

18. Further attempts by the 71st Indian Infantry Brigade to cross the Yan Bauk Chaung, paragraph 12, met with no success, in spite of heavy gun support from destroyers and from cruisers of Force 65. It was, therefore, necessary to review the situation in the light of the Joint Force Commanders' directive, and to devise another plan for defeating the enemy.

19. The possibility of an amphibious landing on the beaches on the south of the Yan Bauk Chaung was considered first of all. The idea, however, was rejected on the grounds that the beaches were strongly defended and believed to be mined. Surf conditions on the beaches were an added objection.

20. A solution was found in a decision to order the 71st Indian Infantry Brigade to advance north east towards Sane and outflank the Japanese positions south of the Yan Bauk Chaung, and then to attack Ramree Town from the north west. To implement this decision, part of the 4th Indian Infantry Brigade were ordered south into the Yan Bauk Chaung area.

21. This new move had Naval implications. While the 71st Indian Infantry Brigade had been operating near the coast, it had been possible to give them all the naval gun support they required. But now that the advance had turned inland, the enemy would soon pass out of range of H.M. Ships lying off the west coast of Ramree Island.

22. The Gates at the entrance to the Kaleingdaung River had already been opened by elements from the 36th Indian Infantry Brigade in their occupation of Sagu Kyun and the south tip of Ramree Island (paragraphs 14 and 15). A survey of the river had already been started in anticipation of a requirement to send destroyers into the river to give naval gun support to our troops advancing on Ramree Town.

23. On 4th February, reinforcements of 8/13th Frontier Force Rifles were landed on the southern end of Ramree Island, this time at Kyauknimaw, (Operation "Mike"), and on the same day two destroyers, preceded by minesweepers, entered the Kaleingdaung River and took up bombarding positions off the Taraung and Ramree Chaungs.

24. By 7th February the outflanking movement of the 71st Indian Infantry Brigade had caused the Japanese to withdraw from their dominating position on the south bank of the Yan Bauk Chaung allowing the 4th Indian Infantry Brigade to cross the Chaung without difficulty, and advance in pursuit.

25. It was not long before Sane fell to the 71st Indian Infantry Brigade, and on the 8th February Ramree Town was captured.

26. A glance at the map in Appendix I will show that an interesting situation had developed. The bulk of the Japanese who survived the battles were now to the eastward of a line drawn between Sane and Ramree with remnants probably still in the southern part of the Island. To the Japanese there remained only two alternatives, to stand and fight or to escape from the island by water. They chose the latter alternative and in so doing met with disaster.

27. The best method of preventing the Japanese from escaping by boat to the east and

the north east had for some time been the subject of close study by the Combined Staffs. The conclusion reached was that with the use of destroyers and all B.Y.M.S., M.Ls. L.C.S.(M) and L.C.A.,* the Navy could block effectively the Chaung exits from the Taraung Chaung to the Pakseik Taungmaw River in the east, and exits into the Mingaung Chaung and Pakseik Taungmaw River in the north east. The Army must look after the remainder.

28. The Combined Operation which followed, known as Operation "Block," commenced on 8th February, and was concluded on the 22nd February.

The Army covered the Chaung exits south of the Taraung Chaung by an advance north from Kyauknimaw with the 36th Indian Infantry Brigade, they also occupied Kalebon to guard the Japanese escape routes north between Sane and the Mingaung Chaung. R.A.F. Fighters straffed boat concentrations and provided cover. Thus the Army and R.A.F. drove the Japanese off the Island into the mangrove swamps where they were successfully dealt with by the Navy.

29. The Navy established their blocks as described in paragraph 27 by placing the Landing Craft (L.C.A. and L.C.S.(M)), camouflaged as far as possible with foliage, in ambush at the mouth of the Chaungs, while the M.Ls. and B.Y.M.S. were used as back stops. Initially there were two Naval blocks known as the North Block (along the course of the Mingaung Chaung and the Pakseik Taungmaw River) and the South Block (from Tan Chaung to the Taraung Chaung).

30. As operations developed and more intelligence of the enemy's intentions was received the South Block was moved to form an East Block (from the lower Zareik Chaung to the upper Didokbank) and later again moved to form the Thanzit Block (from the Wonkpit Chaung to the Awlebyn River). In the later stages the Chaungs were illuminated at night and a greater degree of mobility of craft was introduced.

31. The frontage covered in these operations was considerable. Exits from the mangroves were not confined to those shown on the maps. Hundreds of Chaungs and waterways were found to be in existence, all suitable for native boats. Trees with thick foliage growing down to the water's edge provided ample cover for a small boat. At high water much of the mangrove was flooded, allowing lateral movement from one Chaung to another. The rise and fall of the tide, accentuated by conditions of shallow water and mud near the banks, made concealment of Landing Craft difficult. When the Chaung blocking started the moon was in its first quarter and the tide approaching springs. All these conditions were to the advantage of the enemy.

32. Disadvantages to the Japanese lay in the indescribable horrors of the mangrove swamps. Dark during the day as well as during the night, acres of thick impenetrable forest; miles of deep black mud, mosquitoes, scorpions, flies and weird insects by the billion and—worst of

*Admiralty footnote —

M.L. = Motor Launch

L.C.S.(M) = Landing Craft Support, medium size

L.C.A. = Landing Craft Assault