

567. Early in the morning of the 14th February a new and serious situation developed when the Municipal Water Engineer (Mr. Murnane) reported to the Director General of Civil Defence that he considered a complete failure of the water supply was imminent. In consequence of this report I held a conference at the Municipal Offices at about 1000 hrs., at which the following were present:—

The Director General of Civil Defence
The Chairman of the Municipality (Mr. Rayman)
The Municipal Water Engineer.

The Municipal Water Engineer reported that, owing to breaks in the water mains and pipes as a result of bombing and shelling, a heavy loss of water was going on; that, though both pumping stations were still working, well over half the water was being lost; that all civil labour had disappeared and that it was difficult to get repairs done. He estimated that the water supply would last for 48 hours at the outside and that it might only last for 24 hours. Various methods of dealing with the situation were considered, but the only practical one seemed to be to effect repairs quicker than the mains and pipes could be broken. I therefore ordered additional Royal Engineer assistance, but this could not be provided till the afternoon owing to the fact that all available Royal Engineer personnel were at that time fighting as combatant troops. I arranged another meeting for the evening.

568. At about 1030 hours I met the Governor at the Singapore Club. The Colonial Secretary (Mr. Fraser) was also present. The Governor stressed the dangers which would result if Singapore with its large population was suddenly deprived of its water supply. I informed the Governor that I intended to go on fighting as long as we could, as I did not consider that the water situation, though undoubtedly serious, had yet rendered the further defence of Singapore impossible. I arranged to visit the Governor again in the evening after a further review of the situation. It was agreed that the Governor would report the situation fully to the Colonial Office and that I would report it to the Supreme Commander South-West Pacific. This I did adding that I was watching the situation and fighting on but that I might find it necessary to take an immediate decision.

569. The Supreme Commander South-West Pacific in his reply said:—

“In all places where sufficiency of water exists for troops they must go on fighting.” and in a later telegram he said:—

“Your gallant stand is serving purpose and must be continued to limit of endurance.”

570. At about 1700 hours, after visiting formation headquarters of the 18 British and 11 Indian Divisions, I held another conference at the Municipal Offices. The same officials were present as at the morning conference. The Municipal Water Engineer reported that the position was very slightly better. I instructed the Director-General of Civil Defence to forward to my Headquarters by 0700 hours the following morning an accurate forecast of the water situation as it appeared at that time.

I subsequently reported the situation to the Governor at the Singapore Club.

571. It may not be out of place here to give some description of the conditions which existed in Singapore Town on the 14th February.

The Secretariat and other Government offices were operating on a skeleton basis only. The only newspaper being published was a Government controlled single sheet newspaper of which free issues were made. Practically all offices, business houses and shops were closed. The lower floor of many of the large buildings, including the Secretariat, the Municipal Offices, the Singapore Club and the Cathay building had been taken over as temporary military hospitals and were already full. The Asiatic population with few exceptions was apathetic. There were few people on the streets and public services were practically at a standstill. The Civil Hospitals were working to capacity. Those on the higher levels, including the General Hospital, were without water on the 14th February and special water-carrying parties had to be organized. This applied also to some of the military hospitals. The St. James Electric Power Plant, situated in the Keppel Harbour area, was still working but it was now directly threatened as the enemy were within one mile of it. The Peirce and MacRitchie water reservoirs were in enemy hands although water, whether by design or oversight, continued to flow to the pumping stations. The enemy were within a few hundred yards of the Woodleigh Pumping Station.

SECTION LVI.—EVENTS OF THE 15TH FEBRUARY, 1942.

572. During the night 14th-15th February enemy infantry infiltrated on all sectors of the 18 British Division front and also succeeded in getting a footing on the Mount Pleasant Ridge. The lack of an organized reserve made it difficult to deal with these pockets of penetration. Nevertheless, local counter-attacks were staged which regained some of the lost positions on the Mount Pleasant Ridge.

573. On the extreme left of our position the enemy renewed his attacks with vigour and some bitter fighting ensued on the front of the 1 Malaya Infantry Brigade. Heavy casualties were inflicted and suffered, the 2 Loyal Regt., which bore the brunt of the fighting, at this time totalling only about 130 fighting men. Eventually the line fell back to the east end of the Alexandra Depots area—Mount Washington—east end of the Keppel Golf Links.

574. The morning report on the water situation from the Director General of Civil Defence (see Section LV) showed a serious deterioration. The D.G.C.D. summed up the situation by saying that he anticipated that the water supply would not last more than another 24 hours. On receipt of this report I instructed him to:—

(a) attend a Commanders' conference which was scheduled to take place at 0930 hrs. that morning.

(b) In the meantime, confirm the situation with the officials of the Municipality.

575. At 0930 hrs. the Senior Commanders' Conference met at Fort Canning. The following were present:—

The Commanders Northern and Southern Areas, A.I.F. and Anti-Aircraft Defences.
The Brigadier Royal Artillery.