

The following is a transcript from a typed copy of events in Singapore 1 – 15th February 1942 as experienced by the 1st Battalion, The Cambridgeshire Regiment and recorded by their Commanding Officer, Lt. Colonel Gerald Carpenter. There are many abbreviations throughout, some of which are obvious and some which are unknown to me. Some of the commonest used are:

Bn	Battalion	Div	Division	m/g	Machine gun	Amn	Ammunition
Bde	Brigade	Inf	Infantry	Arty	Artillery	a/c	Aircraft
Coy	Company	Det(s)	Detachment(s)	Pl	Platoon	Com(n)d	Command
Posn	Position	Tps	Troops	Fwd	Forward	Comn	Communication
Rt	Right	Lt	Left	S.A	Small Arms	A.A.	Anti-Aircraft

Note:

R.A.S.C. = Royal Army Service Corps R.A.P. = Regimental Aid Post

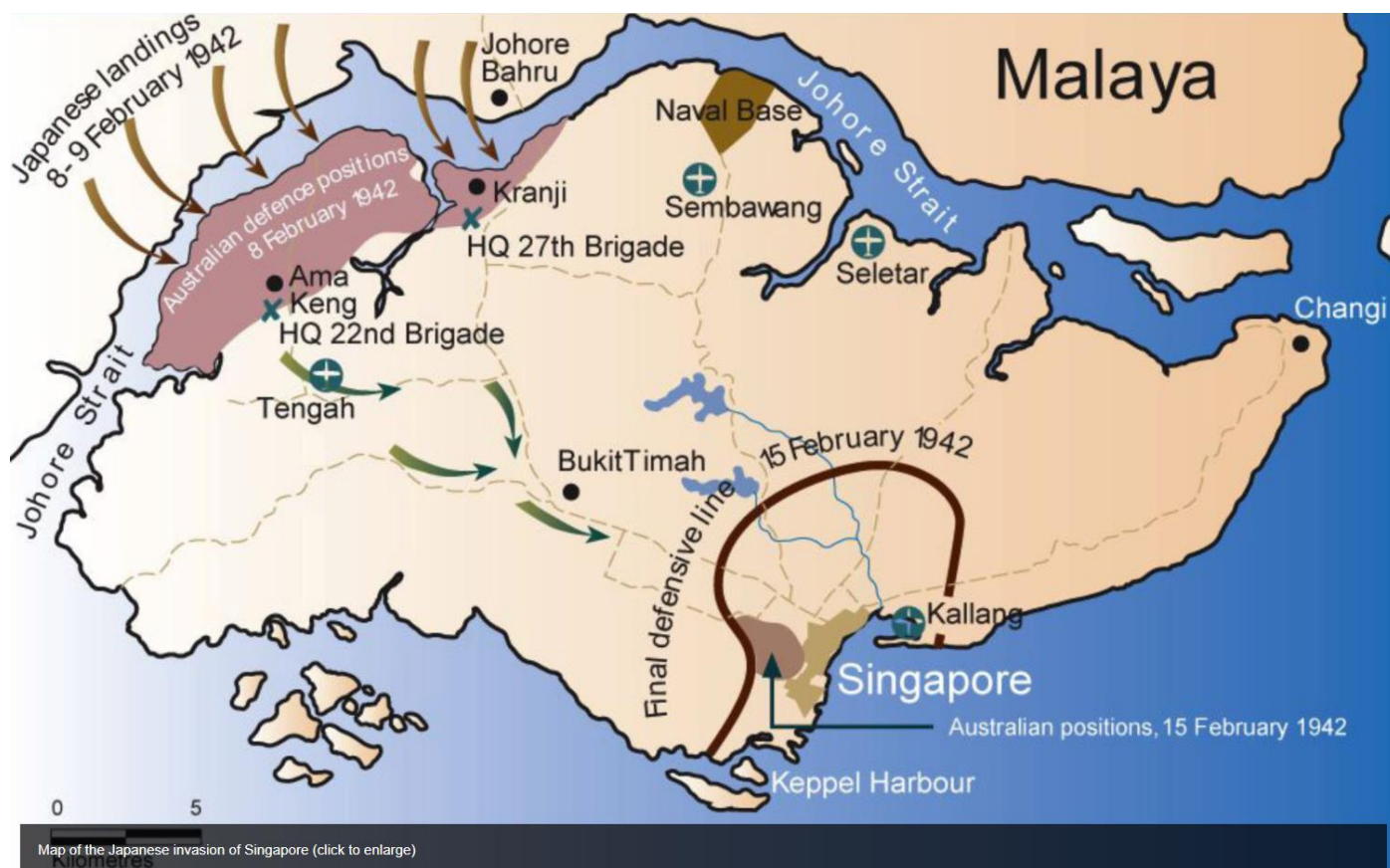
Kapurtala Infantry = soldiers from city of that name in the Punjab, India

S.Pungol = river to South of Seletar Aerodrome

Dalforce = an irregular volunteer army of overseas Chinese, anti-Japanese

Dannart wire = a type of barbed wire

TomForce = a counter-attack on 11 February in the area of Bukit Timah village



Australian map showing Japanese landings and their movements towards Singapore City. 1st Bn. Cambridgeshires were first based at Seletar Aerodrome in the North, and then moved to just South of MacRitchie Reservoir on the defensive line (approximately where the word 'Line' is printed on the map).

Diary – commencing 1 Feb 42.

This diary was written at Changi and has been kept in captivity ever since.

The official War Diary of the Bn. From the time of leaving England until 31 Jan 42 was sent in duplicate to O.i/c 2nd Echelon, Fort Canning, Singapore, on 3 Feb 42. This is understood to have been evacuated, via Java, with the rest of 2nd Echelon effects.

The official War Diary from 1 – 15 Feb 42 incl. was destroyed by fire at the Bn. Adam Road battle position, on receipt of 54 Inf. Bde. Order "Cease Fire" at 1600 hours 15 Feb 42.

On 1 Feb 42 Bn move from the Jee Chiaj billeting area was completed successfully, although no administrative arrangements appeared to have been made, and there was no traffic control anywhere. The Bn. Were placed in reserve to the R.A.F. Seletar Aerodrome garrison. This garrison consisted of 2 coys of Kapurtala Infantry and a few Armoured Cars. Not an impressive force – Kapurtala morale at nil. The Bn. were immediately S. of the Aerodrome, dispersed with two Coys fwd and two in reserve. "C" Coy. Fwd rt covering a sharp bend in the S. PUNGGOL immediately West of DIXIE village. "A" Coy. Fwd left at N. end of DIXIE village, astride the main rd from the Aerodrome, and covering the main gate of the aerodrome. "B" Coy. In reserve rt – in HQ area – at Singapore Rubber Co. Plantation near R.A.F. East Camp (at head of S. PUNGGOL). "D" Coy in reserve left – at Naval Wireless Station. "HQ" Coy in Bn. H.Q. area.

The Bn. were rt fwd Bn. Of the Bde, 5th Bedfs Herts Regt being on the left, holding positions on either side of the S. SELETAR.

1/5th Foresters in Div. reserve.



Seletar Aerodrome (date unknown)

In rt bdy S. PUNGGOL, 5 Suffolk R. of 54 Bde being on our rt.

The camp at the Rubber Plantation was being used as a rest camp by the remains of two Indian Bns who had returned from the mainland. The first impression of this area was the hopeless unpreparedness of it. There was no sign of any defence works at all.

At a Coy Comds Conference the Cmd Off decided to name the localities as fols:-

Bn H.Q. & "HQ" Bn Coy area	Cambridge
"A" Coy area	Chesterton
"B" Coy area (i.e. 11 Pl detached on opposite side of rd to remainder of "B" Coy & fwd as separate locality)	Linton
"C" Coy area	Bourn
"D" Coy area	Newmarket

"D" Coy had hardly settled at the Naval Wireless Station position when they were moved up, to take over the rt fwd position of the Seletar garrison . This was a coconut grove on the point at the mouth of the S. PUNGGOL. The position had not been previously held.

"D" Coy placed under command of Seletar Garrison

The C.O. laid down that all defended localities were to be wired in with either "double-apron" or double "triple-dannart" wiring.

It was found to be impossible to get other than the odd hundred coils of dannert wire out of higher authority, so unit transport set off "on the scrounge" under Major Mapey and 2/Lt. Grigs. They discovered almost unlimited supplies of wire in dumps, no one in charge and no one drawing on the dumps, although the Japanese were already known to be on the mainland shore and in Johore. The wire was therefore, brought in and for several days and nights the Coys wired constantly, until by 5 Feb 42 the C.Os aim was practically accomplished.

The next task to be undertaken was the improvement of camouflage, digging battle H.Qs and alternative positions, finishing off the clearing of fields of fire – including demolishing a number of buildings.

By 8 Feb 42 the area was beginning to assume a fairly ship-shape pattern, and it was felt would present a considerable obstacle to the Japanese.

Boat patrols of the S. PUNGGOL were organised each night from 2000 hours to 0300 hours, under the direction of 2/Lt W.H. CLARK. They were never of any great value, however, as the motor boats supplied by the R.A.F. were not in working condition and the native sampans were too heavy to be worked against the current by small crews.

288 Fd Coy R.E. by 7 Feb 42 had fixed an inflatable boom across the mouth of the S PUNGGOL.

On 7 Feb 42 both sides ranging their guns, and a certain amount of counter battery work going on. Enemy mortars and field guns at work near "A" Coy positions and several bursts in the HQ area – falling within 15 – 20 yds of the R.A.F. – no casualties.

"D" Coy positions under mortar fire several times during 7 and 8 Feb 42 – no casualties suffered, but a certain amount of damage done to stores.

During the period up to 7 Feb 42 it became increasingly obvious that the R.A.F did not regard this as their war. It appeared that there were about three Hurricanes, and a few Buffalos left in operation. One rarely saw them in the air and never at any height. Each morning from the time the unit landed a formation of twenty-seven enemy bombers appeared over the island, and "pattern" bombed their objective. The A.A. fire was at times fairly intense, but it never caused the bombers to break formation, although on three mornings a Japanese aircraft was shot down.

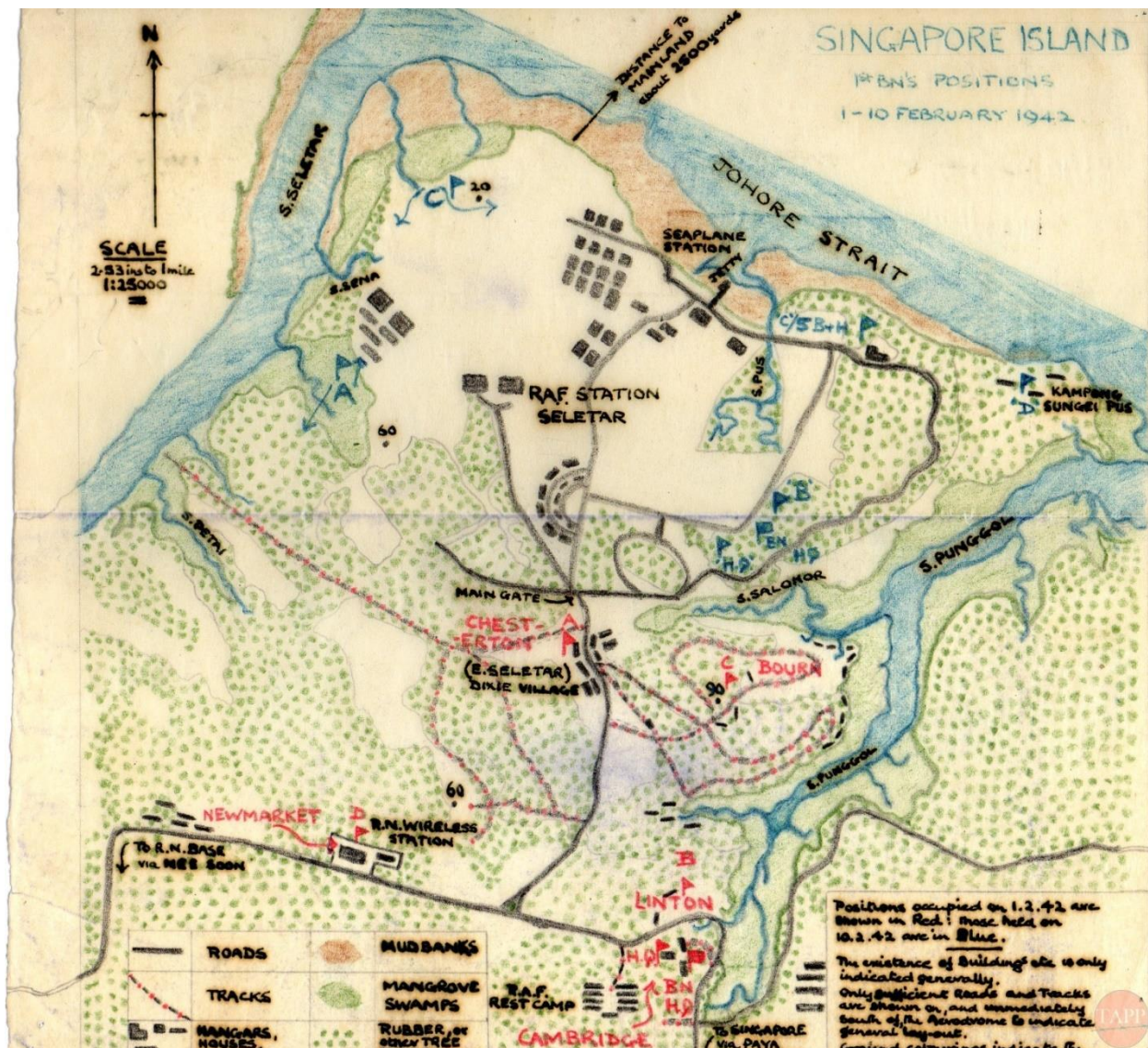
On the night 7/8 Feb 42 the sound of very heavy gunfire was heard, both from the mainland and the island. The duration and intensity definitely pointed to an attempted invasion – well to the West. The unit received no official intelligence regarding this for two days, when it was confirmed that the Japanese had successfully landed at a number of points at the western end of the Straits of Johore, and had during the first night penetrated about one to one and a half miles inland.

On 8 Feb 42 the Bn received orders to take over the forward defences at SELETAR Aerodrome. The Kapurtala Inf Bn were to come into reserve in the Bn positions.

On 9 Feb 42 the move took place – the move was not opposed, although the enemy were shelling the roads intermittently during this time. The Commanding Officer took over the aerodrome defences as Garrison Comd and the command of the Bn devolved to Major E.L.V. Mapey.

The aerodrome had been evacuated by the R.A.F. with the exception of a very small cadre.

Aircraft in various stages of unserviceability were left lying about and had not been destroyed – this also applied to vast amounts of technical tools and stores. The same evidence of haste and unpreparedness by parties sent to the Naval base – vast quantities of tools, machinery, stores and food were left there – abandoned. A huge oil dump on fire (enemy action) sent a colossal pillar of smoke up and hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of goods and stores lying about, undestroyed and at the mercy of anyone who wished to take them.



Map of RAF station Seletar drawn by Sgt. Moore in Changi. Red = positions on 1 Feb; Blue = positions on 10 Feb

The rifle Coys were rather “spread out” at the aerodrome in a linear defence of the beaches. “D” Coy, under command once again, in their position on the right. “C” Coy of 5 Bedfs Herts, under command, on “D” Coy left, “C” Coy on Bedfords left, and “A” Coy on left – occupying the point and around the point on the east bank of the S. SELETAR. “B” Coy remained in Bn reserve with Bn H.Q. and “HQ” Coy in the bomb dump area of the aerodrome. These positions were far from satisfactory, as we were hopelessly thin on the ground – it was impossible to place the reserve in a position where it could be of immediate use on all parts of the front – and command of the area would have proved most difficult in action. As it was, the positions occupied by “D” Coy and “C” Coy were impossible to reach without coming under enemy observation, by day.

On the morning of 7 Feb 42 it was found necessary to replace Capt. Marriott by Capt Hockey in command of “D” Coy. Capt. Marriott was sent to command 1st Reinforcements, and Capt. Coulson brought from 1st. Reinforcements to 2 i/c of “B” Coy. Therefore, at the commencement of the Battle of Singapore Officers were posted to Coys. as follows:

	Commanding Officer	Lt.Col. G.G. Carpenter. D.S.O.
	2 i/c	Major E.L.V. Mapey.
	Adjutant	Capt. C.K. Hill.
	Ass/Adjt.	Lieut. J. Bigmore.
	Intelligence Officer	2/Lieut A.B. Gates.
	Medical Officer	Capt. M.F. Smith, R.A.M.C. attached
o.c. “HQ” Coy.	Major D.G. Lawrence	O.C. “A” Coy. Capt. J.F. Newson
	1.Pl. 2/Lieut.R.F. Lucas	Capt. C.S. Derby
	3.Pl. Capt. R.W. Spooner	Lieut. K.C. Darlow
	4.Pl. Capt. J.R.E. Stagg	2/Lieut. W.H. Clark
	Lieut. F.W. Munday	2/Lieut, E.F. Newman
	5.Pl. 2/Lieut. J.A. Dawson	
6.Pl. M.T.O.	2/Lieut. C.R. Grigs	
Q.M.	Lieut. F.W. Phillips	
O.C. “B” Coy	Capt. W.V. Gurteen	O.C. “C” Coy Major K.S. Few
	Capt. G.N. Coulson	Capt. J.S. Cook
	Lieut. E.G. Lawton	2/Lieut. A.C. Clift
	2/Lieut. H. Donaldson	2/Lieut. J.L. Oliver
		2/Lieut. R. Fulcher
O.C. “D” Coy	Capt. F.S. Hockey	
	Lieut. T.N. Johnson	
	2/Lieut. K.E. Skinner	
	2/Lieut. N.D. Sutor	
	2/Lieut. J.E. Bradford	
1 st Reinforcements Officers		
	Capt. C.D.W. Marriott	Lieut. J.N.F. Kennett
	Lieut. O.S. Taylor	2/Lieut. A.H. Baber
	Lieut. A.C. Lewis	2/Lieut. J.D.V. Allum

The Bn were at full strength, with 1st Line Reinforcements. Details of O.Rs names in Bn. Strength, and 1st Reinforcements are available in the form of a Part II Order published in Singapore and sent off before the engagement commenced, and since reproduced.

While the Bn were in Seletar aerodrome an order was issued from Bde. Detailing the Unit to send a full Lieut. To Command H.Q. on attachment for an indefinite period. The officer selected was Lieut. A.C. Lewis.

There was no sign of enemy activity on the shore on the mainland, other than irregular bursts of mortar fire in the aerodrome area, and on the roads to the south of the aerodrome. Enemy aircraft were not very active on this sector, and by this time there was no sign of our own Air Force. They had presumably placed themselves at a safe distance and had lost all interest in proceedings.

During the period at Seletar, and while the invasion of the island was in progress the sound of an intensive Arty duel to our west continued for very lengthy periods. Judging from the sound, the Japanese invasion was having a fair measure of success, but no news of operations reached the Bn from higher formations, with the exception of the 55 Inf Bde Intelligence Summary, stating that the Japanese had landed at 4 places in the West, and by 0600 hours on the morning of the invasion had penetrated to a feature pt 75 (about 1.5 miles inland) – this reached the unit about 36 hours late. It can, therefore be said that from the commencement of the invasion, until the unit were ordered to leave Seletar Aerodrome, we were completely in the dark as to the state of operations.

On 8 Feb 42 the unit were ordered to detail a Captain for attachment to the Kapurtala Inf Bn. It was understood that their morale was extremely low and they required stiffening by the inclusion of a good white officer. Capt. Cook was detailed and duly reported. It transpired that the Kapurtala Inf. Bn. as expected, simply melted away, and Capt. Cook being unable to contact the Bn. attached himself to the 3 Dogras – according to his report, a fine Bn. who maintained their positions until ordered to lay down their arms.

On the night 10/11 Feb 42 the C.O. received verbal orders from Bde that the unit were to evacuate Seletar Aerodrome, and take up a position on a defensive perimeter around the city of Singapore. A force was to be left at Seletar under command of Major Mapey, consisting of some machine guns, a squadron of armoured cars from 3 Indian Cavalry and various oddments of tps left on the aerodrome. Lieut. J. Bigmore remained with him as his adjutant.

At 0900 hours on 11 Feb 42 the Bn started to leave Seletar, being lifted by an R.A.S.C. Coy. Destination a Hill 105, at the junction of Braddell Rd. and Thompson Rd. just S.W. of MacRitchie Reservoir. The situation at this time was known to be extremely grave. The route was via Payar Lebar – along main Payar Lebar Singapore Rd. to junction of Braddell Rd. and thence direct along Braddell Rd. to Hill 105. The route was not policed, and there was a considerable amount of confusion – military and civilian traffic of all descriptions being hopelessly mixed. Under these conditions it was impossible to maintain a Bn convoy, but active use of the Regtl Police enabled the unit to maintain Coy blocks and to arrive at the destination in reasonable time. Several large dumps of Dannert wire were passed on the way, and very few defences of any sort were noticed. This combined with the general confusion gave one a pretty fair idea as to what the final defence of Singapore would be like. Hill 105 was occupied by H.Q 55 Inf Bde and on arrival the Bn took on the joint defence of the area, “D” Coy. on the north, “HQ” Coy. on the west and “A” Coy. on a feature on the opposite side of the rd to the south; Bde H.Q. undertook defence of the eastern perimeter.

“B” and “C” Coys were detached immediately on arrival and sent about 2 miles north to Thompson Village, with orders to protect the right flank against possible enemy infiltration between the Pierce and MacRitchie Reservoirs. These positions were all occupied by about 1400 hours on 11 Feb 42; no hostile action was encountered either during the move or while preparing the defences. There was, however, a certain amount of air recce. During the afternoon a number of stragglers from the A.I.F. came back into our lines. In one case, a Pl. of about 40 under command of an officer. The Pl. was taken under command and given to “D” Coy – they had a meal and then moved off; when O.C. “D” Coy questioned them they stated that they were going into Singapore to reform and that was the last seen of them. All the Australians seen were very tired, their morale had completely gone. This was particularly noticeable when any hostile aircraft were overhead. They were, without exception, quite unable to give any clear account of the situation forward and the Ptes. showed a tendency to state that “the Japanese are just behind us”. At

this time, such statements had no effect on our tps., but one can imagine that this sort of statement constantly made to tired troops in action must have its effect on morale.

News received during the afternoon that the Japanese were in the neighbourhood of Bukit Timah Village but that recce had proved the village not occupied by the enemy. Capt. Derby was sent straight to Div H.Q. to report. 2/Lieut. Newman received a slight wound in the arm from a mortar splinter.

During the evening a plan was made and forwarded to Div through Bde., that the Bn should make a night march through the jungle between Pierce and MacRitchie Reservoirs and should then attack the enemy from the flank – the attack to follow along the line of any success, without pausing, to consolidate any particular position. If successful, it would have disrupted the enemy comms and would have delayed the end of the battle, but the show as a whole seemed to be too disorganised for it to have done much more than that. The plan was turned down.

At about 1700 hours three officers from Dalforce were attached to the unit. These officers were men with a wide experience of the jungle, who had received a special training in jungle warfare. They told us that they had not been in action before, and actually had not left Singapore since the commencement of the campaign.

At about midnight on 11/12 Feb 42, “B” and “C” Coys were combined into one force – known as “Fewforce” and had the Dalforce Officers attached to them. Fewforce was ordered to proceed through the jungle in between Pierce and MacRitchie Reservoirs, as far as the pipe line at the western edge of this jungle, and to deny the line of this pipe line to the enemy. They reached their objective and on the way shot up a party of about 500 Japanese, inflicting about 40 casualties and suffering none. The Bn less “B” and “C” Coys remained at Hill 105 overnight, and were undisturbed.

At about 0330 hours to 0400 hours 12 Feb 42 the Bn received orders to occupy a defensive position forward of the line of Adam Rd. The C.O. issued his orders to Coy comnds (less Os.C. “A” & “C” Coys) at approx 0430 hours. The Bn (less “A” & “C” Coys) to occupy defensive positions in area of Hill 95 on Adam Rd. Coy areas had to be given from the map. “A” Coy rt., Forward of Hill 95 on line of stream; Rt bdy incl rd from x-rds near cemetery (i.e. first x-rds shown on map north of Bukit Timah Rd – Adam rd x-rds). “D” Coy lt in Adam Park Estate. “HQ” Coy, and Bn H.Q. on Adam Rd at rear of Hill 95. Bn posn 1.5 – 2 mls – order of march – Adv Bn H.Q. on Adam Rd., “D” Coy, “HQ” Coy, “A” Coy. “A” Coy to move out from Cemetery Hill independently and to fit into order of march on main rd. Mortars under Bn Comd. Carriers detached with Seletar force.

Bn moved off in good order at 0700 hours. Adv H.Q. with C.Os Carrier for protection moved ahead – Carrier, C.O’s car, 2 m/cs. Arrived at rear of Hill 95, at a point between Hill 95 and Adam Park Estate, dismounted and immediately came under mortar fire. At first it appeared to be observed fire as it was very close, but very soon it became obvious that Adam Rd and the x-rds were being shelled. Hostile aircraft flew along line of rd – at a few hundred feet only – and delivered low level bombing and machine gun attacks, not of any great intensity, however. The Coys moving showed a momentary hesitation on coming under their first fire, but almost immediately recovered and got on the move again. Position occupied by 0800 hours. Immediately on arrival of “HQ” Coy two Dets of mortars put in position at hutted camp to rear of Adam Park Estate. A considerable amount of rifle fire was heard to the front. Some of it appeared to be from the rear of the 4 Suffolk’s position on the Racecourse. Two small patrols from Pioneers were sent out. One to fwd edge of wood on fwd slope of Hill 95 and one to the ridge of Cemetery Hill. Small officer patrol sent forward through Adam Park Estate. It moved along base of Water Tower Hill and reced the ridge forward of Water Tower Hill, without observing enemy, although it came under rifle fire twice. It was unable to observe the Suff positions owing to the close nature of the country but these posns were easily located by the constant flights of enemy aircraft circling over them. Observed that bursts of firing to rear of position were always preceded by flights of enemy aircraft. Aircraft dropped crackers which gave the appearance of rifle fire coming from the rear of posn – this, it transpired, is a regular feature of the Japanese tactics.

Bn H.Q. moved into a fresh posn on the lawn of one of the houses of Adam Rd Estate, only about 150x from the old posn, but being on a reverse slope it was better protected from Mortar fire.

During the morning and the early part of the afternoon the situation remained very confused, as no information reached the unit from "I" and there was an almost constant stream of traffic towards Singapore along the Bukit Timah Rd – to the left of the unit positions. A great amount of this traffic consisted of TomForce, retiring to reform behind our lines, but from the loose, scattered way in which they moved it was obvious that a lot of these tps would never reform, unless somebody succeeded in catching them in Singapore.

In the early afternoon the 4 Suffes, were still on the Racecourse and a very depleted Bn of Sikhs were immediately to our front, the Bn were busy digging in. "A" Coy were not sending in very clear reports and appeared to be moving their positions overmuch. The C.O., when he went over their area, was unable to find C.O. "A" Coy. "D" Coy and H.Q. positions were taking shape – no news had been heard of "B" & "C" Coys., who were presumably still in the jungle. The lack of these two Coys in forming a defended locality was very sorely felt.

During the afternoon the 5 Loyals (Recce Corps) came into posns on our left flank to the Bukit Timah - Adam Rd x-rds, and later the 4 Suffes were withdrawn from the Racecourse to a position on our rt, extending as far as the Reservoirs.

It was discovered that the enemy were operating medium tanks against us, when the C.O. on recce in his car, almost bumped into two.

The Seletar force moved up to Bn during the night, and joined "HQ" Coy., with the exception of the Carriers, who were moved fwd in the jungle bordering the Reservoirs. They established listening posts as far fwd as the Golf Course.



Aerial photo (post-war-1963) looking towards Macritchie Reservoir with Hill 95 in the foreground and Hellfire Corner in the middle distance

Bn positions on the night 12/13 Feb 42

Rt, and rather detached, Carrier Pl.

"A" Coy – "D" Coy;- "HQ" Coy (less Carriers) and Bn H.Q. in Res immediately to rear of "D" Coy in Adam Estate

"A" Coy with two Pls. on Water Tower Hill and one Pl. astride rd leading towards Golf Course.

During the day there had been several low level air attacks, and spasmodic mortarings of rds, and there were several mortar attacks during the night, but generally we had been left fairly well alone.

At approx. 0700 hours on 13 Feb 42 news was received that "B" and "C" Coys had returned from their jungle trip. It was stated that they had a brush with about 500 Japs, and "B" Coy had inflicted about 40 casualties. Both Coys were ordered to move into position on the rt. "C" Coy resting on the Reservoir, and "B" Coy extending left as far as the rd to the Golf Course and Adam Rd x-rds (known by this time as Hellfire Corner). In these positions they rather overlapped the 4 Suffs, but 4 Suffs had been ordered to move into Res in the Cemetery, later.

At 0730 hours the enemy put in a heavy arty and mortar attack along the whole Bn front. This attack was supported by aircraft which continuously circled our posns at very low altitudes (400-500ft), bombing and machine gunning. In one case it was reported that they even threw grenades out of the plane at some of our tps on a rd. The A.A. fire was pathetically inaccurate and did nothing to assist us. The type of aircraft used were mostly an obsolete fighter type, which appeared to be incapable of more than 180-200 m.p.h. A squadron of Spitfires or Hurricanes could have cleared the sky in a matter of seconds, and yet we had these old planes overhead during the whole action.

No direct attack developed on the "D" Coy-Bn H.Q. front, but from the vol. of S.A. fire, it early became obvious that there was some fairly heavy pressure being applied to "A" Coy. Enemy were seen in the area of Water Tower Hill.

At about 0830 hours O.C. "D" Coy reported into Bn H.Q., with the news that No.9 Pl. of "A" Coy had withdrawn from their posns on Water Tower Hill, into "D" Coy posns. No news of this action had reached Bn H.Q. from Coy H.Q. by 0900 hours, but questioning of 9 Pl. personnel indicated that the Pl. had been surprised and that the Pl. Comd, 2/Lt. Clark, had been killed very early on. The Pl. Sgt found his Pl. had moved back and eventually followed them into "D" Coy lines.

The situation was so obscure that the C.O. detached Capt. Stagg (O.C. Carrier Pl) and sent him to "A" Coy, to find out the exact situation, and with orders to re-establish the Coy front immediately.

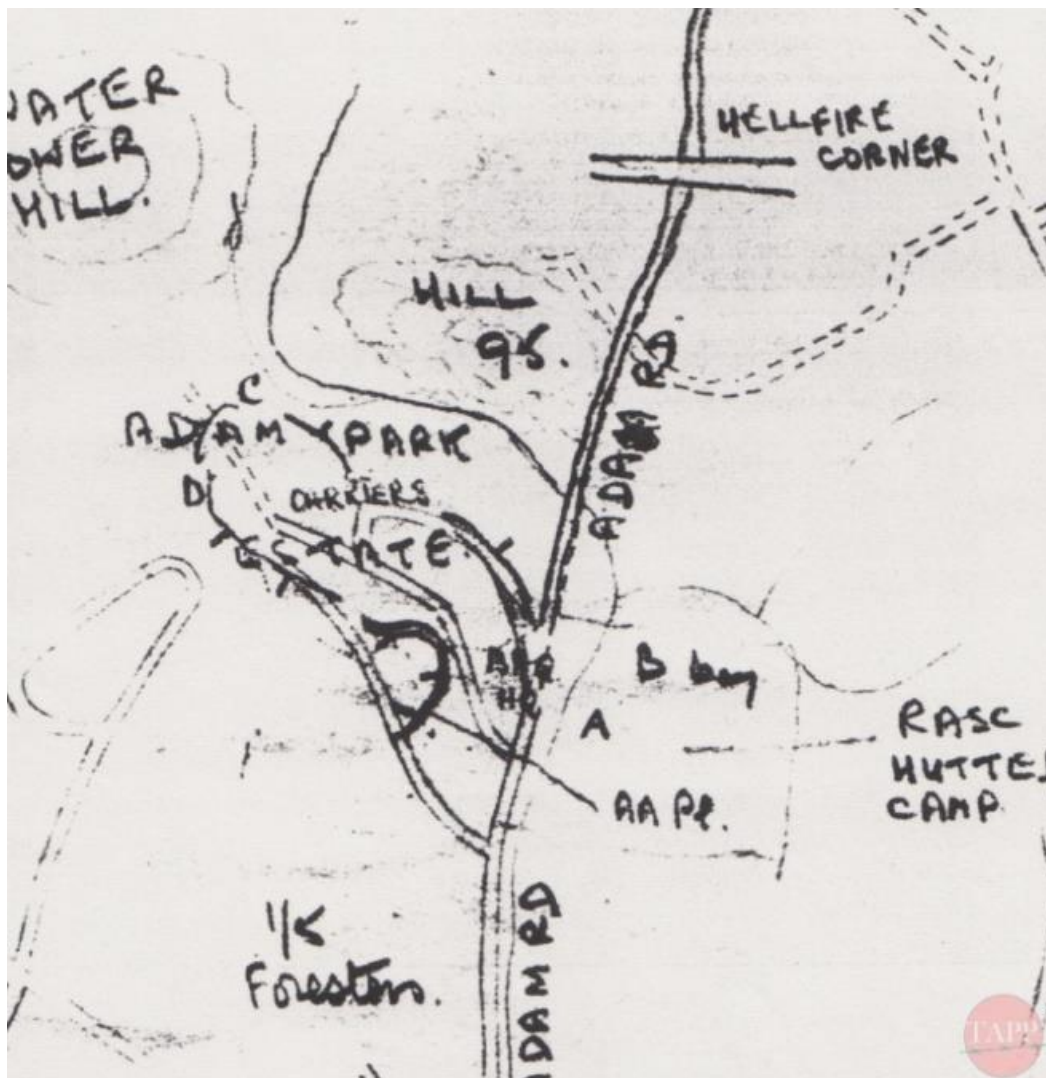


1938 O.S. map shows Adam Park Estate, Adam Rd. and Hill 95 ('95', next to 'Ch'), plus streams & valleys

The situation further to the rt near the reservoir was not known at between 0930-1000 hours, but gave cause for alarm as the Japs appeared to be concentrating a fair amount of arty and mortar fire on these posns, and "B" & "C" Coys were not by that time in position. Arty conc ordered on this area by C.O. – fire brought down fairly quickly.

At about 1030 hours there was a lull in the intensity of the fire. Up to this time the arty had been good and were getting on their tasks quite quickly, although in the close country observation was almost impossible and all tasks were given off the map. After this time, however, the appalling lack of comn in the arty became apparent and there were tragic delays in getting fire brought down. Arty had replied solely on line comn and all the fwd lines were laid above ground and along the sides of rds. Line parties did not appear to be well organised and the result was that the only means of communicating with a Bty was by D.E.

It should be mentioned here that our elaborate 11 & 18 Wireless Sets were quite useless throughout the campaign, never having been rewound for tropical use.

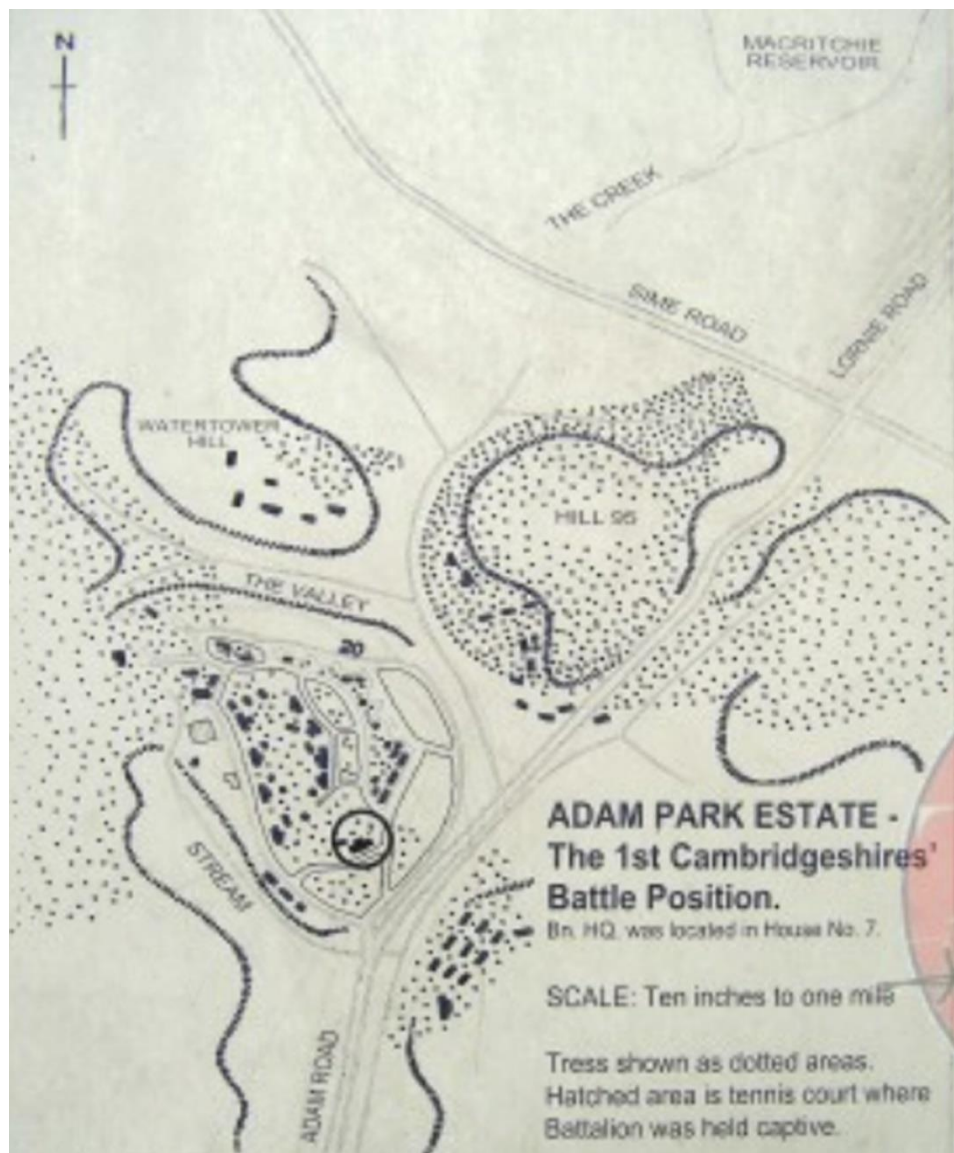


Sketch map of the Adam Park battle area drawn by one of the POW officers in Changi

At the time of this lull in the attack the position on the rt flank was not very clear, but our information was that it was all right. In addition "B" & "C" Coys were about due on the ground. On the left the situation was quite firm and on our left flank the Loyals (2 Coys) had been relieved by the 1/5 Foresters. The position in the centre, however, was not clear owing to lack of accurate information concerning "A" Coy. The Enemy were known to be on Water Tower Hill and to have infiltrated to Hill 95 – the rd between Bn. H.Q. and Hellfire Corner was definitely covered by enemy light automatic fire, and it was reported that there were enemy tps in the woods at the back of Hill 95 – that is on the east side of Adam Rd, to the right rear of Bn H.Q. There was a certain amount of S.A. fire coming from these

woods , but it was difficult to decide with certainty whether or not this was caused by the aircraft fire crackers. In view of this situation the C.O. decided to pull “B” Coy in from the rt and have them in Bn reserve and at somewhere between 1030 – 1100 hours, a runner from “B” Coy who had arrived to report “B” & “C” Coys in position, was sent back to guide “B” Coy to a position in reserve of of Bn. H.Q.

At approx. 1100 hours the Bn had three Fd Regts in support (118, 88 and 148 Fd Regts). This fire power could, at this stage, have been absolutely invaluable, but owing to the lack of communications it was impossible to make the fullest use of them. At about the same time the unit 1st Line Reinforcements Coy joined the Bn. The Coy were almost immediately ordered to counter attack and clear Water Tower Hill of the enemy. They put in three attacks through “D” Coy positions – very gallantly led by their Officers. The attacks were only partially successful as it was found impossible to clear out at least one m/g position. It was noticeable throughout the action that the Japanese were very quick and very clever in pushing m/gs well fwd, under cover of Arty and Mortar fire, into well concealed positions. They invariably held on to such positions with the greatest tenacity, and it always proved difficult and expensive to dislodge them.



Map of the battle area from “Battalion at War” by Michael Moore: circled is the tennis court where 500 prisoners were held at the end of the fighting. Also “20” on the map is the location of the house that Jap soldiers occupied

One such position was held by them on Water Tower Hill. The gun was extremely well concealed among long grass and it was not possible to pin point its position for the mortar. Owing to this situation it was not possible to occupy Water Tower Hill, and the C.O. now decided to counter any threat from that direction, by putting a Coy over Hill 95

from Adam Rd, and into the original "A" Coy positions. "B" Coy were met on their march into Bn reserve from the rt and were led into these positions. Rather a heavy call on them after their recent jungle ops at night, as it meant that a sweep had to be made of the hill to clear it of odd snipers. "B" Coy reported in position in good time. This move appeared to deal with the slight infiltration that had taken place since early morning. It was not until half an hour later, however, that Bn. H.Q. had a clear picture of these positions, as when "B" Coy occupied Hill 95 – 7PI. "A" Coy were presumed to be in position covering the rd to the Golf Course, details of 8PI were still known to be on Water Tower Hill and 9PI were now based on "D" Coy position. A report from Capt. Stagg at about 1130 hours confirmed this, and at the same time a false rumour came that "A" Coy H.Q. were believed to have been wiped out.

At about 1100 – 1130 hours 7 PI came under heavy attack, and apart from a slight adjustment maintained their position. During that period Capt. Stagg reorganised the rest of "A" Coy and got them into their original positions at the base of Hill 95, where they linked with "B" Coy.

In the meantime "C" Coy and the Carrier Pl. were being subjected to some heavy pressure on the rt – along the line of the creek on the S. shore of MacRitchie reservoir. At 1200 hours two Dets of Mortars were ordered from Bn reserve to come under cmd of "C" Coy. To reach "C" Coy they had to traverse Adam Rd and pass Hellfire Corner. This was no light undertaking in spite of the re-establishment of the Hill 95 situation, as Hellfire Corner was constantly under mortar and air attack, and a number of snipers had established themselves in the area. Unfortunately, the 4 Suffs did not do anything about this and it made our lateral comn rather a risky undertaking. However, the mortars under Comd of Sergt. Bonnerson arrived with very light casualties, and were quickly in action. Command of "C" Coy had devolved on Capt. Derby by this time, as Major Few was suffering from exhaustion.

By 1300 hours the pressure on the Bn front – in fact, from MacRitchie reservoir to Bukit Timah – Adam Rd x-rds had eased, and seemed to have swung to the South. For the rest of the day the Bn front remained quiet, except for the attentions of the Japanese air force, and some desultory mortaring and S.A. fire.

During the afternoon the C.O. represented to Bde the extreme danger of holding this point with an entire lack of depth, with the result that after consultation with the Div Cmnd. re-grouping was ordered to take place during the night. The 4 Suffs to take over from MacRitchie Reservoir to Hill 95 incl. 1 Camb R. wood on lower south slope of Hill 95 incl to Adam Estate incl. 1/5 Foresters – Adam Rd Estate excl to Bukit Timah – Adam Rd x-rds incl.

"A" & "B" Coys should have been relieved by the 4 Suffs by 2200 hours, but owing to their late arrival the relief did not, in fact, take place until 0300 hours, 14 Feb 42. Even then 7PI., on the rt, were not relieved until 1000 hours, after strong representations had been made about the matter.

"C" Coy and Carrier Pl. were ordered to withdraw from their positions on the creek at about 2300 hours.

The new Bn dispositions were as follows – "C" Coy and Carrier Pl. (dismounted still) took over rt fwd positions from wood on lower S. Slope of Hill 95 incl. to N side of Adam Estate incl. "D" Coy – west side Adam Estate and along edge of the Estate to link with "HQ" Coy on the S. edge of the Estate. "HQ" Coy and Bn H.Q. in the eastern corner of the Estate. "A" and "B" Coys in reserve at the R.A.S.C. hutted camp on the opposite side of Adam rd, immediately east of Bn H.Q. "A" Coy rt, "B" Coy lt.

During the early hours of the morning, a special party, consisting of Major Mapey, Capt. Stagg and a small number of N.C.Os and men were ordered to report to Bde H.Q. on a special mission. Owing to misunderstanding as to the location of Bde H.Q., however, the party failed to arrive there. It was afterwards learned that this party were to form part of the Div escape party.

With the exception of intermittent mortar fire to L. of C. and the constant shelling of Singapore, the night passed quietly.

General observations of the events of 12 and 13 Feb 42, apart from those already mentioned, are that the Japanese were extremely clever in moving fwd their supplies and amn in the close country, their infiltration and skirmishing tactics were excellent, and they were very quick and able in getting their m/gs fwd, under cover of their mortar fire, to first rate fire positions. They showed a distinct reluctance to come into the open or to come to grips with our tps., always preferring to probe fwd in small parties and work between our positions. Once through, they went to ground and “sniped”, and developed a considerable nuisance value, but no more. Their main effort in the morning was heralded by a heavy mortar and arty attack on our positions, but both forms of fire gave the impression of simply “plastering” a known locality, without any effort to knock out a particular position. The fire was heavy, but the noise was out of all proportion to the amount of metal which fell, and it was suspected that a large proportion of fire crackers were used. Under cover of this they moved fwd and wherever they were met by fire they retired, and retired at some speed. When the Japanese found that positions were being held, their effort swung away from us, and appeared to move along the line of the perimeter, quite obviously searching for a soft spot. After the main morning effort the mortars and arty kept pounding all day and most of the night – the arty on back areas and the mortars alternating between the fwd and reserve positions, and L. of “C” Coy. It was noticeable that even with complete freedom of the air their mortar fire was not particularly accurate and a considerable proportion of m/bombs fell on the ridge to the rear of our positions, which was not occupied. It is possible that the close nature of the country favoured us in this.

The constant and uninterrupted use of the air by the Japanese was a constant source of aggravation. A number of the a/c looked ready to fall apart, and they operated over us all day at heights ranging from 500 – 1000 ft. In the early stages a considerable expenditure of S.A.A. was wasted against them, but by 1100 hours on 12th orders had been issued that a/c were only to be fired on if a direct attack was made.

On the 12th one 3” Mortar and 9 Brens were taken from the Bn to equip tps who lacked weapons. During the greater part of this period the Bn was split and operating as two forces, and for the whole time were holding far too great a front. Added to which the comns to rear were difficult as it was necessary to travel a lateral rd for some distance before a rearward rd was reached.

An extremely unfortunate feature of these two days was that “A” Coy did not settle easily and made a number of changes of disposition. This was not realised at Bn H.Q. until later as the alterations to dispositions were not notified to Bn H.Q.. In addition Bn H.Q. officers who visited the area had, for one reason or another, failed to contact the Coy comd. The Commanding Officer, when he visited the area, left very clear orders that the Coy should take up the positions originally detailed, but it was apparent from the action of the 13th that the Coy had failed to do this. Owing to the wounding, and subsequent death of the Coy Comd the reason for this was never discovered.

The actual positions in which “A” Coy met the initial attack were wrong – they should have been at the base of Hill 95, to the South of the stream marked on the map.

It was impossible to control the Coy in their final position, and it was even impossible for the Pls. to fight in these positions.

During the noise and confusion of the early stages of the action there was a tendency on the part of the men to move about at the double – exhausting themselves. This was checked and thereafter the majority of the men showed great coolness when under fire. In the early stages there was also an inclination to exaggerate reports of the numbers of the enemy present and to accept noise as being evidence of the enemy’s presence. This phase also passed very quickly. It was indeed extraordinary how quickly the majority of the men developed “battle sense”. The value of our high standard of training in England was soon apparent.

The work of the Stretcher Bearers and R.A.P. on the 13th deserves special praise. They brought in, attended and evacuated a large number of casualties both of this and other units. Most of the wounded had to be carried from exposed positions, and in spite of heavy S.A. fire the S.B.s, time after time went out and picked up wounded. In this

they were greatly assisted by personnel of the Pioneer Pl. who acted as guides, relief S.B.s, and gave protection to parties going out.

During the two days there were a number of changes among the officers. The Carrier Pl. were acting dismounted under Lieut. Munday and, in fact, only had four carriers available – the nature of the ground prevented these being used tactically and they were solely employed for message carrying on fire swept rds, and for bringing up amn etc. This left Capt. Stagg free, and he was sent over to "A" Coy on the morning of the 13th to re-organise that front – he remained with the Coy until the early hours of the 14th. The Ass/Adj., Lieut. J. Bigmore, was also sent to "A" Coy on the morning of the 13th when it was found that they had suffered officer casualties – he remained with them.

When "C" Coy came into Bn H.Q. area Major Few was found to be suffering from exhaustion and was ordered to lie up. Capt. Derby, who had been attached to "C" Coy for the jungle march, was sent back to "A" Coy to take command. This left Lieut. Clift in temporary comd of "C" Coy.

Officer casualties suffered up to this time were 2/Lt. Newman wounded by Mortar splinters in the rt arm on two occasions. He remained on duty. 2/Lt. W.H. Clark was killed very early in the initial attack on "A" Coy. It is understood that he was shot after his Pl. had been attacked, while attending to a wounded man. Capt. Newson and his C.S.M. were both shot from the rear at their Coy H.Q. - probably at about mid-day. Both suffered abdominal wounds - C.S.M. Biggs subsequently recovered, but Capt. Newson died in Changi Hospital six weeks later.

Capt. Marriott was wounded whilst the Reinforcement Coy. were attacking Water Tower Hill. His men reported that he had located an enemy m/g position and was attempting to bomb it. Capt. Marriott subsequently died in Changi .

Lieut. Kennett, also of reinforcement Coy. was shot near "A" Coy H.Q. and died two weeks later in Changi Hospital

Lieut. O.S. Taylor, also of Reinforcement Coy. was killed within a yard of Lieut. Kennett. It is reported that he was attempting to assist Lieut. Kennett, but no clear account of the death of either of these two officers is available.

2/Lieut. A.M. Baber was wounded by a mortar splinter in the thigh on the "D" Coy side of Water Tower Hill, during the first counter attack of Reinforcement Coy. He was on the far side of a triple dannert wire and although several attempts were made to get him in, it was unfortunately not possible to do so. "C" Coy made several further attempts when they took over "D" Coy's front, but were not successful, although at night 2/Lieut. Fulcher did manage to pass food to this officer through the wire. Just before the "cease fire" a Japanese tank was seen to stop near him and a man got out of the tank - it was thought that they had evacuated him, but two months later identifications of his body were forwarded to this unit by a burial party.

Between 1630 and 1700 hours a Japanese sniper had been harassing "D" Coy rather badly and had inflicted several casualties. Capt. F.S. Hockey, very unwisely decided to go out for him and left his Coy area. He has not been seen or heard of since, although within 5 mins of his going a patrol was ordered out to contact him. Actually just after he left rather heavy concentration of mortar and arty fire dropped into the area he was presumed to be in. His loss was a great blow and an utter waste. It might well have had serious results as there was considerable confusion for a time. Major D.G. Lawrence took over comd of "D" Coy immediately.

The two great lessons of the fighting so far were dig as soon as a position is occupied, and there is nothing to fear from the Japanese mortars and arty; and remain in position after digging, as the Japanese will retire if the position is firmly held. They showed reluctance to face the bayonet.

Shortly after "A" Coy came back into Bn. Res., early on the 14th, the remains of the Reinforcement Coy were placed under their comd, less 1 Pl. under 2/Lieut. J.D.V. Allum which remained in the "D" Coy area.

Daylight of the 14th did not bring down any concentration of mortar and arty fire, such as occurred on the 13th, but it was not long before the usual hostile a/c were overhead - they remained over our positions throughout the day, and were a constant aggravation to us, but in spite of frequent m/g attacks and a number of low level bombing raids

they did little damage. The exceptions being when they scored a direct hit on a house in the 18 Pls. area. The house itself was badly damaged, but as the Pl. positions were naturally "dug in" around the house no casualties occurred. In the other case an explosive incendiary and an H.E. were dropped together, straddling Bn H.Q. - grass, trees, camouflage nets were fired, but the fires were very quickly kicked or knocked out. Unfortunately this was rather a surprise attack and a number of people were unable to take cover, as a result there were a number of minor burns, and 2/Lieut. R.F. Lucas, Signal Officer was wounded in the leg and evacuated to hospital. Pte. Garner (Adj't's batman) was seriously wounded in the chest and shoulder, and although evacuated to hospital very quickly died the same day.

Shortly before this attack Capt. Stagg was wounded in the arm by a mortar splinter, so although the attacks thus far have been of a purely "formal" nature the Bn lost the services of two more officers before 1000 hours that morning.

At about 1000 hours the water mains to the area were burst and thereafter the Bn had to rely on its water cart for all supplies. When the water went off all available supplies were immediately handed over to the R.A.P. This was soon supplemented by supplies of mineral water found in the R.A.S.C. Camp to the rear of Bn H.Q., all of which were carried straight to the R.A.P.

At about this time a report was received from the 4 Suff's on our rt that Lieut. Kennett was lying in a native hut forward of their positions. Apparently he had been moved there by some Malays on the previous day, they tended him until they evacuated and then reported to the 4 Suff's. A stretcher party under Sergt. Preston went out for him, protected by 2/Lt. J.A. Dawson (Pioneer Offr) and some Pioneer personnel. They succeeded in bringing him in spite of heavy S.A. fire - a very fine achievement.

Up to 1100 hours there had been considerable minor activity on the "C" Coy front. At about 0900 hours the enemy started their infiltration tactics among the houses and succeeded in gaining a footing in a house some 30 yds in front of "C" Coy positions with a L.M.G. "C" Coy made determined efforts to dislodge them - in the first place by sending forward bombing patrols. No windows of this house overlooked "C" Coy so it was comparatively simple to get a patrol as far as the house, but it was then found difficult to get bombs into the house. Several patrols actually entered the building but as by 1100 hours Sergts. Palmer, Cockerton and Corporal Pattle had been killed during attempts to dislodge them, other methods were tried. The house was bombed with 2 " mortar and A/Tk rifle fire - this method had some success but failed to dislodge the L.M.G.

There were also several attempts at infiltration on the left front, against "D" Coy positions and the A.A. Pl. were in action several times (linking "D" Coy with 1/5 Foresters on the left and Bn H.Q. to rear). All these attempts were made by small parties of enemy, who retreated quickly when opposed. The enemy gained no fwd posts in this section of the Bn front.

The detached sections of Mortar from the rt had come in with "C" Coy during the early hours and were now disposed 2 Dets rt front under comd Capt. Munday, 1 Det u/c "D" Coy., and 2 Dets in Bn res, with counter penetration tasks. The fwd dets were frequently in action during the day against known enemy posts and also were used to dislodge the small m/g infiltration parties.

During the afternoon further efforts were made to clear the house to the front of "C" Coy positions. This time, in addition to methods previously tried, discharger cup grenades were used and officer patrols moved fwd in an attempt to lob grenades through the windows - these attempts were not successful and several more casualties resulted. 2/Lt. A.C. Clift particularly distinguished himself leading these raids, and in carrying back to our lines over 80x of bullet swept ground a wounded soldier. He was later recommended for a D.S.O. for these feats, and was given an immediate award of M.C. - thoroughly deserved. At about 1500-1600 hours, while these attacks were in progress, Major K.S. Few reported back to the Coy, and took over command.

During the whole day the enemy kept pegging away at the Bn positions and L. of C. with their mortars. The fire was always intermittent and never heavy. Their arty kept up a continuous bombardment of the back areas and their air force was active both over the front and the back areas - the usual daily flight of 27 bombers arrive from Saigon and unloaded on the city. It should be noted, that as our sector of the perimeter was only about 4 miles from the centre of the city, a bombardment of the back areas, actually meant that the city with its large civilian native population was being shelled almost continuously.

During the afternoon our fwd positions were several times under our own shell fire, which had developed a most unpleasant knack of falling short. Our Gunner Officers communicated with their Regts and finally with C.R.A. but no one could be found who admitted to shooting short - in spite of this there is no possible doubt that our own 25 pdrs did on 3 or 4 occasions drop their shells on our positions.

Between 1700-1800 hours 88 field Regt became very active. Their O.P. succeeded in spotting a useful observed target immediately fwd of "D" Coy's position and at the same time their cable had one of its brief spells of "Life", and consequently three very accurate concentrations were put down at shortly before 1800 hrs. While the officer was at his F.O.P. directing this fire the enemy, quite suddenly, started a very heavy arty and mortar attack on all the Bn positions and on the 4 Suff's left. It was far and away the heaviest attack yet experienced and the most prolonged. During our relatively quiet period of the day the enemy had obviously been extremely busy in moving fwd his amn, and during this attack he made full use of it. After about half an hour of this bombardment a Pl. of the 4 Suff's left fwd Coy were seen running. At first they ran under cover of the trees at the base of Hill 95, but apparently the undergrowth impeded their progress and in order to attain a greater speed the majority of them broke from cover and ran in the open - along the valley in between Adam Estate and Hill 95. Most of them showed a marked inclination to pass through our Bn rear position in the general direction of Singapore.

By this time it was quite certain that the Japanese were using fire crackers mixed with their mortar bombs to increase the noise.

Shortly after the Pl. 4 Suff's runners had been rallied to our lines, the Japanese appeared to bracket off our flank and directed a heavy concentration on to Hill 95, and judging from the sounds this attack was carried on as far as the Reservoir.

By 2000 hours it was definitely known that the entire Hill 95 area, as far [as] Hellfire Corner, had been evacuated by the 4 Suff's. After reports show that retirement took place about mid-day, and it was feared that there might be a considerable enemy infiltration through this gap. To check this until the gap could be closed the Commanding Officer decided to set fire to the woods at the base of Hill 95, and to those extending rearwards behind Hill 95 - "B" Coy were detailed for this task and made a very good job of it. By 2100 hours a fair sized bush fire was raging in the area and any infiltration there was, for the time being definitely stopped. A large petrol dump within the position proved most useful for this.

After the start of the fire the battle swung away from the Bn., and sounded from the south side of the reservoir. Between 2100 hrs and 2200 hrs, the Commanding Officer shouted to the Bn., who were all within hearing distance, that "All Cambridgeshire positions are still in Cambridgeshire hands". The men were in good heart and cheered this announcement.

The Bn were then left in peace for some time, and information of the situation was sent back to Bde. In answer to this information the Bn received a copy of the 54 Bde orders addressed to 2 Camb. R. at about 0100 hrs 15 Feb. The order detailed 2 Camb to attack and take up a defensive position on Hill 95 with one Coy. The attack to commence at 0300 hrs. This was a considerable relief to the Bn as it was thought that any infiltration over Hill 95 up to that time would not be too serious, and it meant that our rt flank would once more be secured and by our own Regiment.

At somewhere about 0230 hrs, however, the B.M. 54 Bde. arrived at Bn H.Q. and stated that a mistake had been made in the order, and for 2 Camb read 1 Camb throughout the order, and that one Coy of 5 Suffs would relieve them at 0415 hrs.

"B" Coy were detailed for this task, and in spite of the extremely short notice, they occupied Hill 95 by 0300 hrs without opposition. They found a number of 4 Suffs casualties and it was evident that they had failed to "dig in" during the day. The Coy of 5 Suffs failed to materialise at 0415 hours, and the attempted relief of "B" Coy did not take place until after day break. "B" Coy tried desperately hard to get this Coy into position on Hill 95, but by this time the enemy had worked considerable bodies of tps, supported by tanks, around to the rd at the rear of the Hill - from direction of Hellfire Corner. Great efforts were made to get them back, but the enemy concentration of inf., tanks and air were too strong, and "B" Coy moved back to their positions in reserve, taking the Coy of 5 Suffs with them.

The enemy arty and mortar shelling continued throughout the night on a fairly heavy scale but the Bn only came in for a light share of it and no damage was done.

General impressions of the action of 14 Feb are as follows. We had been told that during the fighting on the mainland the Japanese snipers took up positions in trees. This we were able to confirm, as several times bursts of fire on a suspected tree had the effect of silencing a sniper, and Major Lawrence actually saw and shot a Japanese soldier in the act of climbing a tree. In another case the body of a sniper was seen hanging strapped to a tree after the tree had been fired on - the sniper in this case was in a coconut tree and was wearing a mask which resembled a coconut.

Snipers were a source of worry during the whole day, and unfortunately the Bn suffered some casualties at their hands. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the majority of the Bn became far too "sniper conscious". There was a very marked tendency to blaze away at tree tops and to attribute almost every Japanese rifle shot heard to snipers. It is more than probable that this slight "jumpiness" was due to tiredness. The men did not show signs of fatigue, but had virtually been without sleep or rest since the night 10/11 in all cases, and in quite a number of cases since 9/10.

Once again the tendency of the Japanese infiltration parties, once they achieved a good fire position, was noticed, and also the remarkable celerity with which they retired if caught moving forward.

Until their main attack at 1800 hours the main impression was that a small force of Japanese were constantly manoeuvring against the Bn - content to just contain us, and quite determined not to be forced to any hand to hand fighting.

One feature of their tactics during the day was speed and frequency with which they moved their mortar positions. Their drill in this respect was excellent, though their fire still gave the impression of "plastering an area", rather than firing at a particular target.

During the afternoon the Bn was switched from 55 Inf Bde to 54 Inf. Bde. These changes of command were bad as the unit had little knowledge of the new commander, or his staff. During the time the unit had been under the command of 55 Inf. Bde. the Bde Comd, Brigadier T N Masey-Beresford, M.C., had kept a very close and personal contact with us. In fact, it was thought that he was inclined to over expose himself to danger, although the extreme gravity of the situation and the need for quick, vigorous action may have influenced him.

After the change over to 54 Inf. Bde. this close personal touch was lost, and its lack was greatly felt by the Bn, particularly in view of the failure of normal communications.

The difficulty of communications with the Gunners became more and more apparent and more serious during the day. Very shortly after the main attack communication failed and the defensive fire signal had to be used.

Fortunately arrangements had been made to relay this back to the gun positions, and as a result the signal was answered reasonably quickly.

During the morning of the 14th the Commanding Officer had seen the Bde. Comd (55 Inf Bde), and had been told the dispositions the 4 Suff's had been ordered to take up to our North - in the direction of the Reservoir.

Later on, however, an Officer of the 4 Suff's arrived at Bn H.Q. and pointed out their positions on a map. These positions were not the ones the Bde Comd had indicated, and were totally lacking in depth, and woefully weak between Hellfire Corner and our rt boundary. An officer was sent to H.Q. 55 Inf Bde to find if there had been an alteration of plan - apparently there had not, so it looked as though the Suff's were not in their correct position. This was never confirmed, however, and what action was taken was never discovered as very shortly afterwards the unit was unfortunately transferred to 54 Inf Bde. It is thought that there was no alteration by the Suff's, as they definitely did not have more than one Coy between Hellfire Corner and our Bn position.

When "B" Coy re-occupied Hill 95 after it had been evacuated by the Suff's they found that the Suff's had made no attempt to dig themselves in during the day. The three factors on Hill 95 which proved fatal to the Suff's were - thinness on the ground - lack of depth, and above all this deplorable failure to dig. The Coy. had been there all day, and yet when "B" Coy arrived they found groups of casualties lying out in the open, in places where no attempt had been made to even scratch a hole. The result was they broke and suffered far more casualties than they should have.

One very satisfactory feature of the days fighting was the quantity of beer, all ranks were able to consume. During the search of the R.A.S.C. Camp for mineral water for the R.A.P., a vast store of beer was discovered and transferred to our positions - while the evening action was in progress nearly every weapon pit had one bottle at the alert, so to speak, and one in reserve.

Casualties during the day were fortunately light, and there can be no doubt at all that this was solely due to the fact that the Bn had dug themselves in. The two officer casualties were not serious ones, although the Signal Officer had to be evacuated. Capt. Stagg, however, only remained at the R.A.P. for a few hours and then, very gallantly, carried on with his arm in a sling. In fact, he remained on duty until about mid-day on the 15th when he had to go into the R.A.P. again.

It appeared that the compromise action putting only one Coy into the Hill 95 area after the Coy of 4 Suff's left, combined with the tragic error of sending the order to the wrong Bn, finally lost us Hill 95 and gave the Japanese undisputed possession of Hellfire Corner. A counter attack by a reserve Bn on the position, would at this stage have had a decisive effect in this sector and would have undoubtedly affected the whole Japanese plan of attack, as at this time they had obviously decided to push through the gap left by the 4 Suff's, using the road through Hellfire Corner as their main route.

Daybreak of 15 Feb 42 found the Bn with the dispositions of the previous night unchanged, except a Coy of 5 Suff's was now in our reserve area. The main battle had swung away from us to the rt and now sounded from out rt rear. Pressure was also being put on the Foresters to our Lt, and the A.A. Pl. were in action to assist them very early in the day.

The Japanese were now in undisputed possession of Hill 95 and early reports from "C" Coy stated that the Japanese were pouring troops and tanks across the stream valley at the west of Hill 95 and thence proceeding towards the cross-rds of Hellfire Corner. "C" Coy, the Carrier Pl, and the mortars had some very pretty shooting against these formations, and Sgt. Holyhead's Det secured a direct hit on a Japanese tank, at a range of approximately 1200 yds. There is no doubt that this fire surprised the Japanese, as until casualties had been inflicted they had moved troops into the open in column of route. It is possible that they thought that the whole area West of Adam Rd had been evacuated.

There was no doubting the seriousness of the position - a breach had been made in the perimeter defences of Hellfire Corner, and the enemy were thrusting through it - the sounds of battle came from our rt rear, some distance away, and may have been from the Northern Sector of the Perimeter. Information of our situation was sent back, and efforts were made to bring down our arty on Hellfire Corner. The old trouble of communications cropped up again, and the amount of fire we got was extremely unsatisfactory.

At somewhere between 1000 and 1030hrs. the 1/5 Foresters Intelligence Sergt arrived and asked for the situation on our rt - this was explained to him in great detail and a written message in confirmation was sent - it was stressed in this message that the Bn position was steady and that very little infiltration had taken place around us, although the enemy were using Hellfire Corner.

Shortly after this a Pl. of Foresters twice retired into our left posns, and were sent back again - the unit Mortars assisting them. Reports from our left indicated that the Foresters had evacuated their forward positions.

This left the Bn in the awkward position making a nasty little salient among the buildings of Adam Estate. In view of these reports the Commanding Officer decided that it would probably be necessary eventually to form a defensive flank on the Foresters. This would entail a withdrawal across Adam Rd of the two fwd Coys, "C" and "D", of "HQ" Coy and Bn H.Q. Accordingly orders for a recce of lines of withdrawal and a new site for Bn H.Qs shortly after 1100 hrs. The Commanding Officer, at the same time, decided to get the Mortars across the rd right away, and orders to this effect were issued very soon after 1100 hrs. The Mortars started their move very quickly.

At some little time before 1100 hrs it became evident that the Japanese were beginning to press in on our rt and a machine gun got into position in locality of the rd near the S.W. base of Hill 95, snipers infiltrated round to our rt and started to become very active against our Reserve Coys. At about 1115 hrs Capt. Derby reported in to Bn H.Q. and stated that he had seen a Japanese tank and a machine gun post immediately to the rear of his rt position.

At somewhere between 1100 hrs and 1130 hrs the enemy suddenly opened an extremely heavy mortar concentration on our reserve posns. Simultaneously they fired some long grass, which very quickly set alight the huts of the R.A.S.C. Camp.

A succession of concentrations lasted for about half-an-hour, during which time the fire raged through the huts. Unfortunately this mortar fire and the firing of the huts caught the Bn. Mortar Pl. in the middle of its move to its new positions, with its 5 mortars and all their amn. For a considerable time after the Japanese concentrations ceased these dumps of our Mortar amn. continued to explode in the heat of the fire. The confusion and noise were indescribable, and at Bn H.Q. it seemed that the casualties must have been enormous.

At the same time the fwd Coys were engaged by increased infantry pressure, and "C" Coy and the Carrier Pl. were attacked by tanks. These attacks were not seriously pressed on by the enemy, however.

Bn H.Q. was subjected to an increased amount of S.A.A. and light automatic fire. Owing to its position on a reverse slope with houses immediately to its front, enemy mortars and arty were not able to range on Bn H.Q. itself up to this time.

During the Mortar attack the Japanese worked a tank and at least one M/G along the road from Hellfire Corner. These took up positions near the point where Adam Rd left the woods around Hill 95. Some very gallant work was done by the Pioneer Pl. in getting improvised obstructions across the rd. The obstructions were improvised out of broken down vehicles and baulks of timber, and could hardly be described as A/Tk obstacles, but they had the effect of stopping the movement at the point just mentioned. One tank was actually knocked out at his position, but it is thought that it was still capable of firing, as a tank was in action against our reserve positions from this area, and unless another tank, which could not be seen from Bn H.Q. was there, it must have been the one which had been stopped on the rd.

Between 1100 - 1200 hours while the mortar attack on the reserve positions was taking place, "B" Coy and some of "A" Coy positions were rendered untenable by the burning huts and grass. The personnel in these positions were forced to leave their weapon pits. As soon as they came out into the open they came under fire from the flank of M/G, rifle and a 2-pdr. tank gun. The Mortar personnel were actually on the move and were in the open on the commencement of the action. Their mortars and their amm were destroyed by the fires.

A re-distribution of the reserve Coys was necessary. "B" Coy with 7 Pl. and part of 8 Pl. of "A" Coy who had been forced out of their weapon pits were ordered to close in on the Bn H.Q. area and take up defensive posns. from the rear left flank around to the rear left of Bn H.Q. This was done, with the exception of 11 Pl. which had moved into the woods to the rear of the Forester posns. and went on as far as Bukit Timah Rd, where they were ordered to fall back on 54 Inf. Bde. H.Q. and remain there for the remainder of the action. The Mortar Pl. personnel were closed in on the Bn H.Q. area and used as riflemen to thicken up the fire. The remainder of "A" Coy, that is Coy H.Q., 9 Pl and part of 8 Pl., who had been able to remain in their weapon pits, together with some "B" Coy personnel, who had joined them, remained in position and were still in action there on the "cease fire".

During the attack it became noticeable that there was no sign of life from the Foresters area on our left, and there was no transport on Adam Rd, near their H.Q. Our left positions reported that they had not seen any Foresters for some time, and were coming under S.A. fire from the direction of some of the Foresters positions. In view of this the Intelligence Officer was sent to contact O.C. Foresters to ascertain his position. This was probably at about 1230 hours, and the enemy mortar fire and the explosions of our own bombs had died down.

Adam Rd and the open ground immediately to its East, between Bn H.Q. and the Reserve positions were now under direct m/g fire from our right flank, and any movement there was extremely dangerous. In spite of this the S.B's, supported by volunteers, made constant journeys to the area of the fire and evacuated a large number of casualties. In this they were greatly assisted by 2/Lieut Dawson – the Pioneer Officer who organised covering fire each time a party were ready to cross the rd. This work actually continued until the "cease fire".

The pressure on the Bn front – which was now from three sides – increased steadily from this time onwards, and by 1445 hours virtually the whole Bn, less "B" Coy, were in action and being heavily pressed by infantry, and on the Carrier Pl. by the occasional tank. The Japanese, however, still showed a marked disinclination to come to close quarters. By 1500 hours the situation was extremely grave. At 1515 hours a message was sent to H.Q. 54 Inf Bde explaining the situation and asking permission to form a defensive flank on the 1/5 Foresters.

Within a few moments of this message being sent off the Intelligence Officer returned with the news that the Foresters had evacuated their positions, and there was no one on our left. The Bn were now completely isolated, were being heavily engaged on three sides and the pressure was now working around to the open left flank.

Adam Rd to the x-rds at the Adam Rd – Bukit Timah Rd (i.e. through the old Forester positions) was still open, although the whole of it was under heavy rifle and M/G fire.

At 1530 hours the Transport Officer arrived with a message, ordering the capitulation.

The thought of a surrender after all the effort expended by the Bn during the last two weeks was most disheartening.

This order was immediately passed to all Coys, and owing to the possible time lag in getting it down it was impossible to come into effect immediately. It proved rather difficult to shout the instruction across the rd to "A" Coy, but by 1630 hours all sounds of firing on the Bn front had died down. There were, however, sounds of arty fire from our rear and the Japanese arty were still firing an occasional salvo into Singapore.

The Japanese commenced to close in on our positions – very cautiously. At about 1645 hours someone fired a burst of Bren – a Japanese tank which had been engaged in picking up wounded, opened on the Carrier Pl. position with its

2 pdr. killing Pte Andrews. Several automatic weapons opened fire on our positions and a 2-in mortar commenced dropping bombs on Bn H.Q. After this any sign of movement in our lines was answered by S.A. fire, and the 2-in mortar continued to drop its bombs at intervals – one bomb killing Pte. Avery and wounding two others.

At about 1645 hours a flight of Japanese a/c flew over the city and dropped bombs. At 1730 hours the Commanding Officer and Adjt went down to Adam Rd to meet the Japanese. Having been previously informed that the Japanese did not take prisoners, and being cut off from information from our rear, made one wonder what would happen.

The Bn were marshalled in the area of “D” Coy positions – Officers were separated from men, and officers placed in a house while the men were all herded into a wired in tennis court. The C.O. gave orders that no Officer was to attempt to escape without permission. Their first duty was to stay with the men.

As a note in the Adj’t’s pocket diary states, “Bn taken prisoner – but taken in their original positions. The unit was not defeated and did not retire”.



This is NOT Lt.Col. Carpenter and officers surrendering; rather it is a well-known staged photo taken by a Japanese photographer in Singapore. I’m including it here to symbolise the capitulation and loss of the colony on 15/02/42

General impressions of 15 Feb 42 are extremely difficult to tabulate, overwhelmed as they are by the main thought that one was ordered to surrender to an enemy of whom one always felt one was the master. However, one did note once again the tendency of the Japanese mortars to “plaster” an area rather than take on a target. The enemy infantry maintained their infiltration tactics to the last and as usual were very clever at it – even when pressing us at their hardest they did not often present us with targets. Again they refused to meet us man to man, and even when they had both our flanks open and had moved around to our rear refused to come to close quarters. It was also obvious, when they moved into our positions at the capitulation, that they had not succeeded in “spotting” half our positions previously.

Our men were magnificent throughout the action. Their morale was of the highest order right up to the end.

No information or orders reached us from the rear, between the time the B.M. 54 Inf Bde informed us of the error in their order, in the small hours, and the arrival of the unit T.O. with the capitulation order.

One feature of the action was that during the whole course the only Div or Bde staff officer to visit the Bn, were the B.M. of 54 Inf. Bde., when he appeared on the morning of the 15 Feb, and motor contact officers.

The Div Comd and both Bde Comds. Did come up, but their staffs did not come near us. Neither did the unit receive any intelligence from the rear, and for the greater part of the action were completely in the dark as to happenings, other than those on our immediate front.

Singapore fell owing to lack of plans, orders and power of command.

Whenever we had the chance the British, Australian and Indian soldier proved himself immeasurably superior to the Japanese, who are nothing more than an overrated crowd of gangsters.

Lt-Col.

Comdg. 1st Bn The Cambridgeshire Regiment.

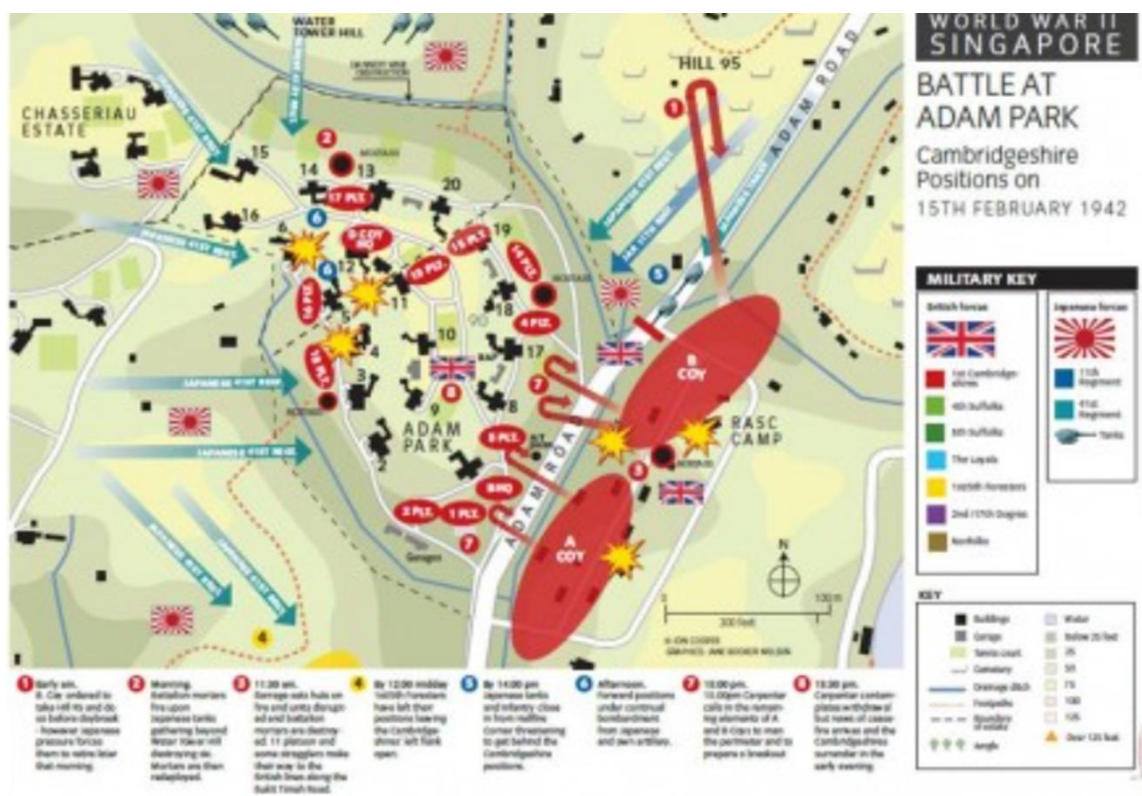
Some extra illustrative material:

- 1) Part of the hierarchy of the British Army in Singapore in February 1942, showing the position of the 1st Battalion, the Cambridgeshire Regiment, within the 55th Infantry Brigade: also the 54th Brigade, into which the Cambridgeshire Battalion was moved towards the end of the action.

- **18th Infantry Division** – Major-General Merton Beckwith-Smith
 - **53rd Infantry Brigade** – Brig. Cecil Leonard Basil Duke
 - 5th Battalion, **Royal Norfolk Regiment** – Lt. Col. Eric Charles Prattley
 - 6th Battalion, **Royal Norfolk Regiment** – Lt. Col. Ian Conway Gifford Lywood († at Alexandra Hospital Massacre)
 - 2nd Battalion, **Cambridgeshire Regiment** – Lt. Col. Gordon Calthorpe Thorne (Died, Indian Ocean while attempting to escape)
 - **54th Infantry Brigade** – Brig. Edward Henry Walford Backhouse
 - 4th Battalion, **Royal Norfolk Regiment** – Lt. Col. Alfred Ernest Knights
 - 4th Battalion, **Suffolk Regiment** – Lt. Col. Alec Albert Johnson
 - 5th Battalion, **Suffolk Regiment** – Lt. Col. Lionel John Baker
 - **55th Infantry Brigade** – Brig. Tristram Hugh "Tim" Massy-Beresford
 - 5th Battalion, **Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment** – Lt. Col. Douglas Rhys Thomas
 - 1/5th Battalion, **Sherwood Foresters** – Lt. Col. Harold Hutchinson Lilly
 - 1st Battalion, **Cambridgeshire Regiment** – Lt. Col. Gerald Goodwin Carpenter

- 2) A series of maps showing the positions of the various companies of (mostly) the Cambridgeshires and Suffolks in the Adam Park/Adam Road/WaterTower Hill/Hill 95 and Hellfire Corner areas, 12th – 15th February. These maps were drawn especially for the Adam Park Project (an archaeological survey of the Singapore battlefield in the area of Adam Park, approximately 2008-15) and have been accessed from the Project's website. Unfortunately the copies are of such low resolution that it's virtually impossible to read much of the text, legend etc. I am trying to contact the project to request better quality maps but in the meantime what follows is the best I can do to give an impression of the positions held over the period.

Quote from the Adam Park website: *"In February 1942 the black and white houses became the backdrop for the heaviest fighting of the week long Japanese campaign to capture Singapore. Men of the 1st Battalion Cambridgeshires held off the IJA's 41st Regiment amidst the ruined houses, shell-pocked gardens and manicured tennis courts for 72 hours before the surrender of the island. Reputedly the last shots of the Japanese invasion were fired at Adam Park. Three medals were won for the defence of the estate and hundreds of troops from both sides were killed in the action."* (www.adamparkproject.com)



3) Recommendation for Bar to D.S.O. for Lt. Col. Carpenter submitted by Lt. Gen. A.E. Percival dated 13/12/45

(1060) Wc19766/796 120m 7/43 FHD Gp38

Army Form W.3121

Date recommendation passed forward

Received

Passed

Brigade

Division

Corps

Army

Schedule No. (To be left blank)

Unit 1 Cambridgeshire Regt. 55

Inf. Bde.

Rank and Army or Personal No. Lt-Col. 13944 16662

Name CARPENTER Gerald Goodwin. DSO.,

(Christian names must be stated)

Action for which commended (Date and place of action must be stated)	Recommended by	Honour or Reward	(To be left blank)
In the severe fighting in which 1st Cambridgeshires took part between Feb 11th and 15th 42, in the Adam Rd area, Singapore, Lt-Col. Carpenter was an unfailing source of inspiration to his Bn. It was largely due to his dogged determination to hold out that the unit maintained its position intact from Feb 12th until the capitulation. During the whole of this period the position was subjected to ceaseless artillery, MG and sniper's fire while enemy infiltration eventually reached a point at which the unit was completely surrounded.		Bar to DSO.	
In spite of this and with his flanks constantly in the air, Lt-Col. Carpenter by his vigour and example inspired his men to resist, despite exhaustion, on the allotted position.			
During Feb 13th and 14th he organised several local offensive sweeps to dislodge snipers, inflicting a number of casualties on the enemy.			

Bar to DSO.

13.12.45

43927

P.T.O.

- 4) Lt. Col. Carpenter in a group photograph taken at Whittington Barracks, Lichfield, 1941



- 5) Lt.Col Carpenter, his wife Marjorie and two of their children, at home c.1970s.



6) In Ely Cathedral there is a Cambridgeshire Regimental Chapel and this chair is dedicated to Lt. Col. Carpenter



7) The houses of Adam Park have all been rebuilt and are occupied today. Meanwhile Singapore city has expanded and new roads have been built. I understand that both Water Tower Hill and Hill 95 have been flattened and built on but the estate (originally developed by the Municipality as housing quarters for senior officers in the British administration between 1925 to 1929) remains as an oasis of peace, separate from the hustle and bustle of modern Singapore. Here is No. 7 which was the location of Lt. Col. Carpenter's Battalion Headquarters.

