

Asia which she had invaded during her orgy of conquest some three years before, was now inevitable.

4. A redeployment of manpower and material resources from Europe for the war against Japan was scheduled to begin, which would thus quicken the tempo of operations. But long before the collapse of Germany had taken place in Europe, the plans for the reconquest of Malaya and Singapore had been prepared. With the other Commanders-in-Chief in this Theatre, I shared the conviction that the second half of 1945 would bring the reinforcements promised by London.

5. On the entry into Rangoon on 3rd May, 1945, theatre strategy was directed to the liberation of Singapore at the earliest possible date with a view to opening up the sea-route to Indo-China and the East Indies, and to liberating enemy-occupied countries. Thereafter, strategy subsequent to the re-occupation of Singapore would depend upon the march of events in the Western Pacific Theatre.

6. It had been the contention, hitherto, that the capture of Singapore would involve at least two intermediate operations before the final goal could be achieved. Firstly, it was considered that an initial operation would be necessary to establish an advanced air and naval base. Through this base, aircraft and assault craft could be staged and operated in support of the next operation for the seizure and occupation of a bridgehead on the Malayan Peninsula. Occupation and development of this bridgehead on the mainland was considered an essential prelude to the final overland advance on Singapore itself.

7. Hastings Harbour was originally selected as the initial objective, but this was postponed to take place after the Monsoon. Further examination by the Joint Planning Staff at Headquarters, S.A.C.S.E.A., however, indicated that a stepping-stone still further south than Hastings Harbour was not only desirable in relation to the time margin, but also a practicable proposition as regards the fly-in of single-engined fighters and close support aircraft. It was essential, however, from the aspect of resources available, that such an operation should be a limited commitment as a military operation and also as regards the shipping lift. These limitations, therefore, narrowed down the selection of this objective to a lightly defended island. Puket Island fulfilled this requirement. Its occupation was therefore planned for June, 1945.

#### *Puket Operation or "Roger".*

8. The Puket operation—"Roger"—was approved in principle by the Chiefs of Staff in February, 1945, but they reserved judgment as to its timing in relation to the fall of Rangoon. A plan for the operation was nevertheless prepared by the Joint Planning Staff and Force Commanders' Staffs were appointed.

9. Force Planning began in Delhi on February 2nd, but it became apparent that the occupation of an island so close to the mainland would involve a greater military commitment than had been envisaged earlier. The Army concept of this operation demanded one Division for the assault and initial occupation of the island, including a small bridgehead on the

mainland, and one follow-up Division to consolidate the position. The Japanese garrison of this island was reported to be approximately one battalion, but other land forces could have been assembled on the mainland once the attack was disclosed.

10. Owing to the distance from our own mainland bases, air cover and support would have to be given by carrier-borne aircraft initially until the capture of the first airstrip, when the Air Forces would accept full responsibility for all air operational requirements. I suggested that the Army demands, both in manpower and material, were excessive for so small an operation (the same opinion being expressed by the Supreme Allied Commander and the Naval C. in C.). I felt that if such demands were persisted in, it might mean that the operation (which would have given vital air bases to support a major operation) would have to be dropped. These fears were well-founded, as the proposed operation was subsequently abandoned, mainly for this reason.

11. Development of the air base at Puket envisaged the completion of three runways to all-weather standard, with an initial force of three Single Engine Fighter Squadrons and an ultimate build-up to:—

3 S.E.F. Squadrons.

1 Fighter/Recce Squadron.

3 Light Bomber Squadrons.

2 Heavy Bomber Squadrons.

Detachments of Air Sea Rescue and Photographic Reconnaissance Unit.

Staging facilities for air transport and other types of air traffic.

12. In addition to this, the base would also require to be capable of staging airborne operations in relation to future requirements of the campaign in Malaya. The air base, too, would require to be fully operational by D plus 100 days, while its development to full capacity was so timed as to provide the necessary air support and cover for the next stage of operations comprising re-occupation of the Ports Swettenham and Dickson areas, and a bridgehead for the final overland advance on Singapore. The occupation of this bridgehead was planned to take place some four months after the initial occupation of Puket with a view to the final assault for the capture of Singapore.

13. Events in Burma, however, had forced a change of plan, which envisaged the necessity to capture Rangoon from the sea before the monsoon broke, and open it as a port to relieve the other overworked supply routes.

14. In this connection, it can now be put on record that a R.A.F. Mosquito aircraft, carrying Wing Commander Saunders, made a low reconnaissance of Rangoon the day before the British Armada disembarked. Finding the city empty of Japanese, and Allied flags flying over P.O.W. camps, he landed at the nearest airfield, hitchhiked into Rangoon and released some of our P.O.W's. Wing Commander Saunders then borrowed a native boat and rowed down the river to tell the British Commander that Rangoon was unoccupied by the enemy, and offered his services as guide to the Expedition. This unusual incident revealed that the enemy forces in Rangoon itself had departed between the times of departure and arrival of the sea convoy. It was later revealed