

possible to land the assault battalions on the east and west banks of the river. Despite this, it was decided that the operation should not be postponed and the magnificent work of the landing craft crews entirely justified this decision. Admiral Martin's signal to the fleet of "Guts and good seamanship" was an apt slogan for the occasion. The landings were successful, the only opposition coming from the elements. By 2000 hours the same night, 36 Brigade had reached and crossed the Bassein Creek. It was on this day that it might be said that the first element of the Imperial forces re-entered Rangoon. An R.A.F. pilot, after seeing signals from the ground and a Union Jack flying over the jail, landed at the airfield seven miles north of the town. He was greeted by the local inhabitants, and made his way into the city and, after contacting our prisoners in the jail, went down river in a country boat and gave 26 Indian Division the news. By 2200 hours on the 3rd May, 36 Brigade had occupied Dala Village, opposite the Rangoon docks, against minor opposition. They had also crossed the river and entered the dock area. This was found to have been wrecked by our bombers, but the only serious damage to the residential part of the town was to the water and lighting installations. Meanwhile, 71 Brigade had occupied Syriam, the only resistance coming from snipers, and were preparing to cross the Pegu River.

263. The liberation of Rangoon had cost us just under one hundred casualties. Only one landing craft, unfortunately containing key engineer and medical personnel, was lost on a mine. By the successful re-entry into Rangoon through the sea-gate, the port was re-opened at least 14 days earlier than if it had been left to Fourteenth Army to take from the north, even as events turned out. The value of these 14 days at this critical period needs no emphasis.

264. By the 5th May, the occupation of the city was complete and exploitation north in progress. On the following day 26 Indian Division linked up with Fourteenth Army at Milestone 29 on the Rangoon—Pegu road, and the north-south bisection of Burma was complete, with 18,000 Japanese troops being cut off to the west. On this date, also, 26 Indian Division passed temporarily under command of Fourteenth Army and 15 Indian Corps thus completed its campaign in Burma.

265. With the capture of Rangoon a major phase of the war against Japan had been completed, a phase important in itself and decisive as far as Burma was concerned. It will be to the eternal credit of the sea, land and air forces of South-East Asia that this phase was completed before the 1945 monsoon.

SECTION XV (paras. 266-274) THE NEW SITUATION

Opening of a new phase: Internal Security situation: Tactical situation after capture of Rangoon: The administrative situation and the effect on future plans.

266. The capture of Rangoon marked the completion of operation Capital and the end of a definite phase in the operations in Burma. From this time onwards I was concerned with the dual task of finishing off the liberation of

Burma, and at the same time completing preparations for the campaign in Malaya. For the sake of clarity, I propose to deal first with our operations in Burma, leaving the plans for Malaya to a later section of my Despatch. But it must be remembered that the planning was in fact being carried out concurrently with the operations.

267. Before describing the continuance of operations, one other matter requires mention. This was the internal security aspect, which could not now be ignored. Both during the retreat in 1942 and during the recent advance large quantities of British and Japanese arms and ammunition had fallen into the hands of the civil population. Furthermore, British and American Long-Range Penetration Brigades, and guerilla organizations, had armed the northern hill tribes on a substantial scale. And finally the Japanese had issued arms to locally raised forces.

The civil population was therefore in possession of a large number of weapons, and there was every chance of a serious outbreak of both dacoity and communal strife. Indeed, dacoity had already been met in the Akyab area, necessitating the detaching of troops to suppress it.

In January the Burma Government had raised the question of the reconstitution of the Burma Army, and I had recommended the raising of seven infantry battalions in addition to those already under my command. The raising of the first of these was begun in June but until the end of the period under review the question of internal security was, as can be understood, constantly in the minds of myself and my subordinate Commanders.

268. My main object at this time, early May, was to complete the liberation of Burma by the destruction of the remaining enemy forces in the country. Apart from direct operations against the Japanese cut off to the west of the Mandalay—Rangoon corridor, it was necessary to exert pressure to the east and south, along the Taunggyi and Mawchi roads, in order that the maximum advantages could be obtained for post-monsoon operations.

269. Our estimate of the Japanese effective fighting strength in Burma at this time was 77,000, of which 18,200 were west of the Irrawaddy. Enemy formations were much intermingled and disorganized as a result of their defeats, and it was therefore difficult to determine accurately their exact groupings. Their locations, however, were generally known, and the Japanese Burma Area Army fell into five main groups. (See Appendix B.)

First, west of the Irrawaddy in the Thayetmyo area, were 54 Division, 72 Independent Mixed Brigade, 153 Regiment from 49 Division and remnants of 112 Regiment of 55 Division.

Second, concentrating in the Pegu Yomas between the Rivers Irrawaddy and Sittang, was a considerable but ill-organized force, consisting of H.Q. 28th Japanese Army and Army troops, 55 Division less 112 Regiment, remnants of 18, 49 and 53 Japanese Divisions, two Brigades formed from the original Rangoon garrison and a number of Lines of Communication and Base troops.

Third, 113 Regiment was east of Sittang, around Taunggyi.