

plans were being discussed, 25 Indian Division had entered Indin Village on the coast, about 22 miles from Foul Point, and Kwazon on the Kalapanzin River, nearly 30 miles further to the north. It was therefore quite possible that a fair proportion of the Japanese forces in the Mayu Peninsula might withdraw on Akyab, and that we might have to land against a reinforced garrison totalling some 4,000 men. There was every reason for supposing that the enemy would not surrender the island without a struggle—not because it was vital to them, but because of its strategical value to us. Apart from its political importance as an administrative centre for liberated areas, its possession would enable us to assist our forces driving south down the Kaladan. It would provide us with a forward base, which was becoming increasingly necessary now that Cox's Bazaar was 100 miles in rear of our forward troops. Our nearest railhead, Chittagong, was about 70 miles further back still. Finally, transcending even the importance of the port and harbour, there were the airfield potentialities of the island. An air base was essential both for the support of further operations in Arakan and, above all, for the maintenance of Fourteenth Army in Central Burma.

163. The situation on the 1st January necessitated further modification of the plan, which had already been anticipated. The Akyab garrison was known to have been further weakened, although to what extent was still uncertain. 25 Indian Division had reached Foul Point, Rathedaung and Kudaung Island well ahead of schedule. 81 (West African) Division was successfully containing the enemy by its pressure in the Kaladan. It was, therefore, imperative to block the Japanese Minbya—Myebon escape route as early as possible. The immediate possession of Akyab thus became essential to our further progress, and the quickest emergency plan for its capture was put into action. 3 Commando Brigade, mounted in the Naf River as previously planned, was to carry out an assault landing on the north-western beaches of the island, supported by such naval and air bombardment as could be prepared at short notice. Simultaneously 53 Brigade was to cross the two mile wide mouth of the Kywede River in country craft, from Kudaung Island. 74 Brigade would be ferried across the four mile wide Mayu estuary from Foul Point and follow up 3 Commando Brigade. D-Day was fixed for the 3rd January.

164. On the 2nd January, an artillery officer in an air O.P. over Akyab, seeing no signs of the enemy, landed on the airstrip in the centre of the island. He was informed by the local inhabitants that the enemy had left. The question, of course, immediately arose as to whether the assault landing should go in as planned. I insisted that it should, except that there would be no sea and air bombardment unless such support was called for. To have changed the plan at this juncture would have involved delay, and, also, it was not certain that the Japanese had evacuated the whole island—the possibility of some opposition in the coastal areas remained. My experience in the past had always been that, in cases when opposition has suddenly given way, one should still go in on the original battle front, though without the planned supporting fire. If, instead, the advance is changed to something resembling an

advanced guard, time is bound to be wasted when the necessity for redeploying occurs, and momentum is consequently lost.

165. The operation, therefore, proceeded as planned in its final form (para. 161). Neither landing was opposed and Akyab Town was occupied on the 4th, our troops receiving a rousing reception.

Patrols found the Boronga Islands and the Pauktaw Peninsula clear of the enemy. Work on the airfields began immediately and, as a result, a squadron of Spitfires was able to fly in just in time to punish the first enemy air attack on shipping in the harbour on 9th January, by shooting down five out of six of the Japanese aircraft.

166. It was learnt that the Japanese had evacuated Akyab Island 48 hours prior to our arrival. The last elements—a battalion and some anti-aircraft troops—had proceeded to Ponnagyun on the west bank of the Kaladan River. Two battalions of 53 Brigade, following in rapid pursuit, had a sharp engagement with these troops, forcing the main body to fall back across the river. Despite their heavy casualties, however, this force made a spirited attempt on the night of the 9th January to rescue their compatriots still marooned on the west bank. They effected a landing from armoured landing craft but most of these were sunk, and the attempt ended in disaster.

167. In order to maintain contact, and to oblige the enemy to keep troops facing west, the detachment (two battalions) of 53 Brigade, mentioned above, was then directed towards Minbya. After a series of chaung crossings, it reached the Thinganet River at a point four miles south-west of Minbya. A number of sharp actions disclosed that the Japanese were holding the area between the Thinganet and Yede Rivers, just west of Minbya and covering their road L. of C. to Mychaung. It had always been the intention that we should exploit to Minbya and Myebon directly Akyab had been secured. Now that Akyab was in our hands and probing towards Minbya already begun, the opportunity had been created to block the Japanese L. of C. Before dealing with this phase of operations, however, I wish to say a final word about Akyab.

168. The final capture of the island may at first appear as something of an anti-climax after all the preparations and planning that it had at various times involved. A project which had originally been planned as a fairly considerable combined operation became an unopposed river crossing. Nevertheless I would like to dispel this impression, and to stress the significance of this operation apart from the strategic gain of Akyab itself (which I have already mentioned in para. 162). The original date for the full-scale assault was the 15th February and, at one time, it looked as if a three weeks' postponement might be necessary owing to lack of the resources required. It was the tireless efforts and moral ascendancy of our men in the early stages of the offensive, as well as the bold and efficient handling of the campaign by Lieutenant-General Christison and his Naval and Air colleagues, which made it possible and necessary continually to ante-date D-Day, until the landings were finally made some six weeks before 15th February. The Japanese evacuated Akyab not because