

Introduction.

2. The initial assault (Operation "Matador") by the 26th Indian Infantry Division, Major-General C. E. N. Lomax, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C., and troops under his command, had taken place at 0942 on 21st January, 1945, after preliminary bombardment by the air forces.

3. The Assaulting Brigade, the 71st Indian Infantry Brigade, Brigadier R. C. Cottrell-Hill, O.B.E., M.C., and the "Follow Up" Brigade, the 4th Indian Infantry Brigade, Brigadier J. F. R. Forman, had been landed under cover of R.A.F. aircraft and guns of the Fleet without meeting with much opposition. On 26th January they were joined by the 36th Indian Infantry Brigade, Brigadier L. C. Thomas, D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C.

4. By 23rd January a firm bridgehead had been established at the north west extremity of Ramree Island. The Naval Officer in Charge, Lieutenant-Commander G. W. S. Goss, R.N.V.R., with Port Party Number 31 had set up his Headquarters on shore, and Kyaukpyu harbour was in the process of being developed as an anchorage. Moored mines had been found in the inner harbour on D day and were being swept by B.Y.M.S.* under command of Commander E. J. C. Edwards, D.S.C., R.N.V.R., Commander M/S, Bay of Bengal. Sweeping operations were concluded on 24th January and the harbour declared clear of mines.

5. Captain E. T. Cooper, D.S.O., R.N., had, on Brigade level, carried out the duties of Senior Officer Assault Group during the landings and remained in charge of the build up and Ferry Service.

6. The Commander, 26th Indian Division, General Lomax, had disembarked on 21st January, with his staff and taken over control of military operations, which had passed from a Brigade Operation to a Battle on Divisional Scale.

7. In compliance with verbal instructions received from Rear-Admiral B. C. S. Martin, C.B.E., D.S.O., Flag Officer Force "W", I joined General Lomax at Kyaukpyu on the morning of 26th January, with a small Naval Staff, and with the title of Senior Officer, Advanced Force "W". Here in a "tumble-down" house, formerly occupied by the Japanese Military Staff, we were joined by Wing-Commander R. Smith, Royal Air Force, and established a Combined Headquarters.

Narrative

8. The Japanese had developed a strong defensive position guarding the beaches near Thames Point. Their main body was established near Ramree Town. A landing at Kyaukpyu was unexpected and tactical surprise was achieved.

9. As soon as our bridgehead was consolidated, the 71st Indian Infantry Brigade was ordered to advance rapidly southward down the west coast road, leaving the 4th Indian Infantry Brigade in defence of the Kyaukpyu Area.

*Admiralty footnote —B.Y.M.S. = British Yacht Minesweeper.

10. The advance of the 71st Indian Infantry Brigade was supported by destroyers and sloops.

11. It was expected that the Japanese would fight a strong delaying action near Mount Peter and Black Hill, to enable their reinforcements to reach the Leiktaung area where a narrow defile, through which our troops must pass, offered a natural defensive position.

12. As events transpired, determined resistance in the Mount Peter—Black Hill area was not as protracted as expected and after some brisk fighting our troops drove the enemy off and passed quickly through the Leiktaung Gap and reached the Yan Bauk Chaung* on 26th January, where they were brought to a halt by a strong Japanese force entrenched on the south bank of the Chaung.

13. In the meantime Force WELLINGTON consisting of Royal Marines from the East Indies Fleet, with naval support under command of Rear-Admiral A. D. Read, Flag Officer Force 65, had occupied Cheduba Island on the 26th January (Operation "Sankey") without meeting any opposition.

14. On 30th January, Force WELLINGTON was relieved by the 2 AJMER Battalion Group from the 4th Indian Infantry Brigade (Force CACTUS). On the same day, the 8/13th Frontier Force Rifles Battalion Group of the 36th Indian Infantry Brigade (Force MARTIN), occupied Sagu Kyun (Operation "Pendant") also without opposition, under cover of naval and air bombardment. The task of this Force was to establish a Naval Landing Craft Base as a springboard for combined landings on South Ramree Island.

15. On 1st February a company of the 8/13th Frontier Force Rifles from Force MARTIN landed without casualties on the south tip of Ramree Island, under cover of naval and air bombardment. The task of this company was to guard the entrance to the Kaleingdaung River.

16. It was the original intention of the Commander 15th Indian Corps, Lieutenant-General Sir A. F. Philip Christison, Bart., K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., M.C., to capture only as much of Ramree Island as was necessary for the development of airfields to supply the 14th Army during the monsoon, and to launch at an early date a major operation against the mainland in the Taungup area mounted from Kyaukpyu.

17. On the 4th February, however, a directive was received from the Joint Force Commanders to the effect that the maintenance difficulties precluded the major operation against the mainland and the following operations were to be undertaken in lieu:—

(a) The whole of Ramree Island to be captured.

(b) Raids and such minor landings as could be supported administratively to be carried out on the mainland between Taungup and An Chaung with a view to facilitating the eventual capture of Taungup itself.

*Admiralty footnote —Chaung = the local name for the innumerable narrow tidal channels or waterways intersecting the low lying, jungle-covered, Burmese coastal plain