

CHAPTER 22

THE END IN JAVA

THE motley and insubstantial forces which remained in and about Java on the 25th February, after the departure of General Wavell and several of the senior American and Australian commanders, was under the command of Dutch officers; Admiral Helfrich commanded the Allied naval force, General ter Poorten the Allied army, and General van Oyen the combined air forces.

Helfrich's ships included three British cruisers, two Australian, two Dutch, and one American; five British destroyers, four American, and two Dutch; and some Dutch submarines and smaller craft. Commodore Collins¹ remained at Batavia as "Commodore, China Force", in general control, under Helfrich, of the British and Australian ships. The defending air forces included some 18 British fighters and 20 twin-engined aircraft fit for operations; a few American fighters; and ten Dutch squadrons, all much depleted. The Dutch Army totalled some 25,000 troops but, as the Australians had observed early in February, they seemed unlikely to be capable of a very effective resistance. These troops were deployed in four area commands: Batavia area, with two regiments under General Schilling; North Central area, one regiment, under General Pessmann; South Java area, one regiment, under General Cox; and East Java, one regiment, under General Ilgen. The only effective mobile striking units were the two Australian battalions (2/3 Machine Gun and 2/2 Pioneers) under the command of Brigadier Blackburn, a squadron of British tanks of the 3rd Hussars, and a battalion of the 131st American Field Artillery Regiment. The British and Australian contingents, including five British anti-aircraft regiments, two of them without guns, were at length placed under the general control of Major-General Sitwell,² who had been Wavell's senior anti-aircraft officer.

Blackburn, a sanguine, gallant and enterprising officer, was a lawyer who had served on Gallipoli in the ranks and won the Victoria Cross as a subaltern at Pozieres in 1916. Between the wars he had risen to the command of a machine-gun battalion, and in 1940 had formed the 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion. He had led this unit in the Syrian campaign of June and July 1941, in which the 2/2nd Pioneers also fought, as infantry, in a series of costly engagements.

As mentioned earlier, the units which disembarked in Java under Blackburn's command on 19th February were his own battalion and the 2/2nd Pioneers, the 2/6th Field Company of engineers, the 2/2nd Casualty Clear-

¹ Vice-Admiral Sir John Collins, KBE, CB; RAN, HMS *Canada* 1917-18; Asst Chief of Naval Staff 1938-39; Comd HMAS *Sydney* 1939-41, British Naval forces in ABDA Area 1942, HMAS *Shropshire* 1943-44, Australian Squadron 1944 and 1945-46. First Naval Member and Chief of Naval Staff 1948-55. B. Deloraine, Tas, 7 Jan 1899.

² Maj-Gen H. D. W. Sitwell, CB, MC. GOC Brit Troops Java 1942. Regular soldier; b. 25 Oct 1896.

ing Station, a company headquarters and a platoon of the Australian Guard Battalion (normally employed on guard duties at formation headquarters), and the 105th General Transport Company. On the 20th these troops except the medical unit, which went to Bandung, were given the role of protecting five airfields.

Blackburn decided to organise his force as a brigade. His machine-gun battalion and the other units possessed only rifles and a few Brens and sub-machine-guns at the outset, but in the next few days obtained a less inadequate supply of Brens, some anti-tank rifles, three mortars, 600 grenades, some trucks, a few carriers and "a considerable number of light armoured cars". There was practically no signal equipment. In the first few days some Australian troops from Malaya or destined for Malaya were added: the 2/3rd Reserve Motor Transport Company, 100 reinforcements on their way to Malaya, and one officer and approximately 175 other ranks from Singapore. Out of these resources Blackburn organised a staff³ and three infantry battalions, which he numbered the 1st, 2nd and 3rd. The 1st (Lieut-Colonel Lyneham⁴) included the 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion and some engineers and others; the 2nd (Lieut-Colonel Williams) was substantially the 2/2nd Pioneers; the 3rd (Major de Crespigny⁵) included most of the engineers, the detachment of the Guard Battalion, men from Singapore, and some of the reinforcements from Australia.⁶ Blackburn organised a supply column from parts of the transport units, and, acting on powers conferred on him by General Lavarack, promoted sufficient officers and N.C.O's to bring his units to full strength in leaders.

Brigadier Blackburn discussed the role of his force with General Schilling on 23rd February, and strongly requested that his force be not dispersed to guard five airfields, but concentrated so that it could be trained for the fighting which seemed inevitable. Two days later General Wavell, on the eve of his departure, saw Blackburn, impressed on him the value to the Allied cause and to Australia in particular of every hour gained by resisting the Japanese invasion; explained that the troops under Blackburn's command were practically the only British troops in Java equipped and trained to fight; and said he was to use them in offensive operations against the Japanese wherever possible.

Blackburn had been instructed the day before that he was under the command of General Sitwell, and on the 25th he sought him out.⁷ As a result of discussion Sitwell decided to add to Blackburn's force a signal section from one of the anti-aircraft regiments, the squadron of

³ Maj J. E. M. Calder, OC of 2/6 Fd Coy, a regular officer, became brigade major; and Capt J. J. Edwards became staff captain.

⁴ Lt-Col E. D. Lyneham, ED, WX3334; CO 2/3 MG Bn Feb-Apr 1942. Orchardist; of Kalamunda, WA; b. Stawell, Vic, 24 Feb 1905.

⁵ Maj J. C. Champion de Crespigny, ED, VX253. I Aust Corps Guard Bn; CO Reserve Bn Blackforce. Advertising manager; of Ballarat, Vic; b. Parkville, Vic, 25 Aug 1908.

⁶ Henceforward, however, the battalions will be referred to as 2/3rd Machine Gun, 2/2 Pioneers and the "Reserve Group". The Reserve Group was organised into eight platoons.

⁷ An Australian liaison officer, Maj F. A. Woods (of Cambooya, Qld) had been attached to General Sitwell's headquarters.

the 3rd Hussars, and part of the I/131st American Field Artillery Battalion.⁸ He decided that the force should be concentrated about Bandung or Buitenzorg;⁹ the latter, a hill town on the road and railway from Batavia (the principal administrative centre) to Bandung (the military headquarters), was the site of the principal residence and offices of the Governor-General. Sitwell and Blackburn then called on General ter Poorten and obtained his agreement to these proposals. Ter Poorten decided that the force should concentrate round Buitenzorg, under the command of General Schilling. Sitwell replaced Blackburn's units as air-field guards with the men of two gun-less anti-aircraft regiments, equipped as infantry.¹

The Japanese had organised two forces to accomplish the final stage of their offensive—the capture of Java. The Eastern Force included the *48th Division* which had been fighting in the Philippines and was now concentrated at Jolo Island in the Sulu Archipelago, and the *56th Regimental Group* which had taken Balikpapan. The 41 transports carrying this force were covered by a naval force of two heavy cruisers and two destroyer flotillas under Rear-Admiral Takagi.

The Western Force was concentrated at Camranh Bay, and included the *2nd Division*, from Japan, and the *230th Regiment* of the *38th Division* from Hong Kong. Its 56 transports were covered by a squadron of four heavy cruisers and by two flotillas of destroyers. To prevent naval intervention by the British fleet in the Indian Ocean, Admiral Kondo's striking force of four battleships and four carriers, having refuelled at Kendari after its attack on Darwin, left there on 25th February and steamed through the Lombok Strait into the Indian Ocean.

On 21st February Admiral Helfrich divided his force into two squadrons, one at each end of the island; a move in which he was influenced by the fact that some of his diminishing stocks of fuel were at Batavia and some at Surabaya. His Eastern Striking Force included the cruisers *De Ruyter*, *Java* and *Houston* and six destroyers. Most of the ships of the Western Striking Force were engaged on escort work, and for the time being only the cruiser *Hobart* and two destroyers were available for other duties.

On the 25th February Admiral Helfrich, having been informed of the approach of the Japanese Eastern Force, ordered all available ships at the Batavia end to join Admiral Doorman's force at Surabaya and attack. Commodore Collins thereupon sent *Exeter*, *Perth* and three destroyers eastward, but not *Hobart*, which could not be fuelled in time. Doorman sallied out at dusk on the 25th without waiting for these reinforcements,

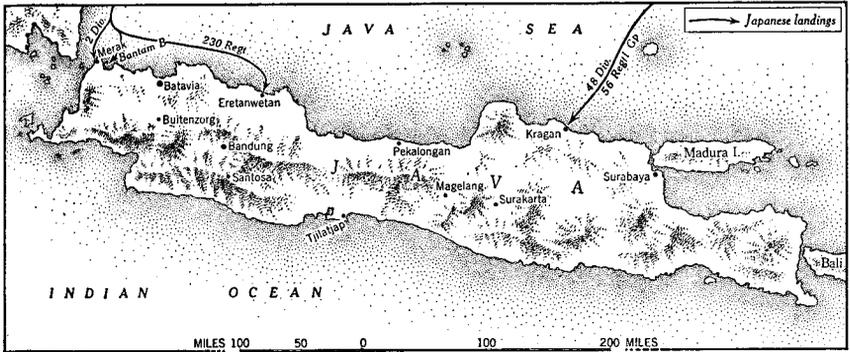
⁸ This battalion had been in the *Pensacola* Convoy, but, whereas the other units in the convoy had disembarked at Brisbane or Darwin, this one had been landed at Surabaya.

⁹ Later re-named Bogor; Batavia was later re-named Djakarta.

¹ The British anti-aircraft units with guns were: 77 Heavy AA Regt, 21 Light AA Regt, 48 Light AA Regt. Those without guns were the 6 Heavy AA Regt and 35 Light AA Regt. These units, with other British detachments, contained 3,500 men. There were also some 2,500 Indian drivers, clerks etc in Java.

but failing to find any enemy ships, returned to Surabaya, where the Batavia squadron joined him. Next day there were definite reports of one Japanese convoy approaching from the east and the other from the north. Evidently the invasion was near.

The only ships now remaining at Batavia were the *Hobart*, the old cruisers *Danae* and *Dragon*, and two ancient British destroyers. This force made a sweep northward from 10 p.m. on the 26th to 1 p.m. on the 27th, when it returned to Tanjong Priok, the port of Batavia. It left port again



The invasion of Java

just after midnight on the 27th-28th, under orders to sweep northward but if no contact was made by 4.30 a.m., to proceed to Trincomalee through the Sunda Strait. The force made no contact and withdrew as ordered.

Doorman's force of 5 cruisers and 9 destroyers set out from Surabaya at 6.30 p.m. on the 26th under orders to attack the Japanese eastern convoy and then withdraw to Batavia. From 9 a.m. on the 27th the Allied force was shadowed by Japanese aircraft. Doorman returned to Surabaya that afternoon, but, receiving a report of Japanese convoys north and northwest, he immediately set off to intercept. At 4.16 p.m. Doorman's squadron came into action against the Japanese escorting squadron of two heavy cruisers and 14 destroyers. In the five-hour battle that ensued the Dutch cruisers *De Ruyter* and *Java* and two British destroyers and one Dutch destroyer were sunk. Doorman went down with his ship. *Houston* and *Perth* withdrew and reached Batavia at 1.30 p.m. on the 28th.

Thence they departed at 7 p.m. intending to go to Tjilatjap by way of Sunda Strait. In Bantam Bay, just east of the entrance to the strait, they were astonished to find a line of Japanese transports at anchor. They sank four of these and damaged others before the Japanese covering force of three cruisers and nine destroyers arrived. The *Perth* and *Houston* were sunk, firing to the last. Later the Dutch destroyer *Evertsen*, following behind, was damaged and beached. Next morning the cruiser *Exeter* and two destroyers, which had been delayed at Surabaya, were also sunk. Of the Allied ships which had taken part in the long battle only the four

American destroyers survived. They reached Fremantle by way of the Lombok Strait. Admiral Helfrich, on 1st March, resigned command of the Allied naval forces, then almost non-existent, and flew to Colombo on the 3rd. Commodore Collins embarked in the corvette *Burnie* on 2nd March and went to Fremantle. Japanese command of the seas round Java was now undisputed.

The early naval actions had delayed the Japanese landings by 24 hours; but the convoys resumed their courses and landed their troops in eastern and western Java on the night of the 28th February-1st March.

The Eastern Force disembarked at Kragan about 100 miles west of Surabaya, and soon overcame the opposition. The *48th Division* advanced on Surabaya, which it occupied on the 8th. The *56th Regiment* advanced across the island and reached Tjilatjap, which meanwhile had been valuable for the evacuation of men, material and ships, on the 7th.

The Western Force divided into two groups. One (the *230th Regiment*) arrived at Eretanwetan east of Batavia, its objectives being the capture of Kalidjati airfield, and the cutting of the Bandung-Batavia railway at Tjikampek. This force was gallantly attacked by about twelve Hurricanes, but the column aimed at Kalidjati, moving in lorries and tanks, reached the airfield about 10 a.m. The defenders, mostly British anti-aircraft gunners armed as infantry, fought bravely until they had been practically wiped out. The second Japanese column advanced inland and by midday on the 3rd was halted at a destroyed bridge about eight miles short of Tjikampek.

The *2nd Japanese Division* landed in Bantam Bay and at Merak at the western end of Java with the task of advancing on Batavia by the coast road and on Buitenzorg by the southern road through the hills. The main body of the division was to have taken the northern route and one regiment the southern one, but the main body was delayed by destroyed bridges and on the 3rd a second regiment was transferred to the Buitenzorg road.

Both the northern and the southern roads crossed the wide Tjiudjung River about 50 miles west of Batavia and Buitenzorg, and along the eastern bank ran a good road, from Kragilan to Rangkasbitung. There was no other good connecting road but, farther east, tracks able to carry vehicles travelled from about Tangerang on the north road to Djasinga on the south one.

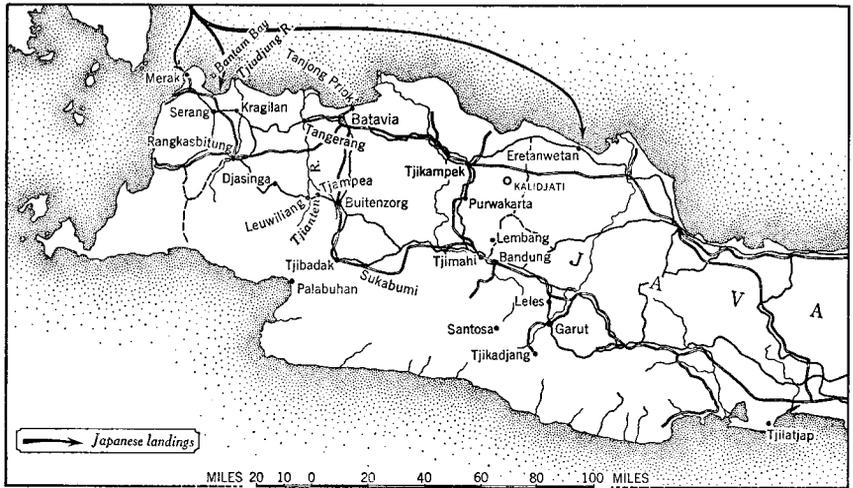
The general Dutch plan was to withdraw, fighting, to the Tjiudjung; demolish the bridges there, and fight a delaying action on that line, and at length fall back to main defensive positions at Tangerang, protecting Batavia, and Leuwiliang, protecting Buitenzorg.

Schilling and Blackburn agreed upon, and ter Poorten and Sitwell approved, a bold plan whereby if the Japanese landed, Blackforce would advance westward along the Buitenzorg road, then north along the connecting tracks to the Batavia road, where it would take the Japanese advancing on Tangerang in the rear. As an alternative Blackforce would attack the Japanese advancing along the southern road. Blackburn empha-

sised that it would be essential for the Dutch troops to hold Djasinga so as to keep the connecting road open.

Since the 27th February Blackforce had been concentrated near Buitenzorg, ready to carry out one of these plans. Its officers studied the notes on Japanese tactics which, as mentioned earlier, had been compiled by General Allen and Brigadier Berryman during talks with Colonel Stewart of the Argylls.

From Merak, however, the Japanese advanced very swiftly, and by mid-day on the 1st March were approaching Tangerang and Djasinga. Schilling



and Blackburn decided that on 2nd March they would first attack the Japanese on the southern road and then advance from the south on Tangerang. Blackforce and an N.E.I. regiment would cross the Tjianten River; Blackforce would hold the centre of the Japanese column and work round its right flank, while the N.E.I. troops attacked its left flank.

Alarmed by the rapidity of the advance of the *230th Regiment* towards Bandung, however, the Dutch commanders decided on the night of the 1st to withdraw all N.E.I. troops about Buitenzorg to Bandung. Schilling informed Blackburn of this and told him that no N.E.I. troops would be left to cover the southern road and that he had no orders for Blackforce. Blackburn thereupon decided to withdraw his force to a position south of Buitenzorg, and obtained permission to do so.

Meanwhile, since the evening of 28th February, Captain Nason's² company of the *2/2nd Pioneers* had occupied positions overlooking the bridge at Leuwiliang with another company in reserve about 800 yards to the rear. They were there when, at dawn on 1st March, the Dutch engineers blew up the bridge. The Pioneers had just begun to move out in accordance with the new order when, at 4.15 a.m. on the 2nd, Schilling

² Capt. C. H. T. Nason, MBE, MC, VX16136; *2/2 Pnr Bn. Grazier*; of Wangaratta, Vic; b. Wangaratta, 18 Oct 1905.

telephoned Blackburn asking him to remain round Buitenzorg and take over all positions being evacuated by the N.E.I. army; two N.E.I. companies would be left with him. Thereupon Blackforce turned about and returned to Leuwiliang, arriving at 6 a.m.

The 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion now went into position on the left rear of the forward companies of the Pioneers. So far the Australian officers knew practically nothing of the enemy's movements.

A feature of the Java campaign (wrote the historian of the Pioneers) was the absence of information of any kind about the enemy or the disposition of Dutch troops. It was known that Sumatra was occupied, but thereafter the C.O.'s repeated enquiries could elicit no news. On one occasion Lieutenant Summons³ in his capacity as Intelligence officer sought information from Dutch Headquarters concerning enemy movements, and was told that the morning newspaper had not yet been delivered! The next day was to demonstrate just how dangerous this lack of information could be.⁴

In an effort to gain information, one of the reserve companies of the Pioneers sent platoon patrols westward. At 11.50 a.m. on the 3rd a Dutch Intelligence report relayed from Blackburn's headquarters in Buitenzorg stated: "No Japanese landings on Java." Five minutes later five Japanese light tanks arrived at the Leuwiliang bridge from the west. The forward companies opened fire with anti-tank rifles and disabled two of the tanks, and several Japanese who had dismounted were seen to fall. After midday a procession of Japanese trucks arrived, and halted beyond the effective range of small arms. Soon enemy mortars opened fire and a patrol began to ford the river 300 yards south of the bridge. The Pioneers' fire drove this patrol back.

That afternoon the commander of a battery of the 131st American Artillery Regiment came forward and was allotted tasks. His guns soon opened accurate fire at targets on the west side of the river, and the Japanese replied with mortars and infantry guns. In the course of this day the Pioneers lost four killed and five wounded.

Late on the 3rd General Schilling told Brigadier Blackburn that General ter Poorten had decided to counter-attack the Japanese (of the *230th Regiment*) advancing on Bandung from the north-east, and wanted him to hold Leuwiliang with a skeleton force and send the main body of the force to Purwakarta to deliver this attack. Purwakarta was almost 100 miles away in country Blackburn had never seen; and Schilling could not give him the exact position of the enemy or an outline of the proposed attack. Blackburn protested, Sitwell supported him, and the plan was abandoned.

During the night of the 3rd-4th the Japanese did not press on in force, but then and next morning they probed forward in small groups. By 11 a.m. they had infiltrated on the left, where the 2/3rd Machine Gun Bat-

³ Lt W. I. Summons, VX14642; 2/2 Pnr Bn. Student; of Camberwell, Vic; b. Melbourne, 6 Apr 1920.

⁴ E. F. Aitken, *The Story of the 2/2nd Australian Pioneer Battalion* (1953), p. 120, on which the following account of the battalion's experiences in Java is chiefly based.

talion was in position, and Captain Guild's⁵ company of the Pioneers was sent forward from Tjampea to make a counter-attack to relieve pressure on this flank of the 2/3rd.

In the early hours of the 4th March General Schilling, at Batavia, warned Brigadier Blackburn that the Japanese advance from the east had been so rapid that General ter Poorten had decided to abandon Batavia and Buitenzorg and concentrate round Bandung. At Schilling's headquarters at 9 a.m. that day Schilling asked Blackburn to hold the enemy west of Buitenzorg for a further 24 hours while his forces round Batavia withdrew to Bandung. Blackburn agreed to do so, and decided to withdraw on the night of the 4th-5th to a narrower front some miles nearer Buitenzorg. Consequently he issued a warning order that the force would break contact at 6.30 p.m. and withdraw to Sukabumi, one company of the 2/3rd Machine Gun and the squadron of the 3rd Hussars forming the rearguard. Guild's company of the Pioneers, however, was out of contact. The machine-gunners could not find it, nor could Colonel Williams when he went forward in an armoured car, nor a second officer who went out in an armoured car.

At 6.30 p.m. the forward companies thinned out and stealthily withdrew. Heavy rain helped to conceal the movement, which was completed by 9 p.m. The men then boarded their vehicles, the last of which reached Sukabumi early on the 5th; but the 118 officers and men of the lost company were missing.

At 3 p.m. on the 5th, all N.E.I. forces having withdrawn through Buitenzorg, the rearguard also fell back to Sukabumi. A conference of senior Allied officers was held at Bandung at 6 p.m. on the 5th, when ter Poorten announced that guerilla warfare would be impossible because of the great hostility of the Indonesians towards the Dutch; Bandung could not be defended for long; on the other hand the High Command could operate only from Bandung. He added the surprising statement that he had instructed his troops to disregard any order he might later give to cease fighting. General Sitwell said that the British troops would fight on if any Dutch did so, and was allotted an area about Santosa south of Bandung. He and Air Vice-Marshal Maltby arranged to move into this area early on the 6th, and sent a report of the proceedings to Blackburn.

Meanwhile, on orders from Bandung, Blackforce had withdrawn to east of Bandung. At dawn on the 6th Blackburn received a message from Sitwell giving him permission to take independent action if the N.E.I. forces capitulated.

In the next two days Blackburn reconnoitred the mountain country south of Bandung and had quantities of rations concentrated there. On the night of the 7th-8th Blackforce moved into the area. Some 1,750 armed men of the R.A.F. were also assembling there. At 9 a.m. on the 8th ter Poorten broadcast that resistance had ceased and all were to lay down their arms.

⁵ Capt D. D. Guild, VX15341; 2/2 Pnr Bn. Architect; of St Kilda, Vic; b. Seymour, Vic, 7 Dec 1916. Missing believed died 1 May 1942.

Learning of this an hour later, Blackburn withdrew his force to an area round Tjikadjang, covering the roads leading to the south coast. On the afternoon of the 8th, judging further resistance useless, Air Vice-Marshal Maltby and General Sitwell issued the Dutch order to all British units. The Australian force remained in its position during the 9th, 10th and 11th. Blackburn tried to send a message to Australia informing the Government of his situation, but later learnt that wireless communications had ceased before it was sent.

The rainy season had commenced (he wrote later); my troops would be compelled, if I continued resistance, to be entirely without shelter in mountainous country and I had been unable to obtain an adequate supply of drugs and necessary medicines. Lieut-Colonel N. M. Eadie⁶ (my A.D.M.S.) and my regimental medical officers all advised me that without drugs and without adequate shelter the health of my troops would suffer very severely if I remained in the mountains; and this advice was strongly supported by Major-General Sitwell's A.D.M.S. I therefore reluctantly decided that in the best interests of my troops and their lives I must capitulate. Despite the fact that my troops all desired to continue resistance until compelled by force of arms or shortages of food and munitions to surrender, I informed Major-General Sitwell that I would join in the surrender.⁷

On the 12th March the senior British, Australian and American officers signed a formal surrender at Japanese headquarters at Bandung. Before it was signed the Japanese commander agreed to add a passage stating that the rights of prisoners under the Geneva Convention would be observed. Later Japanese officers interrogated General Sitwell.

An interesting point which came out in the cross-examination (wrote General Sitwell in 1945) was that the Japanese evidently thought there was a complete Australian division in Java as they continually pressed me to give them the name of the divisional commander and refused to believe that the Australian troops who had surrendered were the total numbers present. They also stated that they knew it was quite impossible for an English officer, as I alleged myself to be, to be put in command of Australian troops as the Australians would never agree to such a course of action.⁸

Later General Sitwell was again interrogated about the remainder of the I Australian Corps (which he knew to be on the way to Australia). When he refused to answer questions he was told it might cost him his life. Sitwell pointed out that this was contrary to the Geneva Convention, whereupon his interrogator, a major of the staff of the *Guards Division*, said that Japan only obeyed the Convention when it suited her "the same as England". Sitwell denied the charge against England and was handed over to the Secret Police

from whom I had a very unpleasant time for the next month being, amongst other things, kept with my hands handcuffed behind my back for the next ten days without a break.

⁶ Col N. M. Eadie, ED, VX14845; CO 2/2 CCS 1941-42. Consultant surgeon; of Melbourne; b. Bendigo, Vic, 12 Oct 1893.

⁷ Report by Brig A. S. Blackburn on operations of the AIF in Java.

⁸ H. D. W. Sitwell, *Despatch on Operations in Java 24 Feb 1942 to 20 Mar 1942*.

Not until long afterwards did the 2/2nd Pioneers learn what had happened to their missing company, which was out of contact when the withdrawal from Leuwiliang took place.

As this company neared the threatened flank of the 2/3rd Machine Gun on the 4th March, the men heard firing from a village to the north-west and at 3.30 p.m. attacked towards it on a wide front. Sergeant Croft's¹ platoon became engaged with a strong group of Japanese and maintained a fire fight until dark, when it withdrew towards company headquarters. As Lieutenant Allen's² platoon neared the village, advancing through rice fields which offered no cover, it came under fire from two mortars and about seven machine-guns. Allen and Sergeant Ling³ with about 15 men charged forward, reached the edge of the village and, standing knee deep in water, engaged Japanese who were entrenched there. Captain Guild crawled forward, and at 5 p.m. Allen shouted to him that he was going to charge with fixed bayonets. At that stage only one Australian had been hit, despite prolonged fire. Suddenly Private Byrne⁴ stood up and fired three magazines from his Bren. The Japanese scattered. But when the 17 men charged five were soon hit and the advance gained only 20 yards. At dark, seeing more Japanese approaching and an encirclement beginning, the Australians withdrew, carrying their wounded on ground sheets.

The third platoon (Lieutenant Lang⁵) had soon run into an ambush in which two men were killed and others, including Lang, seriously wounded. Lang, who was hit in the hip and stomach, ordered the others to leave him, and the survivors withdrew.

By the morning of the 5th the surviving groups of each platoon were out of touch with each other. Croft's men encountered Japanese in a village, and attacked, losing one man killed and four wounded. Guild now ordered a withdrawal on to Sukabumi across country, as it was evident that the Japanese were between him and the village. They set off carrying their wounded on improvised stretchers.

Croft's platoon, still isolated, broke up into small parties with the object of reaching the mountains and the south coast; but by the 8th all these groups had been captured.

The remainder (67 men under Captain Guild) evaded the enemy and on the 10th reached the main road at Tjibadak between Sukabumi and Buitenzorg, where they were informed that the defending army had capitulated. Guild then divided the company into small groups so that they

¹ WO1 T. Croft, EM, VX39726; 2/2 Pnr Bn. Driver; of East Preston, Vic; b. Coburg, Vic, 21 Oct 1915.

² Lt R. W. Allen, QX2176; 2/2 Pnr Bn. Salesman; of Ayr, Qld; b. Launceston, Tas, 10 Jul 1909.

³ Sgt L. F. Ling, VX22828; 2/2 Pnr Bn. Truck driver; of Sandringham, Vic; b. London, 20 May 1908. Killed in action 5 Mar 1942.

⁴ Pte M. G. Byrne, WX14594; 2/2 Pnr Bn. Labourer; of East Perth, WA; b. York, WA, 9 Oct 1910. Died while prisoner 10 Apr 1942.

⁵ Lt C. W. P. Lang, VX19663; 2/2 Pnr Bn. Regular soldier; of Bedford, England; b. Mooltan, India, 2 Jul 1909. Died of wounds 4 Mar 1942. (He had been commissioned a few days previously.)

might make their way to the south coast west of Tjilatjap and perhaps escape by sea.

Helped by friendly Asians and by Dutch civilians, the company re-assembled at Palabuhan on the 13th March and there went to the K.P.M. office to enquire about ships! They found in the harbour the s.s. *Sea Bird*, whose captain told Guild that he would sail if he could find a few and particularly three engineers. The Australians could not provide marine engineers.

At length, still with local help, Guild joined Lieut-Colonel L. van der Post and three other British officers who were collecting refugees at a camp in the mountains. Van der Post explained that he had a wireless transmitter and his task was to either arrange for the evacuation of refugees or, failing that, to organise guerilla warfare.

During the next few days (wrote Lieutenant Allen afterwards) the men rested and regaled themselves on water-buffalo, poultry and native fruits. The party was then divided into small parties of 10 men each under an officer. They were allocated to four posts within one hour's march of each other and then each post was divided into groups of three and allotted dispersal areas into which they could flee in the case of alarm. Rations were still very good—rice, bully beef, biscuits, tinned milk and beans and reserve supplies were buried at each post. The limiting factor on the length of time the party could hold out was the lack of proper medical care as sickness was taking its steady toll. Wet clothes, mental strain and sheer exhaustion lowered the men's power to resist the various tropical diseases. On 3rd April Pte N. R. C. Gibson⁶ died of what appeared to be typhus, Pte E. E. Marshall⁷ succumbed on the following day, and one week later Cpl L. W. H. Dunstan⁸ and Pte Byrne passed away. To be given a chance of survival sick men were collected together and ordered to move out and surrender in the hope of receiving some medical treatment.⁹

In April the Japanese began to round up the guerillas and on the 20th of that month the occupants of "No. 1 Post", including van der Post, Warrant-Officer Phillips¹ of the Pioneers and 18 others were captured. The loss of van der Post's courage, leadership and organising ability was a severe blow. The guerillas then roamed about the mountains in small groups, one led by Captain Guild and others by Lieutenants Allen and Stewart.² On 1st May Guild declared that he would try to reach the coast again and escape by sea. He set off with Stewart, Corporal Hynes³ and Private Murray.⁴ They were never seen again. The others were

⁶ Pte N. R. C. Gibson, VX19476; 2/2 Pnr Bn. Labourer; of St Kilda, Vic; b. St Kilda, 18 Jul 1919. Died 3 Apr 1942.

⁷ Pte E. E. Marshall, VX37351; 2/2 Pnr Bn. Cook's assistant; of West Brunswick, Vic; b. Avoca, Vic, 14 Apr 1912. Died 4 Apr 1942.

⁸ Cpl L. W. H. Dunstan, VX30577; 2/2 Pnr Bn. Butcher; of Moonee Ponds, Vic; b. Moonee Ponds, 28 Nov 1917. Died 10 Apr 1942.

⁹ Quoted in E. F. Aitken, *The Story of the 2/2nd Australian Pioneer Battalion*.

¹ WO2 F. V. Phillips, VX17884; 2/2 Pnr Bn. Baker; of Collingwood, Vic; b. Benalla, Vic, 9 Sep 1914.

² Lt A. I. Stewart, VX19507; 2/2 Pnr Bn. Bank clerk; of Canterbury, Vic; b. Victoria, 25 Feb 1921. Missing presumed died 1 May 1942.

³ Cpl T. E. Hynes, VX14273; 2/2 Pnr Bn. Shunter; of Geelong West, Vic; b. Geelong, 17 Sep 1915. Missing presumed died 1 May 1942.

⁴ Pte A. C. Murray, VX59311; 2/2 Pnr Bn. Labourer; of Albury, Vic; b. Albury, 5 Oct 1905. Missing presumed died 1 May 1942.

at length captured. The last group to be taken, comprising Allen, Private McCrae⁵ (who had escaped from Post I when it was captured) and Private Baade,⁶ were not captured until 2nd August, five months after the Japanese landed in Java. The total Australian casualties in Java up to the time of the formal surrender were estimated at 36 killed and 60 wounded.

In retrospect it can be clearly seen that from the time the Japanese Navy and Air Force gained mastery of the seas round the Indies and of the air above, no reasonable hope remained of successfully defending Java. Even if I Australian Corps had been landed there and had decisively defeated the *XVI Japanese Army* it would have been cut off from supplies by the Japanese Navy and Air Force; and in the event that navy and air force retained substantial command of the Java Sea until 1945. It was fortunate for the Allied cause and for Australia that the Japanese time-table did not allow time for the Australian Corps to reach Java and be lost there.

In view of these circumstances the other handicaps suffered by the land forces, although very real, were not vital to the issue. They included shortages of equipment; difficulties of terrain and communications; and virtually insurmountable problems of organising adequate cooperation between the various parts of so diversified an army in the short time available.

During the invasion of Java the "disastrous debacle" in the Philippines which General MacArthur had predicted early in February had been coming closer. In the second half of February the line across the waist of the Bataan peninsula was still holding, but Filipino patrols, some moving about in native dress and some employing negritos armed with poisoned arrows, were bringing back information that suggested that the Japanese, though effectively halted, were preparing a decisive assault.

Heard President Roosevelt talk on what our production will be in 1943-44 (wrote an American officer in Bataan on 23rd February).⁷ The President meant to cheer us up. Actually, his talk tends to weaken morale. We are not interested in what the production will be in 1943-44 and 45. All we want are two things, but we want them right now. Unless supplies arrive soon we will be finished by the latter part of March.

On 22nd February President Roosevelt instructed General MacArthur to go to Australia and there take command of the newly-defined South-West Pacific Area. MacArthur protested but at length obeyed, and departed from Manila Bay by motor torpedo boat on the 12th March—the day of the final capitulation in Java. General Marshall informed Lieut-

⁵ Pte V. L. J. McCrae, VX33502; 2/2 Pnr Bn. Roofer and floorer; of Melbourne; b. Carlton, Vic, 13 Aug 1919.

⁶ Pte S. A. Baade, VX18656; 2/2 Pnr Bn. Butcher; of Auburn, Vic; b. Gippsland, Vic, 3 Feb 1913.

⁷ Bataan Diary of Maj Achille C. Tisdelle (*Military Affairs*, Fall 1947).

General Brett, commanding American forces in Australia, that MacArthur would call on him to send a flight of heavy bombers to Mindanao to transport some passengers. Soon afterwards MacArthur, having reached Mindanao by motor torpedo boat, asked for long-range bomber aircraft with experienced pilots. Four B-17 aircraft were sent, of which only one reached its destination. MacArthur signalled to Brett that the aircraft was unsuitable and defective and the pilot inexperienced, and sent it back carrying sixteen refugees. Thereupon Brett obtained four new bombers from the Navy, and in these MacArthur and a few staff officers, his wife and child, flew to Darwin.

Throughout March the Japanese High Command sent reinforcements to Luzon: replacements for the *16th Division* and *65th Brigade*; the *4th Division* (11,000 strong) from Shanghai; and a brigade of the *21st Division*, which had been General Terauchi's main reserve.⁸ Thus strengthened, Homma launched an offensive on 3rd April and, four days later, had defeated the defenders. On 9th April General King surrendered the force on Bataan.

There remained the fortress of Corregidor, where Wainwright had taken MacArthur's place in command of all forces in the archipelago, and the scattered forces in the southern islands. After heavy air and artillery bombardment, the Japanese landed on Corregidor on the night of 5th May and Wainwright surrendered on the 6th.

Eight days later, after an arduous retreat, General Alexander withdrew his headquarters out of Burma and into India. The defeat of British and American power in East Asia was complete.

In five months the Japanese had conquered the Far Eastern colonies of Britain the United States and Holland, making themselves the new overlords of more than 100,000,000 people. They had severely damaged the American main fleet at a point 5,000 miles distant from Japan and had sunk nearly every sizeable British, American and Dutch ship that had ventured meanwhile into the East Indian seas or the western Pacific. They themselves had lost no naval vessel larger than a destroyer. They had taken the surrender of about 250,000 troops, mostly Asians, but including an Australian division, a British division, and the equivalent of a division of Americans. Only remnants of the defending air forces survived and made their way to Australia and India.

This had been achieved with comparatively modest land forces and at relatively small cost—about 15,000 killed and wounded.⁹ The defending army in the Philippines alone numbered as many divisions on paper as the Japanese employed in the whole offensive from Wake Island to Burma.

⁸ Thus the *Southern Army*, which initially included ten divisions, now possessed eleven. The four Japanese armies at this stage included the following divisions and independent brigades:

XIV (Philippines): 16 Div, 4 Div, 65 Bde, 62 Regt (of 21 Div).

XV (Burma): 33 Div, 55 Div.

XVI (Java): 2 Div, 38 Div, 48 Div, 56 Bde.

XXV (Malaya): Guards Div, 5 Div, 18 Div.

The main body of the *21 Div* was in Indo-China.

⁹ Estimate arrived at by Historical Section of the United Kingdom Cabinet Office.

The Japanese *Southern Army*, however, had been supported by a navy which, after the first day of the war, was by far the strongest in the Pacific or Indian Oceans, and by army and navy air forces of adequate size and considerable efficiency. The navy and air forces had enabled the army formations to land where they pleased and when they pleased, and to be maintained in action.

The Japanese commanders had proved themselves able to conceive and carry out a plan of unparalleled magnitude. At sea, on land, and in the air the Japanese had shown themselves to possess great courage and, generally, had applied their tactical skill with more initiative and vigour than their opponents. The victorious Japanese forces now stood around a vast perimeter which stretched through the central Pacific to New Guinea, and embraced the East Indies, Malaya, Thailand and Burma. In the west they were on the border of India. To the south, within easy range of their aircraft, lay Australia.