

ground than was necessary and moreover as soon as the enemy got possession of Martaban it would have been easy for him to pass over troops and stores from Moulmein. I therefore issued orders that Martaban must continue to be held.

87. *Loss of Martaban.* The reports received on the 11th disclosed a somewhat confused situation but did indicate that the enemy had started the next phase of his plan.

About six hundred Japanese were now in the area about Martaban and a further 2,000 were reported to have landed on the swamps and mud flats further up the coast and would no doubt be working their way in towards the road.

The 3/7 G.R. were forced to withdraw from Martaban but were still covering the exits of that place; they inflicted very heavy casualties on the enemy and at one time charged them with the bayonet which caused them to run for cover throwing away their arms as they did so.

On this day also, about a battalion of the Japanese crossed the Salween near Paan and were believed to have surrounded the 7/10 Baluch. To restore the situation in this area the 5/17 Dogras were ordered to counter-attack from the direction of Duyinzaik.

By the evening of the 13th the situation was a little clearer. The 5/17 Dogras, only one hundred strong and much disorganised arrived back from Duyinzaik where they had been heavily engaged for the past two days, but there was still no news of the Baluch, who it was believed must have been surrounded.

88. *Condition of Troops.* The Divisional Commander now reported that, while he still had the 48 Indian Infantry Brigade intact and in hand, in the 16 and 46 Indian Brigades there was only one battalion, the K.O.Y.L.I., in a fit state to fight.

In view of the extent of his front and the condition of his troops he wished to withdraw to a better defensive position with a less extended front. While again pointing out the necessity for fighting as far forward as possible I gave him permission to withdraw if and when he considered such a course essential.

On 13th February I sent an appreciation to General Hartley, Commander-in-Chief, India, which emphasised that the situation for the next month, until more troops became available, was likely to be critical and envisaged the possibility that we might be forced back to the line of the River Sittang. The difficulties likely to be encountered in an event of a forced withdrawal across this river were especially stressed. It also pointed out that the loss of Pegu would be likely to seal the fate of Rangoon and referred to the policy of stocking bases in Central Burma with a view to continuing the campaign and covering the road to India in the event of Rangoon being lost. It ended with an appeal for more troops, especially British, as early as possible.

89. *7/10 Baluch.* On the 14th February, the news was received that some survivors of the 7/10 Baluch after 48 hours of heavy fighting had managed to fight their way out and were withdrawing to Duyinzaik. The following day this Battalion was visited by the Divisional Commander who found that its strength was about six officers and 250 men. There is no doubt that this Battalion fought most gallantly whilst completely surrounded by superior

numbers and that it was only after all ammunition was exhausted that a small remnant was forced to surrender. The survivors consisted for the most part of a company that was detached from the Battalion and men who were away with the transport.

90. *Withdrawal to Bilin.* At midday on the 15th February, the Divisional Commander reported that, in view of the pressure on his front, he proposed to withdraw to the River Bilin which he felt confident he could hold. Accordingly as a first step the 46 Indian Infantry Brigade commenced to withdraw behind the Bilin.

On the 16th, H.Q. 2 Burma Infantry Brigade was ordered to move to Nyaunglebin together with the 7 Burma Rifles as soon as transport could be made available. A reconnaissance party started off at once. The object of this move was to ensure that the line of the River Sittang to the north should be at any rate patrolled, and also, if possible, prepared for defence. Most units of the Burma Rifles were no longer fit for further fighting without rest and re-organisation, and certain Indian battalions were in a similar condition. It was hoped, therefore, as reinforcements became available, to withdraw these battalions into reserve across the River Sittang.

About the same time the 1 Burma Rifles which had reached the front from Mergui via Rangoon and which had not been engaged, were sent up to Papun to cover the left flank. This Battalion carried out its task very well and after several weeks in the jungle eventually joined 1 Burma Division near Toungoo. Two detachments of about a company each were also placed to watch likely crossings over the River Salween between Papun and Paan and a Burma F.F. column was detailed to protect the left flank of the 17 Indian Division.

At 12.05 hours a report was received to the effect that a party of Japanese estimated at being from 300 to 1,000 strong, had crossed the Salween at Yinbaing and were advancing on Mepli. A company of the 8 Burma Rifles were sent to investigate and contacted the Japanese at Kuseik.

In the evening Thaton was evacuated and the bridge at Yinnein was demolished, and on this date the 1/4 G.R. of 48 Indian Brigade were put into the line and carried out a counter-attack to restore the situation on the left flank.

Heavy fighting took place on most parts of the front on the 17th February and it was evident that the enemy were trying to work around the left flank of the Division. The remainder of the 48 Brigade was now brought up into line on the right of 16 Indian Brigade, where both 5/17 Dogra and 8 Burma Rifles were found to have vacated their positions. To protect the right flank an organisation of watchers backed up by Burma Military Police was put in operation along the coast.

The 2 K.O.Y.L.I. now became heavily engaged with the enemy about Danyigon and were out of touch for some considerable time.

91. *Pegu Force.* The possibility of the Japanese crossing the estuary of the River Sittang by boat and cutting off our communications with Pegu or of going further afield and landing near the Rangoon River had been considered for some time past, but beyond small detachments of the Burma Frontier Force and Burma Military Police, there had been no troops spare