

Command. The provision of reserves of supplies, stores, ammunition and petrol, of signal equipment and personnel, and of personnel to man various installations on the lines of communication, was a severe strain on my slender resources. By reduction to the minimum elsewhere, provision was made, but on a scale of signals far below requirements.

At the end of August advantage was taken of the presence of the 29th Brigade at Mombasa to test defensive arrangements by a practice attack. In addition to the Naval, Military and Air operations involved, which were made as realistic as circumstances permitted, the whole of Kenya, the eastern half of Tanganyika and the Islands of Zanzibar were, by special legislation, placed under a state of emergency for a period of several days. Surprise landings by the Royal Navy and Royal Marines took place at various points between Mombasa and Dar es Salaam. Pseudo-prisoners of war escaped. "Fifth Columnists" interrupted road and signal communications and spread false rumours. Activities of this nature were widespread and kept even remote places alive. The Civil Governments and population, both European and African, entered wholeheartedly into the exercise with beneficial results.

On 11th August, authority was received from the Chiefs of Staff to proceed with the execution of Madagascar operations. Admiral Sir J. F. Somerville, K.C.B., K.B.E., D.S.O., and myself were charged with the joint Direction of the operations. We nominated Rear-Admiral W. G. Tennant, C.B., M.V.O., and Major-General R. G. Sturges, C.B., A.D.C., as Joint Commanders. The latter in turn appointed Brigadier F. W. Festing, D.S.O., and Captain G. A. Garnons-Williams, D.S.C., as Joint Assault Commanders for the operations against Majunga and Tamatave.

The assault on Majunga was finally settled to take place on 10th September, a delay of two days owing to the slow speed of some of the vessels in the three convoys that started from Mombasa.

Landing at Majunga.

By noon on 9th September the three convoys from Mombasa and the convoy carrying 22nd (E.A.) Brigade Group from Diego Suarez, met at their rendezvous in the Mozambique Channel. By dusk the whole force was just out of sight of land West of Majunga. Neither air nor surface craft had sighted the movement. Secrecy and surprise appeared to have been obtained. The spirit of all ranks and ratings was high. Shortly before midnight the leading ship of the column of 49 moving in single line ahead, dropped anchor. The remainder moved silently to their appointed stations. The moon had not yet risen. The Royal Navy under Admiral Tennant had, with great efficiency, brought every ship, unobserved, to its exact position with a short margin of time in hand, and gave us the chance of effecting a successful landing. Great credit is due to them.

Shortly after 0100 hours the Royal Welch Fusiliers and East Lancashire Regiment landed at a point on an open beach eight miles north of Majunga, quickly followed by Headquarters, 29th Independent Brigade. Their task was to attack the town from the North and North-East at dawn thus getting behind the coast defences.

At first light, the South Lancashire Regiment and 5 Commando landed at selected points on the sea front of the town itself.

Resistance was slight. No firing by naval guns was necessary. By 0800 hours the town was in our hands at a cost of twenty casualties. The reserve battalion and the transport of the Brigade were retained on board.

Soft sand and scrub in the dark caused some delay to the landing, behind the Royal Welch Fusiliers, of the South African Armoured Cars and one portée Company of 1/1 (Nyasaland) King's African Rifles whose task was to make a dash for the bridges over the River Kamoro and River Betsiboka. Despite this delay the first of these bridges, 90 miles inland, was secured intact by 1800 hours on the same day, 10th September, but the centre bridge of the three over the River Betsiboka, 40 miles further on, was found in the early hours of the following morning to have been blown. As the road-way of this bridge, over 400 feet long, had fortunately fallen straight down on to the river bed without turning over, the construction of ramps at each end enabled a continuous, though slow, stream of traffic to be maintained until the first heavy rains in October made it impassable.

Simultaneously with the landing at Majunga, the Island of Nosy Be on the North-West coast was occupied with its important sugar and carborundum factories. A South African Battalion Group of the 1st City Regiment began an advance from Beremanja towards Majunga. Some days later a small column started North from Majunga to meet the South Africans. When junction had been effected, both columns returned to their bases. Other small columns of South African troops went down the North East coast and cleared the road to Vohemar. A party of forty from 5 Commando landed from H.M.S. "Napier" at Morandava, a small town on the West coast of the Island. By advancing some forty miles inland on their push-bicycles, and by intelligent use of the telephone, this party created the desired impression that a column of various arms with mechanised transport was advancing on the capital from this place. After 48 hours on land, the diversion was re-embarked.

As soon as it became apparent that Majunga was safely in our hands, landing of 22nd (E.A.) Infantry Brigade Group commenced and the 29th Brigade returned to their ships preparatory for their voyage round the North of the Island for a fresh landing at Tamatave. Their re-embarkation was completed by the 13th September. They sailed the same day.

22nd (E.A.) Infantry Brigade had been previously organised into three Battalion Groups so that there would be no delay in the despatch of a small self-contained force as far inland as the strength of opposition permitted. At the same time care had to be taken against becoming prematurely involved with a superior force, and the possibility of defeat in detail. From a careful examination of "form" it appeared to me that the advantage of time gained outweighed the risks. When it became a practical fact that four to five days would be required to land each battalion group complete with its transport and supplies, the advantage of an early forward move became more obvious.