

a position where the remnants of the Rangoon garrison, turned out of the town itself, might have fallen back across the Rangoon and Pegu Rivers and have put up a protracted defence of the areas on each side of the Rangoon River as far as its mouth. These areas are intersected with creeks, and with the monsoon rains it would be nearly impossible to deploy forces effectively against the enemy who remained. Thus with Rangoon actually in our hands, we could find ourselves in a worse position than ever, until we opened the Rangoon River. With a seaborne attack the Rangoon River had to be opened first, and the capture of Rangoon town could be closely followed by the opening of the port to traffic. The strength with which Rangoon might be held had made me, earlier on, consider the possibility of going for the less defended ports of Bassein or Moulmein, but it was soon clear that, since these had no all-weather road communications with the main body of Fourteenth Army, Rangoon was the only useful objective.

224. I therefore recommended to the Supreme Allied Commander that a force of two divisions—one for the assault and one for the follow-up—under the command of 15 Indian Corps, should be used to capture Rangoon from the sea. I realised that if my recommendation was accepted, it meant postponing or even cancelling the Phuket operation for which planning was well advanced, and which I had previously agreed to try to carry out.

225. The Supreme Allied Commander approved my recommendation after discussion at a meeting with the Naval and Air Commanders-in-Chief and myself at Kandy on the 2nd April, a few days after I had sent my signal making the recommendation. He made the proviso that the decision as to whether the second (follow-up) division should actually be committed would be taken later. On the 17th April he confirmed his approval in an Operational Directive addressed to his Commanders-in-Chief, in which we were instructed "To carry out an amphibious/airborne operation with the object of the early capture of Rangoon should this not have been previously achieved by Fourteenth Army from the north." D-Day for the initial amphibious assault was to be the 2nd May, and this date should be borne in mind when the progress of Fourteenth Army's advance southwards is followed in the next section of the Despatch.

226. I should like to stress here the hazardous nature of the Rangoon operation. Heavy storms are a common occurrence just before the breaking of the monsoon and, in any case, at this time of year there was a heavy swell outside the Rangoon River. This, combined with the exceptionally long run-in for minor landing craft from the lowering position, made the task extremely difficult and its success somewhat uncertain.

227. Planning started on the 8th April under the experienced team who had been responsible for our combined successes in Arakan. On the 18th April I issued the necessary detailed instructions to the Commander, 15 Indian Corps. The details of the plan itself and its execution are dealt with in a later section of this Despatch.

SECTION XIII (paras. 228-256) FOURTEENTH ARMY'S DRIVE SOUTH

The regrouping phase: Fighting in the Irrawaddy Valley: The capture of Prome: 4 Corps' axis: Successive captures of Pyawbwe, Pyinmana and Tounghoo: Japanese plans to defend Pegu: The advance to Pegu: Capture of Pegu.

228. Early in April, 5 Brigade of 2 British Division and 268 Indian Brigade, advancing south-west from Myingyan—Natogyi area and destroying many isolated enemy detachments *en route*, encountered stubborn resistance at Mount Popa. This is an extinct volcano, 5,000 feet in height, whose steep slopes afforded excellent defensive facilities. Here a force of about 600 Japanese, supported by field and medium artillery, held out until the 20th April, when they were finally eliminated, losing much equipment including vehicles and guns. While this action was in progress, the remainder of 2 British Division was being flown out to India. The fly-out began on the 11th April from Myingyan and was completed by the 25th. For administrative reasons, it had become necessary to reduce the forces in Central Burma by one division, and 2 British Division was required as the follow-up division of the force for operation "Dracula," the capture of Rangoon by a combined airborne and seaborne landing, which was discussed in the last section.

229. 7 Indian Division (less 33 Brigade) was, in the meantime, operating down both sides of the Irrawaddy, while 33 Brigade was directed on the important communications centre of Kyaukpadaung. This town fell on the 12th April, after a strong enemy counter-attack had been repulsed just to the west of it. 33 Brigade then turned west and captured Chauk on the 18th April, the booty taken included five guns (including two medium), and much transport. On the 19th, 89 Brigade cleared Singu, four miles to the north-east. 33 Brigade, advancing south from Chauk, met fierce resistance at Yenangyaung. This extensive oilfield area was completely cleared by the 23rd April after three days' stiff fighting. On this date, 89 Brigade were concentrating seven miles north of Yenangyaung preparatory to crossing the river. West of the Irrawaddy, 114 Brigade had reached a point 17 miles south-west of Seikpyu without meeting any organized resistance. During its advance, 7 Indian Division had inflicted heavy casualties, captured more guns and much booty.

230. After clearing the Myittha—Wundwin area on the railway axis, 20 Indian Division changed two of its brigades from an animal transport to a motor transport basis, and began its rapid move south-west across to the Irrawaddy. This quick re-organization was rendered possible by the fly-out of 2 British Division, whose vehicles thus became available for re-allotment. The advance of 20 Indian Division was directed on Taungdwingyi, which lies some 43 miles east-south-east of Magwe and roughly half-way between the Mandalay—Rangoon railway and the Irrawaddy. This place was the vital rail and road junction of the Japanese communications linking their east and west fronts. Completely under-estimating our mobility, the Commander of 28 Japanese Army had only garrisoned this important point with