

chance of re-establishing any measure of air superiority.

255. As regards the relative strength of the Land Forces, we knew from air reconnaissance that Japanese ships had been steadily discharging at Singora and other ports, but the general situation as regards the strength of the forces on both sides remained as stated in Section XXIII.

We had, however, now been informed that we might expect substantial reinforcements during the month of January, the principal of which were as under:—

(a) *During the first few days of January.*—One Indian Infantry Brigade with attached troops.

(b) *About 13th-15th January*—One Brigade Group of the 18 British Division with certain artillery units. These troops were coming in large American liners, the safe arrival and despatch of which were of the utmost importance.

(c) *Later in January.*—The 18 British Division (less one Brigade Group), one Indian Infantry Brigade, some Australian and Indian Reinforcements and certain other units.

256. The Hurricane Fighters were coming in the same convoy as (b) above. This was therefore a most valuable convoy, the chief danger to which lay in air attack from bases either in West Borneo, in Malaya or in South Thailand, or from aircraft carriers. The scale of air attack which the enemy could deliver would be much increased if he could, before the arrival of the convoy, establish his aircraft on the Kuantan and Kuala Lumpur aerodromes.

257. In the west coast area the situation appeared to be slightly improved. The new 6/15 Indian Infantry Brigade had had 10 days in which to reorganize and to occupy the Kampar position. The 28 Indian Infantry Brigade, though on continuous front line duty, had had no heavy fighting for the last 10 days and was now also in position. The 12 Brigade Group had, it is true, been continuously in action since its arrival in the North and was tired. A defensive position, to which to fall back, was being prepared north of Tanjong Malim. The chief danger lay in the threat to the left flank and rearward communications from enemy forces which might either cross the lower reaches of the River Perak or be landed from coastal craft. It seemed, however, that the strength of such forces must be limited.

258. On the east coast the Kelantan Force was resting in the area Kuala Lipis—Jerantut—Raub covered on the North by Macforce which was still operating on the railway north of Kuala Lipis and on the South by detachments watching the approaches through Pahang. In the Kuantan area patrols had made contact towards the end of December with enemy troops moving South by the coast road in Trengganu and the Kuantan Force had, in accordance with instructions received from Higher Authority, been re-disposed with the bulk of the force, material and transport west of the River Kuantan and with light mobile forces only operating east of the river.

259. It was clear that the enemy intended to continue his advance down the west coast as rapidly as he could. He might also be expected to attempt landings of small forces on the west

coast from the sea. On the east coast a combined sea and land attack against Kuantan seemed possible, while the enemy might also deliver a seaborne attack against East Johore or against Singapore Island direct. In this connection a special landing-craft carrying ship had been seen lying off Singora by our reconnaissance aircraft. There remained also the possibility of an airborne attack directed against our aerodromes.

260. As regards our own course of action, the governing consideration was the safe arrival of land and air reinforcements and time to deploy them. An early withdrawal would enable the enemy to establish his aircraft on the aerodromes at Kuantan and Kuala Lumpur before the arrival of the mid-January convoys. In consequence, it would make the task of bringing in these convoys much more difficult.

To achieve our object of protecting the Naval Base it was necessary to fight the main battle on the mainland and it was hoped to be able to deploy all the reinforcements due to arrive in January for that purpose. Therefore the longer we could delay the enemy in Central Malaya the better.

Further, there was a great deal of machinery and large quantities of stores, both military and civil, in the Kuala Lumpur area. Time for the evacuation of these was required.

I hoped to be able to hold the Kuantan aerodrome for another 10 days or so, which would make it impossible for the enemy to repair and organize the aerodrome before the middle of January. Allowing time for the Kuantan garrison to withdraw and cross the Jerantut ferry, this would mean that the west coast force would have to hold the enemy north of the Kuala Kubu Road Junction until about the middle of January. That would mean that it would have a depth of about 70 miles in which to manoeuvre for 15 days.

With the above considerations in mind I went north on the 30th December to discuss with the Commander 3 Indian Corps and his Divisional Commanders the details of the strategy to be pursued.

261 Accompanied by the Commander 3 Indian Corps I visited the Headquarters 11 Indian Division at Tapah on the 31st December. The Divisional Commander reported that the position at Kampar was satisfactory. As regards future strategy, he expressed confidence in his ability to hold the enemy north of the Kuala Kubu Road Junction until at least the 14th January. He was therefore instructed that he was not without permission to withdraw his force beyond that road junction before the 14th January, and that he was to continue to impose the maximum delay on the enemy's advance. I impressed upon all commanders the importance of taking adequate measures to prevent penetration by enemy tanks down the main road—a danger which I considered a very real one in view of our complete lack of tanks with which to counter it.

262. On the 1st January we visited the Headquarters 9 Indian Division at Raub. The Divisional Commander reported that he had instructed the Commander Kuantan Force that he should hold the Kuantan aerodrome for as long as possible, provided he did not thereby jeopardise his force. He had indicated that the aerodrome should be held for 5 more days if