

into action. After two hours of heavy shelling and mortaring it attacked the Malay Regiment which was holding this feature. The latter fought magnificently but suffered heavy casualties and by the afternoon the enemy had reached The Gap, a dominating position where the Buona Vista Road crosses the ridge. Further north the enemy also gained a local success. After dark our forward troops fell back under orders to positions covering the important Alexandra area in which was situated the Main Ordnance Depot, the Alexandra Ammunition Magazine, the Military Hospital and other installations.

549. In the Tyersall—Tanglin area the Commander A.I.F. (Western Area) had organized an all-round perimeter defence into which most of the units of the A.I.F., including all surplus personnel of administrative units, had been drawn. There was only minor activity on this front during the day.

550. On the Northern Area front the 53 Brigade Group fell back under pressure during the day along the Thomson road, and by the evening had taken up the position allotted to it north of Braddell road and east of Thomson road. Here it reverted to the command of the 18 British Division which now had its three brigades in line, 53rd on the right, 55th in the centre and 54th on the left. The Division was now on a five mile front and there had been much mixing of units as a result of the piecemeal way in which they had necessarily been withdrawn from the beach defences.

On the right of the 18 British Division was the 11 Indian Division holding a position astride the Serangoon road south of Paya Lebar and with its right in touch with the Southern Area eastern defences which included the Kallang aerodrome where some pre-war defences had been constructed.

551. Southern Area still held the beach defences in the Singapore Town area, and also Pulau Brani and Pulau Bukum, Blakang Mati, Tekong and the Pengerang Area. I gave orders for the infantry battalion on Tekong Island, which had not been engaged, to be withdrawn during the night 13th-14th February for employment on Singapore Island.

552. On the morning of the 13th February the Rear-Admiral Malaya decided to sail all the remaining ships and sea-going craft to Java during the night 13th-14th February and to leave Singapore himself. There was accommodation on these ships and small craft for about 3,000 persons in all, in addition to the crews. It was the last opportunity that could be foreseen for any organized parties to leave Singapore. At a meeting held by the Rear-Admiral the vacancies were divided between the Services and the Civil Government. One thousand eight hundred vacancies were allotted to the Army.

As a result of the above decision the move of the battalion from Tekong Island to Singapore referred to above had to be cancelled.

553. At 1400 hours I held a conference at Fort Canning. The following were present:—

The Commanders Northern and Southern Areas, A.I.F., 11 Indian Division and 18 British Division, and Anti-Aircraft Defences.

The Brigadier General Staff Headquarters Malaya Command.

The Brigadier i/c Administration Headquarters Malaya Command.

At this conference the future conduct of the operations was discussed. I indicated that I hoped to organize a counter-attack shortly to relieve the pressure on the defences. All formation commanders were agreed that, owing to the exhaustion of the troops, a counter-attack would have no chance of success at that time. After hearing the views put forward by subordinate commanders I gave orders for the defence of Singapore to be continued.

554. The conference then discussed the allotment of Army vacancies for evacuation the following night. I decided that:—

(a) All female members of the Military Nursing Service should be sent. This decision was taken as a result of a report from G.H.Q. South-West Pacific on the treatment of nurses by the Japanese after the capitulation of Hong Kong.

(b) Trained staff officers and technicians no longer required at Singapore could be sent at the discretion of formation commanders. The decision as regards trained staff officers was made in accordance with instructions received from G.H.Q. South West Pacific that any surplus were to be evacuated as they were badly needed both in Java and in India. Technicians were evacuated to avoid them falling into the hands of the Japanese who, there was reason to suppose, would have endeavoured to extract information from them.

As time was short vacancies were immediately sub-allotted to formations with instructions that they need not necessarily be filled.

555. As a result of the views put forward at the conference I formed the opinion that the situation was undoubtedly grave but was not hopeless. Our defence was now very fully stretched and it was not possible to relieve the troops in the forward areas who were becoming exhausted as a result of the continual day and night operations. The interests of the civil population, which was estimated at that time to number nearly one million, could not in my view be entirely disregarded. As so many and vast Imperial interests were involved I felt it my duty to report the situation fully and candidly as I saw it to the Supreme Commander South-West Pacific. I believe that in such circumstances it is equally wrong to give an over-optimistic view as it is to give one which is unduly pessimistic. As some misleading statements have been made as to the purport of the telegram which I sent to the Supreme Commander South-West Pacific on that day I quote below the final paragraph:—

“Your instructions of 10th February (see Section LI) are being carried out but in above circumstances would you consider giving me wider discretionary powers.”

In his reply the Supreme Commander South-West Pacific made it clear that, while he fully appreciated our situation, continued action was essential and instructed me to continue to inflict the maximum damage on the enemy for as long as possible.