

General Sir Archibald Wavell, and there he gave me a resumé of the situation in Burma and a verbal directive to the following effect:—

"The retention of Rangoon was a matter of vital importance to our position in the Far East and every effort must be made to hold it. If, however, that was not possible the force must not be allowed to be cut off and destroyed but must be withdrawn from the Rangoon area for the defence of Upper Burma. This must be held as long as possible in order to safeguard the oil fields at Yenangyaung, keep contact with the Chinese and protect the construction of the road from Assam to Burma."

PART I.—OPERATIONS RESULTING IN THE LOSS OF RANGOON.

3. After this conference with the Commander-in-Chief I flew to Magwe, which I reached that evening. On the morning of the 5th March I flew to Rangoon, arriving at Army Headquarters at midday.

4.* *Situation at the Time of my Arrival.* On arrival at Army Headquarters I found that General Hutton was away at the front, and, in his absence, the situation was explained to me by the staff as follows:—

17 Indian Division were holding the area Pegu-Hlegu with—48 Infantry Brigade and 7 Armoured Brigade in area Pegu; 16 Infantry Brigade—Hlegu.

Both these Infantry Brigades were very weak and disorganised as explained in General Hutton's Report.

63 Infantry Brigade, having just disembarked, was at Hlawga, sixteen miles north of Rangoon, but its transport was still on board ship.

1 Burma Division having handed over the defence of Southern Shan States to Chinese Sixth Army was located:—

13 Indian Infantry Brigade—Mawchi.

1 Burma Brigade—Pyu.

2 Burma Brigade—Nyaunglebin.

There was a gap of 40 miles between forward elements of 1 Burma Division and 17 Division. There were Japanese forces in Waw and the neighbouring villages north and north-east of Pegu, and in addition Japanese columns had been infiltrating across the Sittang River between Pegu and Nyaunglebin under cover of darkness for some days. These had entered the Pegu Yomas, the jungle country north and north-west of Pegu.

5.* *Operations at Pegu.* In view of this situation, which looked, to say the least, serious, I set off at once for the Headquarters of 17 Division at Hlegu where I met General Hutton and Major-General Cowan, commanding 17 Division. The situation was here explained to me again but in more detail and General Hutton told me of the orders for the evacuation of Rangoon which he wished to issue but had held up pending my arrival. I was not satisfied that Rangoon could not be held but it appeared to me that the only course of action which could save the situation was to effect a junction between 1 Burma Division and 17 Division with the object of preventing any further Japanese infiltration into the Yomas. I accordingly ordered 17 Division to carry out offensive

operations against the Japanese at Waw and in the neighbouring villages with a view to relieving pressure on their immediate front, and at the same time I ordered 2 Infantry Brigade of 1 Burma Division to advance south from Nyaunglebin to join hands with 17 Division. The offensive carried out on 5th March by the 17 Division and part of the Armoured Brigade from Pegu was locally successful but during this operation the Japanese attacked from the wooded country bordering Pegu on the west and succeeded in capturing a part of the town. Considerable fighting took place there on 6th March but 17 Division were not successful in ejecting the Japanese. Meanwhile, the wider enemy encircling movement which had been in progress when I arrived had developed, and the road from Rangoon south-west of Pegu which had been under snipers' fire on 5th March was definitely cut on 6th March.

6. *Decision to withdraw from Rangoon.* Counter-attacks to open the road failed and I then ordered 63 Indian Infantry Brigade to be put at the disposal of the Commander 17 Division.

An attack on 6th March by this Infantry Brigade to open the road was not successful and the situation by noon on this day was as follows:—

The troops cut off in Pegu consisted of—7 Hussars, 48 Indian Infantry Brigade, 1 W. Yorks, and 1 Cameronians.

† There was further confirmation that a force of 2,000 Japanese previously reported by Burma Frontier Force patrols had passed through Paunggyi about 30 miles north of Hlegu and was moving in a south-westerly direction.

† It was also confirmed about this time, that a number of traitor Burmans with Japanese officers had landed at the mouth of the Rangoon River, threatening the Syriam refineries where there was only a small garrison.

In view of this situation I considered that the retention of Rangoon was quite impossible with the comparatively small forces at my disposal, dispersed as they were and with part of them already encircled.

I therefore decided that the right course of action was to order the destruction of the oil refineries at Syriam, the evacuation of Rangoon and the regrouping of my forces north of Rangoon in the Irrawaddy valley. The order to put the Denial Scheme into operation was issued at midnight on the 6th March.

7. *Force cut off and breaks out at Taukkyan.* On the morning of the 7th March, Army Headquarters, administrative units and troops not required to cover the demolitions in Rangoon area moved out of Rangoon on the Prome road. Near Taukkyan, twenty-one miles north of Rangoon at about 11.00 hours, the leading vehicles of Army Headquarters ran into an enemy road block and the column was held up. Attempts by the 1 Glosters, 2/13 F.F. Rifles and some tanks of the 7 Hussars throughout the day failed to clear the block. It must be remembered here that the force in Pegu was still cut off, all the efforts on the 6th March of the 63 Infantry Brigade to relieve it having been unsuccessful.

* See General Hutton's Report, Section IX.

† See General Hutton's Report, paras. 104, 106 and 107.