

A RECORD OF THE ACTIONS OF THE
HONGKONG VOLUNTEER
DEFENCE CORPS
IN THE
BATTLE FOR HONG KONG
DECEMBER, 1941

Harold Atkinson

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FOREWORD

In justice to the officers and men of the garrison of Hong Kong, it will be well to place on record certain points which, though obvious to us at the time, may not be equally obvious to future historians.

The requirements of empire strategy in other theatres of war rendered it impossible for full provision to be made for troops forming the garrison, who were consequently deficient of much essential material. We were lamentably weak as regards sea and air power; we had few anti-aircraft batteries, and those we had were very short of ammunition for training purposes; we had no radio-location equipment; the infantry battalions were, until just before the actual outbreak of war, without mortars, weapons on which the enemy so largely relied; and, owing to shortage of manpower we had to rely for transport mainly on personnel whose reliability was very much an unknown quantity.

It was especially unfortunate that the situation in other theatres of war had not permitted earlier despatch of infantry mortars and ammunition. Ammunition for the three-inch mortars arrived in November 1941, and then only 70 rounds per battalion—for practice and war. The men had had no previous practice or preliminary shooting with the two-inch mortar; in fact, two-inch ammunition was actually served out in battle. There was neither pack-mule equipment nor carrying equipment for the three-inch mortars.

Our inability to make air reconnaissance was a serious handicap; our only knowledge of enemy dispositions and troop movements was obtained from ground observation, and was limited to such enemy forces as were actually in contact with our troops. The impossibility of making sea reconnaissance, and our consequent uncertainty regarding the safety of the south coast of the island necessitated our keeping troops in places where enemy landings might be made. This reduced the number of troops available as reserves for counter-attacks. Our scanty forces had to guard the whole coast-line of the island as well as cope with an invading force at one particular point.

The Japanese domination of the air not only enabled them to observe our positions and troop movements and direct their artillery fire, but also to use their air-force to cover infantry attacks. In the later stages of the fighting, their dive-bombing attacks played an important part in their capture of Mount Cameron and advance along the line of the gaps. Furthermore, the scanty opposition to the frequent enemy air-raids had a disheartening effect on our troops, particularly during the last few days when the enemy aircraft were able to attack us almost with impunity.

FORWORD

In addition to the advantages which the Japanese possessed in complete sea and air domination, and their enormous preponderance in artillery, they had considerable superiority in numbers of fighting-men. They put into the field three divisions against our two brigades. In addition, during the fighting on the island, our troops, for reasons given above, had to maintain static defence, and it was thus possible for the Japanese to throw overwhelming numbers against one particular sector.

Japanese agents had an easy time during the period immediately preceding the outbreak of hostilities. Until the actual declaration of war it was impossible for us to take action against Japanese nationals and pro-Japanese Chinese in the Colony. The enemy had complete maps of the island, on which our fixed positions were shown. On both mainland and island Japanese troops were led by local guides, sometimes willingly, more often under compulsion. Saboteurs disrupted our communications and, in one instance, actually cut the 'leads' of a demolition after the covering-party had withdrawn. Armed enemy agents sniped our troops at night; others were caught signalling to the Japanese troops. We learned later that several local Japanese, some of them well-known, had received citations for the work they had done prior to and during the period of hostilities.

THE DEFENCE PLAN

Previous to November 1941, when the garrison comprised four regular battalions, the Defence Plan had been that one infantry battalion, the 2/14 Punjab Regiment, should operate on the mainland, fighting delaying actions. This battalion was to make its final withdrawal to Devil's Peak Peninsula, where the Ma Lau Tong Line had been constructed. Two infantry battalions, the 2nd Royal Scots and the 5/7 Rajputs, and one machine-gun battalion, the 1st Middlesex, together with the HKVDC were to form the island defence. Two HKVDC units, the Field Company Engineers and the Mobile Machine Gun Company, were also to operate on the mainland; the Field Company being responsible for the road and railway demolitions and the M.M.G. as covering troops.

On the news of the despatch of the two Canadian battalions, a new Defence Plan was prepared. This was modelled on a plan suggested in 1938. It was decided to have a complete brigade on the mainland, and to hold the enemy there as long as possible. Detailed reconnaissance work was carried out, and the so-called "Gin-drinkers Line" was selected. Work on this was pushed forward rapidly despite the fact that it was the malarial season. The Royal Scots, who were working in the vicinity of Tsun Wan, a notoriously unhealthy district, suffered severely.

The new plan also entailed an alteration in the formation of the HKVDC. The Mobile Machine Gun Company had no rôle to perform in the new scheme, and the members of that unit were consequently transferred to Nos. 1 and 2 companies.

The mainland forces, under the command of Brigadier C. Wallis, were as follows: the 2nd Battalion Royal Scots (Lieut.-Colonel S. M. White, MC) held the left sector from the Texaco Peninsula to the Shing Mun Redoubt; the 2/14 Punjabis (Lieut.-Colonel G. R. Kidd) were in the centre, and the 5/7 Rajputs (Lieut.-Colonel J. Cadogan-Rawlinson) were on the right, the end of the line being the sea near Shatin railway-station. Owing to the extensive front, each battalion's lay-out consisted of a line of platoon localities, the gaps between which were covered by fire by day and by patrolling at night. One company only of each battalion could be kept in reserve, and this was normally located in a prepared position covering the most dangerous line of enemy approach. The reserve company of the centre battalion (2/14 Punjabis) was employed initially as "Forward Troops" on the Taipo Road to cover the demolition parties and to delay the enemy's advance.

The Field Company Engineers of the HKVDC, under Major J. H. Bottomley, were responsible for the demolitions on road and railway from Fanling back to Shatin, and were consequently also in the forward area; as also were HKVDC Armoured Cars, under 2/Lieut. M. G. Carruthers. No. 1 Company HKVDC (Captain

A. H. Penn) was at Kai Tak airfield, acting as local protection and as reserve for the Gin-drinkers Line. One platoon of No. 1 Company had recently been equipped with Carriers, and this platoon, under 2/Lieut. R. Edwards, was patrolling the Castle Peak Road. Mainland artillery comprised one troop of 6 inch Howitzers, one of 4.5 inch Howitzers, and two troops of 3.7 inch Howitzers.

On the island were the 1st Battalion Middlesex (Lieut.-Colonel H. W. M. Stewart, OBE, MC); the 1st Battalion Winnipeg Grenadiers (Lieut.-Colonel J. L. R. Sutcliffe) and the 1st Battalion Royal Rifles of Canada (Lieut. Colonel W. J. Home). The HKVDC units on the island, under Colonel H. B. Rose, MC, comprised four batteries and one AA battery; three rifle companies, three machine-gun companies, one LMG anti-aircraft company; Corps and Fortress Signals; the Field Ambulance Company, the ASC Company; Supply and Transport Section; Pay Detachment; the Stanley Platoon, the Special Guard Company, the Hughes Group, or 'hughesiliers' (Home Guardsmen who were later to make themselves famous); and the Nursing Detachment.

The Island Commander was Brigadier J. K. Lawson, MC, of the Canadians.

It was unfortunate that neither the Royal Scots nor the Rajputs had sufficient time to become acquainted with their battle positions. In fact, of our six infantry battalions only two knew their roles in detail—the Middlesex, who were on beach defence on the south and west of the island, and the Punjabis who had throughout been "Mainland Troops". The Canadians, who only arrived in the Colony on November 16th, had no time even to become acclimatized, much less to learn the peculiar geographical features of the country. Another month or two would have made a vast difference.

THE OPENING PHASE

During the first few days of December, the political situation became critical. By December 7th all troops were in their battle positions. Major Grey with the Forward Troops was at Fanling, maintaining frontier observation posts. With him was 2/Lieut. I. B. Tamworth with a demolition party of HKVDC Engineers.

At 0445 hours on December 8th, our Intelligence picked up a Tokyo broadcast giving code instructions to Japanese nationals that war with Great Britain and the U.S.A. was imminent. Word was at once sent to Major Grey, and orders given that the forward demolitions should be exploded.

By 0645 the garrison had been warned that the British Empire and Japan were at war; but to the vast majority of the civilian population the first intimation came at 0800 hours when Japanese aircraft attacked Kai Tak airfield and damaged or destroyed five RAF and eight civil planes, thus putting our entire air force out of action. Shamshuipo barracks were also attacked, but there were few casualties, the troops having already deployed.

At 0800 hours our observation posts beyond Fanling reported that enemy troops were crossing into Laffan's Plain by the hundred. The force there was estimated at a battalion, and later information showed that this advance force attacked on a two-battalion front, one making across country by way of Laffan's Plain, the other using the Taipo Road.

Opinions varied as to the strength of the Japanese forces. It is now known that Lieut-General Sakai used two divisions, with a third in reserve. The strength of the division which later landed on the island was given by the infantry commander, Lieut-General (then Major-General) Ito Takeo at rather more than 20,000 men, and we can assume that the total Japanese force was about 60,000 men.

In accordance with his instructions, Lieut. Tamworth destroyed two bridges at Lowu, completing the demolition by 0830 hours. While doing this, he and his party were within easy rifle range of the Japanese sappers who were constructing a bridge over the Shumchun River. Tamworth then withdrew to Gill's Cutting, where four mines had previously been prepared. By arrangement with Major Grey, and after all transport had been withdrawn, Tamworth exploded the mines and established blocks on the road and railway. He then withdrew his party to Taipo Market, where Major Bottomley was waiting.

Meanwhile the Punjabis were slowly withdrawing. The Japanese battalion moving down the Taipo Road was a constant menace to their left flank, and Major Grey decided not to attempt any delaying action until he had made sure of the two main demolitions, No. 731 and R.34, about a mile north of Taipo.

Here Captain K. S. Robertson had prepared three more bridges for demolition and, on the visible approach of the enemy, at about 1200 hours, these demolitions were carried out successfully. After destroying petrol pumps in Taipo Market, the Field Company withdrew with the Punjabis to a line running inland from the north side of Taipo Causeway.

It was on this line that Major Grey decided to stand, and soon after 1500 hours the Japanese advance party attacked and was driven off. A platoon of Punjabis had been posted wide on the left as a flank guard. At 1830 hours an enemy detachment, led by three Chinese guides, walked into the ambush, and practically the whole detachment was wiped out. At about 1900 hours the Armoured Cars participated in another ambush, when a Japanese platoon, moving down the road in close formation, was annihilated.

The Japanese then commenced outflanking tactics, sending patrols through the hills, and Major Grey withdrew his troops south of the Taipo Causeway. Meanwhile Major Bottomley's men had prepared three more demolitions, which were exploded successfully; Forward Troops then withdrew to the vicinity of Cheung Shiu Tan.

The Japanese advance during the day had been rapid, but there was no slackening off after nightfall. The enemy continued to press

forward in small parties, led by guides who knew the least-frequented paths over the hills, and the Punjabis were continually in danger of being outflanked. At 2030 hours Captain Robertson blew up the railway tunnel. The explosion unfortunately destroyed Major Grey's communications with his left flank platoon, under Lieut. Blair, and it was necessary to put a time-table into operation. The Japanese continued their outflanking movements, and Major Grey decided on another withdrawal. At 2200 hours and 2230 hours the next two road-bridges were destroyed. At the second of these Captain F. A. Redmond had provided two circuits—one an electrical one, one a time-fuse. Sgt. R. J. V. Everest lit the time fuse, but some of the Japanese advance party were on his heels and they cut the fuse. They were presumably congratulating themselves upon having saved the bridge when the electrical circuit was completed and bridge and Japanese went up together.

At midnight Forward Troops were at Taipo Mai, but enemy patrols were soon again threatening the left flank and at 0100 hours on the 9th a further withdrawal was made to the Fo Tan Valley.

At 0200 hours Field Company Engineers were withdrawn to Kowloon Railway Station, leaving two demolition parties near Kowloon Reservoir. Major Bottomley reported that all demolitions had been successfully carried out along the Taipo Road.

On the other route, the Castle Peak Road, where the enemy did not appear, all demolitions were successful, except at the Dairy Farm, where a daring saboteur slipped in after the covering party had withdrawn, and cut the leads. He was killed while trying to repeat this feat at the next demolition.

At dawn on the 9th, the Punjabis were on Tau Fung Shan Monastery Ridge, near Shatin, their last point of withdrawal before reaching the Line. Here they had artillery support as well as full co-operation of the Armoured Cars. During the day the Japanese offered a number of excellent targets for the artillery. At 1800 hours Major Grey withdrew his men to the Gin-drinkers Line. Forward Troops carried out their role excellently and inflicted heavy loss on the enemy.

THE MAINLAND BATTLE

Throughout the afternoon of December 9th, enemy patrols were active along our front. In the left sector, on the tracks leading south from the Kam Tin area, men of the Royal Scots had several encounters with the enemy, and confirmed that their patrols were in many cases led by local guides. The enemy scouts and snipers were well-trained and knew their work. They carried small camouflage nets rolled on their shoulders and their quilted uniforms were designed for the insertion of grass and twigs.

Now that the fighting had come near Kowloon, arrangements were made during the night for the evacuation of Chinese villagers from places near the battle area. Also at 2200 hours the last CNAC

planes left Kai Tak aerodrome for Free China. With them went Lieut.-Colonel H. Owen Hughes, HKVDC, who was to act as liaison officer with the 7th Chinese Military Zone.

THE SHINGMUN REDOUBT

As can be seen on the map, the longest part of the line, that extending from Texaco Peninsula to Shingmun Redoubt was also the most vulnerable. It was held by the Royal Scots; 'A' Company being on the right, with a platoon occupying the redoubt; 'B' and 'C' companies holding the centre and left, with 'D' Company in reserve. It was expected that the redoubt would effectually prevent any enemy penetration into the Shingmun river valley. During the early part of the night there was much enemy activity along our front, chiefly against the Punjabis' position. The Punjabis' line was very thin, where it joined with the Royal Scots line at Shingmun, and Brigadier Wallis moved the reserve company of the Rajputs (under Captain H. R. Newton) across to strengthen this weak spot.

Soon after 2300 hours Captain Newton reported that Japanese were moving down the Shingmun Valley, below the reservoir, across his front. 'A' Company Royal Scots reported having heard explosions from the direction of the redoubt, and heavy enemy pressure in the Pineapple Pass area. Within an hour it became all too clear that the redoubt, together with the artillery observation post, had fallen into enemy hands at the very first onset.

This was a major disaster, for the redoubt was the key position to the left sector, and its loss endangered the whole of the left flank, and indeed the whole of the Gin-drinkers Line. 'B' and 'C' Companies Royal Scots, positioned on the Texaco Peninsula and on the road leading from Tsun Wan to Pineapple Pass, now had their right flank exposed.

During the remainder of the night there was confused fighting in the Shingmun Valley, where the Rajputs finally hustled the Japanese back past the reservoir and into the redoubt. A proposal was made by Lieut.-Colonel Kidd for an immediate counter-attack on the redoubt, but this was ruled out on the grounds that the nearest troops that could be spared were a mile away, that the ground was rugged and precipitous and the enemy at the redoubt probably far superior numerically to any force we could bring against them without seriously weakening other parts of our line.

As the line appeared to be weakest in the area immediately west of the redoubt, 'D' Company Royal Scots (Captain D. Pinkerton), which had been acting as reserve company, was put in on the left of 'A' Company. As a further reinforcement, the reserve company of the Winnipeg Grenadiers was brought across the harbour and stationed at the junction of the Taipo and Castle Peak roads.

At about 0930 hours on the 10th the enemy pushed forward in force from the Shingmun Redoubt. The Rajputs engaged them

and with artillery support, drove them back with, as Captain Newton reported, heavy losses. A proposal was made that Captain Newton's company should follow up their success and make a counter-attack on the redoubt, while the enemy in that area were demoralised. A forward movement of the company, however, would have left a wide gap on the left of the Punjabis' position; and the Japanese were already pressing attacks all along the Punjabis' front, and trying to infiltrate. By midday Newton's company and 'A' and 'D' Companies Royal Scots were fully occupied in repelling attacks as the Japanese patrols sought to exploit their success and force a passage between our Centre and Left Sectors.

It was fortunate for us that the demolition of the bridge near Au Tau on the Castle Peak Road prevented the enemy from getting any of their transport past that point. The Japanese managed to get a tractor-drawn battery of 5.9 Howitzers on to the Kam Tin aerodrome, and this battery bombarded Stonecutters Island and Mount Davis consistently. Attempts to remove the demolitions on the Castle Peak Road were prevented by H.M.S. Cicala, gunboat, which was covering the left flank of the Royal Scots, and which successfully broke up every attempt of Japanese working parties to repair the damage to the road. The little gunboat also did splendid service in bringing flanking fire to bear on enemy troops pressing forward to attack the front held by 'B' and 'C' Companies Royal Scots—the Pineapple Pass track. At about 1500 hours Japanese aircraft commenced vigorous attacks, and though their dive-bombing on that occasion was most inaccurate, the gunboat had little chance. At about 1615 hours she received a hit which necessitated her going to Aberdeen for repairs.

It having been decided that any attempt to recapture the Shingmun Redoubt was out of the question, it was vitally necessary to alter the line and to withdraw 'B' and 'C' Companies Royal Scots from their exposed position.

This was done after dark. The troops withdrew quietly; the enemy, though actually in contact with them, not realising that any movement was being carried out, and the withdrawal was completed without incident though "the two companies required a certain amount of adjustment before dawn." The new line ran from the south end of the Shingmun Reservoir through Golden Hill to Laichikok, and was the weakest part of our defence, as it included the Pass west of Golden Hill, which was regarded as one of the two "very vulnerable features."

THE BATTLE OF GOLDEN HILL

During the early hours of the 11th, the Japanese patrols, feeling their way forwards, came into contact with our men on the left of Golden Hill. During the remainder of the night they were busy bringing up their reserves and infiltrating in small parties through the very thin line of defence. The attack came at dawn all along

the line held by 'B' and 'C' companies. By 0700 hours the enemy had occupied Golden Hill. The two companies of Royal Scots were absolutely overwhelmed by superior numbers. Both company commanders were killed and more than sixty of the men were casualties. The remainder fell back in considerable confusion but were not overrun. A complete disaster was prevented by the vigorous action of 'D' Company, stationed on the right of Golden Hill. These counter-attacked the enemy and succeeded in regaining possession of the hill; and, though they were unable to hold it in face of the large numbers of the enemy attacking, they were able to keep possession long enough for the remainder of 'B' Company to extricate itself from what might have been a complete trap. Carruthers' armoured cars and Edwards' carriers were rushed forward along the Castle Peak Road and covered the retreat of 'C' Company, while the Reserve Company Winnipeg Grenadiers was moved forward towards Laichikok.

These measures checked any further Japanese forward movement in the area; though, considering their numbers—it was estimated that the attacking force was two battalions—the pause in the attack seems strange. Actually for the remainder of the day, the enemy made no further attempt to push forward in the Laichikok area, though there was considerable activity along the front of the Rajputs, particularly around Shatin station area.

The situation, from our point of view, was sufficiently depressing. The enemy, by holding Golden Hill, could command the road junction and a considerable part of the Taipo Road, and this endangered all the units which were using the Taipo Road as a line of supply; namely, the Punjabis, one company of the Rajputs and two Howitzer Troops.

THE WITHDRAWAL FROM THE MAINLAND

December 11th.

These two disasters made it impossible for us to hold the Gin-drinkers Line; indeed, west of the Shingmun Valley, held by Newton's Rajputs, there was no line. The Royal Scots, one company of Grenadiers, a platoon of No. 1 Company HKVDC, the Carrier Platoon and two Armoured Cars were extended obliquely back almost to Shamshuipo. At midday orders were given for a withdrawal of all troops under cover of night; the Rajputs and Punjabis were to retire to Devil's Peak, the remainder to Kowloon Peninsula, where they would embark for the island.

As soon as orders for the withdrawal were given out, the HKVDC Field Company Engineers began to get busy. Lieut. Tamworth with Sgt. Palmer and a party carried out demolition work at the Cement Works and the China Light and Power. Personnel of the Dock Company thoroughly demolished the docks. The Field Company also had the task of salvaging as much transport as possible, and vehicles of all kinds were rushed to the Vehicular Ferry. No. 1

Company HKVDC also had an arduous task. One platoon was already in action near Laichikok; a second was manning the carriers; and the remainder had to guard against a surprise attack on the aerodrome, cover the withdrawal of troops being evacuated from the east side of the peninsula, deal with Fifth Columnists, looters and rioters, and finally complete the demolition of the aerodrome.

The withdrawal of three battalions from their forward position was a most difficult and hazardous operation. There had been no previous practice for want of time; the night was exceedingly dark; the troops had to break off contact with the enemy and move, in some cases, across the front of the advancing Japanese. The two battalions on the right flank had the hardest task. The Rajputs, followed by the Punjabis, moved along the line of the Passes—Kowloon Pass, Shatin Pass, Grasscutters Pass—to Devil's Peak.

This would have been a strenuous march for light-armed troops in daylight. The two Indian battalions were carrying all their stores and equipment and the night was exceptionally dark, rendering progress along the hill tracks slow and laborious. In addition, the Punjabis in the rear were in close contact with the enemy, and for much of the march, were actually fighting a rear-guard action. It was a remarkable feat that both battalions arrived at Devil's Peak, not only intact, but without losing any of their military stores.

In comparison the Royal Scots and the one company of Grenadiers had an easy task. They retired towards Shamshuipo and Mongkok, covered by the Carriers and the Armoured Cars, and were taken across in launches and ferry-boats. When all had been evacuated—just before midnight—the armoured cars, less one, which had been knocked out, and the carriers were shipped across on the vehicular ferry-boat. On the other side of the peninsula, No. 1 Company HKVDC completed the demolitions at the aerodrome and then withdrew from Kowloon City Pier, using the R.A.F. launch.

The troops on Stonecutters Island were withdrawn by ferry-boat during the same night. These comprised a battery of the HKSRA, under Major Mills, two platoons of No. 3 Company HKVDC (Major E. G. Stewart) and some R.E. details. The island had been shelled and bombed consistently for three days and practically every building had been hit, but the casualties had been surprisingly small. No. 3 Company had only lost four men wounded, Cpl. F. E. C. C. Quah and three Other Ranks.

The evacuation was carried out successfully, all stores removed as far as was possible, and the remainder, together with the wireless installations, demolished before the troops embarked. Unfortunately, soon after the troops had disembarked at the naval yard, the ferry-boat was sunk, and all stores and kit were lost.

While these withdrawals were proceeding satisfactorily, the Rajputs and Punjabis were continuing their arduous march on Devil's Peak. The Punjabis were unable to carry out the timed programme

for the withdrawal, but through no fault of their own. The rearguard, comprising part of HQ Company, under Lieut. Forsyth, was cut off from the main body at Shatin Pass, and so withdrew down the road to Kowloon City, where they became involved in fighting with Fifth Columnists as well as with advancing Japanese patrols. With Pte. B. A. Gellman of No. 1 Company HKVDC acting as guide the Punjabis made their way through the streets of the town to the Star Ferry Wharf. Conditions in Kowloon at this time were far from pleasant; on the withdrawal of the civil police, rioting and looting had broken out; shops and houses were being looted and Fifth Columnists were busy sniping any of our troops who could be attacked. At the Star Ferry, Forsyth took over charge from the police and for the remainder of the night the Punjabis guarded the wharf and assisted refugees onto the ferries, which ran continuously. Soon after dawn the advance party of the Japanese appeared and occupied Kowloon Railway Station. A military police in Salisbury Road adjured the advance party of Japanese to "double up there and get a move on". Then, realising his mistake, he obeyed his own injunction. The Punjabis engaged them for some time, but on the approach of the main body of the enemy at about 1000 hours, Forsyth embarked his men on the last ferry-boat, which left the wharf with light automatics and rifles firing from her stern. An RAMC Orderly, wounded in the neck, unable to reach the wharf, swam across the harbour—no mean feat in such cold water. A Punjabi signaller, similarly cut off and unable to swim, made his way across the harbour in a life-belt.

Two other companies of Punjabis, delayed by enemy action, did not reach Devil's Peak until long after daybreak. Meanwhile the Rajputs, who had arrived first, manned the Ma Lau Tong Line, with one troop of 3.7 Howitzers in support.

THE ISLAND BATTLE

THE PERIOD OF WAITING

Already by December 11th the Japanese had shown signs of activity in the near vicinity of the island. On the morning of the 11th the enemy made a landing on Lamma Island and our guns at Jubilee Fort and Aberdeen went into action against them. During the afternoon of the same day a party of Japanese in sampans tried to make a surprise landing on Aberdeen Island, occupied by 3rd Battery HKVDC (Captain C. W. L. Cole) and a platoon of Winnipeg Grenadiers. The attack was repulsed by machine-gun fire. Later still, a concentration of about a hundred junks was seen off Lamma, and these were engaged by our artillery. On the 12th the Japanese were seen to be occupying George Island, near Lamma, and there was considerable activity in that vicinity. This constant menace of a surprise landing on the west or south-west of the island enforced us to keep troops on beach defence all along the threatened coast-line.

December 12th. EVACUATION FROM DEVIL'S PEAK

Throughout the day air raids and shelling of the island continued, chiefly along the North Shore.

On the mainland the Ma Lau Tong Line was bombed continuously, and at about 1700 hours an attack was launched on the left of the line. The enemy was about one battalion strong, and the attack was repulsed with considerable loss to the Japanese. Other attacks developed along the line, equally unsuccessful, and there was heavy bombing and mortar fire. It was decided to evacuate the position and concentrate all troops on the island.

After nightfall the evacuation began and proved even more hazardous than the previous one. Launch crews deserted and many launches had been damaged by enemy fire and were unserviceable. Officers from HQ were sent down to accelerate matters and these took personal charge of launches, manned in many cases by volunteer crews. The old W.D.V. Victoria, under charge of Major A. J. Dewar and Captain C. G. Turner, did excellent work. By 0130 hours on the 13th the Punjabis had all been evacuated. By 0400 hours most of the 1st Troop R.A. and one company of Rajputs were across, though the mules had to be left behind. The tide was now out, which necessitated the men being ferried out by sampan, and as daylight was not far off the situation was critical. The Royal Navy was then called on to assist and responded nobly. Three M.T.B.s were sent from Aberdeen and a fourth, which had been covering the right flank of the Ma Lau Tong Line, was also called in. H.M.S. Thracian also arrived from Aberdeen. Despite all difficulties the evacuation proceeded rapidly. 'A' and 'C' Companies of the Rajputs were holding the second and shorter of the Lines, the Hai Wan Line. These troops were in close contact with the enemy and a withdrawal was no easy matter. Fortunately the rough handling which the enemy had experienced a few hours earlier had discouraged them from any attack in force. One company covered the withdrawal of the other, and then retired as rapidly as possible. Daylight had come and the operations were clearly visible to the enemy but the last men reached 'Thracian' safely and were taken to Aberdeen.

While the last contingent of the Rajputs was still in transit, Lieut.-General Sakai sent over a flag of truce with a letter to H.E. the Governor. The letter made demands tantamount to unconditional surrender and threatened that, in the event of a refusal, the town and island would be subjected to heavy artillery and aerial bombardment. The demand was rejected categorically.

In expectation of an attack on the island, certain preparations were made which could not have been done during peace time. In these the Field Company HKVDC took a prominent part. The Hong Kong Engineering Corps was formed, and Major J. Smith

(HKVDC) established depots at Happy Valley, Kennedy Town, Pokfulam, Repulse Bay and Stanley. Unfortunately the recruitment did not come up to expectation, in fact, barely 200 workers were available. The Corps, under the command of Major Bottomley, in the absence of Lieut.-Colonel R. D. Walker, MC, who was ill, carried out a considerable amount of work during the next few days. The whole front from Shaukiwan to Kennedy Town was wired, sheds at North Point were destroyed and gun bases were constructed in the Naval Yard.

December 13th.

During the day artillery fire was intensified. One of the 9.2 guns on Mount Davis received a direct hit and was knocked out. 4th Battery HKVDC (Lieut. K. M. A. Barnett) at Pak Sha Wan was specially singled out for attention. Belcher's Fort was set on fire and other serious fires were started in Kennedy Town and West Point. By midnight further fires had developed, and the Fire Brigade, which had been hard at work for many hours, asked for military assistance. The fires were finally got under control by midday on the 14th, but they had a very disturbing effect on civilian morale.

December 14th.

Shelling was equally heavy on this day. Two guns at Belcher's Fort were put out of action and an AA Battery at Mount Davis was completely wrecked. 4th Battery HKVDC was again pounded—the B.C. Post and all internal communications being destroyed. Lieut. Barnett was wounded and went to hospital and, through some extraordinary error, the Chinese personnel of the Battery were sent to Stanley. Their place, however, was filled by a few British gunners, and 2/Lieut. Sleep took over command until Barnett's return.

The new organisation was now completed and the island was divided into two Brigade areas. West Brigade (Brigadier J. K. Lawson, MC) comprised the Middlesex, Royal Scots, the Punjab Regiment. The Punjabis were holding the shore-line from the Naval Yard westwards to Telegraph Bay; the Middlesex carried on from that point to Stanley peninsula, and were also responsible for the coast between Causeway Bay and the Naval Yard. The Royal Scots were in the area around Happy Valley. Brigade HQ was on the road 100 yards West of Wongneichong Gap. East Brigade (Brigadier C. Wallis) comprised the Rajputs, the Grenadiers and the Royal Rifles. The Rajputs held the coast-line from Causeway Bay eastwards to Sai Wan; the Royal Rifles were mainly along the coast from that point to Stanley; and the Grenadiers were in the Repulse Bay-Deepwater Bay area. Brigade HQ was at the point where the Shek-O Road joins Island Road—overlooking Saiwan.

After hostilities began on the island, the Grenadiers were attached to West Brigade.

The HKVDC units were positioned as follows:—

1st Battery (Captain G. F. Rees) Cape D'Aguilar.

2nd Battery (Captain D. J. S. Crozier) Bluff Head, Stanley.

3rd Battery (Captain C. W. L. Cole) Aberdeen Island.

4th Battery (Lieut. K. M. A. Barnett) Pak Sha Wan.

5th Battery (Capt. L. Goldman) Sai Wan Hill.

Field Company Engineers (Major J. H. Bottomley) HQ at Tai Hang.

Corps Signals (Captain A. N. Braude) HQ at Peak Mansions.

Armoured Car Platoon (2/Lieut. M. G. Carruthers) HQ at West Brigade HQ

No. 1 Company (Captain A. H. Penn) Tytam Valley.

No. 2 Company (Major H. R. Forsyth) Pottinger Gap and Big Wave Bay.

No. 3 Company (Major E. G. Stewart) Jardine's Look-Out.

No. 4 Company (Captain R. K. Valentine) High West, Victoria Gap and Mount Kellett.

No. 5 Company (Captain C. A. D'Almada) Mount Davis.

No. 6 Company (Captain H. A. de B. Botelho) The North Shore.

No. 7 Company (Captain J. G. B. Dewar) Magazine Gap, Wanchai Gap, Middle Gap.

ASC Company (Major F. Flippance) HQ Deepwater Bay.

Hughes Group (Major the Hon. J. J. Paterson) North Point Power Station.

The Supply and Transport Section (Major H. G. Williams) was attached to HKVDC, HQ, which had moved on the 14th from Garden Road to Peak Mansions. The Field Ambulance Company (Lieut.-Colonel L. T. Ride) was widely distributed. The Pay Detachment (Major C. de S. Robertson, MM) was attached to Royal Army Pay Corps. The Nursing Detachment (Mrs. Braude) was attached to Army Hospitals.

December 15th. THE ATTEMPTED LANDING

Throughout the day there was systematic shelling of the pill-boxes along the North Shore, held by 'C' and 'D' Companies of the Rajputs. Three were completely demolished and two others were badly damaged. The most accurate fire came from a high-velocity small-calibre gun hidden in one of the Kowloon godowns. Aberdeen and Sai Wan were also shelled.

During the day a "Command Observation Post" manned by men from the HKVDC Signals, was established on the Peak. This operated well, although the O.P. was forced to move several times as, despite every precaution, enemy artillery continued to find it and put down heavy concentrations.

Later in the day a collection of craft was seen in Kowloon Bay. Concentrated fire by the 6 inch Howitzers set two craft alight; the

remainder scattered. In expectation of a raid that night, orders were given that in the event of machine-gun fire being heard from the North Shore, searchlights should be depressed to illuminate the harbour.

At 2115 hours, No. 2 Platoon, Royal Rifles, opened fire from West Fort, Pak Sha Wan. The No. 2 searchlight of 4th Battery HKVDC was depressed and showed Japanese in considerable numbers crossing the Channel, using a junk, small rafts and rubber boats. The battery promptly opened fire and sank the junk, besides doing considerable damage among the rafts. The small-arms fire of the Canadians apparently accounted for the remainder. The Japanese counter-batteries quickly opened with howitzer and 3 pdr. fire; the searchlight was hit and considerable further damage done to the fort. Again, at about 2245 hours, the enemy was observed to be attempting a crossing from San Tong and Sam Ki Tsun Bays. Fire was opened by aid of the West Fort fixed beam and the North Shore Lyon Light. 2/Lieut. Sleep reported four enemy craft sunk.

For its prompt action the depleted 4th Battery was commended.

Later that night H.M.S. Thracian carried out a daring raid. She made her way from Aberdeen across the enemy front on the peninsula to Kowloon Bay where she sank two ferry-boats filled with troops.

December 16th.

There was again heavy shelling of the North Shore. There were also numerous air-raids during the day on Mount Davis, Shek-O, Lyemun and Aberdeen, where H.M.S. Thracian was hit, causing casualties. The shelling continued throughout the night and there was also heavy long-range mortar fire on to the North Shore, where more pill-boxes were damaged.

December 17th.

At dawn there was a mass air-raid, followed by a heavy bombardment. Lieut.-General Sakai then sent another flag of truce with proposals similar to the previous ones. He added a hint that rejection would mean a more intensive and less discriminating bombardment. Hostilities were suspended until 1600 hours; after which the bombardment recommenced. The Field Company Engineers at Tai Hang received a considerable share of this and orders were given for their HQ to be moved to Repulse Bay.

December 18th.

There was again heavy shelling of the North Shore, but our counter-batteries were at last able to hit back vigorously, and they silenced the enemy guns on Devil's Peak, at Gun Club Hill and on the water-front.

The morale of the troops was good but the strain of waiting for the inevitable enemy landing was not pleasant. It appeared as if the Japanese were none too eager to make the attempt; at least, not until the North Shore defences had been 'softened' by their artillery and bombing attacks. This delay was all to the good for us, for every day was of value. Hong Kong was fulfilling its rôle as "an outpost of empire", since the duty of an outpost is to delay the enemy and inflict as much damage as possible before being overrun.

THE LANDING

For the attack on the island, Lieut.-General Sakai brought up the 38th Division, which had been in reserve during the fighting on the mainland. This division was commanded by Lieut.-General Sano, but the actual operations on the island were entrusted to the infantry commander, Major-General Ito Takeo. The three infantry regiments of the 38th division were commanded by Colonel Doi, Colonel Tanaka Ryosabura and Colonel Shoji Toshishige.

After the war, in March and April 1947, three of these commanders, Lieut.-General Ito and Major-Generals Tanaka and Shoji, were tried in Hong Kong for atrocities committed by the troops under their command during the period of hostilities. Their war-diaries were produced in evidence. We thus have a clear account of the enemy forces and of the progress of the battle as seen from the Japanese side.

From these accounts it appears that the 38th Division was composed as follows:—

The Right Flank Group. This was under the direct command of Major-General Ito and consisted of two battalions of the 228th (Colonel Doi) and all three battalions of the 230th Regiment (Colonel Shoji), with other details.

The Left Flank Group. This was acting independently under the command of Colonel Tanaka. It consisted of two battalions of the 229th Regiment, with other details.

The Divisional Reserve Infantry. This was two battalions; one from the 228th and one from the 229th.

The Right Artillery Group. This apparently included at least one Mountain Battery.

The Left Artillery Group.

The Kowloon Garrison Force. Strength and composition not known, but apparently composed of 'garrison' or second-line battalions.

An Armoured Unit; light tanks.

Engineers, Signals, Supply and Transport, etc.

The total strength of the division was given at rather more than 20,000 men.

A Japanese infantry regiment (Rentai) normally consisted of three battalions (Daitai), and each battalion was larger than one of ours, as it usually comprised a HQ company, a machine-gun company and four rifle companies. General Ito gave the strength of each infantry battalion (which included an unspecified number of gendarmerie) at 1,100 men. The whole force which landed on the island on the night of December 18/19 was seven battalions, or rather more than 7,500 men. These were landed in two waves, timed for 2030 hours and 2230 hours.

On the 19th the Divisional Reserve and both artillery groups were brought over, and later, as resistance on the island proved to be stronger, and the Japanese losses considerably greater than had been anticipated, more troops were brought across from the other two divisions. It appears that three more Rentais (nine infantry battalions) were brought over, together with some artillery and some 'garrison' battalions.

The attack came on the front from North Point to Lyeemun and three separate landings were made. Colonel Tanaka with the 229th, acting independently, took the left or east flank; Colonel Doi, with the 228th, the centre; Colonel Shoji and the 230th, the right or west flank. Tanaka's men landed at Shaukiwan. Their task was twofold—to occupy Lyeemun and Sai Wan, and to force a way into Taitam Valley, either over Mount Parker or through Quarry Gap. They landed in two waves; the first battalion to land was sent against Lyeemun, the second against Quarry Gap. Both battalions were to rendezvous in Taitam Valley.

The 230th landed in the neighbourhood of North Point, also in two waves, and moved straight inland towards Jardine's Look-Out and Wongneichong Gap, which was their principal objective. They apparently moved across country until they reached Sir Cecil's Ride.

Colonel Doi's men landed west of the Docks. Their task was to take care of the bridge-head and, when possible, push troops forward to support the 230th. Doi and Shoji were to rendezvous somewhere in the vicinity of Wongneichong Gap.

Orders seem to have been somewhat vague and it is not surprising that Major-General Ito reported that he lost touch with all three units for twenty-four hours. Shoji also spoke feelingly of "the dense fog" which obscured the landscape on the morning of the 19th. The fog was mainly mental, and Shoji was by no means the only sufferer.

The night of December 18/19 was exceptionally dark; the sky was overcast and there were frequent showers of rain. In addition the Japanese artillery fire had set fire to the oil tanks near North Point, and the strong wind brought the smoke in a dense pall over the northern part of the island. The result was darkness almost impenetrable. This, we are told, handicapped the Japanese, but was