

that the Japanese Commander of the Burma Area Army had been ordered to hold Rangoon to the end, but on his own initiative decided to withdraw in the face of the Fourteenth Army's pressure.

15. It was realised after Rangoon's capture that to postpone the Puket operation later than mid-June, 1945, would inevitably retard the progress of subsequent operations timed progressively for the capture of Singapore by the end of the year. The Puket operation was therefore abandoned. With it, there vanished a stepping-stone to Singapore which the British Air Forces could well have utilised to great advantage.

Effect of Delay upon Future Strategy

16. The importance of accelerating the Allied Malayan offensive had been emphasised. In the first instance, it necessitated planning for the occupation and development of Puket approximately one month after the Monsoon had set in. Any further delay than this incurred a steady deterioration in weather conditions and a heavy swell on exposed beaches. The cumulative effect of rain was also calculated to cause a steady increase in the saturation of the ground and proportionately greater difficulty in airfield and road construction.

17. It was estimated that the closing stages of the campaign in Burma, involving at the eleventh hour a mounting of the amphibious operation "Dracula" to make doubly certain Rangoon's capture, had imposed a minimum of nine weeks delay in the initiation of the operation to capture the weakly held Puket. It followed, therefore, if Malayan strategy was to be implemented to meet the proposed time schedule for the capture of Singapore that this initial delay must be made good quickly.

18. To achieve this there were three courses open for consideration, each of which involved much planning:—

(1) To select an alternative objective where airfield development was an easier proposition in relation to weather conditions and time available, or where airfields already existed.

(2) To retain the existing objective but on a less ambitious scale of airfield development and military occupation, thereby speeding up development.

(3) To abandon any project for development of a stepping-stone, and to embark upon the second phase of our overall strategy which envisaged a bridgehead on the Malayan Peninsula as a prelude to the final advance on Singapore.

19. Course 1, on examination, revealed that areas more suitable for airfield development did not fulfil the operational requirements, while the occupation of existing airfields in suitable areas was likely to require a major military operation.

20. As regards Course 2, if some reduction in the scale of effort was acceptable, particularly as regards the requirements of heavy bombers, then a substantial reduction in runway development could be achieved. This, however, would reduce the overall period of development to the extent by which the base could be fully operational to provide the necessary air support and softening up operations on a

lighter scale in relation to the next phase of Malayan operations as timed. Furthermore, if reduction in base development were accompanied by a decrease in the scale of military effort required to occupy the island, this would result not only in saving time, but also in a general economy in resources and shipping. The Army, however, would not agree to any reduction in strength of assault and garrison forces.

21. Course 3, when considered, had the great advantage of making up the total time lost, which, for reasons which have already been stated, was of paramount importance.

22. It was obvious, however, that without intermediate air bases, close support by land based aircraft could not be provided either as a prelude to or during the initial occupation of the bridgehead.

23. For this purpose, complete reliance had therefore to be placed upon air support and air cover by carrier-borne aircraft until suitable airstrips could be prepared within the bridgehead. Furthermore, the degree of heavy bomber support would be severely limited by distance and weather. Even on the most optimistic assumption that one or more heavy bomber airfields would be available in Burma by September, air bombing involved a distance to targets of 1,000 miles with a consequent reduction in bomb load and intensity of effort.

24. It was obvious, therefore, that operations at such a range could not afford the required support for the initial occupation of the bridgehead. The lack of an advanced air base also introduced difficulties as regards the fly-in of aircraft for the build-up, and a routine service for aircraft replacement.

25. When the problem was examined, the Joint Planning Staff recommended Course 3, provided that carrier-borne air forces could be assured.

26. Course 3 was therefore adopted, and the operation which, in planning, became known as "Zipper", envisaged the occupation of a bridgehead in the Port Dickson—Swettenham area. The assault, it was intended, should be carried out by two Divisions of No. 34 Indian Corps, with 15 Corps in the following-up rôle. The amphibious operation would be undertaken by a naval task force.

27. It was planned that air cover and support would be provided initially by carrier-borne air forces, presupposing that at least three light fleet carriers would be available for the operation in addition to the escort carriers already in the Theatre. The R.A.F. Squadrons of 224 Group, which had given outstanding service in Burma, were to be flown into the bridgehead as soon as strips were available.

28. As complementary to operation "Zipper", planning was also initiated for the occupation of Singapore Island under planning code word "Mailfist".

29. The initial assault for "Zipper" was timed to take place in early September, 1945, and subsequent exploitation southwards in Malaya was so timed as to permit of the final assault on Singapore by the end of December.

30. From the air point of view I consider the "Zipper" plan for the assault on Malaya possessed one distinct disadvantage—its great