

Appendix 13: Report by Lt. E.J. Peel-Yates, on the movement of 18 Platoon on the events following the withdrawal from Senggarang

At about 17:30 hours on 26 January '42, having unsuccessfully endeavoured to rush the roadblock some 500 yards south of the bridge in the village of Senggarang following a 10 minute bombardment of the Japanese ambush position by 25 pounders at point-blank range, I, and the other five occupants of the two carriers, abandoned the carriers, both being out of action - one having the nearside tracks shot off, and the other having a shot through the petrol tank - both by armour-piercing S.A.A.

The six of us left our carriers singly, and individually doubled across the open ground to the West of the road, taking the automatic weapons with us, and made for the jungle.

After only five minutes in the jungle we met the Battalion column making its way south and we joined up with H.Q. Company, with which was the remainder of my platoon.

We carried on for some hours, stumbling through the most difficult country in the dark with some moonlight, periodically falling almost waist deep into streams and swampy patches until there was a halt in front. I went along the column to find out what had happened, and found that, in the dark the column had broken in the middle of "A" Company, leaving a part of "A" company, H.Q. Company, a company of the Malay Regiment, "D" company and one platoon of "C" company cut-off from the main column, with little hope of making contact again in the dark.

I contacted Captain Andrews (commanding "D" Company) who, being the senior officer on the spot, took over the situation.

At that point we were at a loss to understand why the head of the main column was proceeding due north, and Capt. Andrews decided that we should change direction towards the south west, thus making for the coast. Shortly after moving off we met the Brigade Major and a part of Brigade H.Q. who had lost themselves, and they had the same idea as ourselves about direction. We carried on for some time, but the going was so bad in the dark that it was decided to have a few hours sleep in a coconut grove which was fairly dry underfoot, with the intention all lying up the next day whilst a reconnaissance was made with a view to pushing on under the cover of darkness the next evening. However, at first light on 27th, we found that our resting place for the night was not far distant from a Kampong (K. Bata), which promised better cover for lying up that day. Accordingly we moved to K. Bata where we found the remainder of the Brigade, including the rest of the Battalion.

We spent the day there under cover as enemy aircraft was very vigilant, and learnt that the Brigade Major had been sent off by sampan during the morning to make contact with our forces further south, and to arrange for the Navy to carry out an evacuation of the whole Brigade by sea from the fishing village of Ponggor, some 2 miles south of K Bata near the mouth of a canal.

At approximately 16:30 hours I was ordered to accompany H.Q. Company to Ponggor and, whilst the Company made arrangements for the reception of the remainder of the Brigade, and the perimeter defence of Ponggor, I was to obtain a boat with the object of following the Brigade Major in case he failed to get through.

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I found a 20 foot sampan with two oars, which I provisioned with water, coconuts and some cooked rice provided by a Chinese fisherman in the village, and at about 18:00 hours I set off towards the canal mouth with three other ranks from the carrier platoon, and a Japanese compass (mine had been lost at Senggarang). It took us about an hour to push the sampan over the mudflats as it was low tide, wading waist deep in mud, and with water to chest height, during which time a recce flight of the V.A.F. sighted us and, we learned later, reported the facts to Corps HQ.

When some distance from the shore we saw a Hurricane aircraft which had crashed within 300 to 400 yards from the canal mouth, and the south east of it. The only other incident during that hour was the firing of one round of S.A.A. which somewhat accelerated our labours.

Eventually we made deep water, and proceeded due south until we were about 1 mile from the coast, which we then followed in a south-easterly direction aided by moonlight which, except for some two hours before dawn, enabled us to keep the coastline in sight.

At dawn the next morning 28 Jan the island at P Pising was clearly identifiable, and we proceeded along the coast, closer inshore to enable us to take cover in the mangrove if sighted by enemy aircraft, and also in order that we should not miss the small river mouth leading into Pontian Ketchil, our objective. I knew that Pontian Ketchil was due East of the island of P Pising and, by this means and with the aid of the compass, we finally reached our destination at 09:00 hours.

On reaching the river mouth the figures on the quay some distance away looked like Japs, but we were very relieved to find that they were Gurkhas and that 28 Brigade headquarters was in the village.

Brig. Selby (28 Brigade) met us at the quay, and informed us that our B.M. had got through all right, and that all arrangements had been made for the evacuation by sea.

My job having been completed I then obtained lifts to Singapore, reporting at H.Q. 11 Division and H.Q. 3 Corps en route, eventually contacting "B" Echelon in Serangoon Road.

Although a most exhausting journey it is a tribute to the stamina of the other ranks who were rowing that we completed the journey from Selangor to Pontian Ketchil, a distance of 30 miles, in 15 hours.

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