

592. Whilst he was so engaged, A.H.K. again rang him up at the Resident's House. The Staff Officer doing so specifically enquired whether the British were going to fight, whether General Sitwell had full control of "Blackforce", and whether the last could be persuaded to stop fighting. To these questions he was given non-committal answers except an assurance that "Blackforce" would definitely obey any orders General Sitwell might issue. The A.O.C. was given a further urgent message from the Dutch C.-in-C., which it is understood was telephoned through from Kalidjati, where at that time the Dutch C.-in-C. was negotiating terms with the Japanese C.-in-C. The message pressed for action to be taken to stop "Blackforce" blowing up any more bridges to cover their withdrawal to the hills, as this action was handicapping the negotiations. It is not known how the information about blowing the bridges south-east of Bandoeng reached the Japanese at Kalidjati many miles to the north. This information made it clear that the Japanese already knew our intention and whither we were withdrawing into the hills.

593. The A.O.C. then returned to Tjikadjang where he met the G.O.C. and Brigadier Blackburn at 1330 hours, when the situation was as follows:—

(a) Troops were arriving in the concentration area, the last being due during the night. They possessed small arms and ammunition and a few Bofors guns, but as had been expected, no mortars, aircraft or artillery. Although personnel were tired and many were poorly clad and kitted, particularly R.A.F. personnel evacuated from Singapore, morale appeared on the whole good.

(b) Administrative arrangements were, however, grave. Only 3½ days' rations had so far accompanied the force. Army convoys had experienced considerable obstruction when collecting stores, and the dump in Bandoeng was reputed to be destroyed (news later to prove false). There might be time to collect some more, but this was not certain. Petrol was limited to what vehicles had in their tanks. The combined British/Australian Field Hospital in Bandoeng could not be moved to the hills because it was already overloaded with patients. Hospitalisation was therefore totally impracticable, and medical supplies limited to those carried by units, which were few and of a first aid nature only. Water was everywhere polluted by reason of native habits, water carts were few and effective sterilization was impracticable. Stomach troubles were already in evidence.

594. Given local co-operation and time these handicaps could have been overcome, but there appeared to be prospect of neither. The Dutch had ceased fighting everywhere and, to say the least, were not being helpful. The natives might, or might not, turn against the whites: warning about them had been received, and in any case they were unlikely to assist. And time had suddenly become unexpectedly short now that the Japanese knew about the movement. Much had still to be done in reorganising, in preparing positions for defence and in solving administrative difficulties. Time was now particularly short for training the R.A.F. contingent, which comprised about one-third of the

force, in its new and future role, namely in infantry fighting about which it knew nothing, particularly of jungle fighting. Indeed, many A.A. gunners recently rearmed as infantry were in little better case.

595. Yet something might have been done but for the quandary in which the British had now been placed by reason of the Dutch C.-in-C.'s broadcast (para. 588). This had been promulgated on behalf of the British forces, as well as on that of the Dutch, but without consultation with the A.O.C. or G.O.C. and although the British intention to continue resistance was well known to the Dutch C.-in-C. The broadcast contained the phrase "All organised resistance having now ceased." This phrase had an important bearing. It was believed to have the effect in international law of placing those who continued to resist outside the protection of belligerent rights and subject to summary execution if captured. The Japanese were likely to exercise their rights in the matter. The problem which now faced the A.O.C. and G.O.C. was how to sort out the force, now in a state of movement over a wide area, into those who were willing to face such consequences and those who were not. The latter could not be given legal orders to continue fighting under such conditions as bandits against their will. The next problem was to reorganise the former into a fighting force well clear of the latter and of the 2,900 unarmed R.A.F. contingent which had by now moved unpleasantly close, although still in the plains. (para. 585). One alternative was to send the "bouches inutiles" down to the plains to surrender and for the former to fight where they were. But Japanese revenge on those who submitted themselves under such circumstances was already too well known to permit adoption of such a course. The other alternative was for the volunteer contingent to move to, and reorganise in, a new defence area. But this was impracticable. The Japanese already occupied Bandoeng, through which led all roads to the hill country in the S.W. extremity of Java, where lay the only other remote spots which might be suitable for guerilla resistance: the country elsewhere was too highly developed and too well served by numerous roads. The Japanese quite clearly knew where the British had withdrawn and their intention, and were free to follow up quickly, as was their habit. It was thus impracticable by now to reorganise anything effective.

596. In these circumstances the A.O.C. and G.O.C., regretfully decided that they must comply with the order to surrender. The order as received from A.H.K. was accordingly issued to units about 1430 hours.

Orders were also issued:—

(a) To destroy arms and warlike stores likely to be of value to the enemy, except a limited amount of transport.

(b) For all ranks to observe absolute reticence if questioned for military information by the enemy.

A signal was sent to the R.A.F. H.Q. Signal Section for transmission to the Air Ministry to the effect that the orders to surrender were being complied with. The reasons why this signal did not get through are contained in paras. 610-613.