

THE HUNTER'S BAY 'SCRAP'By An Indian Army Observer With The Royal Indian Navy

Tough British troops and efficient little ships of the Royal Indian Navy Coastal Forces have pulled the nose of the Jap far behind his lines in Burma by reducing to ashes the port and township of Myebon in Hunter's Bay, forty miles south of Akyab. This operation dealt a shrewd blow at the Japanese lines of communication to Akyab.

Myebon, which used to be a considerable bazaar township with a population of 6000 or 7000, now scarcely exists, following five hours' work by landing parties and ships' guns, and I shall not soon forget the three-quarters' mile long chain of fires along the waterfront when we slipped away.

The intention of the raid was to destroy the pier and all buildings which might be used by the Japs in bringing up supplies to the battle areas, and to wipe out any enemy to be found. One disappointment was the scarcity of the latter; of opposition there was virtually none, but the rest of the programme was fulfilled to the last detail.

It was towards midnight, in full moonlight, when our slim craft, possessing immense fire power for their size, slid towards the 100 yards stone pier. On the decks lay troops - rubber-shod infantry with Brens and Tommy guns; and sappers, with loads of explosives and petrol.

We were less than 100 yards away when up went a Verey light. We had been spotted. The next minute we could see figures on the pier, figures of men who were no doubt coming to receive their friends. One Japanese soldier went down under the blast of fire from the leading craft. Another was hit as he was racing back towards the shore.

Heavier guns were giving Myebon itself an introductory plastering. But the main job was to get the troops ashore, and it was done with perfect smoothness. The men were soon off, flitting ghostlike up the causeway, some to establish a bridgehead at the shore end, others, to pass through Myebon. For the next five hours, fire followed fire. Flames leaped and danced against a background of jungle and hills, and spread to many of the trees. Sometimes I could see darting figures of our men silhouetted in the glare as they went rapidly about their work. The Court House, Police Station, Police Barracks, Post Office, and other buildings, all went up in fire and smoke.

Meanwhile, other ships had been off on missions of their own, destroying by gunfire and explosive charges a 250 tons double-deck steamer beached and camouflaged in a creek. Troops ashore made an equally complete wreck of a 32 ft. motor launch.

Dawn was only two or three hours off when re-embarkation began. This was not easy because the falling tide had forced vessels away from the pier - ours actually went aground for a short while - but the Navy promptly overcame the problem by using ropes and dinghies to run a shuttle service between pier and ship.

With the soldiers came ^{some} local inhabitants, brought away for interrogation, and also several Indians caught by the Japanese invasion who clamoured not to be left behind. Most of the population, however, had vanished when our guns first opened up. As soon as the troops were back - and they all arrived without a scratch - a British officer spoke to the inhabitants in their language through a loud-hailer, telling them that the raid was directed against the Japanese.

Fifteen minutes afterwards the biggest explosion of this noisy night occurred. Two naval depth charges had torn a rent 15 yards wide in the centre of the pier. Finally, as we passed still blazing Myebon at the start of our homeward journey the ships, sailing in line, gave a cracking bombardment to a cluster of 12 or more boats and deprived the enemy of some more valuable river transport.

When daylight came, we were out at sea. A task had been ordered and executed without a hitch, and British soldiers and British and Indian sailors had worked together in perfect harmony.