

they wished to but because they had to. The battle that might have been fought on Akyab beaches, and which we should rejoice was not, had already been won in the jungles to the north. The Japanese were fully alive to the value of Akyab to us: it can in fact be said that their evacuation of the island reflected their reactions to battles fought elsewhere in Burma during the previous six months. Finally, here again I had it forcibly brought home to me how poor our Intelligence was in this theatre. It was not until a very short time before Akyab fell that we realised, for the first time, the weakness of the Japanese in Arakan. The real state of the Akyab garrison we never knew.

169. On the 12th January, one week after the occupation of Akyab, 3 Commando Brigade (consisting of Nos. 1 and 5 Army Commandos and Nos. 42 and 44 Royal Marine Commandos), and 74 Brigade (25 Indian Division), carried in craft of the Royal Indian Navy, and supported by naval and air bombardment, mounted an operation from Akyab and made a successful, but opposed, landing on the Myebon Peninsula, 35 miles east-south-east of Akyab. Complete surprise was effected and a bridgehead quickly established. The Naval Forces were commanded by Captain D. C. Hill, R.N. Naval bombardments were carried out by H.M.I.S. NARBADA and JUMNA. This move rendered the position of all the Japanese forces in Arakan, north of Myebon, precarious. They had either to withdraw through the bottleneck east of Myebon, *via* Kangaw, or face destruction. The original intention was that 74 Brigade should advance up the various chaungs and capture Minbya from the south, after the Myebon Peninsula had been cleared. It was now essential to cut off the enemy troops still in the Kaladan and to relieve the pressure on 81 (West African) Division.

170. By the 13th January Myebon itself and the high ground to the west had been occupied by 74 Brigade with tank support against increasing enemy resistance, and exploitation north through Kantha and east towards Kangaw began. At this stage, Naval launches successfully co-operated by patrolling the chaungs, sinking twenty of the enemy's supply craft besides a number of sampans. The Japanese reacted sharply to this disruption of their communications, sending four relatively heavily armed assault craft into action against the naval motor launches. The enemy ships were promptly sunk. At a later stage, too, the small Naval craft materially assisted in bringing about the eventual destruction of the enemy force north of Myebon.

171. There followed a week of severe fighting against the strongest enemy concentration that the troops of 25 Indian Division had yet encountered. Kantha was occupied on the 17th January, and the enemy driven from an important hill feature to the north of it. By the 21st, 74 Brigade had reached a line running east and west two miles north of Kantha. This effectively sealed off the Myebon Peninsula and the mouth of the Myebon River. It remained to cut the enemy's other avenues of escape in this area. These were the water route down the Daingbon Chaung, and the vital road to the east of it, which runs north and

south through Kangaw. Recent air reconnaissance and captured documents had shown, that a series of strong enemy defences existed from Kangaw Village (which lies nearly eight miles north-east of Myebon on the main and only road), across to the hills on the opposite side of the river to the Myebon Peninsula. This defence system faced north and north-east, effectively blocking the approach to Kangaw from that direction. It was, therefore, decided to cancel the projected advance of 74 Brigade by chaung route to Minbya, leaving it to deal with the enemy on its immediate front, and to move a force by water from Myebon south down the Myebon River and then up the Daingbon Chaung, thus out-flanking the main Japanese positions, though the whole area contained defences. The landing was to be effected as close to Kangaw as possible and, relying on a brief period of tactical surprise, a swift advance made to cut the road. The troops most readily available for this operation were 51 Brigade of 25 Indian Division, which had been brought forward to Akyab from Indin, with 3 Commando Brigade under command. 74 Brigade was to continue its exploitation towards Minbya under the direct command of 15 Indian Corps, and 53 Brigade was brought forward to Myebon.

172. The objective—the main road where it skirts the foothills just north of Kangaw—was, as indicated above, too strongly defended to invite approach by any overland route. The direct water approach, *via* the Myebon and Kyaukngamaw Rivers, was completely dominated by enemy hill positions near Zinyawmaw. The only alternative was to put out into Hunter's Bay, turn east through the Thegyan River, and then north up the Daingbon Chaung to a selected landing place two miles south-west of Kangaw Village. This route lay through 20 miles of tortuous waterways and mangrove swamps in the heart of enemy occupied country. It had one supreme advantage however; any approach from this direction was likely to be unexpected. It was only due to naval surveys that this route could be used at all.

173. On the 22nd January a naval force commanded by Captain D. C. Hill, R.N., landed 3 Commando Brigade as planned, on the east bank of the Daingbon Chaung, two miles from Kangaw. This landing achieved complete tactical surprise, but was hampered by very difficult conditions of thick mud and mangrove swamps which prevented the early putting ashore of guns and tanks. Moreover, the position was made worse by the fact that we occupied a narrow strip of flat, open country, largely flooded, while the enemy overlooked our area from positions on jungle-clad features on which accurate artillery fire could not easily be brought to bear. Naval bombardments in support of the Army were carried out by the NARBADA and JUMNA, and close support was given by motor launches and support craft.

174. The ensuing week was to see some of the heaviest fighting of the whole Burma campaign. The Japanese quickly reacted to the threat which we had produced. By their preparations for the defence of Kangaw, they had already shown that they appreciated the importance of the area. Our unexpected landing,