

(f) An Outer and Inner Bridgehead to be organized for the ground defence of the Causeway. Three battalions with supporting arms under Brigadier Taylor were allotted for the defence of the Outer Bridgehead and one battalion (2 Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders) under Lt.-Col. Stewart for the defence of the Inner Bridgehead.

393. *Eastforce*.—The withdrawal of Eastforce was carried out according to plan without enemy interference. The final withdrawal took place in M.T. from Kota Tinggi.

394. *11 Indian Division*.—Of the Batu Pahat Force, one contingent moved east of the road and reached Benut on the night 27th-28th January. The remainder, comprising about 2,000 officers and men, reached the sea at the mouth of the River Ponggor. From here they were evacuated during four successive nights by the Royal Navy and taken to Singapore. The operation was a most difficult one and reflected the greatest credit on all ranks of the Royal Navy engaged in it.

Benut was occupied by the enemy on the morning of the 28th January but our successful demolitions on this road slowed up his advance. In the evening there was contact north of Pontian Besar. On the 29th there were patrol encounters in the Gunong Pulai Reservoir area where a strong position had been prepared. By midnight 30th-31st January the head of the main 11 Indian Division column was following Eastforce across the Causeway, leaving only Westforce to be withdrawn through the bridgehead.

395. *Westforce*.—On the main road and railway front the enemy followed up our withdrawal energetically and much fighting took place. The withdrawal of the two columns required most careful co-ordination. There was little rest for the troops who were constantly fighting by day and moving back by night. The enemy aircraft were particularly active on this front reconnoitring, bombing and machine-gunning. Our own troops received very little assistance from the air.

Astride the main road a number of local engagements were fought by the 27 Australian Brigade Group with 2 Gordons under command and many casualties were inflicted on the enemy by local counter-attacks.

On the railway front disaster overtook the 9 Indian Division on the 28th January. A wide gap developed in the Layang Layang area between the 22 Indian Infantry Brigade, which was forward, and the 8 Indian Infantry Brigade which was supporting it. Into this gap enemy troops penetrated having moved round the eastern flank by estate roads. The Divisional Commander (Major-General Barstow), while moving up the railway to visit the forward brigade, was ambushed by the enemy and there is little doubt that he was killed. He was a gallant and gifted officer and his loss was a severe blow. The 22 Brigade, in an endeavour to rejoin the division, moved through the jungle west of the railway. Some parties of the enemy were met and dispersed, the 5/11 Sikhs again distinguishing themselves, but the dense jungle proved too much for the troops who were hampered by having to carry a number of wounded. In spite of a continuous march of three days and nights they were unable to catch up and efforts to locate them by

ground and air patrols failed. The final withdrawal was postponed as long as possible in an effort to recover this brigade but without success, and arrangements were made to ferry them across the Straits from a point east of Johore Bahru. Eventually only about 100 were saved in this way. The remainder were captured in the neighbourhood of Johore Bahru on the 1st February.

The final withdrawal on the night 30th-31st January was carried out without incident and with little interference from the enemy's Air Force. At 0815 hrs. 31st January all troops had been withdrawn and a gap of 70 feet was blown in the Causeway.

396. The operation of withdrawing the whole force through the bottle-neck of Johore Bahru and over the Causeway with the enemy holding complete control in the air had been an anxious one. In spite of the severe losses which we had suffered on the main-land, the successful accomplishment of this operation was a matter for much satisfaction.

SECTION XL.—AIR OPERATIONS, 14TH-31ST JANUARY, 1942

397. During this period the Japanese Air Striking Force concentrated their attacks chiefly on the aerodromes on Singapore Island. Some attacks also were made on the Naval Base and the Docks area and some bombs fell in the Town area. On several days the civilian casualties ran into several hundreds. The attacks were usually carried out in daylight by formations of 27 Bomber aircraft escorted by fighters. The maximum number of aircraft which attacked the Singapore area in any one day was 127. Our Anti-Aircraft Defence system had naturally been weakened by the loss of the outer part of the area covered by the warning system. Nevertheless, with the aid of the radar sets, it was still found possible in most cases to obtain some warning of attack though rarely enough for our fighters to carry out effective interception. There was much air fighting, especially on the 22nd January when the losses on each side were estimated to be about a dozen.

398. There was unfortunately no improvement as regards the labour conditions on the aerodromes. The civilian workers continued to disappear whenever an air attack took place and usually remained absent for some days. In consequence, one or more of the aerodromes on Singapore Island were almost invariably out of use.

399. In the forward areas, the enemy aircraft co-operated effectively with their ground forces by reconnaissances, by attacks on our troops and transport, and by dropping supplies on isolated parties. On our side, as before, we were able to give our forward troops very little air support, but we were now able to provide increased protection against low-flying attacks with our ground anti-aircraft defences.

400. During this period the Singapore Air Defence Organization was severely tested. On the whole the organization for the control of the Active Air Defence, which had been worked out in the latter part of 1941, worked very satisfactorily. The fire control of the Anti-Aircraft Heavy Artillery also worked smoothly, but the height of not less than 20,000 feet at which the enemy air formations invariably flew