

and in this, physical considerations limited the plans for an advance into Burma from the Imphal-Tiddim area to two possibilities:—

An advance to the area Kalewa-Kalemyo, and thence to Ye-U.

An operation for the capture of the Indaw area (with its airfields) by airborne assault, followed by an advance overland to consolidate the capture. This force would depend on air supply until the Chinese advance from the north opened a route for maintenance by land.

In both plans the use of long range penetration forces was included; but more particularly did they figure in the second as a means to distract the enemy and disrupt his communications—thus reducing the hazards of the temporarily isolated force at Indaw.

Initially I favoured the first alternative, but the Chiefs of Staff inclined to the latter plan, stressing the following considerations:—

(a) The importance of the early seizure of a locality directly enabling us to join hands with the Chinese advances from Ledo and Yunnan.

(b) The element of surprise and the greater scope for employment of long range penetration groups.

(c) Greater economy in lift on the Assam L. of C.

Further and more detailed examination was therefore made, and as a result, and in view of the weight attached to (a) above, I agreed that the second plan was preferable.

On the 27th September, I cabled to the Chiefs of Staff a report on the progress made to date, and the conclusions reached.

The chief features of the plan at this stage were as follows. The Indaw airfields were to be seized by parachute troops, and thereafter a division (less one brigade) was to be flown in in seven days. A third brigade group with mules and jeeps was to advance overland from Imphal to Indaw. This was to be coupled with a limited offensive/defensive operation southwards from Tamu, as well as with the Chinese advances from Ledo and Yunnan on Myitkyina, Bhamo, and Lashio. Offensive operations in Arakan were also to be timed to take place so as to have the maximum distracting effect on the enemy. Finally (and of great importance) the advance of the main forces towards their objectives was to be preceded and assisted by long range penetration forces.

The plan involved the use of transport aircraft on a very large scale. It was thought that this would amount to between 18 and 23 squadrons, depending on the treatment found necessary for the surface of the Indaw airfields. The Chiefs of Staff, however, cabled on the 7th October that provision of aircraft on this scale was quite out of the question, and that a total of 151 transport aircraft (six squadrons) was all that were likely to be available.

Accordingly, the matter was further examined, and on the 13th October I sent the Chiefs of Staff a modified plan, which, while not so satisfactory as the original, nevertheless appeared to be feasible.

The main modifications were:—

(a) Fighter squadrons would be located at Indaw during the dry weather only.

(b) The original air landing force of one division, less one brigade, would be flown in over a fortnight instead of a week.

(c) The parachute force would be retained, in order to strengthen the garrison, until the operational situation permitted it to be flown out.

(d) The delivery of engineer stores would be spread over a longer period by commencing delivery earlier.

Even with these modifications, however, the requirements of transport aircraft, while much less than they were in the original plan, were still greatly in excess of 151. In fact, 290 would be required in the worst case, and 263 in the best case—i.e., 12 and 11 squadrons respectively, as against 23 (maximum) in the old plan.

I continued to look for means to make further reductions in the requirement of troop aircraft, but any such reductions could only be small unless the plan was still further radically altered. It became clear that, unless the additional aircraft could be provided, the capture of Indaw should not be attempted, and I suggested as a means to augment the supply that some aircraft might be made available from the ferry route.

As regards the enemy forces that might be disposed to meet our offensive operations in the Burma Theatre, a summary in regard to the situation in November, 1943, is given in Part II "Operations and Intelligence".

Briefly, there were five Japanese Divisions. The bulk of one (55th) was in Arakan; one (33rd) was in the Chin Hills; one held the Mawlaik Homalin area; and two (18th and 56th) covered the area of North Burma to the Salween.

5. *Plans for Operations on the Arakan Coast.*

At the Washington Conference of 12th to 25th May, 1943, it was resolved to capture Akyab and Ramree Island by an amphibious operation; also, possibly, to exploit any success gained. This was part of the general pattern of offensive operations in the South-East Asia Theatre, and plans were being formulated accordingly. It will be remembered, however, that at this time first priority on our resources was still allocated to the air ferry to China.

In my view the success of the attack on Akyab was of great importance both from the point of view of the Army and public in India, and of public opinion in Europe, America and China. The island was already strongly fortified and formidable. I considered two assault brigades would be necessary in the first flight, and a third, loaded with its own assault shipping and craft, as a follow-up. Three to four (land based) fighter squadrons would be required over Akyab during daylight, and convoys would be protected by carrier-borne aircraft.

Additional to the above plan, I considered that to ensure success we should operate offensively by land down the Arakan coast with up to two divisions. One long range penetration group would operate in the Kaladan River area.

A further important reason for this land advance was the capture of the Maungdaw airfield. With this in our hands shore-based fighter support could be given to the amphibious attack on Akyab.