

formations—was not lost sight of. Not only did I need the troops for post-monsoon operations, but it was also essential to cut down the administrative commitment in Arakan itself, so that the maximum tonnage could be built up in Akyab and Kyaukpyu for Fourteenth Army. Our resources, particularly in harbourcraft, severely limited the rate at which these stocks could be built-up, and we were working to a very small margin of time before the monsoon broke.

187. The next step in the extension of the campaign was, then, the capture of Ramree Island, which lies some 70 miles to the south-east of Akyab. The acquisition of Ramree would deprive the enemy of a vital link in his inland water communications, on which he was so dependent, and furnish us with a valuable forward sea and air base. The harbour of Kyaukpyu, at the north end of the island, provided sheltered anchorage for large ships, and an all-weather airstrip to operate transport squadrons for the maintenance of Fourteenth Army could be constructed. The particular importance of the establishment of an air supply base on Ramree Island lay in the following facts. It shortened the air-lift journey as already stated, thus allowing more sorties by the available aircraft. The mountain barrier between Ramree and Fourteenth Army's lines of advance was lower than that which had to be crossed in the flight from Akyab, a matter of great importance with the approach of the monsoon. The airfield capacity of Akyab alone was not great enough, as the fair-weather fields had to be put into action as soon as possible to relieve the present air supply situation, while with the approach of the monsoon, all-weather airfields had to be built so that air supply could continue as far as possible during the rains.

188. The plan was to launch a seaborne assault against Ramree, using 26 Indian Division, which had been trained, but not used, to carry out a similar operation against Akyab, and then to effect a landing on Cheduba Island, 12 miles to the south-west, with a force of Royal Marines. The timing of this operation in relation to the rest of the operations in Arakan is worth noting. On the 21st January we assaulted Ramree, on the 22nd we landed at Kangaw, while the Myebon operation was still in progress. Three days later the West Africans (81 Division) captured Myohaung in the Kaladan Valley. Under such pressure the Japanese command must have been in no small difficulty.

189. Strong Naval Forces under the command of Rear-Admiral B. C. S. Martin transported 71 and 4 Brigades (26 Indian Division) from Chittagong, and landed the troops at Kyaukpyu on the 21st January under cover of a heavy Naval and Air bombardment. The Naval bombardment force consisted of the QUEEN ELIZABETH, flying the flag of Vice-Admiral H. T. C. Walker, PHOEBE, RAPID, NAPIER, FLAMINGO and KISTNA. For the first time an Aircraft carrier, the AMEER, took part in Burmese operations, her aircraft spotting for the QUEEN ELIZABETH. The whole of Kyaukpyu village was in our hands by night-fall. On the next day, the Brigades started to move south, and, by the 24th, they had advanced 30 miles down the west coast, to

within three miles of the formidable Yanbauk Chaung. Although the Japanese fought tenaciously, we recaptured a number of British 25-pounder guns. It was apparent, however, that the northern part of the island was not being held in strength. Incidentally, the local inhabitants gave our advancing troops the greatest welcome they had had since the commencement of the campaign.

190. On the 26th January a force of 500 Royal Marines, supported by a Naval Squadron consisting of the NEWCASTLE, wearing the flag of Rear-Admiral A. D. Read, KENYA, NIGERIA, PHOEBE, AMEER and four destroyers, landed on Cheduba Island. The Marines met with no resistance. It had not been expected that the Marines would be able to clear the whole island and they were to be relieved after landing by 36 Brigade (26 Indian Division); but this actually proved to be unnecessary. The other tasks allotted to 36 Brigade were to capture the small island of Sagu Kyun, south of Ramree, which it accomplished on 30th January under cover of the fire of NORMAN and RAIDER, who silenced enemy guns, and then to assault the southern end of Ramree itself, and exploit northwards.

191. On the night of the 26th, and again on the 28th, 71 Brigade made two unsuccessful attempts to cross the Yanbauk Chaung. The enemy were obviously determined to hold this excellent natural obstacle. It was, therefore, decided to leave a holding detachment on the northern bank and to switch the axis of advance north-eastwards, towards Sane on the east coast. On the 1st February, 36 Brigade landed on the southern tip of Ramree against only slight opposition. The same day, the Japanese in the Sane area were subjected to heavy bombardment by the Royal Indian Navy. On the 2nd February, leading elements of 71 Brigade drove the enemy out of Sane.

192. In the meantime 22 (East African) Brigade were transferred from Akyab to Kyaukpyu, thus releasing 4 Brigade of 26 Indian Division for more active operations further south. 4 Brigade forced a crossing of the Yanbauk Chaung on the 6th February. The enemy were now trapped by the three-pronged advance of 71 Brigade due south from Sane, 4 Brigade south and east from the Yanbauk Chaung, and 36 Brigade north and north-west, after its landing in the south. They were being driven towards Ramree town, in the south-east corner of the island, whence their escape was cut off by the Naval blockade under the orders of Captain E. W. Bush, R.N. On the 8th February, 71 Brigade had reached the hills north of Ramree. There they were heavily engaged, though a patrol which entered the town itself that afternoon was informed that it had been evacuated. The enemy were, however, unable to stop our tanks and, by the 9th, they were driven from their positions overlooking the town—the Japanese defence, determined as it had been, had failed, but they made a final effort to break the sea blockade and extricate their garrison. On the evening of the 11th February, they launched an air attack on our two destroyers, which were guarding the sea approaches. Under cover of this diversion, forty powered craft left Taung-up to rescue their troops in Ramree. The