

289. During June, 4 Corps' formations not engaged in the operations described in the two preceding paragraphs were engaged with patrols and sporadic engagements with the Japanese concentrating in the Yomas. V Force provided most valuable information, and enabled us to locate the Japanese and forecast their plans. 4 Corps estimated their numbers at just under 10,000, but this figure was in fact only half the total. The discrepancy was due to the unexpectedly large number of non-divisional Japanese troops caught in the trap, who took part in the break-out. Finally, on the 4th July, an operation order was captured giving the entire Japanese break-out plan; the only detail lacking was the date selected for D-Day, but other Intelligence placed D-Day as approximately the 20th July.

290. With this information at his disposal General F.I.S. Toker, acting for General Messervy who was on leave, was able to dispose 4 Corps to block all intended lines of escape. The Japanese held to their plan to the last detail, and the resulting slaughter was tremendous. Between the 21st July and the 4th August over 10,000 casualties were inflicted on the Japanese, not counting wounded. Of these only 740 were taken prisoner.

291. The Battle of the Break-out, it transpired, was the last battle of the war. For the 10 days which intervened between the conclusion of the battle and the end of the period covered by this Despatch, a lull ensued during which little of note occurred. Patrols and small advances were the order of the day, and the Royal Air Force continued to add to the destruction they had caused throughout the campaign.

SECTION XVIII (paras. 292-301) PLANS FOR MALAYA

Joint Planning Staff Paper of the 23rd February, 1945: Operations Roger, Zipper and Mailist: Cancellation of Roger: D-Day for Zipper: Zipper appreciation and plan.

292. It is now necessary to revert to February, 1945, to consider the evolution of the plans for the recapture of Malaya. Throughout the post-Rangoon operations to which the last three sections have been devoted, planning and preliminary action for subsequent operations had been continuing, and their effects on current operations, particularly command and organization, have been recorded. The assaults on Malaya and Singapore (operations Zipper and Mailist) had absolute priority, and every unit required for these operations was either moved to India or concentrated in Rangoon (which was to be the forward base for the assault forces) for rest and reorganization.

293. On the 23rd February the Supreme Commander had held a conference at Fort William, and at it approval was given to the outline plan produced by the Joint Planning Staff in their Paper No. 88 of the 6th February. It was appreciated that the Japanese would endeavour to hold Malaya and in particular, Singapore, as a barrier to prevent our entry into the area of the South China Sea. Similarly, without Singapore we would be unable to extend materially our operations eastwards. The object of the paper was to examine the best outline method of reaching Singapore.

294. It was anticipated that the Japanese would build up their strength in Malaya, and therefore it was desirable to mount the operation as speedily as possible and by the quickest route. This rendered undesirable an approach via the Sunda Straits, Sumatra, or the Andaman Islands, as the establishment of a forward base in these areas would still leave that base at a distance too great for a direct assault on Singapore. By various means we attempted to give the impression that we would move on Singapore by one or more of these routes. It was therefore agreed that the forward base should be on the Malay Peninsula, and an examination was made of the geographical features of the area.

295. The Tenasserim coast was ruled out as a suitable area for a landing owing to the monsoon conditions. The further south the better would these conditions become, until, in the Straits of Malacca, sea conditions were suitable throughout the year.

The Phuket operation was feasible, but the very narrow waterway dividing Phuket Island from the mainland made it necessary to provide a force capable of withstanding any build-up against it. The size of this force depended naturally on the anticipated size of the build-up, and this in turn depended on the length of time during which the British force was to be the only one ashore in Malaya. Another landing would, of course, divert some of the build-up, but the scarcity of landing craft meant a considerable time lag before the next amphibious operation could take place, and for that reason therefore the Army commitment at Phuket had to be considerable if the proposed airstrips were to be protected from artillery fire. While relatively near Rangoon, the seizure of Phuket did not, of course, obviate the need to make another landing on the Malay Peninsula nearer to Singapore.

296. A study of the beaches and anchorages revealed that the Port Dickson/Port Swettenham area also was suitable, though by no means perfect, and the distance on to Singapore was reduced to about 200 miles. This plan would make the maximum use of the capture of Rangoon, and it was considered that with the seizure of a bridgehead in this area it would be possible to disrupt Japanese communications along the Malay Peninsula by the joint use of air power and guerilla forces. It was therefore agreed at this meeting on the 23rd February to examine this project in detail, target dates being decided as the 1st June for Phuket (Roger), early October for the Port Swettenham/Port Dickson landing (Zipper) and December for Singapore (Mailist).

297. Planning accordingly was begun in detail, while the operations in Burma proceeded. As has been recorded (para. 224), the Roger operation was postponed by the decision to capture Rangoon from the sea, as the only landing craft available were used for this operation. On the capture of Rangoon in May, the rapid deterioration of the Japanese air and naval forces and the availability of sufficient aircraft carriers, was such that the Supreme Commander decided that he could accept the risk of not seizing Phuket Island at all, and planning thereafter was concentrated on Zipper and Mailist. Furthermore the situation had now developed