

were left as they did not wish to move. The native Volunteers were given the option of moving, but most of them decided to remain with their families in Penang; the British personnel of the Volunteers were brought away.

The coast artillery denial scheme was carried out and all 6-inch guns destroyed. Approved armament was withdrawn and most first-line transport. Electrical machinery and the oil fuelling system of the Eastern Smelting Company were smashed, the river house, telephone exchange, cable and wireless station and aerodromes destroyed. The Singapore-Colombo and the Singapore-Madras cables were, however, connected by binding screws and left working in the hope that the Japanese might not discover them—a hope that proved vain. A reserve of food was opened for the civil population, which had suffered some 600 killed and 1,100 wounded in air raids during the last week.

The destruction of material was incomplete, the most notable example being certain vessels that were left intact. Efforts were made by the naval authorities to immobilise these by laying mines in the Southern Channel, the Northern already having been mined by the Japanese. Presumably this was not effective for long.

XII.—THE RETREAT FROM NORTHERN MALAYA.

12th-18th December.

115. By the 12th December enemy pressure on the Kedah front was becoming very severe. The Kroh forces were being forced backwards over the frontier, while our right in Northern Kedah was also driven back, necessitating the 6th Indian Infantry Brigade withdrawing on the left to conform and hold a line River Bukit (north of Alor Star) to Penang. Penang was the subject of daily air attacks at this period. Two days of heavy fighting then saw our forces pushed back twenty miles south of Alor Star, the 11th Division taking up a position in the Gurun area. Some of the infantry units in this division reported losses up to 50 per cent., but this included missing, many of whom rejoined later.

The immediate preoccupation on our part at this moment was to co-ordinate the movement of the 11th Division with that of Krohcol. Unless this was done there was serious danger of the Japanese cutting off one of the two forces. Krohcol was now back in Kedah just east of Baling and under the command of the 12th Indian Infantry Brigade, which had been sent up from the south as reinforcements. But on the 16th December the enemy drove in between the Kroh forces and the 11th Division, and counter-attacks by two battalions of the 28th Indian Brigade proved unavailing to restore contact. It was now that the lack of adequate reserves to relieve troops who had been fighting continuously for a week began to be felt. The enemy were pressing home their attacks in spite of heavy losses. Troops from Penang were sent up as reinforcements, while the 6th and 15th Indian Infantry Brigades had been so weakened in the fighting that they were ordered to re-form into one composite Brigade.

The Japanese were now employing Kota Bharu aerodrome, reconnaissance revealing some forty of their fighters on the ground. To attack Kota Bharu, Singora and Patani aerodromes with the object of reducing the scale

of Japanese air effort was part of our general air policy at this period, but our bomber effort was painfully limited by our lack of aircraft. Apart from deficiency of adequate A.A. weapons, the defence of our aerodromes was handicapped by lack of adequate warning in the North. (*See para. 54 above.*) These formed two causes of our heavy losses of aircraft on the ground. The retention of our main fighter strength for the defence of Singapore (*see para. 142 below*) was a contributory cause and also reacted directly on our bombing effort, since it was impracticable to provide fighter escorts.

Two Buffaloes had been specially fitted for photographic reconnaissance. To allow of extra petrol being carried, and at the same time to reduce weight, all guns were taken out. Even then the Buffaloes were inferior in performance to the Japanese Zero fighters. The pilots of these specially fitted aircraft carried out useful work under very difficult conditions.

From the start of hostilities the Dutch submarines had been very active. On the 12th December one of them reported sinking four enemy troopships at Patani Roads.

116. The difficulty of combating the Japanese attacks on our aerodromes resulted on the 16th and 17th December in the evacuation and demolition of Butterworth, Taiping and Kuantan aerodromes, and our aircraft were forced further South. Ipoh, too, was now being bombed, and the aerodrome petrol dump was hit.

On land, the enemy, having advanced in Kelantan (as far as the Sungei Nal) and in Kedah, was now also attacking detachments of our troops in Perak round about the Grik area. The 3rd Indian Corps was accordingly authorised to withdraw behind the line of the Perak River to protect the communications of our forces North of Kuala Kangsar. The 11th Indian Division began withdrawing from the line of the River Muda Southwards behind River Krian, linking up with the 28th Indian Infantry Brigade and protected all the time on the right flank by the 12th Indian Infantry Brigade. During this period the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders made counter-attacks with gallantry and skill. This withdrawal was carried out successfully, the enemy being repulsed with loss at his first attempt to cross the river.

Inter-Allied Conference, 18th December.

117. On the 18th December a conference of inter-Allied representatives took place at Singapore, in accordance with proposals made by President Roosevelt. Owing to the time factor, China was not represented. Results of the conference were telegraphed to England. The main conclusions were as follows:—

(a) The importance of Singapore to the war in the Far East, and to the world war, could not be exaggerated;

(b) The immediate plan was to dispose our combined forces then available in the Far East so as to—

(i) Keep the enemy as far North in Malaya as possible and hold him in the Philippines; and

(ii) Prevent the enemy acquiring territory, and particularly aerodromes, which would threaten the arrival of reinforcements;