

(ii) Immediate counter-attacks should be exploited. These should, whenever possible, be planned beforehand and, owing to the necessity for speed, should usually be carried out by small bodies of a company on the initiative of local commanders.

(iii) It was suggested that the defences should consist of a holding group dug in astride the main communications, with striking forces forward on the flanks which should attack as soon as the enemy made contact with the holding groups.

(iv) The spreading of rumours must be suppressed.

(v) The enemy could not be defeated by sitting in prepared positions and letting him walk round us. We must play him at his own game and attack on every occasion. The efficiency, cunning and alertness of the individual were of primary importance.

Arrangements were made for the evacuation of as much as possible of the reserve stores from the Ipoh area. There was not, however, sufficient M.T. available to move the petrol, which was stored in 60-gallon drums. Arrangements were made for these to be destroyed by puncturing the drums.

I returned to Singapore on the morning of the 20th December.

206. The importance of the lateral road Jerantut-Kuala Lipis-Raub-Kuala Kubu, which was the main communication between East and West Malaya, now became apparent. If our forces on the west coast were driven back beyond Kuala Kubu, the enemy would be able to cut the only road communication of our forces on the east coast.

I discussed this situation with the C.-in-C. Far East and the A.O.C. It was agreed as a general policy that we should withdraw the Kuantan garrison at a time to be decided later in accordance with the development of the situation.

I also thought it desirable to take preliminary steps for the defence of North Johore and of Singapore Island itself against attack from the North.

On the 23rd December I caused to be issued Malaya Command Order No. 28, an extract from which is attached to this Despatch as Appendix "C".

207. The Commander A.I.F. delegated responsibility for the defence of North Johore to the 27 Australian Brigade Group in A.I.F. Malaya Operation Instruction No. 11 dated 24th December 1941 from which the following is an extract:—

"The 27 Brigade Group is made responsible for holding delaying positions towards the Johore-Malacca boundary. Requisition for local labour is to be submitted to the C.R.E."

"The Bde. Gp. is to be disposed as under:—

(i) Gemas-Segamat, one Bn. Gp. plus one Coy.

(ii) Muar, one Bn. (less two Coys.) with attached troops.

(iii) Reserve (in Kluang-Ayer-Hitam area) one Bn. Gp."

SECTION XXIV.—WEST COAST OPERATIONS, 18TH-30TH DECEMBER, 1941.

208 *The Grik Road*.—On the 19th December our troops, who had now been reinforced,

moved forward to recapture Sumpitan, led by the Independent Company. An encounter battle took place in the village, where our troops fought gallantly and were only withdrawn in face of a strong counter-attack. That night they fell back to Lenggong. On the 20th the Argylls were heavily engaged all day and had to drive off by counter-attack an enemy force which had moved down the river on rafts and reached Kota Tampan in their rear. On the 21st the Argylls held the Kota Tampan area against renewed enemy attacks, while the 5/2 Punjab Regt. occupied positions west of Chenderoh Lake. Some enemy rafts were sunk on the lake. At about 1800 hrs. the Argylls disengaged and withdrew through the 5/2 Punjab Regt. and the enemy following up were stopped at the Causeway.

The river approach through the Chenderoh Lake now gave the Japanese the opportunity of by-passing Kuala Kangsar and of threatening the main road and railway bridges over the River Perak and the communications east of them. To meet this threat the 4/19 Hyderabad Regt., which had now arrived from Kelantan, was concentrated east of the River Perak.

The enemy were now only some 12 miles from Lawin, where the Grik road joins the trunk road, and the situation demanded the speedy withdrawal of the 28 Brigade Group before it could be cut off in its positions north of Taiping.

209. *The Krian River Front*.—On the 19th and 20th December there was some activity on the right of the Krian River position and, to avoid being outflanked on the right, the 28 Brigade Group fell back to Ulu Sapetang and Bagan Serai. The bridges over the River Krian were demolished.

210. *The Tactical Situation*.—On the evening of 21st December all troops west of the River Perak, including those on the Grik road, were placed directly under the Commander 11 Indian Division. He decided that, in view of the situation on the Grik road, an immediate withdrawal behind the River Perak was necessary. He realised the importance of covering the Blanja Pontoon Bridge over the River Perak which gave direct access to the Ipoh area and the communications south of it.

The withdrawal of the 28 Brigade Group commenced at 2000 hrs. 21st December, the units being disposed as far as possible to meet all possible threats.

On the 22nd December there was further fighting on the Grik Road and that night the 12 Brigade Group withdrew across the Perak River covered by troops of the 28 Brigade Group. By the morning of the 23rd December all troops, except for a bridgehead at Blanja, were east of the river. The Blanja bridgehead was withdrawn on the night 23rd-24th December.

A gap was successfully blown in the Iskander Bridge, the fine main road bridge over the River Perak. A portion of the pontoon bridge at Blanja was swung to the eastern shore and the pontoons sunk.

On withdrawal the 12 Brigade Group bivouacked in the Salak North area and the 28 Brigade Group concentrated in the Siputeh area with a detachment watching the River Perak at Blanja.