

The month of January therefore ended with our troops west of the River Salween with the exception of small parties of men who did not get away with the ships or who had got separated from their units. Many of these turned up later having managed to cross the river in native boats or on rafts, etc.

79. *Reasons for Withdrawal.* The question may well be asked as to whether it was necessary to evacuate Moulmein. While the initial attack was probably carried out by only one enemy regiment there was every reason to suppose that the remainder of a division was moving up and this afterwards proved to be correct. With the enemy established to the north and south of the town and probably on the island of Chaungzon to the west, no communication with the town would have been possible and in the absence of any naval or military boat crews, etc., operations for relief, even if troops had been available, would probably have been impossible. The area had not in any way been prepared for defence and required at least two infantry brigades to hold a secure perimeter. Furthermore the water supply came from outside the only line which it was possible to hold. In view of these considerations it is quite clear that a decision to hold Moulmein any longer would almost certainly have involved the loss of the garrison and possibly have hastened the fall of Rangoon.

At one time I hoped that the arrival of reinforcements would enable me to establish a strong force across the River Salween at Paan. This would have covered the northern flank of Moulmein and secured its communications across the River Salween. It would also have secured the most promising jumping off place for a counter-offensive.

80. *Request for Naval Assistance.* About this time a signal was despatched to G.H.Q. South West Pacific Command (A.B.D.A. Command) pointing out that Moulmein would probably fall and requesting that warships should be sent to protect the coast as otherwise the enemy would be able to move up the coast from Malaya at will.

81. *Casualties.* The casualties suffered by our troops up to and including the evacuation of Moulmein amounted to 617 all ranks, a considerable proportion being "missing." It should be noted, however, that in jungle fighting involving a withdrawal, practically all dead and wounded are likely to be counted as missing in addition to prisoners and those who, getting separated from their units, may turn up later as stragglers. There is no doubt that the enemy suffered considerable casualties at Moulmein though probably very few at Kawkaik.

Although the Divisional Commander was still anxious to withdraw to the Bilin River and to give up Martaban, I issued orders that the Division was to fight hard to hold the line of the River Salween and to give no ground. As far as possible, however, the Division was to be dispersed in depth so as to be able to deal with enemy infiltration.

The general plan was now to hold Martaban securely and the line of the River Salween to the north of Paan, with the remainder of the 17 Indian Division distributed back in depth along the road to Kyaikto.

Two companies of the 3/7 Gurkha Rifles held Martaban while the 1/7 G.R. were about Paan. The 4 Burma Rifles watched the river between these two places and the 5/17 Dogras were ordered to Dinyinzaik and to carry out active patrolling.

82. *Reorganisation.* A good deal of reorganisation was now necessary within the Division and it was decided to reconstitute the Brigades so as to include a battalion of the Burma Rifles in each Brigade as it was felt that these battalions would be of greater value when brigaded with other troops.

83. *Reinforcements.* On the 3rd February the 48 Indian Infantry Brigade which had arrived in Rangoon on 31st January without its transport and had been held in Army Reserve, was ordered forward to Bilin to join the 17 Indian Division. The Divisional Commander was instructed to keep this Brigade concentrated and not to use it until there was a real necessity to do so.

84. *Enemy Action.* Martaban was now subjected to a good deal of shelling and bombing and small parties of the enemy succeeded in crossing the Salween at different points. In view of the enclosed country and long distances involved it was very difficult to locate them, especially as no information was forthcoming from the local inhabitants. Apart from this there was a lull on the front which gave our troops a much needed breathing space for reorganisation. The 1/7 G.R., however, showed a greater activity in the Paan area. They maintained a post and patrols on the far side of the river and had several very successful encounters with the enemy. Eventually, however, his increasing strength in this area forced their withdrawal across the river.

On the 5th February 7/10 Baluch relieved the 1/7 G.R. opposite Paan who then moved to Bilin. The 2 K.O.Y.L.I. which had been transferred from the 1 Burma Division in the Southern Shan States moved to Thaton while the 8 Burma Rifles and 1/9 R. Jats moved into reserve at Bilin.

85. *Martaban Road cut.* On the 9th a Japanese party which had no doubt infiltrated through the jungle led by local guides cut the road at milestone 8 a few miles south of Paung and established a strong road block there. Two carriers of the 5 Dogras failed to force a passage and two armoured cars of the Rangoon Battalion B.A.F. which came on the scene a little later were put out of action. In spite of further attacks the enemy was not dislodged from his position here. The 3/7 G.R. later succeeded in opening a way through Thebyugon and thence across country to Thaton.

86. *Martaban.* On the following day (10th) Martaban was again subjected to a considerable amount of shelling and a good deal of enemy activity was observed, all of which indicated that the enemy were likely to make a renewed effort in the near future. It was also known that some parties of the enemy were on our side of the river.

In view of the situation the Divisional Commander represented his desire to evacuate Martaban and to withdraw his line in order to get on to a less extended front. For the reasons given already I did not wish to give up more