

The companies apparently withdrew for the night with the intention of attacking the next day. Reports had been received that further enemy forces were coming down the river and there is little doubt that they were correct. The following day the two companies supported by a company of the 3 Burma Rifles (the two companies of this Battalion having been transferred from Rangoon) advanced again to the attack. It is hard to get a clear picture but the attack failed and meanwhile the Japanese had worked round the flanks and ambushed the transport. For the time being the force was broken up into small parties, most of whom eventually made their way back to Moulmein through the jungle.

It should be mentioned here that the 6 Burma Rifles was a newly raised Battalion which had had no opportunity for carrying out higher training in any form, and in the absence of any definitely appointed commander the action of these three companies was probably not too well planned or directed.

During the next two days a good deal of useful information was forwarded to Tavoy regarding the movements of Japanese troops by men of the Tenasserim Battalion and by mine managers and so on. In some cases these reports were passed through by telephone after the Japanese had passed by.

However, early on the morning of the 19th the enemy appeared near the Tavoy aerodrome and commenced to attack it. At first the detachment of the Kokine Battalion The Burma Frontier Force put up a spirited defence but were eventually forced to withdraw and the aerodrome was lost.

The remainder of the troops in Tavoy now completely disintegrated. The enemy had established himself astride the road leading to Ye and most of the troops eventually found their way back to Moulmein moving in small parties through the jungle.

In these operations round Tavoy, parties of the Tenasserim Battalion B.A.F. did excellent work under their officers in blowing up bridges and roads and many of them remained behind for long periods after the other troops had left, eventually getting back through the jungle or by boat and bringing with them much useful information.

*71. Southern Tenasserim.* Before recording the main operations which started at Myawaddy and ended at the River Sittang it is convenient to dispose of the remaining event in Southern Tenasserim.

The Japanese were in occupation of Victoria Point and it was known that patrols were working up towards Mergui. With the possibility of Tavoy falling into the hands of the enemy Mergui would be in a very precarious position. Consequently on the 18th January, it was decided, during my absence in Kengtung, to evacuate Mergui while there was yet time and to transfer the troops to Tavoy and to make every endeavour to hold the aerodrome at that place. I confirmed these orders on my return.

Before this move could be completed Tavoy had fallen, so the garrison and civil officials, etc., were evacuated direct by sea to Rangoon where the last parties arrived on the 24th January.

*72. Effect of Operations.* The results of the action at Tavoy were unfortunate. It had caused the withdrawal from Mergui and it is

possible that in the light of after events that it might have been wiser to hold on to Mergui even if the eventual withdrawal of the garrison or part of it were thereby prejudiced. Its retention would have enabled our air forces, small as they were, to have carried out effective bombing attacks along the L of C supplying the enemy's forces in Malaya. It should be remembered, however, that at the time the plans were made our air forces available for this purpose were practically nil and that if the plan actually made had succeeded it might have ensured the retention of Tavoy for a considerable period.

Another and perhaps more serious effect of the operation at Tavoy was that the units of the Burma Rifles involved suffered a serious loss of morale from which they did not entirely recover. The enemy received a corresponding encouragement to undertake similar enterprises in future.

*73. Operations in Northern Tenasserim.* Before dealing with the operations in Northern Tenasserim it is desirable to draw attention to the fact that nearly all the fighting took place in dense jungle for which form of warfare the Japanese were especially trained while our troops were not. Communications were very limited and in the jungle runners had to be almost entirely relied upon.

The mobility of the Japanese brought home the fact that our troops had far too much baggage and reserves of all sorts with them which often in the end were either lost or had to be destroyed.

Throughout the operations leading up to the Battle of the Sittang I had constantly in mind the necessity for fighting as far forward as possible so as to have room in which to deploy the expected reinforcements. I therefore took every unit I could from elsewhere, including 1 Burma Division, to strengthen our forces on this front. This involved taking considerable risks in the Southern Shan States, on the Karenni front and in Rangoon. There was also an internal security problem that might become critical at any time.

*74. First Japanese Attack.* Active operations on a larger scale commenced on the 20th January when 1,000 Japanese troops, reported to be Thais but probably Japanese, attacked the post of the 1/7 G.R. at milestone 48 on the Myawaddy road. Other positions were heavily bombed and machine gunned at intervals throughout the day. There was every indication that a large scale attack was about to take place.

The following morning the attack developed as expected and most of the forward troops were forced out of their positions.

By midday the enemy were severely pressing the main position of the 16 Indian Infantry Brigade about Kawkareik. As they appeared to be in considerable strength (it was later estimated from the information that became available that there were about 2,500 enemy troops in the initial attack) and no reinforcements or reserves were available, it was possible that if 16 Indian Infantry Brigade tried to fight it out on this position it might be overwhelmed. Orders were therefore issued that this Brigade was not to get so involved as