

200. It was necessary also to take into consideration the condition of the troops of 11 Indian Division. Though their morale was not broken, it could not be regarded as being as high as one would have wished. They were undoubtedly very exhausted by almost continuous fighting and movement both by day and night. Moreover, the superiority which the Japanese possessed in the air coupled with the complete absence of tanks on our side could not but have the most adverse effect upon the trust reposed by the Indian troops in the might of the British Empire. It is not too much to say that the Indian troops were dismayed to find the British so outclassed in these two essentials of modern war.

201. As regards the enemy's course of action, it was now clear that he intended to continue his advance down the west coast with a view to attacking Singapore from the North. Combined with this, his forces in Kelantan might move southward by the coastal route or he might deliver sea-borne attacks against the Kuantan and/or East Johore areas with a view to cutting our communications with our forces in the North, or he might deliver a sea-borne attack against Singapore direct. There remained also the possibility of an air-borne attack directed against our aerodromes.

202. I was informed by the C.-in-C. Far East that the policy was to keep the enemy as far north in Malaya as possible in order to prevent him acquiring territory and particularly aerodromes which would threaten the arrival of reinforcements.

203. I considered the possibility of moving up all or part of the A.I.F. in relief of troops of 11 Indian Division but rejected the idea for the following reasons:—

(a) The relief could not be carried out without temporarily leaving the Johore defences very weak;

(b) It was undesirable to break up the A.I.F. organization;

(c) On the other hand, if the whole of the A.I.F. was sent, the relief would necessarily take a long time and ultimately the vital Johore area would be held by tired troops with no previous experience of that part of Malaya.

204. I decided to go to Ipoh to discuss the situation with the Commander 3 Indian Corps and left Singapore late on the 17th December.

After a reconnaissance of the area and a visit to some of the forward troops on the 18th December the following decisions were made:—

(a) While adhering to the general policy of withdrawal behind the River Perak, the enemy would be held west of the river as long as possible without permitting our forces to become inextricably committed.

(b) The Commander 3 Indian Corps would select and have prepared a series of positions between Ipoh and Tanjong Malim.

(c) The immediate role of 9 Indian Division would be (i) to continue to deny the Kuantan aerodrome to the enemy; (ii) to secure the 11 Indian Division and its communications against attack from the east coast.

(d) As soon as the withdrawal across the River Perak had taken place, the best area for the operations of the sea-borne raiding force (to be known as "Rose Force") would

be that part of the state of Perak which lies west of the river and south of the railway.

(e) Arrangements were to be made for land raiding parties and for "left behind" parties to harass the enemy's communications.

(f) A liaison officer was appointed to co-ordinate the action of the military and civil authorities in the west coast theatre of operations.

(g) The 6 and 15 Indian Infantry Brigades were to be amalgamated and to be known as the 6/15 Indian Infantry Brigade. Certain units were to be amalgamated, notably the East Surreys and Leicesters which became known as the British Battalion. The 12 Indian Brigade Group was to be incorporated into the 11 Indian Division.

(h) The Commander 3 Indian Corps was to consider the question of the command of 11 Indian Division. It was felt that an officer with the widest possible experience of bush warfare was required. A few days later Brigadier Paris, the Commander 12 Indian Infantry Brigade, who had been in Malaya for 2½ years, was appointed to succeed Major-General Murray Lyon.

As all the infantry brigade commanders of the division had become casualties, Lt.-Col. Moorhead was appointed to command the 6/15 Brigade, Lt.-Col. Stewart the 12 Brigade and Lt.-Col. Selby the 28 Brigade.

(j) All troops were to be given a minimum period of 48 hours rest as soon as this could be arranged. Defence in depth astride the main road after crossing the River Perak seemed to be the only way to make this possible.

(k) It was now clear that we were faced by an enemy who had made a special study of bush warfare on a grand scale and whose troops had been specially trained in those tactics. He relied in the main on outflanking movements and on infiltration by small parties into and behind our lines.

For support of his forward troops he relied on the mortar and the infantry gun rather than on longer range weapons. His snipers operated from trees. He exploited the use of fireworks. For mobility he made a wide use of civilian bicycles seized in the country. His tanks he had up to date operated mainly on the roads. His infantry had displayed an ability to cross obstacles—rivers, swamps, jungles, etc.—more rapidly than had previously been thought possible. Finally, speed was obviously of vital importance to him and he was prepared to press his attacks without elaborate preparations.

To meet these tactics, it was agreed that brigade groups should be echeloned in depth astride the main arteries of communication and that in selecting defensive positions special regard should be had to tank obstacles and cover from air, in both of which arms the enemy were well equipped while we were entirely deficient.

205. On return to Singapore I circulated an Instruction on the tactics to be employed, the main points of which were as follows:—

(i) Enemy outflanking and infiltration tactics must not lead to withdrawals which should take place only on order of higher authority.