

could always relieve their tired troops or ease the pace whenever they found it necessary. Without reserves we were able to do neither. Had we had at this time the reserve division, which had been asked for, in 3 Indian Corps area, the story might have been very different.

298. *Air Operations.*—During this period the enemy gave continuous air support to his troops in the forward areas and also to his craft moving down the West Coast. He also made a series of attacks on the Kluang aerodrome in Central Johore and of night attacks against objectives in the Singapore area. Our own air strength during this period fell to a very low level. Our forward troops were entirely without air support. A large proportion of the available aircraft were employed on the defence of Singapore, on convoy protection duties and on seaward reconnaissances.

SECTION XXXIV.—THE WITHDRAWAL TO NORTH JOHORE, 9TH-14TH JANUARY, 1942.

299. *Orders for the Withdrawal and Defence of Johore*—On the 9th January, in accordance with instructions received from the Supreme Commander, South West Pacific, I issued outline orders for the withdrawal to Johore, and the defence of that State. The main points of these orders were as under:—

(a) Commander A.I.F. to concentrate one Brigade Group, A.I.F., in the Segamat area as soon as possible.

(b) 45 Indian Brigade Group to come under command of A.I.F. Malaya immediately.

(c) 3 Indian Corps to withdraw from present positions into Johore covered by maximum possible demolitions. Withdrawal to be carried out by rail and by M.T. as ordered by Corps Commander.

(d) Withdrawal to be covered by rear-guards on the demolitions.

(e) On entering Johore 9 Indian Division to come under command of A.I.F.

(f) 3 Indian Corps, less 9 Indian Division, to take over operational responsibility for South Johore up to and inclusive of the line Endau—G. Beremban—Kluang—Batu Pahat on a date to be fixed later.

A copy of Malaya Command Operation Instruction No. 33 is attached as Appendix "E" to this Despatch.

300. To the best of my belief these orders were in accordance with the instructions received from the Supreme Commander, South-West Pacific. He has since stated that he directed that the Australian Brigade Group in the Mersing area should be moved as soon as possible to join the remainder of the A.I.F. I have no record or recollection of such instructions, though it was my intention, if opportunity offered at a later date, to relieve this brigade group by a newly arrived formation.

The Supreme Commander, South-West Pacific has also stated that he directed that the 9 Indian Division should be employed in the southern portion (i.e. Muar Sector) of the position to be occupied. I have equally no record or recollection of this instruction.

301. At 1100 hours, 10th January, I held a conference at Segamat. It was attended by the Commanders 3 Indian Corps and A.I.F. with

their staff officers and staff officers of Headquarters, Malaya Command. At this conference the orders already issued on the 9th January were supplemented as under:—

(a) The troops in Johore would be re-organised into two forces, the one under Maj.-Gen. Gordon Bennett to be known as Westforce, and the other under Lt.-Gen. Sir Lewis Heath to be known as 3 Indian Corps. This did not include troops under command Singapore Fortress or directly under Headquarters, Malaya Command.

(b) The composition of Westforce to be as under:—

9 Indian Division.

A.I.F. less 22 Australian Brigade Group.

45 Indian Brigade Group.

2 Battalion The Loyal Regt. less one company (from Singapore Fortress).

Artillery, Engineer and Administrative units not included in formations.

The Indian Pioneer Battalion.

The task of Westforce was to hold the North-West portion of Johore, the main line of resistance to be on the general line Batu Anam—Muar. There was to be no withdrawal behind the line Segamat—Muar without my permission.

(c) The composition of 3 Indian Corps to be as under:—

11 Indian Division.

22 Australian Brigade Group with attached troops, which included 2/17 Dogra Battalion from Singapore Fortress, to be known as Eastforce (Brigadier Taylor).

3 Corps Troops, which included Artillery, Engineer and Administrative units.

The task of 3 Indian Corps was the defence of Johore south of and inclusive of the line Endau—G. Beremban—Kluang—Batu Pahat except the Pengerang area, for which Singapore Fortress was responsible.

(d) The 11 Indian Division, less 12 Indian Infantry Brigade, to be accommodated in areas where it could be rested and re-organised. The 12 Indian Infantry Brigade to be withdrawn direct to Singapore.

302. After the conference we reconnoitred in detail the positions to be occupied. I approved a plan for a major ambush on the road west of Gemas.

303. On the morning of 12th January, after a visit to troops of 9 and 11 Indian Divisions, I held a co-ordinating conference at which the Commanders A.I.F. and 9 Indian Division were present. At this conference the tactics to be adopted were discussed and I approved the following plan:—

(a) *Segamat area*—The crossings over the Rivers Muar and Segamat, which were vital to the defence, to be held strongly against all forms of ground and air attacks.

West of River Muar localities to be held as focal points with striking forces available on the flanks to attack the enemy when he tried to move round them.

An ambush force to be located west of Gemas.

(b) *Coastal area.*—On the west coast flank the 45 Indian Brigade Group to cover the main coast road at Muar south of the river with detachments and patrols watching the river and exits south from it over the front Kg. Lenga to Muar.