

During the night 31st December/1st January the rearguard was withdrawn across the river and the ferry destroyed. At that time, however, the River Kuantan was fordable in its upper reaches, a most unusual occurrence at that time of year. This seriously weakened the defence.

273. In the meantime the Commander Kuantan Force had been ordered to hold the aerodrome till the 5th January (see Section XXXI) and this had been later extended to the 10th January. On the 2nd January, however, events on the west coast and the serious threat to our communications there forced the Commander 3 Indian Corps to expedite the programme and early on the morning of the 3rd January the Commander Kuantan Force received orders to withdraw his force to Jerantut forthwith. During the day the enemy closed in on the aerodrome and at about 1745 hours, as the withdrawal was taking place, a strong attack developed and very heavy fighting took place. It was during this action that Lt.-Col. Cummings, commanding the 2/12 Frontier Force Regt., won the Victoria Cross. During the withdrawal the rearguard was twice ambushed on the main road by a Japanese force, which had passed by bush tracks west of the aerodrome, and suffered heavy casualties.

274. The withdrawal was continued on the following days, the rearguard crossing the ferry at Jerantut on the night 6th/7th January. The Kuantan Force then moved to the area Raub-Tras-Tranum. One Infantry battalion (5/11 Sikhs) was still nearly at full strength. The strength of the other two battalions combined was rather less than one battalion. The losses in the supporting arms and administrative units had been comparatively small.

275. The Kuantan Force, like many other forces in Malaya, had had a difficult task to perform, because it had been greatly influenced by events elsewhere. It can be claimed, however, that by denying the aerodrome to the enemy for a month it had greatly decreased the scale of air attack which the enemy was able to develop against the Singapore area. That this was so was proved by the rapid increase in the scale of that attack during the month of January. It has also been ascertained from Japanese sources that heavy casualties were inflicted on them during these operations—especially by our artillery when the enemy concentrated his troops in the Kuantan township. There is little doubt that these casualties were considerably in excess of those suffered by our own troops.

SECTION XXXIII.—WEST COAST OPERATIONS, 31ST DECEMBER, 1941—8TH JANUARY, 1942.

276. *The Battle of Kampar.*—The Kampar position was the strongest of any occupied in Malaya. The main position was semi-circular covering the township of Kampar on a frontage of about four miles. The eastern flank rested against a limestone mountain 4,000 feet high with its steep sides and summit covered with thick jungle. Close under its western slopes ran the main road. To the North, West and South lay an extensive, open, tin-mining area, broken only to the south-west by a large rubber plantation. Fields of fire for small arms, except in the rubber plantation, extended up to 1,200 yards and more. There was excellent

artillery observation from forward O.P.s on the mountain slopes. The newly organized 6/15 Indian Brigade Group was made responsible for the main position.

On the eastern flank the mountain was circled by a loop road which, leaving the trunk road at Kuala Dipang, passed through Sahum and Chenderiang and rejoined the trunk road a little north of Tapah. On this road, covering Sahum, a position subsidiary to, but independent of, the Kampar position was occupied by the 28 Indian Brigade Group. The 12 Indian Brigade Group was in reserve in the Bidor area.

277. On the 31st December the Japanese increased the pressure which had commenced the previous day on the 28 Brigade Group but made no headway. The Gurkhas, who were fighting in country suited to their well-known qualities, proved themselves superior to the Japanese and, ably supported by the 155 Field Regiment, inflicted heavy losses on the enemy.

278. At 0700 hrs. on the 1st January the enemy started a determined attack on the Kampar position and heavy fighting continued throughout the day, particularly on the right flank where the British battalion was located. The garrisons of the defended localities held on grimly and localities lost were immediately recaptured by counter-attack. At the end of the day all positions were intact.

279. On the following day the enemy renewed his attacks east of the main road where fierce fighting took place. The British battalion under the inspiring leadership of their Commanding Officer (Lt.-Col. Morrison) fought desperately. Late in the afternoon the enemy were driven out of a vital position, which they had captured, by the Sikh Company of the 1/8 Punjab Regt. magnificently led by the Company Commander (Capt. Graham) and the situation was again restored.

280. The influence of events elsewhere, however, again predominated though it is doubtful whether in any case the position could have been held much longer and at 2100 hrs., under orders from the divisional commander, the 6/15 Brigade Group started to withdraw. The withdrawal was closely followed up but, covered by the 28 Brigade Group, the 6/15th eventually disengaged and moved to the Tapah Bidor area.

281. The Battle of Kampar, where our troops fought extremely well, showed that trained British troops are at least the equal of the best Japanese troops. The infantry were splendidly supported by the artillery, the 88 Field Regt. on the Kampar front doing some particularly good work.

It is worth recording that during their stay at Kampar the British battalion lost over 100 officers and men evacuated with malaria—the result no doubt of operations further north.

282. *West Coast Operations.*—As recorded in Section XXIV the 1 Independent Company had been sent to the Telok Anson area to watch the seaward approaches. Here it was joined by a squadron of the 3 Indian Cavalry. Supporting units were moved to the Changkat Jong area on the Telok-Anson/Bidor road, where work on defensive positions was begun.