

organised into seven company groups. The road, which passed through miles of swampy country, had been blocked in many places. Each block had to be cleared in turn and some of the fiercest and most terrific fighting of the whole campaign took place on this day, our troops, harassed on all sides, repeatedly charging with the bayonet, and the Japanese Guards fighting with their traditional fanaticism. It was not till 0600 hrs., 21st January, that the head of the column reached the bridge at Parit Sulong to find it held by the enemy.

361. Early in the withdrawal the Commander 45 Indian Brigade (Brigadier Duncan) was killed while leading a bayonet charge. He had set a magnificent example of courage and fortitude and can in no way be held responsible for the disaster which overtook his untrained brigade. The command of the force devolved upon Lt.-Col. Anderson A.I.F., who for his fine leadership was awarded the Victoria Cross.

362. At 0833 hrs. 21st January I ordered the Commander Westforce to assume command of all troops on the Yong Peng—Muar road at a time to be arranged direct with the Commander 11 Indian Division. The reasons for this change in command were as under:—

(a) The movements of the Segamat and Muar Forces now required very careful co-ordination.

(b) The shortening of communications now made it possible for the Commander Westforce to control both forces.

(c) The only possibility of communication with the Muar Force was by W/T from Headquarters Westforce.

363. At 1230 hrs. 21st January I held another conference at Yong Peng. The decisions reached at this conference, which concerned chiefly the organization for future operations, will be recorded later. The Commander Westforce reported, however, that he was organizing a counter-attack with 2 Loyals, withdrawn from the Segamat front, to recapture the Bukit Payong feature with the object subsequently of re-opening communications to the Muar Force. To this project I gave my approval. That it was not subsequently carried out was due partly to delay in the provision of transport for the move forward of the 2 Loyals and partly to the difficulty of providing artillery support. Having studied the problem carefully I am now of the opinion that the chances of a single battalion being able to advance 7 miles through that type of country and relieve the Muar Force in the time available were remote. The remaining infantry in the Yong Peng force were by that time too exhausted to be able to take a useful part in the operation.

364. Throughout the 21st January desperate efforts were made by the Muar Force to force the river crossing at Parit Sulong. But the bridge was strongly held and the attacks were repulsed. In the rear a new threat appeared in the shape of heavy tanks, several of which were destroyed by anti-tank guns and tank-hunting parties. By nightfall, however, the position held had become very contracted. The following morning food and medical supplies were dropped by three aircraft from Singapore, but at 0900 hrs. the Commander Muar Force reluctantly gave the order for all guns, vehicles and heavy weapons to be destroyed, for the

wounded to be left behind in charge of volunteers and for all who could walk to make their way through the jungle to Yong Peng.

Eventually some 550 Australian troops and some 400 Indian troops rejoined. I regret to have to record that the wounded who were left behind were, almost without exception, subsequently massacred by the Japanese.

365. The 45 Indian Infantry Brigade ceased to exist. Those killed included the Brigade Commander, every battalion commander and second-in-command and two of the three adjutants. Only one or two of the surviving British officers had more than a few months' service. This brigade had never been fit for employment in a theatre of war. It was not that there was anything wrong with the raw material but simply that it was raw. It was the price of our unpreparedness for war and over-rapid expansion.

366. Throughout the Battle of Muar the Navy and Air Force did their utmost to help us, the former by sending gunboats nightly to bombard the Muar area and the latter by mobilizing all possible resources, however antiquated, to attack the enemy.

367. The Battle of Muar, which lasted six days, was one of the most sanguinary of the Malayan campaign. Our small untried force, in spite of its handicaps, had held at bay a division of the Japanese Imperial Guards and by doing so had saved the Segamat Force which would otherwise inevitably have been lost.

368. *The Withdrawal from Segamat.*—On the afternoon of the 18th January the enemy attacked with tanks near the main road north of Batu Anam but were repulsed. During the night, in accordance with the decision previously recorded, the 9 Indian Division fell back behind the line of the River Muar and the 27 Australian Brigade Group behind the River Segamat.

During the night 19th/20th January the 9 Indian Division was withdrawn south of the River Segamat to the Tenang area. All the big bridges over the Rivers Muar and Segamat were destroyed.

During the night 20th/21st January the 27 Australian Brigade Group was withdrawn by M.T. from the line of the River Segamat and fell back direct to Yong Peng, where it took up positions covering the vital road junction. The 9 Indian Division moved one brigade group to the Labis area and one to Kampong Bahru. On the afternoon of the 21st January the forward troops of the 22 Indian Brigade successfully ambushed the leading Japanese troops moving down the main road. Our troops, having got used to this novel form of warfare, were now displaying more cunning.

During the night 21st/22nd January the 22 Indian Brigade Group less one battalion (R. Garhwal Rifles) moved by M.T. to the Kluang area, the R. Garhwal Rifles marching down the railway to the Paloh area. The 8 Brigade Group was in position astride the main road some 12 miles south of Labis where the enemy made contact early on the 22nd January. Fighting continued on this front throughout the day. During the following night the 8 Brigade Group fell back behind the River Gerchang some 4 miles north of Yong Peng, a strong position where further fighting took place on the 23rd. This day was also remarkable for intense enemy air activity,