

across the river was completely held up for three hours by a 3-ton lorry which got off the roadway. Movement did not therefore start again till 06.30 hours.

At 08.30 hours, as the 7/10 Baluch was marching through the railway cutting immediately east of the bridge, the enemy put in a heavy attack from the north-east of the bridgehead. One and a half companies of the 3 Burma Rifles holding that sector were forced back and the attack went through almost to the end of the bridge itself. An Advance Dressing Station north of the bridge was overcome. The A.D.M.S., D.A.D.M.S. and all medical personnel were taken prisoner. Two companies of the 4/12 F.F.R. at once counter attacked and re-took the original position on the north and north-east of the perimeter. The Battalion was supported by the 7/10 Baluch. The bridgehead was again lost and re-taken later. D Company 2 D.W.R. then on the west bank was ordered across the River and took up a position on the south-east of the bridgehead perimeter. The ferries immediately above the bridge were destroyed in view of the situation and there was no communication with the remaining battalions or brigades which were still a considerable distance on the far side of the river.

At about 14.00 hours the bridgehead was shelled. About this time two platoons of 1/3 G.R. reached the bridgehead. It transpired later that the 2/5 R.G.R. and 1/3 G.R. had staged an attack on the enemy between them and the bridgehead. These platoons, whilst taking part in the attack, had lost direction in the dense jungle. They were subsequently employed in the defence of the bridgehead. During the remainder of 22nd and during the night heavy pressure continued on the bridgehead. The original garrison had had considerable casualties and 1/4 G.R. less one company were brought up to reinforce it. In spite of heavy fire stragglers started to come in via the river bank from the south—all telling the same story of troops ambushed, cut up and scattered. It seemed as if no unit of the Division remained intact, and as the enemy pressure gradually increased the Commander 48 Brigade after consulting the Divisional Commander by telephone and obtaining his consent, decided to blow the bridge before daylight on the 23rd.

At 05.30 hours on the morning of the 23rd, after very heavy fighting, the bridge was blown.

The destruction of the bridge left the other two Brigades and two battalions of 48 Brigade on the far side of the River in a very precarious position and it is necessary now to return to the story of their action on 22nd.

At about 08.45 hours on 22nd heavy fire was opened on 3/7 G.R., the leading battalion of 46 Brigade, an immediate counter attack failed to dislodge the enemy and further attacks developed on both flanks. 5/17 Dogras and one company 2 D.W.R. endeavoured to deal with these attacks but while doing so a further attack was made on the rearguard—2 D.W.R. Severe casualties were sustained on both sides.

101. *Bridgehead recaptured.* About 10.00 hours Brigadier Ekin, Commander 46 Brigade, organised a sweeping movement through the jungle which enabled the troops on the road to move forward and join 16 Brigade, three miles further on. This Brigade was also by this

time heavily attacked. This action continued till dark on 22nd and the column under the Brigadier 46 Brigade encountered about 20.00 hours a large enemy force moving up the railway line on Mokpalin. By now the forces involved were much split up and various elements eventually made their way through the jungle and crossed the river higher up. Meanwhile Brigadier Jones, 16 Indian Infantry Brigade had been fighting hard and a number of gallant counter attacks had been carried out by battalions of that Brigade and the Gurkha battalions of 48 Brigade which were cut off from the bridge. By 09.00 hours on the morning of 23rd he had cleared the enemy from the bridgehead and organised its defence with his own Brigade, two battalions of 48 Brigade and portions of all three battalions of 46 Brigade. He also had the Divisional Artillery and most of the M.T. with him. By this time, however, the bridge had been blown and there were no boats.

Very determined attacks supported by artillery and air bombing were still being made by the enemy from the south and east and there was no hope of organised withdrawal. Brigadier Ekin now succeeded in joining 16 Indian Infantry Brigade and after discussion it was decided that the only course possible was to start withdrawal by every means possible before disorganisation became complete.

Great credit is due to those officers and men who held their positions to the last to cover the withdrawal of the others and the evacuation, so far as it was possible, of the wounded. Many men swam the River, a most formidable undertaking involving nearly an hour in the water. A large number who attempted it were unfortunately drowned in the attempt. Others crossed, under fire all the time, on improvised rafts on which they carried such of the wounded as they could collect. Others with the aid of ropes collected in Mokpalin crossed the gap between the remains of the bridge, also under fire. A number of others who could not swim, forced their way through the jungle and crossed some miles higher up, where the River is narrower, in boats or rafts. Quite a number did not get back to our lines for many days, or in a few cases weeks, afterwards.

It has only been possible to obtain the names of a few of those who performed outstanding acts of gallantry on this day. Many swam the River again and again under fire bringing over parties of wounded and the whole episode, disastrous as it was, is a magnificent example of heroism on the part of all ranks of the forces engaged. The fact that a large proportion of men eventually rejoined their units shows that at no time was there any disposition to surrender to the enemy. Brigadier Ekin swam the River about 15.00 hours and Brigadier Jones about an hour later. Although many of the troops were able to make good their escape few were able to bring back their arms and practically all transport and equipment had to be abandoned. Many of the transport mules which had been turned loose swam the River on their own and joined up with other units which had mules.

102. *Condition of Troops.* From this date onwards none of the Infantry Brigades concerned could be regarded as more than remnants, ready to defend themselves doggedly but otherwise unfit for any of the normal operations of