

Machang were all attacked on this day. The performance of the Japanese aircraft of all types and the accuracy of their high level bombing had come as an unpleasant surprise. Our own air force had already been seriously weakened.

128. At 0820 hrs. 8th December G.H.Q. Far East reported that Operation MATADOR had been approved by the Chiefs of Staff if the Japanese attacked Kota Bharu but G.H.Q. added "Do not act". Air reconnaissance sent to Singora and Patani at dawn reported that enemy forces had landed at those places, that there were a number of ships lying off the coast and that the Singora aerodrome was in use. It was clearly too late now to put Operation MATADOR into effect, so I authorised the Commander 3 Indian Corps to start harassing activities and to lay demolition charges on the roads and railways.

At 1000 hrs. the Straits Settlements Legislative Council, in accordance with previous arrangements, met at Singapore. I took the opportunity to report the situation to it.

At about 1100 hrs. 8th December, sanction to enter Thailand then having been obtained from the C.-in-C. Far East, orders were issued to the Commander 3 Indian Corps to occupy the defensive positions on both the Singora and Kroh-Patani roads, and to send a mobile covering force across the frontier towards Singora to make contact with the enemy and to harass and delay him.

129. This change from an anticipated offensive, for which the 11 Indian Division had been energetically preparing for some weeks, to the defensive had undoubtedly had a considerable psychological effect on the troops. It was aggravated by the fact that on the 7th December certain preparatory moves had been carried out within the division in preparation for MATADOR, including the moves of two battalions of the 15 Indian Infantry Brigade to Anak Bukit Station to entrain. The Division was thus caught to some extent on the wrong foot for the defensive operations which were to follow. It had, however, always been realised that the chances of being able to put Operation MATADOR into effect were not great in view of the political restrictions and Commanders had been instructed to prepare for either alternative. Possibly the defensive preparations had been to some extent sacrificed in favour of the offensive.

130. It was originally intended that the column operating on the Kroh-Patani road, known as Krohcol and commanded by Lt.-Colonel Moorhead, should consist of the 3/16 Punjab Regt., the 5/14 Punjab Regt. from Penang, one coy. sappers and miners, one field ambulance and a light battery of the F.M.S.V.F. The F.M.S.V.F. battery had, however, been unable to mobilise in time, and was replaced later by the 10 Mountain Battery from the North Kedah front. The 5/14 Punjab Regt. was moved up to Kroh on the 8th December leaving one company in Penang but had not arrived when operations started. Responsibility for operations on the Kroh front was on 8th December delegated by Commander 3 Indian Corps to Commander 11 Indian Division.

At 1330 hrs. on the 8th December the Commander Krohcol received orders to occupy the Ledge position some 35-40 miles beyond the

frontier. It was hoped that the Thais would at worst be passively neutral. These hopes were speedily disillusioned. As the vanguard crossed the frontier at 1500 hrs. they were immediately engaged by a light automatic post manned by Thais. Throughout the afternoon the advance was disputed by snipers assisted by road blocks, the enemy fighting skilfully. By nightfall our troops had cleared only 3 miles of the road and then they halted for the night. The enemy were all Thais, some of whom were armed with Japanese rifles.

131. On the North Kedah front, a mechanised column consisting of two companies and the carriers of the 1/8 Punjab Regt. with some anti-tank guns and engineers attached, crossed the frontier at 1730 hrs. 8th December and moved towards Singora to harass and delay the enemy. Concurrently an armoured train, with a detachment of 2/16 Punjab Regt. and some engineers, advanced into Thailand from Padang Besar in Perlis. The Singora column reached Ban Sadao, 10 miles North of the frontier at dusk, where it halted and took up a position north of the village. Here, at about 2130 hrs. it made contact with a Japanese mechanised column, headed by tanks and moving in close formation with full headlights. The two leading tanks were knocked out by the anti-tank guns, but the Japanese infantry quickly debussed and started an enveloping movement. Our column was then withdrawn through the outpost position at Kampong Imam, destroying two bridges and partially destroying a third on the way back. Meanwhile the armoured train party had reached Klong Gnea, in Thailand and successfully destroyed a large bridge before withdrawing to Padang Besar.

132. To return to the Kelantan front, as soon as it had become clear from the dawn reconnaissance that there were no ships off the coast further south, the Commander Kelantan force moved up his reserve battalion, the 1/13 Frontier Force Rifles, with some anti-tank guns attached, from Peringat with a view to counter-attacking the enemy who had landed. Some local counter attacks had already been put in and progress made. At 1030 hrs. the 2/12 Frontier Force Regiment (less two coys.) was ordered to counter attack from the south and the 1/13 Frontier Force Rifles from the north. Owing chiefly to the difficulties of the thick waterlogged country and the impassable creeks which lay behind the beaches, these attacks failed to close the gap and by 1700 hrs. the advance of our troops was stopped.

At about 1630 hrs. the R.A.F. Station Commander decided that Kota Bharu aerodrome was no longer fit to operate aircraft and obtained permission from the A.O.C. Far East to evacuate the aerodrome. All serviceable aircraft were flown away and the ground staff was evacuated by road to rail-head. No offensive or reconnaissance aircraft were then available in that area. By 1900 hrs. more ships were reported off the Sabang beach and the Japanese had started to infiltrate between the beach posts in the Kota Bharu area. The Commander Kelantan force therefore decided to shorten his line and ordered a withdrawal during the night to a line east of Kota Bharu. It was pouring with rain and pitch dark and communications had been reduced for the most part to Liaison officers. It was therefore not