

be detrimental to the actual defence of Rangoon. These included the diversion of certain ships carrying administrative units which would be very difficult to unload in the existing conditions and whose presence would seriously complicate the evacuation problem. It made it clear that fighting troops should be continued to be sent as reinforcements and that every effort would be made to hold Rangoon. It also dealt with the evacuation of women and children and the denial of the oil refineries. It concluded with emphasizing once again the need for a Corps Commander and also for a Senior General Officer to undertake liaison duties with the Chinese Armies.

There can be no doubt now that the timely adoption of these measures was amply justified, without them there would have been chaos.

95. *Withdrawal begins.* On the 20th February after three days of almost hand to hand fighting, the forward troops managed to disengage from the enemy and the first stage of withdrawal commenced. The withdrawal was co-ordinated by the Commanders of the 48 and 16 Brigades. The only unit that had any difficulty in getting away was the 1/9 R. Jats, which was partially surrounded and owing to a delay in receipt of orders to withdraw was caught by a pre-arranged bombing attack intended for the enemy. This delayed the withdrawal of 48 Brigade till 1500 hours and it was eventually ferried to Kyaikto by M.T., reaching that place at about 2030 hours.

The intention now was for the 17 Indian Division to form a strong line on the west bank of the River Sittang, and it was hoped that, if any enemy managed to cross in any strength, the 7 Armoured Brigade would be able to deal with them. It may be mentioned here that while the paddy land looked most suitable for the employment of tanks, it was found that the small bunds between the fields necessitated the tanks slowing down to take them, and thus making them vulnerable and slow.

96. *Plan of Withdrawal.* The 17 Indian Division's plan for the withdrawal was for 48 Brigade to move back first, going into divisional reserve. It was to pass through 46 Brigade which was already in the Kyaikto area. 46 Brigade was to act as rearguard to the 17 Division. On 21st February the leading battalion of 48 Brigade was only to go as far as the quarries, two miles east of Mokpalin. The remaining battalions were to halt on positions some four or seven miles further back along the main road. To strengthen the bridgehead defence consisting of the 3 Burma Rifles and one company 2 D.W.R., the Divisional Commander subsequently ordered the 4/12 F.F.R. to the Sittang bridge area.

The 2 D.W.R. less one company remained with 46 Indian Infantry Brigade and it was also decided that units should retain their transport.

97. *Communications.* The withdrawal across the river was bound to be a difficult operation as only the one bridge existed, but a power ferry for M.T. with three boats had been placed in position as an alternative means, and was provided with landing stages of elaborate construction.

It should be noted here that in this area communications were extremely difficult, apart

from the railway there was a road only as far as Waw some 10 miles west of the Sittang Bridge, on the east side there was no road until reaching Kyaikto 16 miles beyond the River. Every effort had been made to complete the road, and to deck over the railway bridge. By excellent work on the part of Mr. Stewart of the Burma Railways, the latter and the power ferry were completed, but the "road" was still a very dusty and rough track through the jungle. It may be added, that the River Sittang at this place was nearly 500 yards wide and very swift. The rapidity of the current, the enormous rise and fall of the tide (40 feet) and the existence of a bore, were considered to render it unsafe for navigation, and nobody but a very strong swimmer could hope to cross it by that means.

98. *Visit to Lashio.* As the withdrawal of 17 Indian Division on 20th had been successfully begun, I felt able on 21st to fly up to Lashio to meet the Generalissimo on his way back to China. It was obviously most desirable that I should do so in order to hasten as far as possible, the arrival of the Chinese troops in Burma. Unfortunately he decided at the last moment not to land, and flew straight on to Chungking. I returned to Rangoon by air on 22nd to find a very serious situation had arisen on the River Sittang. It is necessary first however, to describe what had taken place on 21st during my absence.

99. *Events of 21st.* By 12.00 hours on the 21st both 48 and 16 Indian Infantry Brigades had passed through 46 Brigade at Kyaikto. During the afternoon 46 Brigade commenced its withdrawal and although bombed from the air it was not followed up. The order of march was 48 Brigade leading, followed by 16 Brigade M.T., 46 Brigade M.T. and then 16 Brigade followed by 46 Brigade. One battalion of 46 Brigade moved by the railway line, all the remainder by the road and track.

Between 12.00 and 15.00 hours the troops between Kyaikto and Mokpalin were very heavily bombed and machine gunned by aircraft which were considered by many people to be our own. Whether this was the fact and whether the fault lay with the Army or the R.A.F. was not satisfactorily cleared up at the time.

By 18.30 hours on 21st H.Q. 48 Brigade and 1/4 G.R. were established in Mokpalin with the remaining battalions of the Brigade supporting them and seven miles further south as laid down by Divisional H.Q.

The 16 and 46 Brigades spent the night 21/22nd on the road between Kyaikto and Mokpalin and the time of start for the 22nd was fixed between the Brigadiers concerned. It was agreed that 16 and 46 Brigades M.T. should start at about 03 00 hours, in that order, followed by 16 Brigade and 46 Brigade. By 06.00 hours the whole of the troops in the rear of the column were on the move.

100. *Situation about the Sittang Bridge.* We must now return to the head of the column.

The movement from the Quarries started at 04.00 hours on 22nd February with the 1/4 G.R. leading, followed by Divisional H.Q. and H.Q. 48 Indian Infantry Brigade.

The 1/4 G.R. were given the task of protecting the west bank of the bridge against parachute attack and the bridgehead was still therefore dangerously weak. The passage of M.T.