

Report 16 RAPWI Contact Staff (25)
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A Report on RAPWI in JAVA
Appendix I to Chapter 2.

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A Report on ambush of a RAPWI Convoy in SURABAYA.

A convoy of 20 x 3 ton lorries of 123 G.T. Coy had been ferrying APWI women and children throughout the day from GOEBENG along route GOEBENG - BRUGSTRAAT - PALMENLAAN - DARMO BOULEVARD. This convoy was under comd Capt D.N. CHOPRA, 3 IND FD REGT R.I. ARTY, and had an escort of 20 IOR's of 4 MAHRATTAS. It had lifted about 400 women and children and their furniture by 1600 hrs 28 OCT.

At 1630 hrs the convoy passed the 5 RAJ RIF post on the bridge on BRUGSTRAAT. About 100 yards past the junction on PALMENLAAN it was stopped by a road block. Capt CHOPRA who was in the lead and three IORs in his jeep and the driver were shot dead immediately. Heavy fire was opened on the leading half of the convoy with rifles, LMGs and grenades, several lorries being set on fire before the women and children could be got out. Hav. GOPAL UBALÉ 4/5 MAHRATTAS and other Sepoys under heavy fire ran out along the convoy lowering tailboards and organising the collection of women and children under guard in some empty houses and then took up defensive positions. Sub TEK CHAND, RIASC, took charge of the defence of the rear part of the convoy.

Heavy massed attacks were put in by the armed mob who advanced firing rifles, brandishing spears, sword and clubs down the roads while heavy fire from rifles, LMGs and grenades and incendiaries was poured into the lorries from roof tops and windows by uniformed INDONESIAN soldiers. Heavy losses were inflicted on the dense mass of INDONESIANS but casualties were also incurred by the G.T. drivers and MAHRATTA escort. After an hour and a half the attacks ceased but heavy sniping continued. At 2130 hrs further lorries were set on fire and the remaining IORs occupying fire positions in the road had to withdraw to the houses in which were some forty women and children. Subedar TEK CHAND, RIASC, at this time managed to start up three lorries with some 20 women and children of whom 5 were wounded and after considerable difficulty two lorries found their way into "B" Coy RAJ RIF area, and one into 3 IND FD REGT areas. One further truck escaped at this time returning to 5/6 RAJ RIF with 7 women and children of whom two women and one child was killed and one woman wounded. As soon as the men on the road were withdrawn the mob swarmed over the lorries looting and flinging dead bodies of women and children into the road. Owing to the necessity of conserving ammunition the few Indian troops defending the women could not open fire. Wounded Sepoys were seen to be dismembered with Jap swords. Two women and children were seen to be butchered with swords by the crowd.

The surviving Sepoys held out successfully till the following night, when owing to their running out of ammunition they were forced to surrender. They and the women and children were severely beaten and struck by the INDONESIANS. The Sepoys were then taken to the prison where the VCO and two Sepoys were murdered by their guards. The women and children were led away elsewhere with their hands bound.

No further information is available regarding the whereabouts of these women and children. All attempts to trace them from evacuees have failed, as far as is known they are not now living in SURABAYA.

No accurate numbers can be given as the officer in charge of the convoy was killed.

The opinion of the surviving women from Sub TEK CHAND's two lorries is that these women were butchered by the crowd after being taken away. This is not necessarily true as on surrender the mob was restrained from attacking the Sepoys and women by uniformed INDONESIANS. These were nevertheless responsible for the murder of the VCO and the two IORs in the prison and may well have connived at or carried out the murder of these women and children.