

gain this coveted prize. Their progress was barred by mines averaging 130 to every mile of road, demolitions and, last but not least, mud. By the afternoon of the 3rd May, when 17 Indian Division was still 32 miles from the city and held up by a flooded chaung, Rangoon was being entered by 15 Indian Corps. 4 Corps had been frustrated, not by the Japanese, but by the elements. In their advance from Pyawbwe they had covered 260 miles in 20 days. Although they did not actually liberate its capital, the reconquest of Burma was in the main effected by Fourteenth Army, and to them largely belongs the honour and glory.

SECTION XIV (paras. 257-265) THE CAPTURE OF RANGOON

The plan for the seaborne operation against Rangoon: The airborne operation: Rangoon discovered virtually abandoned: The link-up with Fourteenth Army.

257. While Fourteenth Army were thrusting south, the planning of the seaborne invasion of Rangoon was proceeding. It will be remembered that, as stated at the beginning of this Despatch, when the various projects were discussed, how considerable an operation this invasion in its original form was to have been. It was now proposed to carry it out on a very much smaller scale, but the inherent difficulties of the operation remained the same, with the exception that the weather conditions would be a great deal worse than at the time of year originally contemplated for this operation.

258. In preparing the plan for a seaborne assault on Rangoon, the first consideration was the clearance of the Rangoon River and its channel, to permit the approach of major landing craft. Throughout its whole length of 24 miles it had been mined both by the Japanese and by our own minelaying aircraft. Since minesweepers could only work with the flow of the tide, it was estimated that they would require four days to complete their task. Before minesweepers or major landing craft could enter the river, the coastal defences on the west bank, especially those at Elephant Point, would have to be eliminated. Owing to the difficulties of approach to the mouth of the river, it was not practicable to neutralise these by fire nor was a sea landing on the Point itself possible at this time of year. The only solution was to seize Elephant Point by an airborne operation, so as to allow the sweeping of the entrance to the river and the approach of major landing craft. In any case a very long run-in for minor landing craft was involved, about 24 miles. On the east bank, the village of Kyauktan and the town of Syriam on the Pegu River were both believed to be garrisoned, the latter being held in strength. Thus it was apparent that preliminary operations, probably extending over several days, would be necessary before Rangoon itself could be attacked.

259. The plan in broad outline was as follows. 15 Indian Corps was to consist of 26 Indian Division, now at Ramree, as assault division, with 2 British Division, which had been withdrawn into the Calcutta area, as follow up. The airborne operation was to consist of a parachute battalion dropped on the 1st May,

west of Elephant Point, with the task of destroying the defences in that area. This would permit the entrance of minesweepers which would sweep a channel up the river as far as its junction with the Bassein Creek at Thakutpin, some twelve miles from Elephant Point. The way being thus opened for the first flight of assault troops, 36 Brigade of 26 Indian Division was to land half-way between Elephant Point and the Bassein Creek on the 2nd May (D-Day). Simultaneously with the landing of 36 Brigade, one battalion of 71 Brigade was to land on the east bank, near the mouth of the Hmawwun Chaung, and exploit towards Kyauktan. The remainder of 71 Brigade was to build up this bridgehead as landing craft became available, followed by 4 Brigade. These two Brigades, after capturing Kyauktan, were to drive northwards to the outskirts of Syriam. On D plus 9, 6 Brigade of 2 British Division would take over the area from 71 Brigade, thus releasing 71 and 4 Brigades for the capture of Syriam and the clearance of the southern bank of the Pegu River. The remaining two brigades of 2 British Division were to follow up and assault Rangoon.

260. One of the main difficulties was the shortness of time available for preparing for this operation. The greater part of the Parachute Brigade was on leave and so an improvised Gurkha battalion had to be got together for the operation. It was very much to the credit of the Indian Airborne Division that this was efficiently organized and the operation carried out up to time. The consideration which limited the size of the airborne operation was the available air-lift. To find enough aircraft to lift the battalion, the two American Air Commandos had to be taken from 4 Corps. At the same time we could afford no reduction in air supply lift and so pilots had to be called on to fly at very high rates during this period, a call to which they, needless to say, responded magnificently. Finally, it will be remembered that 2 British Division had been flown out of Burma into India. To take part in this operation it had to be re-equipped. This was done by G.H.Q. India, in what must have been record time, brigades being re-equipped in turn within seven to ten days of their arrival, and although the whole Division was not in the end used, the first brigade embarked to schedule.

261. On the 1st May, heavy air attacks were made on all known defences on both banks of the Rangoon River and the Parachute Battalion was dropped successfully at 0630 hours. They captured Elephant Point practically unopposed. It was only now that we received the first indication that the Japanese had virtually abandoned Rangoon. Aircraft reported the message "Japs gone" painted on the roof of the Rangoon jail, which was known to be a prisoner of war camp.

262. By the 2nd May, the invasion fleet had been successfully and correctly assembled—no mean task—and lay off the river estuary on the agreed lowering position, which as I have said before was a considerable distance from the beaches. The weather, however, before dawn on D-Day was extremely bad with high seas, low cloud and drenching rain, and the Naval Commander (Rear-Admiral Martin) predicted odds of three to one against it being