

the West Coast from which we could improve air and sea control of the Mozambique Channel; the port of Tamatave on the East Coast, from which most of the produce of the Island is exported; Tananarive, in the centre, the capital and seat of Government, which possessed long range wireless installations communicating direct with Paris and Indo-China. Various unofficial visitors from Tananarive arrived at Antsirane, and though they were not accredited by the Governor General, they were understood to represent his views. In July it became obvious that M. Annet, whilst toying with the idea of collaboration, was really playing for time until the rains commenced in October, was dancing to Vichy's tune, and that no sincere "rapprochement" could be expected from him. I was, therefore, reluctantly obliged to advise that further operations were essential. Sinkings of our shipping in the Mozambique Channel had increased. The possibility of enemy submarines receiving assistance from French ports had to be eliminated.

On 2nd July, the Island of Mayotte, the most easterly of the Comoro group, was occupied by English and East African Infantry landed by H.M.S. "Dauntless" and H.M.S. "Active." A seaplane base at the Northern end of the Mozambique Channel was thus secured.

On 26th June, after consultations with Field Marshal Smuts, I submitted a plan of operations for the extension of our control over Madagascar. Preparatory work in the detailed planning of this combined operation was started immediately. Major-General R. G. Sturges, C.B., A.D.C. and Brigadier F. W. Festing, D.S.O., were brought over from Madagascar to assist in this.

The plan of operations proposed by Admiral Sir J. F. Somerville, K.C.B., K.B.E., D.S.O. and myself in conjunction with Air Commodore M. L. Taylor, A.F.C., was briefly as follows:

(a) 29th Independent Infantry Brigade Group to carry out a surprise landing under cover of darkness at Majunga with a view to seizing the town and harbour, supported, in the event of opposition, by ships of the Royal Navy and aircraft of the Fleet Air Arm.

(b) As soon as a sufficient bridgehead had been secured ashore, the 22nd (East African) Infantry Brigade Group to land and advance on Tananarive. A small detachment of 22nd (E.A.) Infantry Brigade Group and South African Armoured Cars to land with 29th Independent Brigade and capture the important series of large bridges some 90-130 miles beyond Majunga.

(c) The advance of the East African Brigade on Tananarive was to be supported by an air component which was to move from Antsirane to Majunga as soon as the aerodrome at that place was fit to use.

(d) Whilst Majunga was being attacked, a diversionary landing to be made at Nosy Be while columns from the North were to advance along roads on the North-West and North-East of Madagascar with original objectives at Ambanja and Vohemar respectively. A further diversion was subsequently added by landing from warships at Morandava on the West coast.

(e) As soon as 22nd (E.A.) Infantry Brigade could start on their advance to

Tananarive, the 29th Independent Brigade was to re-embark and be conveyed to Tamatave for a combined assault on that town. This operation was to be so timed that it would take place as the 22nd (E.A.) Brigade was approaching the capital. 29th Independent Brigade was then to advance on Brickaville, and Tananarive. 22nd (E.A.) Brigade was also to advance on Brickaville from Tananarive thus establishing communication across the centre of the Island.

In view of the approaching rainy season these operations were required to start by 8th September.

As in most plans for attack, and in all cases of landing operations, the chances of success depended greatly on surprise. Surprise in its turn depended on secrecy. The collection at Diego Suarez of the number of His Majesty's ships and transports necessary for the operation and the loading of troops, vehicles and stores, would have banished secrecy and limited surprise to the point or points selected for attack. No efforts at Diego Suarez, where both Infantry Brigades were located, could have eliminated this liability.

The ideal would have been to move all troops to be engaged to the mainland of Africa. Provision of shipping within the time available made that impracticable. 29th Independent Brigade was moved to Mombasa in the middle of August. A chance had to be taken with 22nd (E.A.) Brigade Group sailing from Diego Suarez direct to Majunga, but as they had not to be stowed tactically like the British Brigade, the dangers of leakage and intelligent anticipation were reduced.

As cover to the real plan, India was spoken of in confidential whispers as the destination of 29th Brigade. The arrival at Diego Suarez of 7th (South African) Brigade at the end of June and of 27th (Northern Rhodesian) Brigade in early August, gave colour to the rumour that 22nd (E.A.) Infantry Brigade was being relieved. Whatever the effect of this cover on subsequent operations, it certainly diverted the curiosity of the inhabitants of Kenya onto a false scent.

Other difficulties in implementing the plan were apparent; firstly the necessity of securing undamaged the vital bridges on the road Majunga-Tananarive some 90-130 miles from the coast. The total length of the set of bridges over the River Betsiboka was some 1,600 feet with one span of 452 feet. That span was known to be prepared for demolition. If these bridges were destroyed I had no equipment capable of repairing or replacing them and the advance would have to depend on deviation or the slow and laborious use of pontoon ferries. The problem seemed an ideal opportunity for the employment of paratroops. Unfortunately the War Office were unable to accede to my request that these should be made available for the purpose. Secondly, from a naval aspect, the landing at Tamatave was likely to be difficult, as the only sheltered water is inside the harbour and the possibility of using landing craft elsewhere depended on weather which could not be predicted.

In order to provide sufficient motor transport for these operations, five-and-a-half Reserve Mechanical Transport Companies were required from the mainland of East Africa