

movement. The Division moved swiftly, reaching Thandada, six miles south-east of Thayettabin, by the 22nd December. The enemy had been out-witted and the majority of his force, including all his guns, were still north of Thayettabin, expecting to fight in the area which they had selected.

157. The next few days were spent by 81 (West African) Division in establishing a firm base in the hills south-east of Thayettabin. The Japanese pulled back and concentrated west of Point 317—an isolated feature which runs parallel to, and just east of, the road Thayettabin—Myohaung. Despite three days of saturation bombing, from the 29th to 31st December, and vigorous ground attacks supported by further air strikes, the new enemy positions in this area were not carried till the 9th January, and then only in the face of a determined defence.

158. At this stage, 4 Brigade of 82 (West African) Division came into the picture. This Brigade, moving *via* Kanzauk, reached Apaukwa on the 9th January and came under command of 81 (West African) Division, on the 10th, for the operation to capture Myohaung. Myohaung and Minbya were now the enemy's concentration areas and there were good reasons for anticipating that he would defend this zone strongly. It included the only road fit for vehicles; it covered the flank of their activities 180 miles to the east; and finally, the Dalet—An—Minbu track was not yet ready for traffic, and further time was required to complete its construction. The somewhat abnormal amount of artillery known to be in the area also indicated the probability of determined resistance. Before, however, describing what actually happened on this front, it is necessary to revert to the operations which took place in the coastal sector.

#### SECTION X (paras. 159-185). CAPTURE OF AKYAB AND SUBSEQUENT EXPLOITATION

Modified plans for the capture of Akyab: The enemy's withdrawal: The Myebon and Kangaw operations: The battle for Myohaung: Operations of the West African divisions.

159. For the past two years planning teams had been studying how best to recapture the island of Akyab by amphibious assault. On the 10th December, I had issued an Operation Instruction, based on plans made and instructions received before I took over command, for the mounting of an amphibious operation from Chittagong. 26 Indian Division (Major-General C. E. N. Lomax) was earmarked for this assault, which was scheduled to take place about the 15th February but it looked as if it might have to be made later, since the landing craft of Naval Assault Force "W" were only partially assembled. In this original plan the choice of a landing beach caused a good deal of anxiety. The tests recommended by the Scientific Advisers to the Supreme Allied Commander had not yielded any conclusive results on the consistency of the beaches, and inland swamps and waterways limited the landing places from which deployment was practicable. It was, however, decided that a beach on the south coast of the island, between

Fakir Point and Akyab Town, showed most promise. It was, however, narrow—about 900 yards—and looked like restricting the assault to a one brigade front. The garrison of the island had been some 2,000 infantry, supported by artillery. As usual our Intelligence of the enemy garrison was very poor and we later found out that the Japanese had started to thin out in the autumn, and by December only about a battalion remained.

160. As described in the last section, our offensive in Arakan had opened well, and unexpectedly fast progress had been made. It was essential to maintain this momentum and take full advantage of the enemy weakness. Thus the situation demanded that quicker, and therefore simpler, ways of capturing the island be devised than the original fairly large-scale amphibious operation in mid-February or later. Accordingly Lieutenant-General Christison, with Rear-Admiral Martin and Air Commodore the Earl of Bandon, prepared new plans. These were considered by the Supreme Allied Commander, with the Naval and Air Commanders-in-Chief and myself, at a conference at my Advanced Headquarters at Barrackpore on the 21st December. From the outset it was realised that, in the event of the enemy weakening further, even these new plans would be too slow and elaborate, and it was agreed that if circumstances allowed it, emergency plans for the quickest possible occupation of the island—known as Operation "Lightning"—should be carried out. The plans for a fully opposed landing were, nevertheless, very carefully examined. It should be remembered that this operation was the first combined operation to be undertaken in the theatre, and the importance of its complete success, as affecting the subsequent larger ones we were going to undertake, was very much in the minds of all concerned.

161. This revised operation took the form of a river crossing operation using combined operations technique, by 25 Indian Division, on to the north-west corner of the island, followed by the capture of Akyab town from the landward side. The method to be adopted, and the concept of subsequent operations, may be summarised as follows. The initial landing was to be made by 3 Commando Brigade, half of which was composed of Royal Marines, mounted in the Naf River, to be followed by 74 Brigade of 25 Indian Division from Foul Point. Full air and naval support would be available. Meanwhile 53 Brigade of 25 Indian Division was to clear Kudaung Island, which lies to the north of Akyab, and exploit to Akyab Island and also eastwards through Ale Chaung to Ponnagyun on the Kaladan River, about 14 miles from its mouth. 25 Indian Division was then to exploit success, seizing all commanding ground on the Boronga Islands, and on the Pauktaw Peninsula to their north. It was then to advance by way of the rivers and establish a base south-east of Minbya, prior to attacking Myebon. 82 (West African) Division, after relieving 81 (West African) Division, was to clear the area south of Kyauktaw and join 25 Indian Division at Minbya.

162. It must be remembered that, when the above revised plan was decided on, our offensive, though going well, was still in its early stages. On the 21st December, when the