

possible. Communication with Kuantan had broken down and an officer sent to ascertain the situation had not yet returned. After discussion it was decided that the Commander Kuantan Force should be instructed to hold the aerodrome until the 10th January.

263. Late on the 1st January the Commander 11 Indian Division reported that an enemy force had landed at Ulu Melintang near the mouth of the River Bernam (a little south of the mouth of the River Perak) and that he had moved the 12 Brigade Group to meet this threat. He further said that he thought he could continue to hold the Kampar position, where a strong attack had already been repulsed, for several days but that, if he did so, his ability to hold the enemy north of the Kuala Kubu Road Junction might, in view of the threat to his communications, be prejudiced. He asked for authority to withdraw his force from Kampar at his discretion. This was granted.

264. The Commander 3 Indian Corps was already having reconnaissances carried out of lines on which to co-ordinate the withdrawal as far back as North Johore. With a view to co-ordinating future defence plans I arranged to hold a conference at Segamat in North Johore on the 5th January at which both the Commanders 3 Indian Corps and A.I.F. should attend.

265. After visiting Port Swettenham and Port Dickson, I returned to Singapore late on the 2nd January.

266. During this tour the following matters, in addition to those reported above, were discussed:—

(a) Measures to harass the enemy's communications. "Left behind" parties, consisting for the most part of Chinese led by Europeans, were being rapidly trained at Singapore. It was planned to send these parties up to the 3 Indian Corps area as soon as ready. In addition, an offer had been received and accepted from the N.E.I. Military Authorities for a detachment of Marechaussees, specially trained in guerilla warfare in the jungle, to be sent to Malaya.

(b) The preparation of special news sheets for distribution among the Indian troops to counter Japanese propaganda.

(c) Methods of anti-tank defence. In this connection, a very large number of concrete cylindrical blocks were being manufactured both at Singapore and at Kuala Lumpur and some were now ready for distribution.

(d) Policy as regards the Federated Malay States Volunteer Force.—This Force consisted partly of European and partly of Asiatic personnel. It was organized on a State basis and maintained out of Federated Malay State funds. In practically all cases the families of the Asiatic personnel were resident in the State and would remain there after withdrawal. Faced with the prospect of moving into South Malaya and leaving their families behind, some of the Asiatic Volunteers began to show discontent and desertions had taken place. We were faced with the alternative of continuing to enforce service with the Colours at the expense, almost certainly, of weak and discontented units or of releasing those who wished to leave. We decided on the latter course. Thereafter, when a unit was to be withdrawn

from its State every Asiatic member was given the option of remaining with it or of handing in his arms and equipment and going to his home. In almost every case the latter course was chosen. The arms and equipment were re-issued to units requiring them as there were few or none at that time in reserve.

267. On return to Singapore I circulated a letter on Tactics. A copy of this letter is attached as Appendix "D" to this despatch.

SECTION XXXII.—THE KUANTAN OPERATIONS.

268. The Kuantan area was very isolated. As already stated, it was over 100 miles, through desolate jungle country, from Jerantut on the east coast railway, and it was 160 miles from the Headquarters of the 9 Indian Division at Raub. These are big distances when there are no aircraft available for inter-communication. Its military importance lay solely in the R.A.F. aerodrome, 9 miles inland from the town and on the other side of the Kuantan River.

Kuantan was garrisoned by the 22 Indian Brigade Group under command of Brigadier Painter.

269. Since the 9th December when the aerodrome had been evacuated, Japanese aircraft had been daily active over the Kuantan area, reconnoitring, bombing and machine-gunning, but little damage had been done. It appears that the enemy had intended to make landings on the coast of Trengganu but had been prevented from doing so by his losses, especially of landing craft, in the Kelantan operations.

Between the 20th and 24th December our long distance patrols were in contact with Japanese troops moving southward in M.T. on the coast of Trengganu. On the 27th the enemy were engaged by our artillery near the Trengganu/Pahang frontier.

270. It was now apparent that the threat against the Kuantan area was developing from the North, though it might still be accompanied by a sea-borne landing. It will be recollected that we had by that time had heavy losses of material on the west coast and that our reserves had been depleted. We could not afford to have further heavy losses. The situation at Kuantan was particularly hazardous owing to most of the material being east of the River Kuantan which was crossed only by a single ferry. In consequence of this and of the situation which was developing on the left flank instructions were issued to the Commander Kuantan Force that he should concentrate the bulk of his force, material and transport, west of the River Kuantan, holding the area east of the river with light mobile forces only.

271. This readjustment of the position was going on when, on the morning of the 30th December the Japanese advanced via the Jabor Valley in greater strength than they had previously shown. They were engaged by our artillery and small arms fire and confused fighting continued throughout the day. The ferry, which had been split into two working halves, was bombed during the day and one half only remained in action.

272. By the morning of the 31st December the enemy were attacking the ferry, but a bridgehead was maintained during the day.