

Durban. It was clear that the addition of this squadron would greatly increase the strength of my force for the consolidation of the objective, although owing to the distance from the nearest base, the squadron would be unable to take part in the capture of the aerodrome. Colonel S. A. Melville, S.A.A.F., arrived from Pretoria with the offer in his pocket. The S.A.A.F. also offered the complete personnel and ground equipment for a fighter squadron if the Air Ministry could supply the aircraft. The offer of the bomber and reconnaissance squadron was accepted with gratitude. The aerodrome was made serviceable and the whole squadron was operating by 12th May. Thereafter it proved a most valuable component for the fortress. That the squadron was grossly overworked was a truism, but none of the many tasks given to it were refused. They included long distance sea patrols and escorts in co-operation with the Royal Navy, photographic reconnaissance in anticipation of future operations, interception and communications.

All this made a vast amount of detailed work for the administrative staff and the services. All ranks concerned worked extremely well and did not spare themselves. In particular I would here draw attention to the work performed by: the A.A. & Q.M.G., Lieutenant-Colonel A. F. J. Elmslie, A.D.O.S., Lieutenant-Colonel E. J. Savage, and D.A.D.O.S.(E), Major A. Blunt.

The Project for the Capture of Tamatave and Majunga

10. Early on the morning of 26 April, a cable was received from London instructing Rear Admiral Syfret and myself to forward our appreciation of the possibility of operations to capture Tamatave and Majunga either simultaneously or shortly after Diego Suarez. We at once investigated this problem and came to the conclusion that, if 13 Infantry Brigade Group could be permanently allotted to the force and if the opposition at Diego Suarez was such that it could be overcome by 1800 hrs. on D1, these additional operations could be carried out simultaneously by re-embarking 29 Independent Brigade and 5 Commando four or five days after the initial assault on Diego Suarez. Rear Admiral Syfret and I issued combined directives for these operations to Brigadier Festing and Captain Garnons-Williams. During the remainder of the stay at Durban and the passage to Diego Suarez, they prepared and issued orders for these operations. However, on 4 May, orders were received that in view of the extreme importance of 13 Infantry Brigade Group reaching India as soon as possible, these operations were to be held in abeyance. These projects however appeared again later after the capture of Diego Suarez.

11. The slow convoy sailed from Durban 25 April and the fast convoy, containing all the personnel ships, on 28 April. By this time all re-adjustments of personnel, stores and vehicles for the operation were completed. Accompanied by Colonel Melville, S.A.A.F., Lieutenant-Colonel G. F. Houghton, Royal Corps of Signals, C.S.O. and Major R. O. Nash, M.C., GSO2, I embarked in *H.M.S. Ramulhes* which was flying the flag of Rear Admiral Syfret, while the majority of my H.Q. were embarked in *H.M.S. Keren* with S.N.O.L. and H.Q. 29 Independent Brigade. This arrangement was necessary in order to enable an early start to be

made on the beach maintenance project, and to co-ordinate with S.N.O.L. the landing of the 17 Infantry Brigade Group, after disembarkation of 29 Independent Brigade. A further dispersion of my H.Q. was necessary so that a team in *H.M.S. Karanja* could take on the duties of assault H.Q. ship and S.N.O.L. if *H.M.S. Keren* were sunk.

12. The work at Durban was greatly assisted by the facilities made available by the Government of the Union of South Africa, co-ordinated in Durban by Brigadier J. Daniels, Area Commander and Colonel S. A. Melville S.A.A.F.; by the Military Mission under the command of Brigadier A. G. Salisbury-Jones; and Lieutenant-Colonel A. W. Bryant and the staff of the Imperial Movement Control at Durban. It was a hard struggle. The Union was practically denuded of certain commodities such as bostiek and insulating tape for waterproofing vehicles and of aircraft bombs and it seemed that almost the impossible had been achieved.

Passage to the Objective

13. The passage to the objective was made according to the naval plan and is fully described in the naval dispatches. The final opportunity to distribute orders occurred on 1 May by destroyer. At dusk 4 May the complete convoy, which now consisted of the slow and the fast elements, formed up in its assault formation and I observed with some relief, that, when darkness fell, we did not appear to have been discovered by enemy air reconnaissance or surface vessels.

THE CAPTURE OF THE BEACHES AND ADVANCE INLAND.

(See plan 1 at end.)

14. The general plan for the assault was a main landing by 29 Independent Brigade in Ambararata Bay area at three beaches named from South to North: Green, White and Blue. This brigade which was on a very light scale of transport, and had under its command among other units, "B" Special Service Squadron (6 Valentines, 6 Tetrarchs) and 455 Light Battery (4 × 3.7 howitzers and 2 × 25-pounders), was, as soon as it had secured the beaches, to advance and capture Antsirane, about 21 miles by road to the East. Simultaneously with this landing, 5 Commando (which was under command 29 Independent Brigade) and one company 2 East Lancashire Regiment from 29 Independent Brigade, were to land in Courier Bay at beaches named Red; South, Central and North: silence two coast defence batteries reported in that area, and then advance East to secure the Andrakaka Peninsula. This peninsula projects into the main harbour of Diego Suarez but is separated from the town of Antsirane by a strip of water about 1,200 yards across. Zero was at 0430 hours 5 May when the leading troops were to reach the beach, 17 Infantry Brigade Group, followed if necessary on D2 by 13 Infantry Brigade Group, was to land, as soon as landing craft had completed 29 Independent Brigade and 5 Commando, on the best of Green, White, or Blue beaches, and come into action as necessary to complete the capture of Antsirane and the Orangea Peninsula. On the latter stood coast defence batteries covering the narrow entrance to the harbour.