

Disembarkation at Majunga was disappointing even though it was known beforehand that there was no deep water quay against which the ships could unload. Everything had to be moved by landing craft or captured lighter. The landing craft had only arrived at Mombasa in August from India where they had been used for training purposes. There was no time to give them the complete overhaul they badly needed. There were neither spare craft nor spare parts. Some had to be cannibalised. The deficiency in quantity as well as quality was accentuated by the necessity to re-embark a proportion for the landing at Tamatave. It had not been possible to make a repair ship available. In these operations against Madagascar our luck held, but it may not do so a second time. The conditions as regards landing craft against which we toiled should never be repeated against an effective enemy.

The landing of a follow-up formation, and the setting of it on to an axis of advance inland, is a different operation to an assault from the sea with the limited objective of securing a bridgehead. It needs a separate staff, with vision ahead, who are neither immersed in, nor tired out from, the details of assault action and unloading tables. The assault staff and personnel have a full time task after a long night with little sleep, in dealing with the affairs of the moment in their immediate neighbourhood, which they generally, and of necessity, have to overcome in an *ad hoc* manner. They have no time for planning for more future operations. Exploitation of a successful landing requires a survey of the whole front affected; the selection of routes to the major line of advance; the utilisation of all local facilities, workshops, material, and means of transport; the accommodation of troops and siting of stores; the clearing of quays and beaches; the construction of roadways, etc. They must think days, even weeks, ahead. They must come fresh to their task.

French request for Terms.

On 13th September I moved my Headquarters ashore at Majunga and on the 16th received a wireless message from Monsieur Annet, the Governor General, asking me to receive Plenipotentiaries in order "to ask by what means we can, with honour, cease the conflict before the last battle takes place." The Plenipotentiaries were brought by South African aeroplane to Majunga on 17th September, and presented with conditions for the cessation of hostilities. They declared that these were not acceptable and returned to Tananarive the following morning.

During the advance on Tananarive opposition from fighting troops was encountered on a few occasions when Senegalese troops particularly, fought well. The chief obstacle to the advance was the number of road-blocks that the French had erected. Boulders, felled trees, craters and demolished bridges were constantly encountered. Sometimes these obstacles were continuous for a couple of miles. There were only short intervals between one area of obstruction and the next. Fortunately for us they were seldom covered by fire, but they required much time and labour for removal and repair.

As the column approached Tananarive, air reconnaissance and other intelligence made it clear that the French were withdrawing southwards towards Antsirabe, with Ambositra and Fianarantsoa beyond, blocking all roads heavily as they went. To follow them directly would be slow and would give the maximum opportunity for delaying action. I was therefore anxious to land troops on the South-East Coast of the Island and advance on Fianarantsoa from that direction as well as from Tananarive. From the map Mananjary and Manakara seemed particularly suitable. The former is connected with Fianarantsoa and Ambositra by road, while from the latter there is a railway, but no road inland fit for mechanical transport.

I flew to Diego Suarez on 23rd September to discuss the possibility of landing with Rear-Admiral Tennant. After an exhaustive examination, we reluctantly came to the conclusion that such an operation was not feasible. The swell and surf prevalent at that time of the year, and poor beaches, offered no chance of getting ashore, undamaged, even the minimum of mechanical transport. The same conditions obtained at Fort Dauphin. At Tulear in the South-West the situation was slightly better, but it was still not possible, in a reasonable time, to land sufficient mechanical transport. The port had some facilities which, together with the airfield and possibilities of establishing a sea-plane base, would make it of use for patrolling the Mozambique Channel. It was decided to establish a small garrison there. This was effected by H.M.S. "Birmingham," H.M.S. "Inconstant," H.M.A.S. "Napier" and H.M.N.S. "Vangalen" landing two companies of the Pretoria Regiment and a few armoured cars from Diego Suarez on 29th September.

Landing at Tamatave.

It had been my original intention that the assault on Tamatave on the East coast should take place as the leading troops of the 22nd (E.A.) Infantry Brigade were approaching Tananarive from the West, but the delays caused by demolitions and road-blocks made it undesirable for the convoy and escort to wait for exact co-ordination. Landing was accordingly fixed for the early morning of 18th September.

The only means of landing at Tamatave being from inside the harbour, the original plan had required a bombardment to precede the landing. As a result of negligible opposition encountered at Majunga, and in a desire to save life and avoid destruction, Rear-Admiral Tennant and I agreed to endeavour to enforce surrender without recourse to bombardment.

When the convoy was off the town in the early hours of 18th September, wireless messages were sent calling for surrender. Later a Naval Officer approached the quay in a landing craft bearing a white flag to present terms. He was greeted by machine-gun fire. Ships' guns, of light calibre only, opened fire. After very few minutes, a white flag was hoisted on land and firing immediately ceased. Troops were landed and the town occupied without opposition. Little damage had been done by the naval bombardment. Port facilities at Tamatave were better than at Majunga and disembarkation proceeded quickly.