

In accordance with the above decision, I caused the following telegram to be despatched to the Commander, 3 Indian Corps at 1125 hrs. 14th December:—

“Importance of covering Penang is increased by fact that bulk of remaining cables to U.K. and India pass through that Island. Considered that ability to hold Penang depends upon result of Kedah battle. You are at liberty, therefore to use any part of the garrison of Penang that can be made available to take part in Kedah operations, particularly Independent Company. Should it become impossible to cover Penang from mainland, policy will be to evacuate Penang removing by sea the garrison and such essential stores as possible and destroying remainder. Preliminary arrangements should be made as necessary but to avoid causing alarm it is of utmost importance that such arrangements should be kept secret. Resident Counsellor Penang is being given similar instructions. Acknowledge.”

188. On the 14th December the Municipal Commissioners of Georgetown presented a memorandum to the Fortress Commander stating that the Civil Administration had broken down and pointing out the danger of outbreaks of cholera and typhoid owing to the fouling of the water catchment area and the breakdown of the sanitary and conservancy services.

189. At 1100 hrs. 15th December, following a warning the previous evening, the Fortress Commander received an order from the Commander 3 Indian Corps that the evacuation, which was to take place by sea, would be completed on the night 16th-17th December. Shipping had to be found locally. Most of the troops were moved to the mainland but the remainder and all Europeans, except a few who remained behind at their own request, were evacuated. Asiatics serving in the Volunteers were given the option of being evacuated or of staying. The majority decided to stay to protect their families. Lack of transport would have made it quite out of the question to evacuate large numbers of Asiatics. Moreover it was undesirable at that stage to increase the population of Singapore.

190. A great deal of denial work was done at Penang. The Fixed Defences were effectively destroyed and the smaller weapons were withdrawn. At least most of the ammunition in the magazines was destroyed, as also was much of the oil and petrol. Denial schemes were similarly carried out at many of the civil establishments. But it was hardly to be expected in the circumstances that the destruction would be complete and there were two unfortunate omissions which had a very considerable effect on subsequent events. One was the failure to destroy the Penang Broadcasting Station from which during the rest of the campaign a stream of anti-British propaganda was sent out and the other was the failure to remove or scuttle all the small vessels and barges in the harbour. The latter was probably due, at least in part, to the masters and crews having disappeared. The Japanese later made great use of them in developing their threats to our communications from the west coast. When this omission was discovered a destroyer was sent by night to mine the southern exit from the harbour, but this could not have been entirely effective.

191. *Province Wellesley Operations.*—On the 16th December heavy fighting developed at the Batu Pekaka Bridge on the right of the River Muda position where the 5/2 Punjab Regt. was attacked by enemy troops led by an European. Late in the afternoon the enemy succeeded in getting a footing south of the river but were ejected by counter-attack. The Argylls were withdrawn from Baling to Titi Karangan.

During the day the units of 11 Indian Division were being reformed in Province Wellesley covered by a weak rear-guard which consisted of one platoon and the armoured train on the railway bridge, the Independent Company and a company of Leicesters at the two main road bridges and a squadron of 3 Indian Cavalry at the ferry to the west of them. The 137 Field Regt. was in support.

The Commander 3 Indian Corps, in consultation with the Commander 11 Indian Division, decided to withdraw the division behind the River Krian, the main bridges over which were at that time being held by personnel from the Penang Reinforcements Camp. The 28 Brigade moved by road and rail to Simpang Lima and the next morning took over the defence of the River Krian from the railway bridge at Nibong Tebal to the sea. Fifteen miles to their right at Selama was the 3/16 Punjab Regt. from Kroh.

During the 17th December the troops on the Muda River and in the Bukit Mertajam area were withdrawn to the Taiping area where they came into reserve to the Krian defences. The 12 Brigade Group fought a rear-guard action from the Batu Pekaka Bridge to the Terap—Selama area. By the 18th December all troops were south of the River Krian.

192. *The Grik Road.*—On the Grik Road contact was made a little north of Grik during the night 16th-17th December. Our small force, which consisted only of one company of the Argylls and a detachment of F.M.S.V.F. Armoured Cars was hard pressed on the 17th and fell back to the area South of Sumpitan. It was reinforced by two platoons of the Perak Battalion F.M.S.V.F. It now became clear that the enemy had directed the main body of his Patani Force down this road, difficult as it was for wheeled transport, and was endeavouring to cut off the 11 Indian Division by reaching the main road at Kuala Kangsar. Indeed, reports from Japanese sources have subsequently indicated that this was a strong attack and that their grand strategy was to cut off and annihilate the whole of the troops in Kedah and Province Wellesley.

193. On the evening of the 17th December the Commander 3 Indian Corps decided that the 12 Brigade Group which he had intended to withdraw into reserve at Taiping, should go straight through to Kuala Kangsar and that the 1 Independent Company should leave Taiping at first light on the 18th December for Lenggong on the Grik Road.

194. *Future Operations.*—On the evening 17th December I authorised the Commander 3 Indian Corps to withdraw to the line of the River Perak if he thought such a withdrawal absolutely necessary. I also instructed him to arrange for reconnaissances to be carried out of the Slim River Line in South Perak and placed at his disposal officer teams from the Officers Cadet Training Unit to assist in carrying out rearward reconnaissances.