

Appendix 7: Report by Capt. A.C.A. Carter commanding "D" Company regarding that company's withdrawal after being cut off at Gurun.

On 14th December 1941, at 04:30 hours, "D" Company was ordered to take up a position at the 19th milestone West of the main Alor Star-Gurun road in the foothills of Kedah Peak. Our new position was occupied forthwith, and the company commenced to wire and dig themselves in, although the men were extremely tired having done four withdrawals within the last three days. At midday Brig. Lay arrived and put the company under the command of Major Andrews, commanding 1/8 Punjab Battalion, on our left flank. During the afternoon the men were able to obtain some rest but, at 1630 hours, Japanese advance formations appeared South of the cross roads at the 18th milestone. These units were plainly visible to us from our hill, and were headed by five medium-heavy tanks with 10 truck-loads of troops in rear. The O.P. on our hill immediately telephoned through to our supporting artillery, and the enemy tanks and mobile troops were heavily shelled. At the same time H.Q. Company and the remnants of "A" Company 2 Surreys counter-attacked this force, and fighting was still continuing to our front at dusk.

Throughout the night we were under fire from L.A. and mortar fire, the enemy using tracer bullets which seemed to be coming from all directions. Meanwhile patrols of the 1/8 Punjabs were operating to our front through extremely thick undergrowth and jungle, making progress and scouting difficult.

At 23:30 hours Sgt Perkins came up with our rations, which he had dumped at the foot of the hill. However, the alarm went a few minutes later and heavy firing broke out from both sides, making it impossible to collect the rations. At about 0300 hours 15 December Sgt. Brach, the Intelligence Sergeant, appeared and reported that a strong party of Japanese were advancing down the main road to our right, and he had seen Japanese troops eating our rations and drinking our rum issue. Captain Howard, the Adjutant, appeared at 0400 hours with orders for the Company to counter attack at the crossroads at 0430 hours, when the Artillery would support us with a heavy barrage. This message was received too late for the counter-attack to take place, as previous runners had failed to reach our position and, at 0500 hours, a Jamadar of the 1/8th on the road reported that the Japanese had broken through his company with hand grenades and Tommy guns, and only 17 men were surviving. Meanwhile the telephone line of our O.P. had been cut in the rear and, in view of the fact that we were now cut off, Major Andrews gave orders to withdraw to the coast with the object of rejoining the Brigade in rear.

I gave orders for the immediate withdrawal of platoons, in the order 17,16,18, from their positions with a rendezvous on Banana Ridge, and thence to make for the coast to Yen through the jungle round the foothills of Kedah Peak. I also sent double runners to "B" Company on my right flank informing them of our plan. These runners returned in half an hour reporting that "B" Company Headquarters had moved, and the Company could not be located. The remnants of 1/8th Punjabs moved off at dawn but, owing to the thickness of the jungle, contact was extremely difficult to maintain, and the long line of "D" Company became split into two parties owing to wounded men in the centre not being able to maintain the pace. In the first party I had with me Lt. Bobe and Company Headquarters, and 2/Lt Leage with 17 Platoon. In the second party was Lts. Bond and Faulkner with 16 and 18 Platoons.

We climbed uphill through dense jungle throughout the day, and in the evening a torrential

Appendix 7: Report by Capt. A.C.A. Carter commanding “D” Company regarding that company’s withdrawal after being cut off at Gurun.

rainstorm. We were now 2000 feet up and, as the men were tired and cold, so we spent the night near a waterfall, eating for supper and breakfast our emergency rations which we shared with the Indians, who had had no food for 24 hours. At dawn we began to descend the mountain towards the coast, and by late afternoon had reached a Kampong where we obtained coconuts, bananas, rice and coffee. From the map we calculated we were 5 miles from Yen, and so sent forward a small party under 2/Lt. Leage to reconnoitre the lie of the land. In three hours two guides returned from this party with the message that arrangements had been made with the Yen police for transport to take us to the coast. No enemy had yet been sighted in this area. Accordingly the whole party moved to Yen, where the police were most helpful, giving us coffee and biscuits and supplying us with transport to Tan Jong Dawai where we spent the night. Natives here reported that the party under Lt Bond had arrived earlier, and left by boats as there were Japanese south of us across the S Patani. I managed to procure nine open sampans with two oars each, but no sails for our party, with the intention of reaching Penang and then rejoining the Battalion near Butterworth. We started off at 1000 hours on 18th of December to row across the open sea to Penang Island, a distance of 20 miles. I was in the first boat to arrive after a hot and exhausting journey. On our way across 27 Japanese bombers flew over us and bombed Georgetown, and we saw many direct hits and fires started. Lt. Bird and his party were less fortunate, and drifted out to sea and only reached Penang at 2300 hours after rowing for 13 hours.

However, much to our surprise when we landed, we discovered that Penang had surrendered, all Europeans and troops having being evacuated two days before, the white flag was flying from all houses and the Japanese were expected any minute.

Owing to the other boats drifting round the island, and darkness approaching, it became very difficult to collect men together but we collected all the men available. The remainder spent the night on the beaches, and in the morning I met Major Finlayson of the 1/8 Punjabs, Lt. Bobe and Captain Howard, who had followed us from Kedah Peak and, together with Pte Meddings and L/Cpl Wells of “D” company, tried to find a boat to escape in.

That evening we managed to procure a sailing junk in the harbour and, having run the gauntlet of Japanese patrols of internees who had been released, and were patrolling the city, we pushed off at dusk but drifted up Penang River until our boat jammed into an iron bridge. At midnight the tide turned, and we drifted into the harbour only to wedge ourselves on to a sandbank. We threw the cargo of logs overboard to lighten the load, but were still wedged the following morning. We endeavoured to find another junk and, after five failures, procured an A.P.C junk with oil in the hold. We then hoisted the 40 foot sail and started to sail out. We were now threatened by burning oil on the water, as the sea presented a remarkable sight of circles of flames of oil ignited from the demolished oil tanks. We were also being sniped at from the shore by Japanese internees. We started to drift the wrong direction into the harbour, and then to our consternation we saw 11 motor sampans flying Japanese flags approaching us. It was the Japanese Naval Landing Party arriving to take over Penang. We hastily threw the anchor overboard and dived below, the enemy passing within 200 yards of us but did not stop. We lay until dusk when a breeze sprang up, and we drifted quietly out of the harbour.

Appendix 7: Report by Capt. A.C.A. Carter commanding “D” Company regarding that company’s withdrawal after being cut off at Gurun.

We sailed South for five days. We had some food and water on board, one oil compass but no map.

We had heard that the Japanese advanced troops had reached Taiping, and so had decided to try and land South of this area. We sailed on mostly by night as there was more breeze and less chance of being spotted by enemy aircraft which appeared over us frequently. In the course of our voyage we were becalmed for two days, and on the third today a sudden hurricane almost capsized the boat and we lost our dinghy. We rammed three fishing pagars which always seemed to suck us towards them. On the fifth day our provisions and water ran out, but we stopped at Panghor Island where the Chinese community supplied our needs. That night, while anchored in the harbour waiting for the tide to turn, a British Naval Patrol Boat appeared at 01:00 hours and boarded us. We had calculated the date to be 23rd December but now discovered it was Christmas morning. At 10:00 hours the boat towed us into Bagan Datch and then sunk the junk by gunfire. That afternoon we were transported to Advanced Corps Headquarters at Tapan and then rejoined the battalion at Kampar on the following morning, Boxing Day.