

consisting of 5 and 17 Indian Divisions, with 255 Indian Tank Brigade and one armoured car regiment, was to secure Pyawbwe, strike at Japanese forces and concentrate for a thrust south. 33 Corps was to clear Mandalay—Maymyo—Kyaukse, to operate 20 Indian Division to the south and the south-west, to operate 2 British Division south-west, and move 19 Indian Division south to follow up and take over from 4 Corps up to Meiktila.

The instructions for the advance south stated that Fourteenth Army with 19 Indian Division would hold secure the area Mandalay—Thazi—Meiktila. 4 Corps was to capture Rangoon at all costs before the monsoon. 33 Corps was to capture Seikpyu and Chauk first, containing Yenangyaung, then capture in succession Magwe, Yenangyaung, Prome and finally Rangoon, if possible before 4 Corps.

218. The magnitude of the undertaking should be noted. About five weeks were available before the monsoon broke. Its arrival would cut the land line of communication from Kalewa to Shwebo and vastly increase the difficulties of air supply. The serious consequences of the delay imposed on our advance by the transfer of airlift and forces to China (see paragraphs 51 and 52) were now fully apparent. To reach Rangoon in time meant that Fourteenth Army's advance had to average at least ten miles a day against opposition and despite demolitions—a formidable proposition. There was also the very disturbing possibility that the Japanese, instead of withdrawing their defeated forces southwards, would retire into the mountains that lay to the east of the road and railway between Mandalay and Rangoon. Maintenance would be possible by the road from the Lampang railhead in Siam, *via* Kengtung, Takaw and Loilem. The presence of such a force on our flank would inevitably have weakened the drive south, while we certainly could not afford to operate eastwards against it in any strength. Fortunately, this threat did not materialize.

219. I had, for some time, been considering the necessity of a subsidiary operation to assist Fourteenth Army. At the end of March, I decided that I must recommend to the Supreme Allied Commander that a sea-borne attack on Rangoon, in addition to Fourteenth Army's thrust, was essential.

220. Both General Slim and I were full of hope that Fourteenth Army would reach Rangoon before the monsoon, despite the difficulties which faced them. But at the same time I had to take into account the possibility of failure to do so. It is not too much to say that the results of such failure would have been disastrous. The long land L. of C.—it is over 600 miles from Manipur Road railhead to Meiktila—was not designed to withstand monsoon conditions, as an important length of the road, running from Kalewa to Shwebo, about 108 miles, was constructed to fair-weather standard only. Air supply on a considerable scale was in any case essential to supplement what came by land and river. But during the monsoon, flying conditions were often hazardous, and would certainly interrupt air supply altogether for periods, at a time when our land L. of C. was interrupted and possibly the I.W.T. traffic on the Chindwin was reduced too. Moreover, I knew, and the Americans had been quite candid and warned

me, that if we did not get into Rangoon by June, their American transport aircraft which formed a large proportion of the theatre resources, would be taken off to China. Thus we might well have the position where our troops, halted only a comparatively short distance from Rangoon by the monsoon rains, would have to be withdrawn back to Mandalay or even to the Chindwin, with all the attendant losses in vehicles and morale, for reasons of supply. How real this danger was, was afterwards proved by the fact that, even after Rangoon was captured and opened in May, the R.A.F. were unable, at times, during the June monsoon rains, adequately to supply even the small forces which we still had to maintain in Central Burma. General Slim had repeatedly asked me to put in an amphibious operation to assist his army to capture Rangoon, because he felt he could not guarantee reaching it before the rains.

221. In the early part of this Despatch (paragraph 11) I mentioned that a combined operation for the capture of Rangoon, known as Dracula, had had to be postponed. This operation was, however, never actually cancelled. As far back as the 5th February, the Supreme Allied Commander had issued a Directive in which my tasks were defined as follows: "To secure the Ledo—Burma road, capture Rangoon by 1st June, 1945, open the port of Rangoon and destroy the main Japanese forces in Burma, excluding the Tenasserim coast." In this Directive the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies Fleet, was instructed "To furnish such Naval support and amphibious resources as may be required for combined operations," and, mention was also made of the Indian Airborne Division, which was to be held under the Supreme Commander's operational control. This amounted, in effect, to "Operation Dracula," though in a modified form, and I considered the time had now come to put it into effect, that is, to carry out a combined sea, land and air operation against Rangoon, though on a much smaller scale than was originally planned.

222. Everything indicated that the enemy was going to make determined efforts to halt us in the Yenangyaung area on the Irrawaddy axis, and that we should meet defence in depth on the road-railway axis to the east. From captured documents and the evidence of Staff officers obtained later it is clear that the enemy intended to halt us successively at Pyawbwe, Pyinmana and Toungoo. It was only his inability to carry out the necessary moves in time that prevented these plans from fully materialising.

223. Moreover, there was the problem of Rangoon itself. The garrison was at this time known to be some 10,000 strong. Although these were largely Base troops, experience in Manila and elsewhere in the Pacific theatre had shown that these troops were capable of stubborn and suicidal defence, and I had had no indication from my Intelligence that the enemy might abandon Rangoon. Nor with the clearing of Rangoon town itself was the problem by any means solved. Before supplies could be brought in by sea, the twenty-four odd miles of the Rangoon River approach had to be cleared of mines, and naturally the mine-sweepers could not start until the banks were cleared of enemy. It was not difficult to foresee