

Royal Artillery. Heavy casualties on the enemy were observed. The 5/7 Rajput Regt. was subjected to dive bombing and heavy mortar fire throughout the day. In view of the weight of the Japanese attack, the rapid development of their heavy mortar fire, the constricted passage across the Lyemun Strait, the shortage of launch crews, and as we now had no footing on the mainland except at Devils Peak Peninsula, I gave orders to Commander Mainland Infantry Brigade that the Ma Lau Tong line should be evacuated during the night.

The first task was to be the evacuation of HQ and two companies of 2/14 Punjab Regt. which had been previously arranged. This was to be followed by the withdrawal of the 3.7-in. Howitzer troop R.A. The second and the shorter of the Devils Peak Lines (Hai Wan) was to be held by HQ 5/7 Rajput Regt. and two companies, the remainder of that battalion being evacuated last. The first withdrawal was timed for 1930 hours.

34. Shell fire died down at dusk (12th December) but the water transport difficulties were serious. Chinese crews deserted in the darkness from the W.D. fleet, though covered by rifles, engineers were deficient, and some launches were found to be in a sinking condition. Administrative officers had been sent out from my HQ to accelerate matters and took personal charge and operated what boats they could, but serious delays occurred. It was not until 0130 hours that the 2/14 Punjab Regt., some 300 men, were all across.

At 0400 hours the bulk of the first troop R.A. (less mules) and one company of 5/7 Rajput Regt. were across, but the Mule Corps was still to come. It was clear that the situation was critical if daylight crossings were to be avoided and I called on the Royal Navy to assist. Their response was prompt. Three motor torpedo boats were despatched from Aberdeen and one more was recalled from patrol in Junk Bay where it had been covering the right flank of the 5/7 Rajput Regt. from possible enemy attack in sampans from Hang Hau area (an operation which had been attempted by night during peace training and found feasible).

The destroyer H.M.S. "Thracian" was also ordered round from Aberdeen but could not be expected to arrive before 0600 hours, 13th December.

I ordered Brigadier Wallis to give full priority to personnel, and that there was to be no question of evacuating the 120 mules and further risking the operation. In any case the mule lighter crew had deserted, and the handling of this craft in the dark by personnel unaccustomed to it was a dubious proposition, and moreover she was badly holed by enemy fire and had to be abandoned in a sinking condition. Meanwhile the W.D.V. "Victoria" had been slowly and steadily evacuating personnel and equipment under Major A. J. Dewar and Captain C. G. Turner. When the torpedo boats arrived at the small pier on the Devils Peak Peninsula it was found that the state of the tide did not permit them to "lie close to"—a risk that had been foreseen and accepted. This meant more delay and ferrying by sampans. Ferry trips were, however, made by the torpedo boats directly H.M.S. "Thracian" arrived, the tide having risen slightly.

35. At about 0400 hours 13th December I discussed with Brigadier Wallis the advisability of also including in the withdrawal the two companies of 5/7 Rajput Regt. holding the rear position. The enemy were in constant though light contact throughout, and after their severe handling would be temporarily disinclined to follow up. The water transport situation had already become more than precarious, it was extremely doubtful if any W.D. vessel, except perhaps the "Victoria" would be available next night, and I thus foresaw the greatest difficulties and even the impossibility of maintaining the 5/7 Rajput Regt. with ammunition and supplies in their isolated position. I decided that the risk was too great, and I also urgently required them to relieve and man the North East sector then held by 2 Royal Scots. This latter battalion was not in good shape, as they had lost many of their best officers killed or wounded, and I judged it to be necessary to withdraw them into reserve so that they could obtain a short respite in which to rest and re-equip. In addition they were unfamiliar with the ground, their previous sector having been the South West. One company of 5/7 Rajput Regt. was therefore ordered to cover the withdrawal of the remainder and then themselves embark in the last flights. Daylight had arrived by then, but they accomplished the evacuation without casualties, covered by artillery fire from various island positions.

36. It was not until 0920 hours that the last contingent of 5/7 Rajput Regt. from the mainland reached Aberdeen. The whole battalion was collected in the Tytam Gap area by noon and given twenty-four hours to rest and re-equip before taking over the North East sector from 2 Royal Scots. The 2/14 Punjab Regt. took over the North West sector. During the night (12/13th December), at the urgent request of the civil authorities, arrangements were made with the Harbour Master to pass 9 tons of dynamite from Green Island to the Star Ferry for collection and distribution.

On its return, loaded, it left Green Island two hours ahead of schedule, with the result that it reached the Vehicular Ferry (not Star Ferry) unexpectedly, and the N.C.O. commanding the pill box there gave the order to fire, as no lights or distinguishing marks were visible. The launch blew up and all on board thus unfortunately lost their lives.

37. At 0900 hours 13th December a launch bearing a flag of truce was seen to put off from Kowloon. It arrived at Victoria Pier with a Staff Officer of the General commanding the Japanese Forces (Lt.-General Sakai) bearing a letter addressed to H.E. The Governor. The letter demanded the surrender of the Colony and threatened severe artillery fire and aerial bombardment in the event of refusal. The demand was tantamount to unconditional surrender and was rejected categorically.

38. During the morning the Japanese were observed to be collecting launches in Kowloon Bay and concentrating them mainly at Bailey's Shipyard near the cement-works. The situation as I saw it was that the enemy, if he attacked from the mainland, might direct his attack on to:—

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|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| (a) Lyemun-Quarry Point area   | } From<br>Kowloon<br>Peninsula. |
| (b) Northpoint Bowrington area |                                 |
| (c) Victoria                   |                                 |
| (d) Kennedy Town               |                                 |