Myitkyina air bases.

Fourteenth Army to get into the dry belt of Central Burma in order to defeat the main Japanese armies and thus ensure permanent security to the Ledo/Burma Road, to develop airfields there, and to provide an "anvil" for the invasion of Rangoon after the 1945 monsoon.

Fifteenth Corps in Arakan to liquidate the remaining Japanese threat in that sector by a limited offensive to just beyond Akyab, in order that formations could be withdrawn to take part in post-monsoon offensive operations against Rangoon or elsewhere.

14. On the 4th November, eight days before I assumed command, the Supreme Allied Commander had issued an Operational Directive to his three Commanders-in-Chief, regarding an offensive in Arakan, instructing them jointly to initiate the planning, and direct the execution of the following tasks.

An advance by land was to be made down the Mayu Peninsula and the Kalapanzin and Kaladan Valleys with the object of clearing the area north of the general line Foul Point-Kudaung Island-Minbya. This advance was to begin as soon as possible.

An amphibious assault on Akyab Island was to be launched as early as possible in 1945, with the aim of clearing the island by the end of January. The area north of the line Akyab-Minbya was to be consolidated but no exploitation was to take place south of Myebon without the Supreme Allied Commander's authority.

On the 9th November, General Giffard had issued an Operation Instruction to the Commander, 15 Corps, defining his task in Arakan in accordance with the above Directive.

15. A week after I had assumed my new Command, the Supreme Allied Commander issued a Planning Directive (19th November) in which he ordered plans to be made for the execution of "the stages of operation Capital [the plan for the advance into Central Burma] necessary to the security of existing air supply routes and the opening of land communications with China and the exploitation of Capital throughout 1945 as far as may be possible without prejudicing the preparation for the execution of Dracula [the plan for the amphibious assault on Rangoon] at the very earliest date possible after the end of the monsoon in 1945." (I quote the actual words of the directive.)

After stating that the plans for operations to secure the general line Kalewa-Shwebo-Mogok-Lashio (Phase II of operation Capital) had received his approval, the Supreme Allied Commander further directed me in conjunction with the Allied Air Commander-in-Chief, to initiate and co-ordinate plans for the execution of Phase III, with the object of securing the general line Pakokku-Mandalay-Maymyo-Lashio.

I was also directed "to bear in mind the paramount importance of destroying the maximum number of Japanese during this Phase, so as to prevent their withdrawal to South Burma and to facilitate subsequent exploitation." This was fully in accordance with my own views since I had already decided in my own mind that the Mandalay Plain, for the reasons I have already explained, should be the graveyard of the Japanese armies. I may add that I found when I met General Slim that he had long been of the same opinion and that his future strategy was directed to this end.

16. Another Directive which I received about this time (18th November) informed me that the British Chiefs of Staff had ordered that the Cocos Islands, lying midway between Ceylon and Australia and some 1,500 miles from each, were to be developed early in 1945 as an air staging point for heavy aircraft in transit. I was called on to provide for the land defence of these islands, in consultation with the Naval and Air Commanders-in-Chief; the target date given for the completion of the development of the islands being the 1st June, 1945.

I may add here that the Army component of the garrison eventually decided on was one battalion, one Coast and two A.A. batteries, and certain Engineer and Pioneer companies. The disembarkation of troops and stores commenced on the 25th March, 1945, and was completed without enemy interference.

17. There is one other project that arose during the period under consideration. In a