

Appendix 5: Report by Lt. R.C. Humphries, Cmdg 7 Platoon, "A" Company E. Surreys on the movement of 7 Platoon after the withdrawal from Alor Star

As Platoon Commander No 7 Platoon A Company I was ordered to withdraw on a compass bearing of 149° at dusk on 13th December '41 with instructions to watch my left flank especially, my platoon being the extreme left of our line and the last to withdraw. This compass bearing took us across paddy fields, and we struck the road after about one hour; four or five mortar shells fell in the vicinity of our line of march, the nearest being about 50 yards away.

Mistaking this road for the road Alor Star - Gurun I continued along it for a approximately 5 miles, when we were stopped by Ptes Allen and Bartram of 8 Platoon who informed me that we were on the West Coast road and that 9 Platoon had made the same mistake. From this point a track led to the Alor Star pipe line, which runs directly South and, from information obtained from a native, it appeared that we could rejoin the road Alor Star - Gurun by following this pipeline. (9 Platoon had already chosen this and were 15 or 20 minutes ahead of us). We started along this mud track and caught up with the tail of 9 Platoon's column after some two or three hours. At approx. 0400 hrs we halted for a two hours rest and continued again at 0500 hrs (9 Platoon did not halt here). During this rest we were joined by about 18 men of 60 A/T Regiment. Progress was very slow after this owing to the condition of the men's feet, and also to the nature of the track which very often disappeared altogether.

At approximately 1300 hrs we arrived at Sunkai Limau, and again met 9 Platoon. Rumours that the enemy were on the main road reached us, and it was not possible to ascertain the exact position situation or to discover where our own troops were. I therefore decided to wait for dusk and make for the open sea. This we did but, on reaching the mouth of the river, decided to sleep the night there, to obtain provisions and water, and then to start at dawn. We set out at dawn in three boats and headed for Penang. The middle boat, with Cpl. Robertson in charge, got stuck on a sandbank for a short time and so fell into third place. Later in the day, unknown to me, Cpl. Robertson put into an island, and it was not until some hours later that I learned of this.

Some 3 miles off the North coast of Penang our two boats were picked up by the minesweeper "HMS Malacca". I told the Captain of our third boat but, as it was then almost dark and the waters in this area rather shallow, he was unwilling to risk his ship. Later we picked up one boat containing 2/Lt. Oldridge and three men of 1 Leicesters.

At first the Captain had promised to land us at Penang town, but later recently received instructions by wireless to take us direct to Singapore as Penang was being evacuated. On landing at Singapore we were ordered to report to 7 M.R.C. at Bidadari.

R.C. Humphries Lt.
Cmdg 7 Pl A Coy E Surreys

Occupants of Cpl. Robertson's boat:

Cpl Robertson, Pte Darby, Pte Bradley, Pte Jennings, Pte Ball, Pte Gove, Pte Sanger, Pte Wright (54),
Pte Robertson (B Coy)