

There was also a failure to make proper use of the beach searchlights for reasons which it has not been possible to ascertain. This disadvantage was, however, countered to some extent by the illumination provided by burning ammunition barges.

493. The strongest enemy attack was directed from the west up the banks of the River Murai with Ama Keng Village, the key point lying between the headwaters of the River Kranji and the River Berih, as its objective. In this area a wedge was driven between the 2/18 and 2/19 Battalions A.I.F.

494. At about midnight the commanders of the three battalions, in accordance with their instructions as outlined above, ordered the forward troops to withdraw into battalion perimeters. The 2/20 Battalion on the right concentrated in a position about the Namazie Estate, but the 2/18 Battalion was too closely engaged with the enemy and only a small proportion of them reached their perimeter at Ama Keng Village. A similar fate befell the 2/19 Battalion on the left. At about 0900 hrs. the commander of the 2/20 Battalion ordered a withdrawal to the Ama Keng Village area where he hoped to join up with the 2/18 Battalion, but found it occupied by the enemy.

495. The plan for the forward troops to fall back to battalion perimeter positions was contrary to the policy laid down by Headquarters Malaya Command and, in my opinion, involved an operation which was too difficult in the middle of a night battle which was being fought fiercely at close quarters. As a result of it there was much confusion and disorganization, groups of men becoming detached and lost in the close country. Some were collected and taken back to the Base Depot where they were refitted and reorganized. Others made their way to Singapore Town. The 22 Australian Infantry Brigade, however, did not cease to exist—on the contrary it continued to fight well later on as will be seen—and it would be very wrong to judge the performance of the A.I.F. by these stragglers. The action of these men must be judged in relation to the existing conditions. They were not long-service soldiers and discipline was not deep-rooted. They had volunteered for service and had been sent to Malaya to defend the Naval Base. The Naval Base was no longer of any use, but Australia, their homeland, was being threatened. Many of them belonged to units which, after heavy casualties on the mainland, had been reorganized but had had no time to regain their full fighting efficiency. They had fought well throughout a long night against heavy odds and were exhausted. This is the true picture and should be judged on its merits. Active and effective measures were quickly taken by Headquarters Malaya Command and by Headquarters A.I.F. to deal with the situation by means of reinforced stragglers' posts and officers' patrols in the Town area.

496. Shortly after midnight the Commander Western Area ordered the 2/29 Battalion A.I.F. from Area reserve to move up to the Tengah area and come under the orders of the Commander 22 Australian Infantry Brigade with a view to a counter-attack. It reached Tengah about 0600 hrs., and preparations for a counter-attack to recapture Ama Keng Village were put in hand. The enemy, however, who

had by now been strongly reinforced, anticipated this move by continuing his offensive tactics and by 0800 hrs. he was attacking the Tengah aerodrome.

497. At 0700 hrs. the Pasir Laba 6 in. Coast Defence Battery was attacked by dive-bombers and both guns put out of action, many of the crew being killed and wounded.

498. At 0830 hrs. 9th February, it having by then become apparent that no attack was likely to develop against the Northern area, I ordered the Command Reserve (12 Indian Infantry Brigade) to move at once to the Bukit Panjang—Keat Hong Village area where it would come under command Western Area. This so-called brigade now consisted only of the 2 Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, 350 strong, of which 150 were Royal Marines, and one Indian Battalion 400 strong. On arrival about mid-day it took up a defensive position astride the road just west of Keat Hong Village in the right sector of the Kranji—Jurong Line.

499. At 1100 hrs., with a view to forming a new Command Reserve, I ordered the Commander, 3 Indian Corps to put his reserve, the 6/15 Indian Infantry Brigade, at one hour's notice and not to use it without reference to me.

500. In the middle of the day there was a lull in the fighting which had been focused chiefly round the Tengah aerodrome. Early in the afternoon I discussed the situation with the Commander Western Area at his headquarters near Bukit Timah Village. A decision had to be taken with regard to the 44 Brigade Group which was still holding its positions on the southwest coast of Singapore Island and whose only line of communication along the Jurong road was now being threatened. The possibility of using this brigade to attack the right flank of the enemy's penetration was considered but dismissed as being impracticable owing to the dispersion of the brigade in its defensive positions. The following decisions were then taken:—

(a) The 27 Australian Brigade Group should continue to hold the Causeway and maintain its position east of the River Kranji.

(b) That we should now concentrate on holding the Kranji—Jurong Switch Line.

(c) That to assist in holding this line the 44 Brigade Group should be withdrawn at once from its coast defence positions and take up a defensive position on the left of the line astride the Jurong road.

(d) That the 6/15 Brigade from the Northern Area should be moved as soon as possible to a rendezvous on the Bukit Timah road with its head at the Racecourse where it would come under the orders of the Commander Western Area.

501. The enemy's thrust now exercised a very serious threat to our depots and dumps along the Bukit Timah road, especially to the large Kranji ammunition magazine and to the vital food and petrol dumps east of Bukit Timah Village and in the Racecourse area. I impressed upon the Commander Western Area the great importance of covering the area in which these depots and dumps were located.

502. It now became necessary to formulate a plan for the eventuality that the enemy's advance down the Bukit Timah road might force us to withdraw our troops from the other