

SECRET

COPY NO. 11

THE CAMPAIGNS IN THE FAR EAST

VOLUME II

MALAYA, NETHERLANDS EAST INDIES  
AND BURMA

AIR HISTORICAL BRANCH (1)

AIR MINISTRY.

## THE CAMPAIGNS IN THE FAR EAST

VOLUME II  
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AND BURMACONTENTS  
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EAST INDIES

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## Volume II

### Part I

#### Chronological Summary of Principal Events

22nd November, 1941:	Appreciation by C.-in-C. Far East
24th November, 1941:	"Norgroup" reforms at Kuala Lumpur
29th November, 1941:	Seaward reconnaissances start
1st December, 1941:	No.2 Degree of Readiness ordered
2nd December, 1941:	Eastern Fleet arrives at Singapore
4th December, 1941:	Initial Reconnaissance Plan implemented
5th December, 1941:	Authority received to order "Matador"
6th December, 1941:	Japanese invasion fleet sighted
6th December, 1941:	No.1 Degree of Readiness ordered
7th December, 1941:	First aircraft casualty
8th December, 1941:	Enemy Landings at Kota Bahru and Singora
8th December, 1941:	Singapore has its first air raid
8th December, 1941:	Enemy attacks on Northern airfields
8th December, 1941:	Nos. 21 and 27 Squadrons evacuate Sungei Patani
8th December, 1941:	No.1 Squadron evacuates Kota Bahru
9th December, 1941:	No. 62 Squadron evacuates Alor Star
9th December, 1941:	Singora is bombed by Nos. 34 and 62 Squadrons
9th December, 1941:	Aircraft withdrawn from Kuantan
10th December, 1941:	<u>Prince of Wales</u> and <u>Repulse</u> sunk
11th December, 1941:	First night attack by R.A.F.
11th December, 1941:	Penang raided
11th December, 1941:	Denial of the Borneo oil wells
12th December, 1941:	Battle of Jitra
13th December, 1941:	Japanese fleet sailing towards Borneo.
13th December, 1941:	No.453 Squadron move to Ipoh to defend Penang
14th December, 1941:	Battle of Gurun
14th December, 1941:	No. 60 Squadron personnel return to Burma
15th December, 1941:	Evacuation of Butterworth
15th December, 1941:	"Norgroup" moves back to Ipoh
16th December, 1941:	R.A.F. Mission to Sumatra airfields
16th December, 1941:	Invasion of Borneo

16/17th December, 1941: Evacuation of Penang

18th December, 1941: Inter-Allied Conference at Singapore

18th December, 1941: Evacuation of Kuantan

19th December, 1941: No. 453 Squadron falls back to Kula Lumpur and No.1 Squadron is withdrawn to Singapore

20th December, 1941: "Norgroup" disbanded

21/23rd December, 1941: Final air operations over Kula Lumpur

23rd December, 1941: Army crosses River Perak

23rd December, 1941: No.62 Squadron takes over No.60 Squadron aircraft

23rd December, 1941: Blenheim reinforcements arrive from Middle East

24th December, 1941: Dutch aircraft withdrawn from Sinkawang

24th December, 1941: Air Sea Rescue service starts to operate

25th December, 1941: Hong Kong surrenders

26th December, 1941: Kuching occupied by Japanese

27th December, 1941: 100 enemy aircraft on Sungei Patani

27th December, 1941: Air Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham replaced by Lt. General Sir Henry Pownall

29th December, 1941: Final appreciation by C.-in-C. Far East

30th December, 1941: Night raids on Singapore re-commence

30th December, 1941: No.62 Squadron moves to Kluang

30th December, 1941: Proposal to establish a Bomber Group at Palembang

2nd January, 1942: Army withdraws from Kampar

2nd January, 1942: Kuantan occupied by Japanese

2nd January, 1942: Batu Pahat put into use

3rd January, 1942: First re-inforcement convoy arrives

4th January, 1942: No.153 M.U. to move to Java

5th January, 1942: Battle of the Slim River

6th January, 1942: No.62 Squadron returns to Tengah

8/12th January, 1942: Series of Long distance bombing operations

10/11th January, 1942: Kuala Lumpur and Port Swettenham airfields demolished

12th January, 1942: Daily East Coast reconnaissance started

12th January, 1942: Daylight raids on Singapore begin

13th January, 1942: Second Convoy arrives - with 51 Hurricanes

14th January, 1942: Army crosses into Northern Johore

15th January, 1942: South-West Pacific Command formed under General Sir Archibald Wavell

15th January, 1942:	Batu Pahat demolished
16/26th January, 1942:	Close air support on West Coast
17th January, 1942:	Dutch fighters revert to N.E.I. control
18th January, 1942:	No.225 (B) Group forms at Palembang
19th January, 1942:	First Hudson III reinforcements reach Singapore
19/21st January, 1942:	Further long distance bomber raids
20th January, 1942:	The Hurricanes go into action
21st January, 1942:	No.151 M.U. to move to Java
22nd January, 1942:	Third reinforcement convoy arrives
22nd January, 1942:	Kahang demolished
22nd January, 1942:	Ground parties of Nos. 1, 8, and 34 Squadrons arrive in Sumatra
23rd January, 1942:	Blenheims of Nos. 84 and 211 Squadrons begin to arrive at Palembang I
23/24th January, 1942:	Nos. 34, 27 and 62 Squadrons land at Palembang II
23rd January, 1942:	Kluang demolished
24th January, 1942:	Fourth reinforcement convoy arrives
26th January, 1942:	Site for rear Headquarters found at Palembang
26th January, 1942:	Enemy landings at E <sup>N</sup> edau
27/28th January, 1942:	48 Hurricanes fly-off H.M.S. <u>Indomitable</u>
28th January, 1942:	No.258 (F) Squadron lands at Seletar
28/30th January, 1942:	No.232 (F) Squadron arrives at Palembang I
29th January, 1942:	Nos. 1 and 8 Squadrons transfer to Sumatra
29th January, 1942:	Fifth reinforcement convoy docks
30th January, 1942:	No.21 Squadron ground personnel go to Sumatra
30th January, 1942:	Decision to form No.226 (F) Group
31st January, 1942:	No.205 Squadron flies to Batavia
31st January, 1942:	Nos. 36 and 100 Squadrons transfer to Kamajoran
31st January, 1942:	Wirraway Flight goes to Kenayaru
31st January, 1942:	All troops are withdrawn on to the Island
28th January to 12th February, 1942	Constant raids on Malaya by bombers of No.225 Group now based in Sumatra
1st February, 1942:	All Buffaloes of Nos. 243 and 488 Squadrons absorbed by No.453 Squadron
1st February, 1942:	No. 258 Squadron moves to Palembang I
3/4th February, 1942:	Heavy air raids on Singapore Docks

4th February, 1942:	Airfields come under artillery fire - all aircraft concentrated on Kallang
5th February, 1942:	No. 232 Squadron arrives at Singapore
5th February, 1942:	No. 453 Squadron evacuates to Sumatra
5th February, 1942:	Abdair directs A.H.Q. to remain at Singapore.
5th February, 1942:	Last convoy get in to Singapore
6/7th February, 1942:	Heavy enemy air attacks on Palembang I
6th February, 1942:	Invasion convoy located in Anambas
8th February, 1942:	Japanese land on the Island
9th February, 1942:	Final operations by No. 232 Squadron
10th February, 1942:	All aircraft withdrawn from the Island
10th February, 1942:	Senior R.A.F. officers leave for Sumatra
11th February, 1942:	Operations Room destroyed
12th February, 1942:	A.H.Q. moves nearer to Fort Canning
13th February, 1942:	The A.O.C. leaves Singapore by launch
15th February, 1942:	Singapore surrenders

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PART I (Continued)

Chronological Summary of Principal Events

10 February 1942 : Last R.A.F. aircraft leave Singapore for Sumatra.  
11 February 1942 : Air Vice-Marshal P.C. Maltby becomes A.O.C., R.A.F. Far East.  
14 February 1942 : Japanese paratroop landings at Palembang, Sumatra.  
15 February 1942 : Surrender of Singapore. R.A.F. attacks on Japanese convoy and barges in Palembang River.  
16 February 1942 : Evacuation of Sumatra.  
25 February 1942 : ABDACOM and ABDAIR disbanded. Dutch High Command control Allied forces in Java.  
26 February 1942 : Two Japanese convoys approaching Java.  
27 and  
28 February 1942 : Naval battle of Java Sea.  
1 March 1942 : Japanese establish beach-heads in Java.  
8 March 1942 : Hostilities cease.  
12 March 1942 : Instrument of Surrender signed.

PART II

Chronological Summary of Principal Events

15 February 1941 : No.60(B) Squadron R.A.F. arrives in Rangoon.  
21 April 1941 : Formation of 221 Group R.A.F. in Burma.  
1 September 1941 : American Volunteer Group arrive in Rangoon.  
13 October 1941 : 67(F) Squadron a complete Unit in Rangoon.  
November 1941 : Twelve Blenheims of 60(B) Squadron move to Malaya.  
7 December 1941 : Japanese reconnaissance aircraft over Tenasserim.  
8 December 1941 : Burma at War.  
10 December 1941 : Victoria Point evacuated.  
11 December 1941 : First Japanese air attack on Tavoy.  
13 December 1941 : Japanese bombers over Rangoon. Mergui bombed.  
15 December 1941 : Defence of Burma transferred to India from F.E. Command.  
21 December 1941 : First R.A.F. attack on Japanese airfield in Thailand.  
23 December 1941 : Heavy air raid on Rangoon.  
25 December 1941 : Second bomb raid on Rangoon.  
1 January 1942 : A.V.M. D.F. Stevenson arrives as A.O.C. Burma.  
11 January 1942 : 5,000 Japanese troops in Tenasserim.  
19 January 1942 : Mergui and Tavoy in enemy hands.  
30 January 1942 : Japanese enter Moulmein.  
11 February 1942 : Martaban occupied by Japanese.  
15 February 1942 : Army retreat behind Bilin river.  
21 February 1942 : R.A.F. Blenheims destroy Japanese road transport.  
23 February 1942 : Army defeated at Sittang river.  
24 and  
25 February 1942 : Intense air fighting over Rangoon: Japanese defeated.  
5 March 1942 : General Alexander becomes G.O.C. Burma.  
8 March 1942 : Fall of Rangoon.  
8 March 1942 : Burwing R.A.F. formed at Magwe.  
12 March 1942 : Akwing formed at Akyab.  
12 March 1942 : No.221 Group reformed in Calcutta.  
21 March 1942 : Heavy R.A.F. attack on Japanese airfields at Rangoon.  
21 March 1942 : Japanese air attack on Magwe.  
22 March 1942 : R.A.F. destroyed and evacuation of Magwe.  
27 March 1942 : Akwing move to Chittagong.  
1 April 1942 : No.224 Group formed in Calcutta.  
5 April 1942 : Japanese attack Ceylon.

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Chronological Summary of Principal Events (Contd.)

14 April	1942 :	Attack by Hudsons on Japanese flying boats at Port Blair.
15 April	1942 :	Yenangyaung oil wells destroyed.
18 April	1942 :	Attack by Hudsons on Japanese flying boats at Port Blair.
20 April	1942 :	Bengal Command formed in Calcutta.
30 April	1942 :	Japanese occupy Lashio.
20 May	1942 :	End of First Burma Campaign.

## PART I

THE CAMPAIGNS IN MALAYA, BORNEO AND NETHERLANDS EAST INDIES

## THE LAST WEEKS OF PEACE

IIJ50/32:  
"Far East  
Emergency:  
Encs. d/d  
21 & 25 Nov. 41.

Brooke-Popham  
Despatch para 50

A.H.B.  
IIM/A19/3A  
"O.R.B.  
Appendices  
A.H.Q.F.E.,  
1941" Appendix  
'F' d/d  
22 Nov. 41.

A.H.B. File  
IIJ50/3  
"G.H.Q.  
Instructions  
to A.O.C."  
Enc. d/d  
19 June 41.

Ibid Appendix  
'E' d/d  
22 Nov. 41 and  
A.H.B.  
IIM/A19/1:  
"O.R.E.A.H.Q.  
Far East  
1933 to 1941":  
Entry d/d  
21 Nov. 41.

Upon realizing that war with Japan was almost a certainty in the very near future the C-in-C., in a signal to the Chiefs of Staff once again urged the necessity for operation MATADOR to forestall the Japanese in the Singora area; he also asked if H.M.G. could define in advance the circumstances under which the operation could be authorized by himself. But the C.O.S., representing Government policy, would not be committed in advance to automatic reaction to any particular situation. They could only advise the C-in-C to make all the necessary preparations so that he might act immediately - but he could not order any move into Siam without sanction from H.M.G., which, it was estimated would reach him within 36 hours of the receipt of a report of Japanese movements. Meanwhile, the C-in-C, on 22nd November 1941 issued an Appreciation to the G.O.C. Malaya and A.O.C. Far East. The location of bomber aircraft in Southern Indo-China he stated, was an indication that action would be directed from this area against Siam, rather than from Northern Indo-China against the Burma Road; and because the Japanese realized the naval situation was likely to change, there was every possibility she would attempt a sudden coup against the airfields in the Northern area or even against Singapore itself. Under these circumstances he expected MATADOR would have to be carried out. Accordingly the A.O.C. was directed to move the necessary Squadrons to the Northern Stations, such requirements taking precedence over those for the International Air Force. The "Second Degree of Readiness" (1) was not put into force however, and in order to conserve aircraft, routine reconnaissances were not ordered for the South China Sea. Nevertheless A.H.Q. were warned that the plan might soon be required, whilst naval and land forces in the Singapore area were to be ready to counter a raid on the Island.

A.H.Q. then issued the first Operation Order of the campaign, detailing the movements of the four Squadrons supporting IIIrd Indian Corps, who were to advance into Southern Siam when MATADOR was ordered (2). The R.A.F. units were put at 72 hours notice and would be under the control of No. 223 Group ("Norgroup") which was to reform

- (1) Degrees of Readiness - The Command was always kept one of the Degrees of Readiness described below:
- No. 3 Degree: The Normal war state.
  - No. 2 Degree: The international situation deteriorating, utmost vigilance necessary; Command to be in position to operate at short notice.
  - No. 1 Degree: Command to be ready for immediate operations, and all Units to be prepared for sudden enemy attack delivered without prior warning.
- (2) No. 62 (B) Sqdn. at Alor Star ) To remain at these  
No. 27 (NF) Sqdn. at Sungei Patani ) Stations until  
further orders
- No. 34 (B) Sqdn. from Tengah to Alor Star - to be ready  
to move at 24 hrs. notice.
- No. 21 (F) Sqdn. (R.A.A.F.) from Sembawang to Sungei  
Patani - to arrive 25 Nov. 41.

DSD (M.R.S.)  
2012 - Enc. 11a  
d/d 4 Feb. 46  
"Report by O.C.  
21 Sqdn."

ILJ50/4 "Ops.  
Room Narrative  
R.H.Q.F.E."  
Entry d/d  
1 Dec. 41.

A.H.B.  
IIM/A19/3A  
"O.R.B.  
Appendices  
A.H.Q.F.E.";   
Appendices "I"  
& "J" Nov. 41.

A.H.B. File  
ILJ50/32 "Far  
East Emergency"  
Encs. d/d  
27 Nov. 41  
29 Nov. 41.

Ibid, Encs. d/d  
30 Nov. 41  
2 Dec. 41.

A.H.B. File  
ILJ50/4 "Ops  
Room Narrative  
- A.H.Q. F.E."  
Entries d/d  
2 Dec. &  
3 Dec. 41.

with its Headquarters at Kuala Lumpur on 24 November 1941.<sup>(1)</sup> The move of No. 21 (F) Squadron to Sungei Patani relieved the small detachment of No. 243 (F) Squadron at Alor Star of their duties of intercepting foreign aircraft infringing Malayan territory, in consequence the section of Buffaloes moved to Kota Bahru on 26 November 1941. In anticipation of the initial seaward reconnaissance plan being put into action, No. 8 (G.R.) Squadron (R.A.A.F.) was put at short notice to move to Kuantan whilst arrangements were made for No. 60 (B) Squadron at the Armament Training Camp to move to Butterworth and so free Kuantan for the arrival of No. 8 (G.R.) Squadron.

On 28 November 1941 A.H.Q. were informed that a report had reached G.H.Q. from Saigon concerning the intention of the Japanese to land troops in South Siam on 1 December 1941. Although the report was not altogether reliable, G.H.Q. were aware of the adequate forces in Southern Indo-China, therefore an air reconnaissance was ordered to obtain information of the approach of any convoy from Saigon. Landings were expected between Singora and Patani or at Nakawm, between 0500 and 1200 hours 30 November and 1 December 1941. A striking force would not be ordered to attack even if such a convoy were found, and aircraft might not be risked in bad weather. Consequently, on 29 November 1941, three Hudsons of No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron made daily reconnaissances from Kota Bahru, but nothing was sighted. Notice for Operation MATADOR was reduced from 72 to 12 hours and Norgroup informed accordingly.

At this stage the C-in-C, convinced of the psychological value of an offensive in the opening stages of the war, once more signalled to the Chiefs of Staff the need for operation MATADOR to be ordered in time. He pointed out that enemy troops could start disembarking at Singora within 33 hours of leaving Saigon, which period was shorter than the 36 hours grace required for deliberations at Government level. In the opinion of the Chiefs of Staff, this latest situation envisaged by the C-in-C was one in which the use of operation MATADOR would certainly provoke war with Japan - and the policy in this respect was still to avoid war as long as possible. Consequently they would only re-affirm their most recent decision - no offensive action without prior authority from H.M.G.

But the situation with regard to Japan was fast deteriorating so that the Governor Straits Settlements was advised by the Colonial Office to review all measures to be taken in the event of the institution of the precautionary stages. It was also anticipated that the "general warning" and "war inevitable" telegrams, because of the rapidly developing situation, might not reach the Governor in sufficient time to allow him to act, therefore he was to consider taking the necessary measures in advance. The Governor's response, on the advice of C-in-C and G.O.C. was to mobilize the Volunteer Forces on 1 December 41; Borneo and Sarawak also reviewed their own precautionary measures. Also on this day G.H.Q. ordered No. 2 Degree of Readiness to be brought into force.

The special air reconnaissance from Kota Bahru, was superseded on 3 December 1941 by the full reconnaissance plan; this was ordered by G.H.Q. and was the plan originally formulated after the A.D.B. Conference, known as FLEN/PS. The area allotted to the R.A.F. was: Kota Bahru - Southern tip

(1) For the initial formation of No. 223 Group, see also in Section: "Co-operation with other Services" (Chap. 1)



Maltby Despatch  
para 148.

of Indo-China - Great Natunas - Kuantan. An extension of this plan into the Gulf of Siam was precluded through lack of aircraft. Dutch flying boats arrived at Seletar to carry out their part of the reconnaissance covering the area Kuantan - Great Natunas - Kuohing, whilst the Hudsons of No. 8 (G.R.) Squadron commenced to move to Kuantan from Sembawang.<sup>(1)</sup> Both the G.R. Squadrons - No. 1 at Kota Bahru and No. 8 at Kuantan were then ordered to carry out the initial reconnaissance plan commencing on 4 December 1941.

A.H.B. File  
ILJ50/4 "Ops.  
Room Narrative -  
A.H.Q.F.E."  
Entries d/d  
4 Dec. 41  
5 Dec. 41.

Subsequently the aircraft of No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron at Kota Bahru were unable to carry out their first reconnaissance sorties because of bad weather and similar conditions prevailed the next day, but No. 8 (G.R.) Squadron, Kuantan, were able to operate. An anti-submarine patrol by three Vildebeeste from Seletar was maintained ahead of H.M.S. Repulse which was sailing at slow speed for the first 48 hours on a visit to Port Darwin, Australia. (This patrol, supplemented by a Singapore of No. 205 (F.B.) Squadron was in operation until 7 December, when H.M.S. Repulse had returned to Singapore after recall).

Maltby Despatch  
para. 149

Brooke-Popham  
Despatch para 51  
(C.O.S.F.E.  
No. 50 d/d  
5 December 41)

On 5 December 1941 there came the long-awaited signal from the War Cabinet giving the C-in-C authority to order MATADOR. Over a period of twelve months this project had been urged by G.H.Q. and on every occasion the Government had declined to vest the initiative in the Far East authorities. But because of the assurance of American armed support the whole situation was changed. Now, at the eleventh hour, the C-in-C could order MATADOR without reference to London in either of two contingencies; if a Japanese expedition was advancing with the apparent intention of landing on the Kra Isthmus, or if any other part of Siam was violated. Only a few days previously the well-established policy had been re-affirmed - Japan must not be provoked, and in view of this the C-in-C considered it his duty to be scrupulously careful in his interpretation of the final signal.

"Enemy Publication No. 278"  
by Allied  
Translator and  
Interpreter  
Section S.W.  
Pacific area.  
d/d 8 Oct. 42:  
Page 5

#### The Approach of the Japanese Fleet

As part of the plan to strike simultaneously in Malaya, Hong Kong and Pearl Harbour, the Japanese invasion fleet was on the move in the opening stages of the "Greater East Asia War". The Yamashita Group (25th Army plus part of 15th Army) was sailing in convoy, escorted by naval units. After moving southwards from Saigon and Camranh, (the Indo-China bases) it rounded Cape Cambodia on the morning of 6 Dec. 1941.

(1) The move was carried out in stages: Four a/c on 3 Dec., three a/c on 4 Dec., four a/c on 5 Dec., two a/c on 6 Dec.

The ground party also moved by boat on 6 Dec.

Note: Except where otherwise stated all times used in the ensuing narrative are LOCAL TIME. To convert the L.T. of various theatres to GREENWICH MEAN TIME the following table may be consulted:

(a) FAST on G.M.T.

8 hours : Hong Kong, Philippines, North Borneo.

7 $\frac{1}{2}$  " : Singapore, Java.

7 " : French Indo China, Siam, South Sumatra.

6 $\frac{1}{2}$  " : Burma, North Sumatra.

5 $\frac{1}{2}$  " : India, Ceylon.

(b) SLOW on G.M.T.

8 hours : Washington.

10 $\frac{1}{2}$  " : Pearl Harbour (Hawaii).

(c) Japanese time was 1 $\frac{1}{2}$  hours fast on British Local Time. e.g. 2030 hrs. British L.T. = 2200 Japanese L.T.

IIJ50/4 "Ops  
Room Narrative -  
A.H.Q.F.E."  
Entries d/d  
6 Dec. 41.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2014: Enc. 10A  
d/d 21 June 46.  
Report by O.C.  
No. 1 (G.R.)  
Sqn.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2024 Enc. 5a  
d/d 8 Jan. 46 -  
"Report by  
O.C. Seletar"  
and  
IIJ50/4 :Entries  
d/d 6 Dec. 41.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2014: Enc. 8a  
d/d 5 Jan. 46.  
"Report by F.L.  
Allansonex No. 36  
Sqn."

Form 540  
R.A.F. Selector  
Entries in  
Oct. Nov. 41.

So far the ships had been undetected, but on that day the adverse weather (which had hitherto restricted the Initial Reconnaissance Plan to the aircraft at Kuantan) lifted and so allowed the plan to be fully implemented; No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron flew three Hudsons from Kota Bahru, whilst No. 8 (G.R.) Squadron operated two aircraft. It was a Hudson of No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron which made the first sighting at 1212 hours; the group consisted of a Japanese Cruiser together with a merchant vessel, a minelayer and a minesweeper, about 30 miles south of Pulau Obi (an island off the southernmost tip of French Indo-China), sailing in a North-Westerly direction. Shortly afterwards, at 1246 hours the same Hudson operating some 300 miles from its base sighted a larger force of merchant vessels escorted by warships; (1) and 14 minutes later another Hudson reported a further convoy. (2) Both fleets were heading West at a position about 80 miles South-East of Cape Cambodia. (3) One of the Hudsons was chased by a single-float seaplane so it was assumed the Japanese knew they had been intercepted.

As a result of these sightings "No. 1 Degree of Readiness" was ordered at 1517 hours, Kota Bahru was required to shadow the convoys with two Hudsons, and Seletar instructed to send a Catalina of No. 205 (F.B.) Squadron to the anticipated position of the two main convoys (08° 05' N - 104° 25' E) to continue the shadowing during the night. Seletar also had to send nine Vildebeestes of No. 36 (T.B.) Squadron to Kota Bahru to stand by as a striking force.

Norgroup was warned by A.H.Q. not to implement MATADOR without definite orders, and at the same time No. 62 (B) Squadron at Alor Star was transferred to A.H.Q. control. In order to carry out a photographic reconnaissance of the Jap convoys a Buffalo was to be sent from Kallang to Kota Bahru, but when it was discovered the aircraft was not fitted with long range tanks a Beaufort of No. 100 (T.B.) Squadron (at Seletar) was prepared for the task. All bomber aircraft were required to arm and units warned that unidentified aircraft would be engaged by A.A. fire, although G.H.Q. ordered no offensive action was to be taken by our own fighters. Nine Vildebeestes were ordered to move from Seletar; these took off at 1800 hrs, but two returned owing to engine trouble. After flying for nearly 400 miles through bad weather and in darkness, the remaining seven aircraft arrived Kota Bahru at 2245 hours. During the night they were armed with torpedoes. (4) By 1830 hours the Catalina of No. 205 (F.B.) Squadron was airborne with instructions to proceed to the calculated position of the main Japanese convoys, but in the meantime the relieving Hudson from Kota Bahru had failed to make contact with the convoys during the evening search. This had finished at 2230 hours, when weather was bad - it was raining with

- (1) Second sighting: one battleship, five cruisers, seven destroyers, twenty-five merchant vessels.
- (2) Third sighting: two cruisers, ten destroyers, twenty-one merchant vessels.
- (3) Some doubt is cast on the fact that two main convoys were sighted. O.C. No. 1 Squadron, in his very detailed report concluded that both aircraft had sighted the same convoy. Times of sightings also conflict although the differences are small.
- (4) This arming procedure was made possible by the earlier transference of 50 per cent of the torpedoes from SELETAR. Between 20 Oct 41 and 25 Nov 41, 35 torpedoes were flown in to KOTA BAHRU and 34 in to KUANTAN by Vildebeestes.

cloud at sea level. The enemy convoys at this stage were lost to their pursuers, but Kota Bahru had reason to believe that the convoys in actual fact were one hour ahead of the reported positions. It was also suggested by Kota Bahru that a search should be made in the Gulf of Siam at first light next morning, for which purpose three aircraft were in readiness. This opinion was endorsed by the C-in-C, who, in consultation with Admirals Layton and Pallister (Sir Tom Phillip's Chief of Staff) concluded that the main convoys would not continue due West but would turn North-West and follow the small convoy into the Gulf of Siam. Here, off the West coast of French Indo-China was the good anchorage of Ko-Kong which might be the next stage towards a landing in Siam. Meanwhile, O.C. Seletar had requested that the Catalina on shadowing duties should be relieved by another flying boat. This was agreed by A.H.Q. and, at 0200 hours 7 December 1941 the second Catalina left Seletar with orders to take over the shadowing from the first Catalina. It was arranged that if this aircraft had not made contact with the enemy, then the relieving flying boat was to continue Northwards to search the Cambodia coast. The first Catalina eventually returned to Base at 0800 hours, whilst the second was known to have flown towards the Indo-China coastline.

Enemy Publication No. 278 -  
pages 10, 11

The assumptions that the enemy fleets had entered the Gulf of Siam were indeed correct. The Japanese had staged a feigned landing in Bangkok and for this purpose were steaming Northwards along the Cambodia coast. But at this stage they had air cover. From distant bases in Southern Indo-China this would have been difficult, if not impossible by reason of the distances involved, (1) but the problem had been solved by the use of an air base specially constructed in a space of two weeks on the island of Phu Kok (off the West coast of Cambodia). By this means, and commencing 7 December 1941, the Japanese convoys were given fighter protection by squadrons of the Aoki and Kato forces, led to the convoy positions by reconnaissance aircraft. This cover eventually extended as far West as Singora.

A.H.B. File:  
IIJ 50/4 Entry  
d/d 7 Dec. 41.

At first light 7 December 1941, the Initial Reconnaissance Plan was continued in respect to No. 8 (G.R.) Squadron in case another convoy was on the way from Indo-China. This however, was cancelled for No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron in favour of the special sweep into the Gulf of Siam in search of the elusive convoys. Kota Bahru, however, was in difficulty; not only was the weather bad, but the airfield was becoming congested with aircraft. A.H.Q. thereupon gave permission for Gong Kedah to be used, and it was to this airfield that O.C. Kota Bahru eventually moved the striking force of No. 36 (T.B.) Squadron's detachment of seven Vildebeestes, which had arrived late the previous evening. Despite the bad weather the patrol of three Hudsons took off from Kota Bahru at 0645 hours, but no contact was made with the convoys, in fact two of the Hudsons were forced to return to base within the hour. The second Catalina of No. 205 (F.B.) Squadron fared differently; at 0830 hours the flying-boat had acknowledged instructions by radio from Seletar that she was to keep 10 miles from the Cambodia coast - no doubt these orders were meant to emphasize the original briefing - but from that moment there was unbroken silence. The rest of the story may be derived from the Japanese narrative. Their convoys were sailing Northwards along the Cambodia coast with a fighter escort provided by the Takeda Force, when they

IIJ53/8  
"Japanese Air  
Operations in  
Malaya" pp. 33,  
37

Enemy Publication No. 278  
page 12.

(1) The distance from Saigon to Singora is approximately 500 miles; and from Phu Kok to Singora, 300 miles. 12th Air Brigade was responsible for the air protection at the Convoy whilst the J.N.A.F. flew anti-submarine patrols.

were sighted by the Catalina from a position a few miles North-west of Pulau Panjang. Without apparently sending a sighting report the Catalina dived to attack the Japanese fighters who promptly engaged it with at least four aircraft. The Catalina with its crew of eight exploded in mid-air so ending the first air combat of the Malayan Campaign.

File ILJ50/10  
"Operational  
Returns" Entry  
d/d 7 Dec. 41.

At 1010 hours the C-in-C visited the Combined Army/Air Operations Room and expressed himself satisfied with the situation; B.O.A.C. aircraft were to be routed through Bangkok until the last possible moment, but he was considering the question of allowing our aircraft to fire upon aircraft not established as friendly. At 1135 hours on 7 December Kota Bahru was instructed to send the P.R. Beaufort to Ko Kong, the anchorage off the Cambodia coast to which it was considered the Japanese fleet was sailing, but because of bad weather, it returned without completing the task. During the afternoon of 7 December aircraft from Kota Bahru and Kuantan had been operating in the Gulf of Siam. The No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron Hudson reported a 6000 - 8000 ton vessel heading West, whilst the No. 8 (G.R.) Squadron aircraft had sighted an armed merchant raider of 3000 tons moving south with men in khaki uniforms on her decks. Although the weather was bad with heavy, low clouds over the sea, two Hudsons continued the reconnaissance in the evening with a diverging search in the area North of Kota Bahru, until at 1750 hours a cruiser in company with a merchant vessel was sighted 112 miles North of Kota Bahru; the No. 1 Squadron Hudson then came under fire. An hour later another report was made of contact with four warships 60 miles North of Patani moving South. This information reached the C-in-C about 2100 hours. Even at the time of the first enemy sightings he had considered he would not be justified in ordering MATADOR under the existing circumstances, and especially in view of the sudden change of policy by H.M.G. But now, with these final sightings his ultimate decision, with the concurrence of C-in-C Eastern Fleet, was not to order MATADOR after all. He considered that because the reconnaissance conditions had been bad there was no real certainty the ships were an expedition; and furthermore, if the expedition were indeed aimed at Singora then it could reach this area before the British forces could arrive. MATADOR, he states in his explanatory signal, "was designed only to forestall a Japanese expedition". Also he had to bear in mind the fact that if the conclusions drawn from the reconnaissance had proved incorrect the disadvantage of being the first to break Thai neutrality would have been incurred - an action which it seemed the Japanese, by their movements, were endeavouring to provoke. These views were further strengthened by a telegram from the British Minister in Bangkok to the Foreign Office which in strong terms asked that British troops should not be the first to violate Siam. Although practically every Siamese was behind Britain in her opposition to Japan, irreparable harm would be done if the British were the first to violate their territory.

Orders were then issued for B.O.A.C. aircraft to discontinue their use of the East Coast route through Bangkok - in future the West Coast only should be used. Such was the position in the late evening (2300 hours) in the Far East Command. The R.A.F. were standing by to engage the enemy, even though the intentions of the approaching convoys were not finally apparent. Although indefinite sightings had been made that same evening, contact with the main forces had been lost. In actual fact the Japanese were fast approaching their objectives. After sailing well into the Gulf of Siam to simulate a landing in Bangkok, the convoys turned south in the final stage of their approach to the shores of Malaya. The main force was heading towards a landing in the Singora - Patani area,

Brooke-Popham  
Despatch para.  
100 and  
Appendices "Q"  
& "R"

Enemy Publi-  
cation No. 278  
page 15

IIJ50/4  
Entry d/d  
8 Dec. 41.

whilst a smaller convoy was approaching Kota Bahru. At this station, the furthest north in the chain of airfields, the weather continued to favour the Japanese. Rain and low cloud extended up to 100 miles out to sea restricting the airfield's serviceability to urgent operations. A small force of ten Hudsons of No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron was at readiness, of which five were already armed. Two Buffaloes of No. 243 (F) Squadron were also standing-by, whilst at Gong Kedah, under the control of O.C. Kota Bahru, were the seven Vildebeestes of No. 36 (T.B.) Squadron.<sup>(1)</sup> To discover if any Japanese ships had actually made a landing in south-east Siam it was the intention of A.H.Q. to send at first light on the 8th December a beach patrol from Kota Bahru to the Lakon Roads, and at the same time it was proposed that the Reconnaissance Plan from Kuantan should be discontinued. Evidently the A.O.C. considered there was then little chance of a landing in the lower stretches of the East Coast. This opinion was not entirely shared by the Navy, who in response to the A.O.C's plan, had asked for a further diverging search from Kuantan at first light. But all evidence had pointed to the existence of the convoys in the Gulf of Siam, and it was logical to assume they were making for the only deep-water port in that region - Singora; in fact for over a year the primary strategical consideration had been to forestall the enemy in that area. But it was destined the Hudsons from Kota Bahru were never to follow-up their earlier success in seaward reconnaissance by flying Northwards in the coming dawn; the Japanese themselves were to supply the answer. Once more a well-timed feint was to distract the attention of the British for at the very moment the reconnaissance to the Lakon Roads was being ordered (0030 hrs.) a Japanese force of three to five ships was standing off the Kota Bahru beaches. Japan was about to strike, and in striking draw the fire from her main forces at Singora.

#### Order of the Day

Brooke-Popham  
Despatch  
para 99  
Appendix "P"

During the progress of the Campaign many public announcements were to be made. The first of these - the "Order of the Day" - was jointly prepared as far back as May 1941 by the Commander-in-Chief Far East and the Commander-in-Chief China Station. The reason for its early drafting was that by such means it could reach Burma and Hong Kong in time to be translated into the different languages and so be ready for issue on the first day of the war. It is quoted in full:

'Japan's action today gives the signal for the Empire Naval, Army and Air Forces and those of their Allies, to go into action with a common aim and common ideals.

'We are ready. We have had plenty of warning and our preparations are made and tested. We do not forget at this moment the years of patience and forbearance in which we have borne, with dignity and discipline, the petty insults and insolences inflicted on us by the Japanese in the Far East.

(1) No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron also had three U/S Hudsons at Kota Bahru, together with one aircraft undergoing 180-hour inspection at Sembawang.

Note: Details of the Japanese Air Forces may be found at Appendix I. These include: Organization of the Army and Naval Air Forces; Tactics - level, glide and dive bombing; fighter; attacks on airfields and shipping; Order of Battle of J.A.A.F. in Malaya; Performance and characteristics of aircraft; Strength and losses.

We know that those things were only done because Japan thought she could take advantage of our supposed weakness. Now, when Japan herself has decided to put the matter to a sterner test, she will find out that she has made a grievous mistake.

'We are confident. Our defences are strong and our weapons efficient. Whatever our race, and whether we are now in our native land or have come thousands of miles, we have one aim and one only. It is to defend these shores, to destroy such of our enemies as may set foot on our soil, and then, finally, to cripple the power of the enemy to endanger our ideals, our possessions and our peace.

'What of the enemy? We see before us a Japan drained for years by the exhausting claims of her wanton onslaught on China. We see a Japan whose trade and industry have been so dislocated by these years of reckless adventure that, in a mood of desperation, her Government has flung her into war under the delusion that, by stabbing a friendly nation in the back, she can gain her end. Let her look at Italy and what has happened since that nation tried a similar base action.

'Let us all remember that we here in the Far East form part of the great campaign for the preservation in the world of truth and justice and freedom; confidence, resolution, enterprise and devotion to the cause must and will inspire every one of us in the fighting services, while from the civilian population, Malay, Chinese, Indian or Burmese, we expect that patience, endurance and serenity which is the great virtue of the East and which will go far to assist the fighting men to gain final and complete victory.'

In drafting this Order, the C-in-C had to bear in mind the need for a universal appeal to men of varying races and religions, and subsequently he had reason to believe the Order had had such desired effect. THE TIMES War Correspondent in Malaya reports that most of the people in Singapore agreed the Order was a good statement. 'It expressed their feelings' he writes, 'and gave vent to the confidence which they felt'.

The Services, however, were not so complacent, if the reactions of the officers of R.A.F. Seletar may be considered representative of the Far East Command. The Senior Operations Officer at that Station recounts how some fifty officers were gathered in the Mess to hear the Order, where-upon they dismissed the matter from their minds in the knowledge that the assurances were worthless. 'It would have been better if this speech had never been made' declares this officer.

On the opening day of hostilities, the C-in-C., Far East, was also to receive a message of encouragement; but this particular signal acknowledged the limitations in the Far East. It was from the Chief of Air Staff and read:

'Our thoughts are with you at this fateful time and I send to all the air forces under your command the best wishes of us all. We know the limits in numbers and in equipment which necessity has set to your resources but we are confident nevertheless, that your squadrons by their skill, gallantry and determination will overcome all handicaps and win enduring fame for themselves and their service'.

This message was promulgated throughout the Far East Command.

"Malayan Post-script" by  
Ian Morrison  
page 50.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2014 "Bomber  
Ops" Enc. 17a  
d/d 10 Feb. 46.

ILJ50/18/7  
"Defence Schemes  
etc." Enc.  
d/d 8 Dec. 41.

Invasion in the North

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page 6.

IIJ 53/8  
page 38

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2024 "Reports  
on R.A.F. Stns"  
Enc. 6a d/d  
28 Nov. 45

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2014 "Bomber  
Operations"  
Enc. 10a d/d  
21 Jan. 46

A.H.B. File  
IIJ50/4 "Ops  
Room Narrative"  
Entries d/d  
8 Dec. 41

Brooke-Popham  
Despatch,  
paras 100,  
101.

Maltby  
Despatch  
paras, 170,  
171, 172, 174,  
673.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2014 Enc. 13a  
"Report on  
R.A.A.F.  
Operations"

The Japanese describe their main landing operation in Siam as 'the bloodless landing at Singora'. And well it might have been for the British forces were still in their defensive positions on the Malayan side of the Border. Apparently the initial landings were made at 0330 hrs. 8 December and the first objective was the British Consulate which was taken by surprise. There was some token resistance however, at the Singora Police Station, which was soon overcome. These landings had air cover and in fact the aircraft were able to land unchallenged at Singora.

Meanwhile the Takumi Co-operating Force had proceeded Southwards for their attack on Kota Bahru which was planned to divert attention from the main landings. They were sailing into clear weather, for at 0030 hours 8 December the beach defences at Kota Bahru reported to A.H.Q. that they had sighted three ships lying off-shore. The enemy had arrived. Thirty minutes later O.C. No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron telephoned A.H.Q. Singapore with the news of shell-fire being heard - from which side it was unknown - and the fact that the Kota Bahru aircraft were on the ground awaiting orders. Within seven minutes A.H.Q. ordered off a Hudson to make a quick reconnaissance to clarify the position, for offensive action could not be taken at this juncture because until the Japanese had committed some definite act of hostility against the United States, the Dutch or ourselves permission had not been given to attack a Japanese expedition at sea.<sup>(1)</sup> But the Hudson did not take off, for at 0115 hours landing craft were seen approaching the beaches and the local Brigadier was asking the R.A.F. for an urgently needed bombing attack. Five minutes later the A.O.C. instructed the Hudsons of No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron to take off immediately with parachute flares for full offensive action (five aircraft were already bombed-up, each with four 250 lb bombs, and the other four then proceeded to arm). Because of the low cloud base pilots were briefed to make individual low-level attacks on the landing barges and transports.

By this time A.H.Q. had issued orders for all available squadrons to concentrate on the Kota Bahru area to repulse the landings. Nos. 8 (G.R.) Squadron and No. 60 (B) Squadron, both at Kuantan were ordered to take off at first light to attack transports and landing craft off Kota Bahru, and at the same time instructions were given for the section of No. 243 (F) Squadron Buffaloes to be used. Units from the now derelict operation MATADOR were to be employed in this new defensive role: No. 62 (B) Squadron at Alor Star was ordered to stand-by to deliver a high-level bombing attack, and No. 27 (N.F.) Squadron was to attack from Sungei Patani. Since 22 November 41, No. 34 (B) Squadron at Tengah had been at short notice to move to Alor Star to participate in MATADOR; they were now required to bomb-up with

(1) The attack on Pearl Harbour is often quoted as 0800 hrs, 7 Dec. 41; in comparison with the Kota Bahru landings (0115 hrs 8 Dec.) it would appear that G.H.Q.F.E. should have had adequate warning of the Japanese attack in Hawaii. Such is not the case, however, because these times are Local Time. If converted to G.M.T. it will be seen that the Pearl Harbour attack actually took place 45 minutes after the invasion at Kota Bahru, viz:

Kota Bahru: 0115 hrs 8 Dec. 41 minus  $7\frac{1}{2}$  hrs - 1745 hrs  
7 Dec. G.M.T.

Pearl Harbour: 0800 hrs 8 Dec. 41 plus  $10\frac{1}{2}$  hrs - 1830 hrs  
7 Dec. G.M.T.



500 lb S.A.P. for a possible objective at Kuantan, but within the space of two hours their target was changed to a bombing attack at first light on transports at Kemasin (10 miles South of Kota Bahru); after the attack the squadron was to land at Butterworth to re-fuel and re-arm. Another squadron from the Island was to be moved to the north-east; this was No. 100 (T.B.) Squadron, Seletar, which, at first light was to fly to Kuantan and there await orders, (an hour later their mission was altered to a dusk attack). The other Torpedo-Bomber Squadron, No. 36, was already at Gong Kedah with orders to carry out a torpedo attack at dawn on the enemy shipping. Finally, the lone Beaufort at Kota Bahru had instructions to take-off at first light for a photographic and beach reconnaissance up to the Lakon Roads.

All available aircraft had now been committed against the Kota Bahru attack; in fact the only aircraft not involved were No. 205 (F.B.) Squadron, Seletar; No. 21 (F) Squadron - the remnant of the MATADOR force - at Sungei Patani, and the three fighter squadrons defending Singapore Island - Nos. 243, 488 and 453. At this stage of the invasion it was not realized that the main landings were taking place in the very area which had long been anticipated - Singora - Patani. Contact with these main forces had been lost on 6 December, indeed they were not sighted again until the P.R. Beaufort arrived over Singora. By that time it was too late to divert to a fresh target what was virtually the whole of Malaya's air striking force. The Japanese had achieved a major tactical surprise at the outset, and they were to retain the initiative throughout the seventy days of the Campaign.

D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2014 Enc. 10a  
d/d 21 Jan. 46,  
"Report by  
O.C. No. 1  
Sqdn."

#### The Air Forces go into Action

A.H.B. File  
IIJ50/4  
Entries d/d  
4 Dec. 41.

Maltby Despatch  
paras: 175 to  
180

Briefed for low-level attacks on the invasion fleet, the first Hudson of No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron R.A.A.F. took off at 0208 hrs 8 December from the rain-soaked and virtually unserviceable air strip at Kota Bahru. It was followed at intervals of approximately two minutes by six other Hudsons. The aircrews of this squadron during the two previous days had been engaged in long and arduous reconnaissance flights, and their efforts to locate the invasion fleet in difficult weather conditions had met with a measure of success. That the Japanese had eluded them in their northwards feint must have rankled in the minds of those crews as they headed for the invasion beaches, and there can be no doubt of their determination to strike hard at the enemy. And strike hard they did! They attacked the four merchant vessels lying about 2 miles off-shore and despite the heavy and accurate A/A fire scored hits on the transports with bombs and machine-gun bursts. And if these vessels were not located in the darkness then attacks would be made on the supporting warships (three cruisers and three destroyers) some 15 miles out to sea. By the time the 8th sortie had taken-off, troop-carrying barges were approaching the shore and attention was directed upon them with very satisfactory results. But a cruiser had put in to the landing area and was putting up an effective covering fire for the transports. Two Hudsons were shot down and the crews lost, whilst several other aircraft were badly damaged by shrapnel. Yet the 250 lb G.P. and S.A.P. bombs were having their effect: the largest transport, a vessel of some 10,000 tons received a direct hit with two bombs which set it on fire; subsequently the ship blew up. Two other merchant vessels were severely damaged whilst at least twenty-four landing barges were reckoned to have been sunk or capsized. At a conservative estimate about three thousand Japanese soldiers lost their lives. By 0500 hrs that morning seventeen sorties had been flown when the O.C. No. 1 Squadron decided to cease flying for an hour in order to re-arm and take stock of the situation.



D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2024 "Report  
on R.A.F.  
Stations"  
Enc. 6a d/d  
28 Nov. 45.

In the meantime, at 0300 hours, the section of two Buffaloes of No. 243 (F) Squadron had been sent off to deal with barges moving up the Penkalen Chepal River adjacent to the airfield. Unfortunately, upon returning to the airfield one of the Buffaloes was written-off when it overshot on landing and crashed into a Hudson undergoing a tail-wheel repair, thereby reducing the fighter strength to one solitary Buffalo.

Enemy Publi-  
cation No. 278;  
page 7

The Japanese likened the initial action off Kota Bahru to an earlier sacrificial battle above Port Arthur, in the Russo-Japanese War. Their ships, 'clearly illuminated by the moonlight' were effectively bombed by ten aircraft and eventually a transport was hit and caught fire. This bombing, together with the fire from shore batteries resulted in considerable loss of life, yet the Japanese did succeed in getting ashore despite the superiority in numbers of the defenders. With the beachhead firmly established by the early morning, the invasion fleet drew off and put to sea, but a Hudson of No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron which had left Kota Bahru at 0600 hrs. located the fleet of two cruisers, four destroyers and two merchant vessels 30 miles N.N.E. of the beachhead, sailing at high speed in a northerly direction and covered by nine enemy aircraft. The Hudson then returned to base, but before landing managed to strafe enemy barges off the landing beaches. No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron made a further nine sorties against similar targets as well as troop concentrations on the banks of the local river.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2014 Enc 13a,  
"Report on  
R.A.A.F.  
Operations"

IIJ50/30/4  
Enc. d/d  
22 Dec. 41  
IIJ54/5/4  
Enc 24C

When the Hudsons of No. 8 (G.R.) Squadron (twelve Hudson II) and No. 60 (B) Squadron's eight Blenheims arrived at the beachhead from Kuantan the only target was the still burning transport - the remainder of the ships had hurriedly departed some two hours earlier. They could only attack the remnants of the landing craft but as these were being effectively dealt with by No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron, an attempt was made by Kota Bahru to direct them to chase the retreating convoy. The signal was received by only one Flight of No. 8 (G.R.) Squadron whose ensuing attempt to locate the convoy was prevented by a heavy storm. Whilst attacking the already sinking transport one of the No. 8 (G.R.) Squadron Hudsons sustained severe damage and had to crash-land at Kota Bahru. Another Hudson was damaged whilst attacking an armoured power boat and returned to Singapore to crash at Seletar. But an enemy fighter was claimed to have been shot down; it is evident that the Japanese by that time were providing air cover over the beachhead, for Hudsons of No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron had an inconclusive brush with a Japanese Navy Zero. A Blenheim was also reported missing from this action (1).

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2014 Enc 8a d/d  
5 Jan 46 "Report  
on No. 36 Sqn"  
and D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2024 Enc 6a d/d  
28 Nov. 45.

No. 36 (T.B.) Squadron at Gong Kedah at 0300 hrs were ordered by O.C. Kota Bahru to deliver a torpedo attack at dawn on the invasion fleet, dropping their torpedoes on an approach from the seaward side. Whether these orders were properly received over the open telephone is not known, for the Squadron Commander was subsequently killed in a flying accident, but the fact remains that the seven Vildebeestes took off at about 0627 hours into bad weather. Two aircraft lost the main formation and proceeded on their own whilst the other five Vildebeestes led by their Commanding Officer failed to sight the convoy in the heavy rain until it had reached a position some 10 miles to the North. At 0730 hours one of the

(1) On 22 Dec 41 it was confirmed that tanks intended for the Kota Bahru landing were sunk with the shipping destroyed by air action.

Japanese cruisers received a torpedo attack from these aircraft. But only four torpedoes were dropped and owing to the unfavourable conditions the attack could not be synchronized and no hits were registered; The Vildebeestes all returned to Kota Bahru.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2014 Enc. 21a  
"Report on  
No. 34 Sqdn".

The other three Squadrons which took-off at dawn for Kota Bahru all arrived over the beaches only to find them empty of shipping. The No. 34 (B) Squadron Blenheims left Tengah at 0634 hrs. Twelve crews had been briefed, but only nine aircraft took-off for three Blenheims had been damaged by bomb splinters during the first air raid on the Island (1). The 500 lb G.P. bombs could only be used against the barges, and although in addition to this attack on a secondary target, the beaches were machine-gunned, the raid was considered unsuccessful, especially as three aircraft were lost and four severely damaged. One Blenheim crash-landed after an engagement with two Japanese Zeros, another was forced down at Maching; and whilst the squadron was returning to Butterworth to refuel, the Zeros made an interception with the result that a further Blenheim crash-landed. One enemy fighter was claimed in this engagement.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2012 Enc. 7a  
d/d 23 Jan. 46  
"Report on  
No. 27 Sqdn".

No. 27 (N.F.) Squadron (twelve Blenheim I) at Sungei Patani fared no better in their mission to Kota Bahru - all that remained as a target were the landing craft, and when the squadron returned it was to find that in their absence the airfield had been extensively bombed.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2014 Encs. 3a  
and 11a d/d  
1 Feb. 46,  
"Report on 62  
Sqdn".

The story of No. 62 (B) Squadron's raid is somewhat different to the other Units. The whole of the squadron - eleven Blenheims - took off from Alor Star at 0655 hours on 8 December with orders to carry out a high-level bombing attack on the invasion fleet at Kota Bahru. Arriving there some 50 minutes later there was no sign of enemy activity, so in an endeavour to locate the Japanese the squadron flew south-east to the vicinity of the Perhentian Islands. There was still no enemy, but with orders to 'seek-out and destroy', the formation leader turned on to a reciprocal course, and off Patani found a Japanese fleet of some fifteen to twenty ships. Landing barges were carrying troops to the shore when the attack with 500 lb bombs was made from 8000 feet. The results, however, were unobserved because of low stratus cloud, and although there was some fighter (2) and anti-aircraft opposition the squadron returned to Alor Star without loss of a single aircraft.

II 353/8  
pp. 41, 42.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2014 Enc. 5a d/d  
19 Dec. 42  
"Report on  
No. 100 Sqdn".

The only Unit of the hurriedly impressed defending force not to go into action that day was No. 100 (T.B.) Squadron at Seletar. Nine Vildebeestes of this Squadron together with two aircraft of No. 36 (T.B.) Squadron left at 0913 hrs. for Kuantan where they were to await further orders. One aircraft of No. 100 Sqdn. subsequently returned to Seletar with engine trouble. On arrival at Kuantan the Vildebeestes were loaded with torpedoes, and although in the early afternoon two aircraft were ordered to reinforce Kota Bahru, they were recalled to Kuantan by W/T because it was reported the enemy had by that time taken Kota Bahru airfield.

(1) See also in Section: 'First Bombs on Singapore'.

(2) Probably fighters of 11th Regiment which were patrolling above the Patani beachhead. This Unit had relieved 22nd Air Flotilla which had given earlier cover.

Lastly the Beaufort which had left Kota Bahru at first light for a photographic reconnaissance of the Lakon Roads returned at 0915 hrs. It had been attacked at Singora by six enemy fighters and was so badly damaged that it scarcely managed to get back to base (where it burned-out after landing). But the pilot had accomplished his task; photographs had been taken at Patani of six transports unloading troops, covered by two destroyers. These photographs were developed at Kota Bahru and at 1530 hrs. flown back to Singapore by the only serviceable Buffalo.

The evidence obtained by the Beaufort clearly established the fact that the bulk of the Japanese forces had landed intact in South-East Siam. The landing at Kota Bahru had indeed been a diversion and although in some respects a costly one to the enemy, it had achieved its purpose in concentrating the greater part of our air forces in the defence of Kota Bahru. The actual number of R.A.F. aircraft lost in this initial engagement had not been unduly high, but even so, out of a total of eighty-seven aircraft deployed to the invasion area at least nine had been lost or written-off and many severely damaged.<sup>(1)</sup> The next move would be to strike at the enemy on their easily won airfields in the Singora-Patani area. But - was the R.A.F. in sufficient strength at their northern battle stations?<sup>(2)</sup> And, what is more important, could they attack before the enemy followed up his initial successes?

#### First Bombs on Singapore

In the early hours of the first morning of the war in the Far East, the great city of Singapore, clearly outlined in the moonlight, was oblivious of the tumult at its northern outpost. It slept quietly on; but at Sime Road, in the Combined Operations Room a different scene prevailed. All attention was concentrated upon Kota Bahru and the 'green-line' telephone to that Station was continuously engaged in the direction of operations which at the time were progressing quite satisfactorily. The realization that the long-expected hostilities had at last commenced must have been upper-most in everyone's mind when, at 0330 hours an unusual telephone message came in from the Fighter Operations Room at Kallang - 'Two unidentified aircraft --- coming in towards Mersing!' The radar station there was plotting the approaching tracks 40 miles out to the north-east at 10,000 feet. Quick checks were made: none of our aircraft were flying that night but the fighters were armed and standing-by whilst action was to be taken to warn the civil authorities. Seven minutes later (at 0342 hours) the aircraft tracks turned ominously southwards and began to converge on the coast, only 40 miles from Singapore. (3) By this time the enemy crews must have seen the not far-distant lights of Singapore; at 0403 hrs. they were only 14 miles away from the target when the formation divided at a height between 14,000 and 17,000 feet. R.A.F. fighters were ordered to await complete first light, but the A.A.guns were

ILJ 50/4  
Entries d/d  
8 Dec. 41.

Brooke-Popham  
Despatch  
para. 101

Maltby Despatch  
para. 181

ILJ 53/8  
pp. 35, 41.

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- (1) For Summary of losses see Appendix IV, page 3.  
(2) The disposition of Units in the Far East Command at 8 Dec 41 may readily be seen on the Map at Appendix II. This should be read in conjunction with Appendix I, Vol. I.  
(3) The size of the enemy force has been assessed as up to seventeen Type 96 aircraft which had flown from bases in southern Indo-China. These were Units of the 22nd Air Flotilla.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2012 Enc. 8A  
d/d 28 Jan. 46.

IIJ 50/17/8  
Enc. d/d  
8 Dec. 41.

under orders to open fire.<sup>(1)</sup> The first bombs were heard at 0408 hours, and these may well have been the ones which fell in the very heart of the city: on Raffles Square, the famous shopping centre, and in Battery Road, as well as in the vicinity of the General Hospital and the Singapore Prison. An attack was also made on the eastern part of the Harbour, possibly in mistake for Kallang airfield. The Governor Straits Settlements in his signal to the Colonial Office numbered the casualties at sixty-one killed and one hundred and thirty-three injured; they were all Asiatic, the majority being Chinese.

On the north side of the Island two airfields were damaged. Three salvos of bombs fell on Seletar from nine aircraft at 0415 hours, demolishing a sanitary annexe and cookhouse, whilst other domestic buildings were damaged as well as a water main: three men were killed. Eleven bombs fell on the airfield itself of which six did not explode. At Tengah bombs were dropped on the domestic area without damage, but there were twenty-two craters in the airfield and three Blenheims of No. 34(B) Squadron (waiting to take-off for action against the invasion fleet at Kota Bahru) were struck by bomb fragments.

At 0440 hours the 'all clear' was sounded: the raid had lasted a little over half-an-hour, and during that time, at the cost of possibly one aircraft the Japanese had inflicted slight damage to military targets, although a sharp but salutary lesson had been brought home to the civilian community.

This first raid was not serious when compared with the weight of attacks, which after a lull of some three weeks, were to be directed upon the city. Even so it had a two-fold significance. It was an earnest of Japan's initiative and faith in the use of air bombing, and at the same time it so revealed the indifferent attitude (in varying degrees) of both the Service authorities and the Civil Administration that attempts to allocate the blame for the initial collapse of the A.R.P. measures have continued ever since. The most obvious fault of the whole raid, and one to which everyone could point, was the failure to extinguish the lights of the city. Through out the raid all the street lights were burning and in fact were not extinguished until after the raid. According to an eye-witness 'the city's lights were blazing as if nothing untoward was happening'.

In all probability the lights made very little difference to the effectiveness of the raid. The opinion of the C-in-C is that the coast line and most of Singapore must have shown up very clearly in the bright full moon. Nevertheless someone was at fault in not putting the A.R.P. services into action. The black-out of Singapore was the ultimate responsibility of the Governor, so that in the end the A.O.C. had to telephone Sir Shenton Thomas personally in order to have the alarm sounded and, eventually, the street lights extinguished. The Director of A.R.P. claims that the military authorities had always promised 48 hours notice of the necessity to impose black-out regulations. When the situation had begun to deteriorate he had pressed for the black-out to be introduced, but the Colonial Secretary had refused to allow this measure because re-assurance had been given of the 48 hours notice. Even so, the Director 'took the precaution of having the Control Room manned'.

(1) The only night-fighters ready to take-off were three Buffaloes of No. 453 (F) Squadron, Sembawang, yet despite repeated requests to A.H.Q. and Fighters Ops by the Squadron Commander these aircraft were held on the ground and so missed 'a perfect night-fighter target', because, the O.C. goes on, 'the raid had to be left to the anti-aircraft guns'.

'In 70 Days  
by E.M. Glover  
page 77.

Colonial Office  
letter 14742/47  
d/d 19 June 47.

Yet when the raid began he was in bed in his home at Katong and it was not until he received the Governor's telephone message that he gave the necessary orders for the alarm to be sounded. The main excuse given by the Civil Administration is therefore that they were taken by surprise because the Service authorities had failed to give the civil defence organisation any adequate warning.

Letter d/d  
18 Nov. 46 from  
Brooke-Popham  
to A.M.(D.S.D.)

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2012 Enc. 13a  
d/d 13 Aug. 42.

When the enemy raid was approaching Singapore the Commander of No. 224 Fighter Group telephoned the C-in-C to warn him, and at the same time he was extremely concerned that no reply could be obtained from A.R.P. Headquarters. Later he complained that the A.R.P. authorities had always refused to provide a liaison officer in the Fighter Operations Room, therefore, on the night of the raid, there was no channel available through this medium.

Whilst no attempt may be made to allocate the blame for the A.R.P. failure, nevertheless it is possible to underline some of the shortcomings of both the Service and Civilian authorities. Quite apart from the rather apathetic attitude of the civil population towards war (1) it might well seem that the Administration itself considered war unlikely and, should it come, then it was the sole concern of the military. If such were not the case, then surely, when the armed forces 'stood-to' at the 2nd and 1st Degrees of Readiness (on 1st and 6th Dec. respectively) an equivalent gesture on the part of the Civil Defence should have been deemed necessary? And again, if the head of the A.R.P. chose to sleep at his home during a critical period, then should not authority to sound the alarm have been delegated to one of Control Room staff? But whatever the issue the fact remains that such mistakes were speedily put aright after the raid. A liaison officer appeared at the Fighter Operations Room and full co-operation was established. A complete black-out was rigidly enforced and steps were taken to provide adequate shelters against future raids.

On the part of the Services it might fairly be asked whether a true spirit of co-operation existed between them and the Civil authorities. Because of the difficulty in the interpretation of the movements of the Japanese convoys on 6th December it might not have been practicable to give the agreed 48 hours warning, but on the other hand it would seem that when the invasion actually commenced at Kota Bahru no attempt was made to advise the Governor; and 3 hours were to elapse between that time and the first news of the approaching bombers. Would it not have been to the interest and security of the R.A.F. to have made certain at the outset that the A.R.P. services were at a state of readiness? But possibly A.H.Q. was too pre-occupied in its long-distance conduct of the war; and perhaps the R.A.F. did not expect night attacks from such distant bases. This may well have been the case. Night flying organisation was in a very backward state (2) and at least one Station Commander (O.C. Kallang) had been directed by A.H.Q. that night fighting would not be undertaken in the event of war. Indeed, on this Station No. 488 (F) Squadron had only one operationally trained flight at the outbreak of war, whilst in the other squadron, No. 243, very little elementary night flying had been done by the pilots. When the latter Squadron's Commanding officer (newly arrived from a Fighter Squadron in U.K.) raised the question of night fighting with A.H.Q. he was told that it was unnecessary owing to the

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2012 Encs. 5a  
d/d 10 Jan. 46  
and 3a d/d  
30 Dec. 45.

(1) See also in Section: 'The Civilian and Service Communities'  
(2) See also in the Section: 'The Work of Air Headquarters.  
Far East Command'.

distance from Japanese bases (1). As already recounted, the only Unit standing-by with night fighters was No. 453 (F) Squadron at Sembawang and in any case they were not allowed to take-off.

Such were the effects of the first air attack on Singapore: it had touched all sections of the community. The Chinese, hitherto detached and remote from contact with the long war in their homeland now saw at first hand the terrible and devastating power of air bombing. As did the European population. The ruined buildings which had stood almost as long as the city itself were ample proof that the night's work had been no more practice raid (as many had at first thought) but the attack of a ruthless enemy who not only was capable of waging an orthodox invasion in the far-off State of Kelantan but was ready to shatter and destroy the tranquillity of the easy existence which they had always regarded as their right. And to the defence services, both military and civilian, had come the realization of many deficiencies as well as the disturbing knowledge that the 'Fortress' was no longer impregnable - strategic air power had instantly found the weakness.

#### Air Attack from Siam

There can be no doubt concerning enemy plans for the opening stages of hostilities - powerful air forces were given the predominant rôle and then fully exploited. Their aim must have been the elimination of all air opposition and so well-timed were their initial blows that after the first day the Royal Air Force virtually ceased to exist as a means of defence.

Although the long-range bombing of the early morning did comparatively little damage as far as the Island airfields were concerned, a far more serious blow was to be delivered in the North by the enemy's tactical air forces. Whilst the greater part of the R.A.F. in Malaya were re-fuelling and re-arming after their defensive action at Kota Bahru the Japanese air force had been far from idle. The C-in-C afterwards considered the size of the enemy force as two hundred and fifty to three hundred aircraft plus two aircraft carriers (2). The first day's effort was reckoned to be in the region of one hundred and fifty aircraft of which one hundred were probably fighters; these were established on Singora and Patani airfields, 'which', he signalled to the Chiefs of Staff, 'were probably stocked with fuel and ammunition in advance by arrangement with the Thais' (Siamese). Again the Japanese were ready to seize the initiative, this time by striking at the grounded R.A.F. on the Northern airfields. Their objective was to be two-fold; firstly to destroy aircraft on the ground, and next to put the airfields and buildings temporarily out of action in order to deny them to such aircraft as were already airborne or had escaped the ground attacks. By this means the R.A.F. would be incapable of retaliation, and the airfields, once they had been captured by the enemy ground forces, would soon be made serviceable for the subsequent operations of their own aircraft.

Brooke-Popham  
Despatch  
para 103.

Maltby Des-  
patch paras  
182 to 185

A.H.B.  
ILJ50/18/7  
'Defence  
Schemes' Enc.  
d/d 14 Dec. 41.

U.S. Strategic  
Bombing  
Survey.  
'Interrogation  
at Japanese  
Officials'  
Volume II,  
pp. 333, 335.

(1) After the raid, this officer, on his own initiative had a flame trap designed for his Buffaloes, and during the ensuing two weeks, not only commenced night training, but had two aircraft at 'readiness'. On the third week the squadron was therefore somewhat surprised to be ordered by A.H.Q. to start night flying training!

(2) Enemy sources quote these figures as:-

Saigon area: Naval Air Forces - 132 aircraft.  
Army Air Forces - 200 aircraft.

IIJ50/4 Entries  
d/d 8 Dec. 41

IIJ53/8  
pp. 35, 38.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2014 Enc. 10a  
d/d 5 Dec. 45  
p. 10.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2012 Enc. 10a

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2014 Enc. 13a

IIJ50/4 Entries  
d/d 8 Dec. 41

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2024 Enc. 2a  
d/d 31 Dec. 45

Commencing at 0700 hrs. 8th December the Japanese air force began to attack the seven main airfields in Northern Malaya. Naval 97's first bombed Machang and Gong Kedah, (1) whilst the civil airfield at Penang was shot-up by nine fighters; but little damage was inflicted for these airfields were empty at the time. The Vildebeestes of No. 36 (T.B.) Squadron were away from Gong Kedah in search of the invasion fleet, whilst Machang and Penang were amongst the many vacant stations.

The next attack was on Kota Bahru, but significantly the Japanese carefully avoided damaging the surface of this field. No bombs were dropped; instead eight separate fighter attacks took place commencing at approximately 0900 hours and continued throughout the day. The formations varied between five and nine aircraft which were Navy Zeros and Army 97's, and attacks were carried out with what one R.A.A.F. eye-witness describes as 'reckless abandon'. The fighters, skilfully handled, dived from 5000 to 7000 feet down to tree-top level firing until all ammunition had been expended. The early attacks were directed upon A/A posts, but later were changed to strikes against personnel and aircraft, and during the last strafe at 1700 hrs. two Hudsons were badly damaged.

The position at Sungei Patani was far more serious however. On this airfield it will be remembered, two fighter squadrons were stationed: No. 21 (F) Squadron R.A.A.F. and No. 27 (N.F.) Squadron. From their reports it may be gathered that the Australians were not favourably impressed by the conditions which prevailed on this station. The absence of accommodation for the maintenance of aircraft; the impossibility to disperse aircraft because of the 'boggy condition of the airfield; and the 'apathetic attitude of the Station Commander' were amongst the several complaints. Whether this attitude was justified is impossible to decide, but it must be borne in mind that No. 21 (F) Squadron had only recently exchanged the comparative luxury of a permanent airfield at Sembawang for the rigours of a battle station and in consequence their judgment may have been biased by the discomforts which were bound to be part of such an exchange. But whatever these shortcomings may have been the fact remains that at dawn on 8th December No. 21 (F) Squadron had mustered twelve serviceable Buffaloes, but possibly because of their lack of experience in the basic principles of dispersal, these aircraft were positioned in a straight line near the stand-by hut. The other unit, No. 27 (F) Squadron, was away on its mission at Kota Bahru at this juncture.

The crews of No. 21 (F) Squadron were standing-by in the briefing room when, shortly after 0700 hours a message was received from the Station Operations Room of two enemy aircraft approaching from the West; one section was ordered to stand-by for further instructions. Four pilots (two sections) then moved to the stand-by hut and their aircraft were warming up, when, at 0730 hours a formation of bombers was sighted almost overhead, heading in a south-easterly direction at 11,000 feet. Bombs began to fall on both the No. 27 Squadron side of the airfield and upon the aircraft of No. 21 (F) Squadron

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(1) These were fighters of 59th Regiment. The Japanese state those two airfields were attacked between 0630 and 0730 hrs. by 11 fighters and 28 light bombers of 59th, 75th, and 90th Regiments. 23 Type 99 bombers of 75th Regiment also bombed Gong Kedah.



whose crews and ground personnel had by then taken cover. Two of the stand-by aircraft, however, without instructions from the Operations Room, immediately took-off and subsequently followed the enemy towards Singora, but failed to intercept. The damage from this raid was considerable. Incendiary and H.E. bombs had fallen on Station Headquarters and a petrol dump whilst fragments had struck seven Buffaloes, setting fire to four of them; five men had been killed.

When the second raid took place at 1100 hours, No. 27 (N.F.) Squadron must have been back on the airfield. Again the same tactics were used by the enemy bombers, estimated as being up to thirty in number. Damage was inflicted on barracks and the airfield itself whilst a large petrol installation was destroyed. Eight more men had died, and when the smoke cleared from the airfield only four aircraft of each Squadron were found to be serviceable.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2161 Enc. 4a  
d/d 16 Jan. 46.

At this stage, having suffered so much damage, it was decided to evacuate No. 21 (F) Squadron (1) to Butterworth with their few remaining aircraft, leaving a rear party at Sungei Patani to effect possible repairs to some of the damaged Buffaloes. It was the intention to return to this airfield as soon as it had been made serviceable. During these preparations a request was received for 11th Division for a reconnaissance of the Singora district. A Buffalo made this sortie and discovered some forty ships in the harbour and motor transport on the move to Alor Star; the pilot was lucky to be able to return for he had been attacked by five Zeros which broke-off the attack only when all their ammunition had been expended.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.).  
2024 Enc. 8a  
d/d 25 Feb. 46.

Meanwhile Butterworth had not fared too well. This station, which was to bear the brunt of the hurriedly organized moves of three squadrons, was on a Care and Maintenance basis and commanded by a junior Accountant Officer awaiting posting; the remaining twelve Australian officers (A & S.D.) had no more than five months service apiece. It was in to this somewhat inadequate organization that A.H.Q. decided to divert the Blenheims of No. 34 (B) Squadron after their bombing raid at Kota Bahru. And to aggravate matters there were no re-fuellers - three days previously A.H.Q. had sent them to Gong Kedah. Three tankers were hurriedly obtained from Sungei Patani and at 1015 hrs. when the Blenheims began to arrive it had to be explained to their Squadron Commander that although the requirement for 500 lb bombs could be met there was no gear to hoist them into the aircraft! (In the end 250 lb bombs were man-handled into the racks). But their troubles were only just starting. The tankers from Sungei Patani contained 90 octane petrol and the Blenheim IV's needed 100 octane, yet despite the dire emergency this slightly lower grade petrol was not acceptable, so that later, petrol in drums had to be brought from the reserve and hand-pumped into the aircraft. Simultaneously with the arrival of the second flight of four Blenheims (seven aircraft survived the action at Kota Bahru) came fifteen enemy fighters in a well-timed strike on the airfield against which the Lewis and tommy guns comprising the ground defences were quite inadequate. The last Blenheim to land had its undercarriage shot away and subsequently crash-landed, and of the six already on the ground one was completely burned-out and three others badly damaged - No. 34 (B) Squadron were reduced to two operational aircraft in the first day's operations.(2).

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(1) No. 21 (F) Squadron evacuated Sungei Patani without orders from 'Norgroup' whose commander had no knowledge of the move.  
(2) See also in Section: 'The Air Forces go into Action'.



But more difficulties were in store for the harassed personnel of Butterworth when the remnants of Nos. 21 and 27 Squadrons began to limp in from Sungei Patani during the late afternoon. The Station Commander reported eight Buffaloes of No. 21 (F) Squadron and seven Blenheim Is of No. 27 (N.F.) Squadron had arrived in varying stages of unserviceability, but at the end of the day, after another low-flying attack in the afternoon, these two squadrons could only muster an operational state of three Buffaloes and three Blenheims. That night the Australians had no intention of sleeping in the target area of the airfield; they found accommodation some 2 miles distant on the sea-shore, and although the Station Commander protested that by so doing they would deprive themselves of the facilities for servicing and repairing the aircraft next morning, he was evidently over-ruled by the more senior Squadron Commander.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2014 Enc. 3a  
d/d 20 Dec. 45.

The same tactics were used by the enemy at Alor Star. No. 62 (B) Squadron, after its bombing attack on the shipping at Patani had returned to base without loss of any of its eleven Blenheims; but such good fortune was not to continue. Re-fuelling and re-arming was in progress, when at 1045 hrs, twenty-seven enemy aircraft made a bombing attack from 13,000 feet with 150 lb H.E. bombs and incendiaries. Four of the Blenheims were destroyed and five damaged, whilst some buildings and a large petrol dump were set on fire. Like the other stations, the casualties were small, amounting to seven men killed; also the anti-aircraft defence of 4 x 3 inch guns was quite ineffective against the high-flying aircraft.

A.H.B. File  
IIJ50/4 Entries  
d/d 8 Dec. 41.

Of all the Northern stations to be attacked the R.A.F. at Kota Bahru probably suffered the worst, for in addition to the fighter attacks which continued throughout the day it was evident that the enemy were bent upon capturing this airfield intact. Despite all efforts of the Army beach defences the Japanese had not only succeeded in getting ashore but had infiltrated in some depth towards the airfield. The Brigade Commander himself was conducting 'mopping-up' operations at 0758 hours against the two enemy companies which were between Padang Sabak and the airfield, but beyond this fact the progress of events was somewhat confused. At mid-day the 8th Brigade reported to A.H.Q. that limited air support had been obtained against a vessel unloading further troops and stores at Padang Sabak; yet the four Hudsons of No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron which had carried out this task failed to discover any such vessel and in consequence the Squadron Commander considered these sorties were a waste of effort at a time when the aircraft might have served a better purpose in attacking the fast-retreating invasion fleet (1). A definite sortie was made at 1530 hours to destroy the railway bridge spanning the Goluk River (this railway was the only line between Singora and Kota Bahru) but although four bombs were dropped in a low-level attack there was no apparent damage. The Station Commander at Kota Bahru and the Brigadier were in complete agreement about the seriousness of the local situation, and at 1600 hrs. when the Station Commander reported to A.H.Q. that the airfield was being attacked by ground forces, the A.O.C. ordered the aircraft to evacuate to Kuantan. The Brigade Commander was subsequently informed of this decision (2). At this stage, a report (which eventually

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2014. Enc. 10a  
d/d 21 Jan. 46.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2024. Enc. 6a  
d/d 28 Nov. 45.

(1) 3 Vildebeestes of No. 36 (T.B.) Squadron also took part in this operation.

(2) O.C. Kota Bahru (W.C. Noble) states in his report that during later conversation with the Brigade Commander (Brigadier Key) when they were both P.O.W's, he gathered that the Brigadier considered the decision to evacuate was right, but he should have been consulted first.

proved to be false) of the enemy reaching the eastern perimeter of the airfield caused the Station Commander to go forward to investigate; and it must have been during his absence that a message was received at 1625 hrs. by the Station Adjutant from A.H.Q. giving instructions for the airfield to be demolished after the aircraft had left. Unfortunately the destruction commenced forthwith and when the Station Commander returned from the airfield he was to find the Operations Room ablaze and with it the operational records and diary. When the evacuation order was received by No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron that unit was well-prepared for such an eventuality. Several months previously a Movement Order had been prepared in great detail to enable the Squadron to operate at an advanced base for six weeks. The Order could also be adapted to a withdrawal, consequently the whole Squadron was able to prepare for evacuation in the space of only one hour. Each aircraft was to carry ten personnel as well as boxes of spares, and whilst these were being mustered Station and Squadron Stores were fired and the four unserviceable Hudsons destroyed. Shortly after 1700 hours the five aircraft capable of being flown were sent off to Kuantan. The two Hudsons each requiring only a wheel were not destroyed however, neither was the crashed Hudson of No. 8 (G.R.) Squadron, for all attempts at repair or destruction were prevented by attack from the air or by fire from snipers. The road party moved off for Krai by motor transport at 1845 hrs., whilst the Station Commander left about 15 minutes later. No personnel were lost in this evacuation (1).

A report from Kuantan that same evening (1910 hours) shows how five Hudsons of No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron and seven Vildebeestes of No. 36 (T.B.) Squadron were flown in from Kota Bahru, thereby raising the Torpedo-Bomber strength at Kuantan to seventeen Vildebeestes. The signal also advised A.H.Q. that one of the last officers to leave by air from Kota Bahru had seen the enemy advancing on the north-east corner of the airfield, and furthermore this officer thought there was little chance of the runways being effectively demolished. Such an opinion is to some extent borne out by the Japanese account of the capture of the airfield. After the beach-head had been established a reconnaissance was made with a view to a night attack on the airfield. When the attack was joined, their account continues, the demolitions began with a 'thundering roar', but the retreat commenced before the task could be properly accomplished (2).

Enemy Publication No. 278,  
page 8.

IIJ54/24/7  
Enc. d/d  
20 Feb. 48

(1) Although the personnel of A.H.Q. and No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron evacuated at this time there must have been someone at Kota Bahru on the following day, for at 1810 hours 9 Dec a Blenheim landed at Alor Star from Kota Bahru. It belonged to No. 62 (B) Sqdn. and in all probability was one of the Blenheims detached to No. 4 A.A.C.U. (See Appendix IV, page 1.)

(2) Quite possibly this was the explosion of the petrol installation or the bomb store. Apparently the R.A.F. did not have time to destroy these vital stores (they got away quite rapidly in a matter of 2½ hours from the time of receiving the order) consequently the demolition was left to the resourcefulness of a Battery of Royal Artillery.

The final reports on aircraft losses began to come in to A.H.Q. during that evening. Operations had exacted a heavy toll, and even the darkness was to claim one more victim - a Vildebeeste of No. 100 (T.B.) Squadron which crashed on landing at Kuantan (1). The fortunes of war for the Kota Bahru invasion have already been examined; those losses were high, but proportionately, the Japanese attacks on the airfields were nothing short of disastrous (2). Every Station visited by the enemy bombers and fighters suffered very heavy losses. Kuantan was the exception: perhaps because of its comparative remoteness it was not attacked, and so lived to fight at least until the next day. The total number of operational aircraft in Northern Malaya on 8th December 1941 was one hundred and ten. At the end of that momentous 24 hours only fifty were fit for operations. The remaining sixty had either been lost, destroyed by the enemy or ourselves, or seriously damaged. The R.A.F. in the North had been reduced in the space of one day by nearly 55 per cent! The remaining units were on Singapore Island and comprised: Nos. 205 (F.B.), 243 (F), 488 (F), 453 (F) Squadrons and No. 4 A.A.C.U., together with the balance of Nos. 36 and 100 (T.B.), and No. 34 (B) Squadrons. The Malayan Volunteer Air Force were not yet in action because of the preponderance of enemy fighters.

IIJ53/8  
page 39

A.H.B. File  
IIJ50/22/10  
"Re-inforce-  
ments" Enc.  
d/d 8 Dec. 41.

The C-in-C realizing the outcome of the battle in the north would be governed largely by the number of available aircraft signalled that afternoon to the Chiefs of Staff. His urgent requirement was for the early despatch of a maximum of re-inforcements. He particularly wanted two squadrons of long-range bombers and two squadrons of night-fighters. 'Should Japan gain air superiority', he urged 'the situation would be very difficult'. Perhaps the fast-moving events of the morning had clouded the issue; in any case at that time the full tally of losses could not have been realized in Singapore. Japan was not to achieve air superiority in the near future - rather she had grasped it that very day.

#### Summary

Prompted by the realization of almost certain war, the C-in-C Far East once again urged the need for operation MATADOR to forestall the Japanese; and as before, his proposals were not supported by H.M. Government. Thereupon he made an appreciation on 22nd November 1941 for the Commanders' guidance, in which, anticipating the operation would eventually be sanctioned, he required the redistribution of the MATADOR squadrons. 'Norgroup' was reformed at Kuala Lumpur on 24th November 1941 in order to control these four

(1) A comprehensive aircraft state does not appear to exist therefore an analysis has been compiled from those records which have survived. This summary of losses for 8 Dec. 41 may be found in Appendix IV, page 3.

(2) The pattern of the Japanese attacks on airfields is revealed in enemy documents. 7th Air Brigade, operating from airfields in Southern Indo-China and using a total of eighteen, Types I and ninety-seven fighters together with seventy-five Types 97B and 99B bombers, attacked in two waves. The first was from 0630 to 0730 hrs. and the second 1040 to 1110 hrs. Raids were made on Sungei Patani, Alor Star, Kuala Ketil, Butterworth, and Penang. Twenty-three grounded R.A.F. aircraft were claimed as destroyed, whilst the Japanese admit of three seriously damaged.

Units of which Nos. 62 and 27 were already at Alor Star and Sungei Patani respectively, No. 21 was to move to Sungei Patani, and No. 34 to remain at Tengah under 24 hours notice to transfer to Alor Star. Nos. 1 and 8 were to be prepared to operate from Kota Bahru and Kuantan in order to carry out the initial reconnaissance plan.

Reports of a plan for invasion commencing 1st December led to special air reconnaissances being flown by No. 1 Squadron from Kota Bahru, but no sightings were made. The C-in-C F.E., still convinced of the need for the initial offensive, reminded the Chiefs of Staff that adequate warning must be given for MATADOR - yet to avoid any provocation which might result in war the C.O.S. continued to reserve the authority to initiate MATADOR. Nevertheless the fast deteriorating situation dictated the adoption of 'No. 2 Degree Readiness' on 1st December and on the same day the Governor mobilized the Volunteers.

Three days later the full seaward reconnaissance plan was brought into force and commenced by No. 1 Squadron from Kota Bahru together with No. 8 Squadron, now moved to Kuantan, and Dutch flying boats at Seletar. The long delayed authority giving the C-in-C F.E. permission to stage MATADOR on his own initiative came on 5th December.

On the following day the Japanese invasion fleet rounded Cape Cambodia into the Gulf of Siam where improved weather disclosed their presence to searching Hudsons of No. 1 Squadron. As a result, 'No. 1 Degree Readiness' was ordered and a Catalina sent to take over the shadowing during the night. A striking force of No. 36 Squadron moved to Kota Bahru and a long-range Beaufort prepared for a photographic reconnaissance of the ships. Meanwhile, relieving Hudsons, because of bad weather, failed to maintain contact with the Japanese. Both Kota Bahru and G.H.Q. had reason to suspect the fleet had turned North-West into the Gulf of Siam in a stage of an approach on Siam. This supposition proved correct - the Japanese, with air cover were indeed sailing northwards.

Seaward reconnaissance was intensified on 7th December, No. 8 Squadron continued with the set plan, and from Kota Bahru the Hudsons, restricted by bad weather, searched in a more northerly direction, but without success. Neither had the flying boat of No. 205 Squadron made contact during the night; the relief Catalina did so but at the cost of being shot down by enemy fighters. Both Hudson squadrons operated during the afternoon, and although the convoys were not sighted, individual vessels were located and indeed, one aircraft came under fire. The C-in-C F.E. now had to consider the question of setting off MATADOR: bearing in mind the sudden change of policy by H.M. Government, and appreciating the somewhat indefinite sightings of the afternoon, he decided not to order this operation. In his estimation it was too late, for were an expedition aimed against Singora then it could arrive there before the British. Furthermore, if the search reports had been mistaken, MATADOR would do nothing but violate the neutrality of a country which, according to the resident British Minister, would support the British in their opposition to Japan.

Whilst the Far East Command stood-by during the night of 7th December, the Japanese expedition had turned southwards; the larger body headed towards the Singora-Patani area whilst a smaller force moved down upon Kota Bahru in order to divert attention from the main landings to the northward. In anticipation of war the C-in-C F.E. had long since prepared an

Order of the Day, which, in the event, was to be received with mixed feelings.

The diversionary enemy force arrived off Kota Bahru at 0030 hrs. 8th December. No offensive could be taken until the Japanese themselves committed a hostile act and this took place at 0115 hrs when landing craft began to approach the beaches. No. 1 Squadron was then ordered to take-off for the offensive, and at the same time A.H.Q. issued instructions for all available Squadrons (Nos. 62, 27, 34, 100, 8, and 60) to augment the defences at the beachhead. Thus all squadrons in Malaya, with the exemption of Nos. 205, 243, 488, 453 and 21, were concentrated upon the secondary target, whilst at Singora (the long anticipated invasion port) the Japanese landed their main forces unmolested.

Seven Hudsons individually attacked the transports and supporting warships. Later, troop-carrying barges were strafed, but enemy covering fire destroyed two aircraft. A total of seventeen sorties was flown during which one large vessel was sunk, two severely damaged and at least twenty-four barges destroyed. A detachment of two Buffaloes of No. 243 Squadron also participated in this successful action. Having established a beachhead the transports withdrew northwards leaving the barges to be attacked by further sorties of No. 1 Squadron, aided by the reinforcing aircraft of No. 8, 60, 34, and 27 Squadrons. An attempt was made to divert these latter Units to the pursuit of the retreating ships, but without marked success. Solely upon their own initiative No. 62 Squadron did in fact fly northwards to bomb shipping off Patani. No. 110 Squadron did not arrive at Kuantan until the late morning and in consequence were not involved in the defence; the other torpedo-bomber unit - No. 36 - temporarily operating from the uncongested airfield at Gong Kedah, followed the north-going transports but, due to unfavourable conditions, delivered an ineffectual torpedo attack. During this time a Beaufort carried out a photographic reconnaissance and established the fact of a main Japanese landing at Patani. Because of enemy action it crashed on return to Kota Bahru bringing the total losses in aircraft up to nine of the eighty-seven deployed in the North-East.

Almost simultaneously with these landings the enemy staged a long-distance air attack upon Singapore Island. The raid, of seventeen aircraft, divided into two formations at 14,000 and 17,000 feet, whilst the meagre force of night-fighters was held on the ground in order to give full scope (sic) to the A.A. guns. Bombs fell at 0408 hrs. in the city and on the harbour, killing sixty one and injuring one hundred and thirty three; Seletar and Tengah airfields were also attacked but with little resulting damage. Although not of a serious nature this raid did much to reveal the lack of co-ordination between the Services and the Civil Administration as well as certain inadequacies in the defence. The fact of the city lights continuing to burn throughout the raid may have had little effect upon the accuracy of the bombing by full moonlight, but it certainly emphasized the need to perfect A.R.P. measures. And on the part of the R.A.F. this unexpected attack found a weak spot - the almost complete lack of night-fighters

On the morning of 8th December, following the defensive action at Kota Bahru, the air forces in the North were refuelling on their battle stations, when the Japanese, now established on Singora and Patani, struck again - but this time from the air. Using a force of approximately one hundred and fifty aircraft the enemy launched attacks upon the empty airfields of Machang, Gong Kedah and Penang.

Then, throughout the day they strafed Kota Bahru and badly damaged two Hudsons. Sungei Patani, on which were stationed Nos. 21 and 27 Squadrons was bombed so effectively that each Unit was reduced to four aircraft. Butterworth was perhaps the scene of the greatest chaos for it was to this 'care and maintenance' station that three Squadrons unexpectedly moved. Upon No. 34 Squadron being diverted there after its action at Kota Bharu, difficulties in refuelling and rearming were aggravated by low-flying enemy fighters and soon only two Blenheims survived. Then Nos. 21 and 27 Squadrons began to straggle in after the retreat from Sungei Patani, and following another enemy attack their already depleted strength was down to three Buffaloes and three Blenheims. No. 62 Squadron, so far unscathed, was bombed whilst grounded at Alor Star and nine of their eleven Blenheims put out of action.

Besides the air attacks at Kota Bahru the enemy were making progress from the beachhead; our air support was very limited, and when at 1600 hrs. the airfield itself came under fire, the Station Commander was authorized to withdraw to Kuantan. Preparations had been made for such a move by No. 1 Squadron, consequently the remaining Hudsons were flown off with little difficulty, and the road party evacuated to the railhead. On the Station itself some of the demolitions were premature whilst other installations fell into enemy hands. By evening a total of five Hudsons and seven Vildebeestes had flown into Kuantan.

When the final reports were evaluated by A.H.Q. at the end of the first day's fighting it was seen that of the one hundred and ten aircraft which had stood-to in Northern Malaya only fifty were fit for operations, a startling fact which must have prompted the C-in-C F.E. to urgently cable the Chiefs of Staff for maximum reinforcements.

EARLY WITHDRAWALS

The march of events in Northern Malaya during the second and third days of the campaign were of necessity mainly centred upon 'Norgroup'. A.H.Q. Singapore has re-assumed control of two of the Group's units for the anti-invasion phase at Kota Bahru, but with the disorganisation resulting from the enemy air attacks on the forward airfields, these two Squadrons were perforce to revert to Norgroup control.

II J50/4.  
'A.H.Q. Ops.  
Room Narrative'  
Entries d/d 9  
and 10 Dec. 41.

D.S.D. M.R.S.  
2024 'Report  
on Norgroup'.  
Encs. 2A d/d  
31 Dec. 45 4A  
d/d 7 Jan. 46.

Headquarters Norgroup was at Kuala Lumpur in a school, the major portion of which was occupied by H.Q. IIIrd Indian Corps (1): Throughout the first day of operations no reports were received at this H.Q. from either Alor Star or Sungei Patani as communications by W/T. and land-line had apparently failed, therefore, as a result of urgent representations to A.H.Q. at 1900 hrs. 8th December, O.C. Norgroup was given permission to move forward to the pre-arranged advanced headquarters of IIIrd Indian Corps at Bukit Mertajam, which was situated within 10 miles of Butterworth. At the same time A.H.Q. were advised that the Buffaloes on this airfield were operationally unfit owing to lack of gun firing solenoids. The move was completed during the night and by 0915 hrs. on the following day the advanced headquarters of Norgroup was established and the O.C. preparing to visit his three Stations. But the A.O.C., realizing the function of Norgroup could not long be sustained, gave orders for the airfields to the south to be made useable for modern aircraft. Approaches were to be cleared, boundary drains filled and arrangements made for the rapid provisioning of bombs, petrol and oil in the event of operations. Meanwhile Butterworth was becoming the focus point of R.A.F. operations. As already recounted, the remnants of Nos. 21 and 27 (F) Squadrons from Sungei Patani, together with a proportion of No. 34 (B) Squadron had arrived there during the previous evening. They were soon to be joined by No. 62 (B) Squadron; sometime before 0835 hrs. 9th December, six Blenheims of this Unit flew in from Alor Star. Evidently the ground crews of the squadron had done much to repair the damage of the previous morning's raid. No. 27 (NF) Squadron had also striven to repair its aircraft - four Blenheims were serviceable (one more than the previous evening), and in fact two aircraft had already carried out a patrol at 12,000 feet over the airfield. The same may not be said about No. 21 (F) Squadron - their operational state had been reduced to two Buffaloes. However, this might well have been due to the failure of the gun solenoids. But efforts were being made to repair this deficiency: as a result of O.C. Norgroup's call to A.H.Q. a P.R. Buffalo at Kallang, previously detailed for a reconnaissance of Singora at first light 9th December was first to land at Butterworth with a supply of new solenoids, afterwards flying northwards for the reconnaissance.

On the morning of 9th December, A.H.Q., realizing the offensive capabilities of the Japanese fighters, planned two raids to destroy these aircraft on Singora airfield. (2)

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(1) The Officer Commanding Norgroup was Wing Commander R. G. Forbes appointed in the absence of the Commander designate, Group Captain A. G. Bishop, who was away in South China. W.C. Forbes had previously been O.C. Alor Star.

(2) The enemy fighters could also be used as cover for the bombers which might attack "Prince of Wales" and "Repulse".

(But see also 'Loss of EASTERN FLEET').

The R.A.F. bombers were a much depleted force, nevertheless it was decided to use them for daylight bombing with a fighter escort. At 0939 hrs. Tengah was instructed to muster six Blenheims: three aircraft of No. 34 (B) Squadron (of which there were still fourteen at Tengah) were to bomb-up with 500 lb. G.P., whilst No. 60 (B) Squadron, freshly evacuated from Kuantan, had to provide the other three Blenheims armed with 250 lb. bombs. The formation was to take-off between 1100 and 1200 hrs. and fly up the west coast to Butterworth where the fighter escort, if available, would be picked up. From there they were to fly out to sea; then, approaching from the West a landfall was to be made on the island of Terutau. From there onwards the aircraft would cut across the Isthmus to deliver their attack between 1500 and 1600 hrs. Re-arming was to be carried out at Butterworth in order for the aircraft to be available at first-light on the following day. At the same time Norgroup was ordered to mount a raid from Butterworth on the Singora target with a maximum force of Blenheims, and if the raid was successful, to strike again.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2024  
Enc. 8A dated  
25 Feb. 46.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2012  
Enc. 10A

The reports on these two raids are somewhat confused and to some extent contradictory, but one fact clearly emerges, which is that no adequate fighter cover was provided. The severely depleted fighters at Butterworth were fully engaged with standing patrols over the airfield and tactical reconnaissances for IIIrd Corps. In fact, in respect to the latter commitment two Buffaloes of No. 21 (F) Squadron made a particularly useful reconnaissance of the Singora area at 0845 hrs. when they reported twelve to fifteen light tanks at Ban Sadao. These requirements together with what would appear to be the un-co-ordinated control of the fighters, deprived the Blenheims of what little cover might have been available.

The raid staged from Tengah took-off at 1245 hrs. The fourteen Blenheim IVs of No. 34 (B) Squadron and the four Blenheim Is of No. 60 (B) Squadron together with the aircrews had been pooled, consequently the formation consisted of six Blenheims of No. 34 (B), three of which were crewed by No. 60 (B) Squadron personnel. When the formation passed over Butterworth two Blenheim fighters were seen to take-off, but after a short time they broke away. The approach to the target was as briefed and on the bombing run heavy A/A fire was met in addition to at least thirty to forty enemy fighters. Despite violent evasive action the bombs fell amongst a group of fighters near the runway. What little cloud cover existed was used in the get-away, but with such unequal odds it is not surprising that three aircraft (two crews of No. 60 (B) Squadron and one of No. 34 (B) Squadron) were shot down; the Japanese claimed four Blenheims. The three surviving aircraft of this disastrous raid returned to Butterworth and landed.

Extracts from  
London Gazette  
d/d 21 June 46  
and letter  
from widow of  
S. I. Scarf d/d  
24 June 47.

The second raid was never launched; the mixed force of Nos. 62 and 34 (B) Squadrons was about to take-off from Butterworth when the enemy made a combined bombing and low-level attack. All aircraft were damaged or destroyed with the exception of one Blenheim of No. 62 (B) Squadron captained by Squadron Leader A. S. K. Scarf which had become airborne a few seconds before the attack started.<sup>(1)</sup> Instead of abandoning what was intended to have been a formation sortie this officer flew on to Singora. Opposition over the target was severe and included attacks by a considerable number of

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(1) S/Ldr. Scarf, at the time of his death was serving as a Flight Lieutenant, but in actual fact he was a Squadron Leader (temporary) for promotion was to be Gazetted on 16th Dec. 41 with retrospective effect from 1st Dec. 41.



fighters, yet despite this the bombing attack was completed. Unfortunately, during this engagement S/Ldr. Scarf was mortally wounded; a running fight continued until the Malayan border was reached and although a determined effort was made to regain base, he was unable to accomplish this object owing to his wounds. A force-landing was made at Anak Bukit (near Alor Star) without causing injury to either of his two N.C.O. aircrew but S/Ldr. Scarf was admitted into the General Hospital(1). The circumstances of this epic flight were made all the more tragic by the very fact that his wife was a nurse in this hospital. She was on duty at the time and when it became necessary she immediately volunteered to give a blood transfusion. But her offer was in vain; as she was about to prepare for the operation her husband suddenly died. He was subsequently awarded the Victoria Cross.

II J53/8  
page 40

Later that evening, at 1745 hrs. the ill-fated station at Butterworth suffered yet another low-flying attack; according to the Norgroup Commander 'aircraft were being picked off one by one on the ground'. The four remaining Buffaloes of No. 21 (F) Squadron, without waiting for orders, went up to engage the enemy; it was, however, an ineffectual sortie for without loss to the enemy two Buffaloes were shot down(2).

Maltby Despatch  
para. 196.

As a result of the day's operations against Singora A.H.Q. decided that daylight bombing should cease until such time as fighter escorts could be provided. But such a decision must have been almost involuntary - four Squadrons, Nos. 34, 62, 21 and 27 had by this time virtually ceased to exist!

II J50/4  
Entries dated  
8 Dec. 41

It will now be necessary to return to the somewhat uneasy atmosphere which prevailed at the East Coast Station of Kuantan. On the evening of 8th December the Station Commander, extremely concerned with the news brought in from Kota Bahru by the personnel of Nos. 1 (GR) and 36 (TB) Squadrons(3), requested permission of A.H.Q. to commence the evacuation of ground personnel by sea. Although this was refused at the time, A.H.Q., possibly having in mind the dangerous congestion of aircraft at Kuantan, signalled at 2127 hrs. instructions for the evacuation at first light 9th December of all aircraft except the Hudsons and twelve Vildebeestes(4). To Seletar were to go six Vildebeestes (of No. 36 (TB) Squadron) with torpedoes, whilst Tengah was to receive the No. 4 A.A.C.U. detachment (Sharks), together with the Blenheims of No. 60 (B) Squadron. These aircraft duly arrived back at Singapore Island by 0900 hrs. that day.

II J50/4  
Entries dated  
9 Dec. 41.

Throughout the day Kuantan was kept alert by a series of false reports of enemy shipping which were to be a feature of the evacuation. At 0155 hours two Vildebeestes were airborne

(1) Anak Bukit was the location of the Satellite planned for Alor Star.

(2) A total of ninety-three aircraft of the 7th Air Brigade - seventeen Type 1 fighters and seventy-six heavy bombers, Type 97B, 99B, - left French Indo-China to attack the Kedah airfields. Bad weather diverted the majority to Victoria Point but the 64th Regiment got through to Singora from whence they attacked Butterworth (probably the 1745 hrs. raid). A total of six Blenheims and five grounded aircraft was claimed as destroyed. The raid connected with the Scarf incident was probably delivered by two Regiments of the 12th Air Brigade, which claimed sixteen destroyed.

(3) See also in Section 'Air Attack From Siam'.

(4) A miscalculation on the part of A.H.Q.: only eleven Vildebeestes would be left at Kuantan at this stage.

on an extended sea reconnaissance; the pilot of the No. 100 (TB) Squadron aircraft, whose search had been slightly restricted by bad weather, was positive there were no surface craft within his search area. The other Vildebeeste also gave a negative report. Then again at 0738 hours three Hudsons of No. 8 (GR) Squadron were sent up as the result of a report from the G.O.C. to search for ships in the vicinity of the Perhentian Islands: in this instance a convoy of one battleship, two cruisers, seven destroyers and three transports was seen a few miles North-East of Kota Bahru. Yet another search was made at 1350 hours by three No. 100 (TB) Squadron Vildebeestes armed with torpedoes - but the ship, reported 60 miles off the coast, was not found. At 1530 hours the Captain of a No. 8 (GR) Squadron Hudson reported a merchant vessel of 3,000 ton in the vicinity of Tenggol steaming south; off Merchong he also saw ten barges. As a result of this apparently reliable sighting three Blenheims of No. 34 (B) Squadron were despatched from Tengah, yet nothing was sighted except a few houses burning near the town itself. Likewise the 3,000 ton merchant vessel failed to materialize - in an extensive search aided by good visibility six torpedo-carrying Vildebeestes of No. 100 (TB) Squadron were unable to locate it!

II M/E. 100/1  
O.R.B.  
No. 100 Sqdn.

II J53/8  
pages 35, 41

Meanwhile, at 1225 hours a bombing raid was plotted on its way to Kuantan and within a few minutes the Station was subjected to its first experience of high-level bombing<sup>(1)</sup>, followed by low-level machine gunning. Runways were damaged but still useable whilst a temporary bomb dump and power house were blown up; the main Stores was also hit. The dispersed aircraft had suffered to some extent: recorded casualties were one Vildebeeste of No. 100 (TB) Squadron and one Hudson of No. 1 (GR) Squadron destroyed; three Hudsons of No. 8 (GR) Squadron destroyed and others damaged. At the Station Commander's suggestion the A.O.C. agreed that all serviceable aircraft should be flown back to Singapore although Kuantan was only to be demolished if in danger of actually falling into enemy hands. In consequence the Squadrons flew out their aircraft: four Hudsons of No. 1 (GR) Squadron, together with seven Hudsons of No. 8 (GR) Squadron landed at Sembawang; and seven Vildebeestes of No. 100 (TB) Squadron returned to Seletar. Unfortunately the evacuation of the ground personnel was by no means so well organized. Whilst the Squadron Commander of No. 8 (GR) Squadron was preparing the move of his aircraft a rumour spread that all personnel were to evacuate the Station forthwith<sup>(2)</sup>. So without waiting for further orders the majority of the personnel of Nos. 8, 60, 36 and 100 Squadrons moved off in some twenty trucks without their officers. They were eventually met by the ground personnel of No. 1 (GR) Squadron. This party had set off from Kota Bahru on the previous evening<sup>(3)</sup> and upon arrival at Kuala Lipis by rail at 0800 hrs. 9th December the Officer Commanding had telephoned A.H.Q. from whom he received instructions to detach a party of sixty airmen and proceed to Kuantan by road from Jerantut. This party, led by its C.O., was within 20 miles of Kuantan when they met the personnel of the four Squadrons hurrying in the opposite direction. As there appeared to be no-one in charge, and upon learning for the first time of the evacuation of Kuantan, the No. 1 (GR) Squadron O.C. re-organized the convoy and moved the whole party, now numbering four hundred and sixty six airmen, back to Jerantut where they were entrained.

D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
(M.R.S.)  
2014  
Enc. 13A,  
page 26 and  
Enc. 10A,  
page 14.

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- (1) This was carried out by Type 69 bombers of 22nd Air Flotilla. Ten aircraft were claimed as destroyed.  
(2) This incident bears marked resemblance to the premature destruction of Station Headquarters, Kota Bahru.  
(3) See also in Section 'Air Attack from Siam'.

Station Headquarters personnel were sent to Kuala Lumpur whilst Squadron airmen continued back to Singapore. By accomplishing this somewhat difficult task this officer had transformed a disorganized retreat into an orderly withdrawal.

Percival  
Despatch paras:  
133, 134, 146.

At this juncture it will be necessary to briefly appreciate Army activities in Northern Malaya. In this area was disposed the IIIrd Indian Corps commanded by Lt. Gen. Sir L. M. Heath<sup>(1)</sup>. The 9th Indian Division was in the East Coast sector and one of its Brigades - the 8th Indian - throughout the first day's operations was engaged in the defence of Kota Bahru<sup>(2)</sup>. After heavy fighting on the airfield throughout the night the Japanese put in a determined attack at dawn 9th December forcing the Brigade to withdraw to the South. After this new line had been stabilized the 4/9 Hyderabad Regiment, which had arrived during the afternoon from the Command Reserve, took up a position 12 miles South of Kota Bahru. When on 10th December units were re-organized the casualties did not prove so heavy as at first reported, nevertheless, with the potential threat to communications should fresh landings be made on the East Coast, the Brigade Commander on 11th December withdrew his forces from Gong Kedah and Machang to a rearguard position South of the latter airfield.

Ibid paras:  
128, 129, 130,  
143, 144, 145.

II350/19/6  
Enc. dated  
8 Dec. 41

With the cancellation of operation Matador the tactical plan for 11th Division was to meet the main Japanese advance in a defensive position at Jitra, some eighteen miles South of the frontier. Following the initial violation of Siamese neutrality by Japan, sanction was given by the C.-in-C. for the land forces to enter Siam. Consequently mobile covering forces were ordered to move forward along the Singora and Kroh-Patani roads. This sudden change-over to the defensive not only had a considerable psychological effect upon the troops but necessitated a rapid re-disposition of preparations.

The column operating on the Kroh-Patani road was known as 'Krohcol' and consisted of 3/16 Punjab and the 5/14 Punjab Regiments together with a mountain battery and ancillary units. At 1330 hours 8th December it was ordered to occupy a position some 35 to 40 miles inside Siam known as the 'Ledge'. When, at 1500 hrs. the leading elements crossed the frontier, instead of being met by passively neutral natives they were engaged and held-up by a comparatively small force of less than one hundred and fifty armed Police. It was not until the following afternoon that opposition ceased, but the delay had enabled the Japanese to reach the 'Ledge' first so that when 'Krohcol' duly arrived at first light 11th December a battle developed, the issue of which was decided in favour of the Japanese by the surprise appearance of tanks. After repeated enemy attacks our casualties had risen above two hundred and permission was given to withdraw back to Kroh for a final stand.

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- (1) Subordinate formations within IIIrd Corps comprised:
- (a) Lines of Communication Area
  - (b) Penang Fortress
  - (c) 9th Indian Division (8th 22nd Indian Infantry Brigades)
  - (d) 11th Indian Division (6th 15th Indian Infantry Brigades 28th)
  - (e) Federated Malay States Volunteer Force

Note: Numerical strengths are shown at Appendix III  
(2) See also in Section 'Air Attack from Siam'

Ibid paras.  
131, 137 to  
142.

On the North Kedah front other forces were on the move. Two companies of 1/8 Punjab Regiment together with some anti-tank guns crossed into Siam at 1730 hours on 8th December to delay the enemy advance from Singora. At the same time an armoured train moved into Siam from Padang Besar to which it returned after destroying a large bridge at Klong Gnea. The road column, meanwhile, had made contact with an enemy mechanised unit at Ban Sadao, but although two tanks were knocked out, the Japanese infantry, by an enveloping movement caused the Indian troops to fall back. This action, however, together with the demolition of two bridges so delayed the enemy that it was not until the early morning of 10th December that contact was made again - this time at Changlun, South of the frontier. This position was held by 1/4 Punjab Regiment whilst a battalion of 2/1 Gurkha Regiment took over the outpost at Asun, about 10 miles further south. An early attack was repulsed at Changlun on 11th December but at midday the enemy made a serious penetration. Covering troops, withdrawing down the railway to Kodiang and carrying out demolitions on the way were ordered to reinforce Asun to impose further delays. Meanwhile the column retreating from Changlun was about to enter Asun when suddenly their rearguard was attacked by twelve medium tanks, followed by infantry. Heavy casualties were suffered by the Indian troops, the majority of whom had never before seen a tank. Another attack followed at 1830 hours which broke into the outpost and inflicted over five hundred casualties. Misfortune also overtook the troops falling back from Kodiang, this time not in the form of an enemy engagement, but a premature demolition which caused the loss of all the transport, guns and carriers of the covering and outpost troops. Such incidents as these were to have a profound effect upon the coming Battle of Jitra.

II J50/19/6  
Enc. dated  
11 Dec. 41.

On the evening of 11th December the Commander-in-Chief, in a report signalled to the War Office, estimated the minimum scale of attack by enemy land forces was two or three divisions, supported by an air force of two hundred to three hundred aircraft. Naval units included one battleship, seven cruisers, seventeen destroyers and one aircraft carrier. And he expected these forces would expand to the region of seven divisions and three hundred aircraft. Nevertheless his report contained the optimistic note which characterized the majority of his pronouncements - 'Japan cannot stand a long war' read the opening words of the signal, 'Having begun the war she must be expected to try to end it as quickly as possible ...' The events of the first three days of the campaign in all certainty were endorsing the bitter truth of this latter sentence! The R.A.F. were virtually beaten; the Army was falling back on all fronts, whilst the Far Eastern Fleet, prime defender of Malaya had been sunk before it could take the offensive<sup>(1)</sup>.

#### The Retreat Commences

II J50/4

Entries d/d  
10 Dec. 41.  
D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2014 Enc. 3A  
dated 20 Dec. 45.  
also 2024  
Encs. 4A & 8A

With no hope of re-equipping the decimated Squadrons of Northern Malaya in the near future A.H.Q. decided on 10th December to withdraw the remnants of the flying Units from Butterworth. At 1200 hours on the previous day Alor Star had anticipated evacuation, and following a request to A.H.Q. for guidance the demolitions began at 1340 hours 10th December; that same afternoon their convoys began to arrive at Butterworth. The two surviving Blenheims of No. 62 (B) Squadron, which had been operating from this Station, were

(1) See also in Section 'Loss of the Eastern Fleet'

then flown out to Singapore, but because O.C. Norgroup considered it advisable to keep the Unit together with a view to subsequent re-equipment, the Squadron personnel, after a night halt at Butterworth, were sent down to Taiping on the morning of 11th December.

The personnel of No. 21 (F) Squadron, who had moved overnight to Ipoh by rail, were followed by their four Buffaloes on the morning of 10th December. These aircraft were still suffering from trouble with the gun solenoids. Evidence is by no means conclusive but both O.C. Norgroup and O.C. Butterworth independently reported upon the hurried nature of the move which, besides allowing secret and confidential papers to be left behind, resulted in unserviceable aircraft being abandoned at Sungei Patani and Butterworth. On the latter Station two Buffaloes declared unserviceable by the Squadron were subsequently found to be easily and speedily repairable when a Mobile Salvage Section of No. 81 R. and S.U. arrived on the scene.

Little record exists of the ultimate movements of the other two Squadrons at Butterworth except that on the morning of 10th December those aircraft capable of flying were sent back to Singapore, together with the spare aircrews. In this way the sole Blenheim I of No. 27 (N.F.) Squadron and three Blenheim IVs of No. 34 (B) Squadron returned to the Island.

Whilst the aircraft flew out so the A.A. guns made their somewhat belated appearance! From 11th Division had been sent eight Bofors; these were sited and moved into position during the early morning of 10th December. Meanwhile the destruction of those airfields no longer required by the R.A.F. was put in hand. Authority was given at 1010 hours for the demolition of Penang; this action was commenced at 1220 hours, and a little later (as already mentioned) the denial of Alor Star started. O.C. Norgroup then ordered preparations to be made for the demolition of Sungei Patani and the evacuation of all unnecessary personnel. Similar arrangements were made for the airfields at Kuala Ketil and Lubok Kiap, although because of lack of suitable explosives it was expected that bombs would have to be used. These demolitions, however, were to become virtually impossible because as a result of the destruction of Alor Star (in the rear of the ground forces) the sight of fires and sounds of explosions had so demoralized our forward troops that G.O.C. 11th Division had ordered that in future buildings were to be broken up rather than fired, and petrol was to run to waste.

DS.D. (M.R.S.)  
2024  
Enc. 2A dated  
31 Dec. 45.

Although on the West Coast of Malaya the weight of the main Japanese advance was the deciding factor in the conduct of R.A.F. withdrawals, on the other side of the peninsula, at Kuantan, a paradoxical situation existed. Immediately following the first air attack on that Station on 9th December, A.H.Q. had agreed to all serviceable aircraft being evacuated, consequently a total of thirteen aircraft flew back to Singapore. Yet within the hour Kuantan was advised that three Blenheims from Singapore were to be based on the Station to carry out a dawn reconnaissance! Three Blenheim IVs of No. 34 (B) Squadron, Tengah, were due to arrive at Kuantan 1750 hours under orders to carry out a search at first light of an area extending 50 miles to the North and South of Singora; any enemy vessels were to be reported, after which the Flight was to return to Kuantan.

Quite apart from this apparent contradiction in tactics Kuantan was indeed the scene of very great activity during the night of 9th December. At 2200 hours a report, originating

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2014.  
Enc. 8A dated  
5 Jan. 46.  
Enc. 10A dated  
21 Jan. 46.

II J50/4  
Entries d/d  
9, 10 Dec. 41.

from the Army, was received at A.H.Q.: another enemy landing was taking place at Beserah. The telephone to the R.A.F. at Kuantan was "dead" - a fact which tended to confirm the landing report, consequently, immediate arrangements were put in hand for an air striking force to take-off from Seletar and Sembawang. The C.-in-C., aware of the position, concurred with the action being taken by A.H.Q. there-upon six Vildebeestes of No. 36 (T.B.) Squadron and a mixed force of two Hudsons of No. 8 (G.R.) Squadron together with one Hudson of No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron were briefed for a night attack. Many delays were experienced on both Stations in mounting this operation - heavy rain and armament difficulties were the main factors, consequently the Operations Room Controller had to make frequent changes in the departure times in order to avoid the risk of collision over the target. When at 0205 hours the Vildebeestes finally started to become airborne from Seletar another and more tragic incident occurred. The Squadron Commander (S. L. Witney) on take-off collided with a taxiing aircraft; the bombs came off his aircraft and exploded killing the whole crew and injuring the pilot of the other aircraft to such an extent that he subsequently died. The four remaining aircraft, unaware of the accident continued to take-off and set course for Beserah. After further delays the three Hudsons got away from Sembawang at 0407 hours. Whether these enforced hold-ups enabled the majority of the enemy forces to get away from Beserah in the interim may perhaps never be known; the fact remains that when the Vildebeestes arrived on the scene there were only three small ships to be seen, which were dive-bombed with uncertain results. The Hudsons arrived later, at 0530 hours, and did not locate any shipping despite a thorough and extensive search in the area - their only positive report was that Kuantan was still burning. All aircraft duly returned to their bases after what might well be described as an unsatisfactory operation, especially in view of the fact that no actual enemy landings were made. Furthermore, this incident was to have a very significant effect on the movements of H.M.S. Prince of Wales and Repulse.

The position at Kuantan on the 10th December must have been fairly stable for the Station Commander was able to advise the A.C.C. that although there was no W/T, and the power house had been hit, one grass runway was still serviceable and there was adequate petrol, together with thirty torpedoes. The O.C. was instructed to remain at Kuantan with the three other officers and twelve airmen until further orders. On this day, however, the Japanese did in fact land on the North-East coast of Besut, and the British Adviser, Trengganu, made a request to the Governor, Straits Settlements for a flying boat to evacuate British women. Because he considered they could escape inland, as well as realising the need to conserve aircraft for operations, the Governor did not press this point with A.H.Q. who endorsed his decision in view of the shortage of Catalinas.

Percival  
Despatch, paras.  
161 to 164

Whilst the air forces were engaged in withdrawing from the Northern airfields, the Army, despite initial offensive actions was retreating on all fronts before the rapidly advancing enemy. A decision had to be made as to whether the 8th Brigade should remain in Kelantan or be withdrawn to fight elsewhere. After approval by the C.-in-C., on 12th December, 1941, the latter course was adopted mainly because the three airfields would no longer be required for the use of the R.A.F.(1); also the main threat was developing on the West Coast where our forces were inadequate. Furthermore, the

II J50/3  
Enc. 1A dated  
12 Dec. 41

(1) Kota Bahru, Machang and Gong Kedah.

precarious communications in the East might well result in the loss of the Brigade if it remained. The enemy became active as soon as the withdrawal commenced but they were successfully held by the 2/10 Baluch Regiment so that by 16th December, after practically all stores had been removed, the evacuation of rail began from Kuala Krai. This was completed by 19th December when the railway bridges were destroyed; the Brigade was then concentrated in the Kuala Lipis/Jerantut area by 22nd December after suffering fairly heavy, but not excessive losses.

During the same day as the Kelantan withdrawal the 3/16 Punjab Regiment, after repulsing an attack on the "Krohcol" force were compelled, by reason of an outflanking movement, to withdraw to Kroh after suffering heavy casualties. The other Regiment of the column - 5/14 Punjabs - were also forced to move back to the same position. At midnight, on 12th December the IIIrd Indian Corps assumed direct command of "Krohcol" from the 11th Division Commander. Two days later "Krohcol" ceased to be an independent force when it was taken over by the Commander 12th Infantry Brigade who moved it to the Baling area some nine miles West of Kroh(1). This withdrawal left uncovered the road to Grik, and thence to Ipoh; to meet this threat a company of 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, together with a detachment of armoured cars, was ordered to Grik(2).

Percival  
Despatch  
paras. 165  
to 173.

On the Kedah front the enemy, after breaking through the outpost positions, repeated their tactics on the main defences at Jitra shortly after midnight 11th December. This position was held by the 15th Brigade on the right and the 6th Brigade on the left. Two attacks astride the main road were repulsed by battalions of the 15th Brigade - the 2/9 Jats and the 1st Leicesters, but at 0800 hours 12th December, a determined frontal assault captured the Jats' position, leaving the Leicesters on the flank. Thereupon the 11th Division Commander asked to be allowed to fall back to Gurun, some thirty miles to the South; the G.O.C. refused permission for such an early withdrawal. Counter-attacks were then put in by the 1/8 Punjab Regiment, but in the afternoon an attack was made against the 2/2 Gurkha Rifles on the right. This advance, together with the shelling of the road South of Jitra prompted the Divisional Commander once again to ask permission to withdraw. This time his request was granted. The difficulties of the withdrawal, which commenced at 2100 hours, were aggravated by darkness, and the confused state of the units as well as the broken communications. Some got away without incident, others made their way across country, but many were left behind. By the following day the 15th Brigade had been reduced to 600; the 6th Brigade were seriously depleted, whilst of the 28th Brigade the 2/1 Gurkha Rifles had been almost wiped out. Several guns and a large number of vehicles were lost, which could not be replaced from the reserves in Malaya.

The G.O.C. considered that the battle, fought against not more than one enemy division, was 'half lost before it began', mainly because of the irreplaceable loss of two battalions on the previous day, together with the lowering of morale caused by

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(1) The 12th Brigade, which was the Malaya Command Reserve, on 12th December had been placed at the disposal of IIIrd Corps for employment on the West Coast.

(2) These armoured cars, two in number, were manned by personnel of No. 62 (B) Squadron which, at this time, was reforming at Taiping.



Enemy Publication No. 278,  
pages 18 to 20

the sudden change-over to the defensive. On the part of the Japanese this early victory against a main position, the location of which they had never anticipated 'strengthened their belief in victory and implanted a strong confidence in their tropical campaign'.

It has been shown how in the first few days of the Campaign the relentless drive of the Japanese invaders was met with resolute determination on the part of the air forces despite the comparatively few aircraft at their disposal. But when this meagre strength was further reduced by well-timed attacks upon the forward airfields, the war was then brought home in no uncertain fashion to both flying and ground personnel alike, sheltering as best they were able on the inadequately defended airfields. There can be no doubt concerning the tendency for morale to deteriorate rapidly, which led in turn to the premature evacuation of the airfields. Kota Bahru was perhaps the exception: the withdrawal of No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron was both orderly and well-conducted, although it is impossible not to discern evidence of panic in the hurried destruction of Station H.Q. buildings.

Maltby, paras.  
183, 222

Air Vice Marshal Sir Paul Maltby, in his Report, advances well-founded reasons for this widespread and untimely defection. Constant attacks upon scantily defended airfields without the means of retaliation; pernicious rumours of disaster in the land fighting, together with the opportuneness of the air attacks all combined, he states, in demoralizing the air force personnel<sup>(1)</sup>.

D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2014  
Enc. 13

So grave were the accusations against the forward units, and in particular the R.A.A.F. Squadrons that later the A.O.C. was to convene a Court of Inquiry to review the circumstances. This was presided over by Group Captain McCauley R.A.A.F. who was Officer Commanding R.A.A.F. Station, Sembawang. Evidence was taken under difficult conditions; owing to the posting to the Netherlands East Indies of O.C. 'Norgroup' no satisfactory conclusion was reached over the events on the West Coast. Only an interim report could be made to A.H.Q. in January 1942; but in the case of the East Coast evacuations the full proceedings of the Inquiry were sent to H.Q. R.A.F. Batavia in February of that year. As far as known to Group Captain McCauley no copies are now in existence, but it is thought by this officer that although the Court did not arrive at any final conclusion in regard to Sungei Patani and Butterworth, it was considered that whilst the evacuation of Kota Bahru was unobjectionable the withdrawal of personnel from Kuantan 'was not controlled as it should have been'.

Private papers  
held by A.V.M.  
Sir Robert  
Brooke-Popham

It is significant to observe, however, that prior to this Inquiry, the C.-in-C. on 24th December, 1941, had thought it necessary to address, through the A.O.C., a letter to all Units<sup>(2)</sup>. In this he deplored the disorganised evacuations of the airfields; and whilst recognising the cases of gallantry amongst all ranks he pointed to instances 'where airfields appear to have been abandoned in a state approaching panic, stores which will assist the enemy have been left behind ... and a general state of chaos has been evident'. He then went

(1) Although there existed strong grounds for suspecting a leakage of information concerning Squadron movements, together with the spreading of alarmist rumours, the case was never definitely proved.

(2) It is not certain whether this order was in fact promulgated for the notice of all Units. Nevertheless it expressed the convictions of the C.-in-C. on this distressing subject.



on to outline the duty of Commanders towards their subordinates and the need to deny aircraft and equipment to the enemy before thinking of their own safety. His concluding and pertinent remark was that 'airfields have been usually vacated whilst still out of range of enemy forces'!

#### Loss of the Eastern Fleet

Somewhere to northward of the Anamba Islands a submarine was on patrol in the South China Sea. It was the 9th December - the war had hardly begun for the crew when into their restricted vision came two ships-of-the-line with attendant destroyers. H.M. ships Prince of Wales and Repulse were speeding towards the invasion beachheads. But it was to be their last cruise for the unseen watcher was a Japanese Submarine.

IIJ/18/8  
'Admiralty  
Battle  
Summary'  
No. 14  
paras. 2, 3

C.B. 018151B  
Oct. 1941  
'Particulars  
of War  
Vessels'

It is not unlikely this very submarine was one of the pack known by the Admiralty to be in the vicinity of Singapore and which had been the cause of their suggestion, wirelessly to the Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, on 3rd December, to request United States aid in the loan of a destroyer screen<sup>(1)</sup>. The despatch of a Fleet to the Far East had always been governed by a policy which fluctuated with the ever changing political and strategical situations. In August 1941, the question was reviewed by the Joint Planning Committee and it was proposed to assemble in the Indian Ocean a large fleet whose eventual station would be Singapore<sup>(2)</sup>. But such a plan could not take effect until March 1942 therefore as an interim measure it was proposed to send three capital ships to Trincomali. However, the steadily worsening political situation dictated the immediate despatch of a force and on 20th October, 41 the decision was taken to send Prince of Wales to join the Repulse in the Indian Ocean<sup>(3)</sup>. Admittedly this was an unbalanced force for no aircraft carrier was available, but it was held to be justified by the urgency of the situation. The presence of this 'fleet in being', it was hoped, would deter the Japanese from entering the war, or at least, if war did break out, they might be reluctant to send their forces southwards. Furthermore, in moving these two ships to the Far East the containing power of the strong United States Fleet based on Hawaii was taken into full consideration.

H.M.S. Prince of Wales (Captain J. C. Leach) wearing the flag of Acting Admiral Sir Tom Phillips<sup>(4)</sup>, C.-in-C. designate Eastern Fleet, arrived at Colombo 28th November after leaving the United Kingdom 25th October. She was joined there by H.M.S. Repulse (Captain W. G. Tennant), and thereafter the

(1) The C.-in-C. E.F. did in fact discuss this matter with the Commander U.S. Asiatic Fleet (Admiral Hart) who subsequently moved four destroyers into Malayan waters. They were due to arrive Singapore p.m. 9th December.

(2) Seven capital ships, one aircraft carrier, ten cruisers and twenty-four destroyers.

(3) Prince of Wales

35,000 ton, 28.5 knots.

Armament:- 10 x 14 in., 16 x 5.25 High Angle  
6 x 2-pounder multiple pom pom.

Repulse

32,000 ton, 28.75 knots.

Armament:- 6 x 15 in., 9 x 4 in., 10 x 4 in. High Angle  
2 x 2-pounder multiple pom pom  
4 x .5 in., 8 Oerlikon

(4) Rear Admiral Sir Tom Phillips had previously been Vice Chief of Naval Staff.

Form 540  
R.A.F.  
Seletar

Brooke-Popham  
Despatch  
para. 107

II J53/4  
'No. 205  
Squadron  
Diary'

IIJ50/4  
Entry d/a  
5 Dec. 41.

IIM/E100/1  
'Form 540  
No. 100 Sqdn.'

IIK/18/8  
para. 8

ships awaited the arrival of the anti-submarine screen - four destroyers: Electra, Express, Encounter and Jupiter, whilst the Admiral, in a Catalina of No. 205 (F.B.) Squadron flew direct from Koggala to make a night landing at Singapore. His reason for getting to Singapore on 29th November was to co-ordinate plans with the Dominion, Allied, and American Admirals. The Naval Squadron reached Singapore on 2nd December but there was no opportunity for full consultation with the C.-in-C. Far East partly because Admiral Phillips was engaged in taking over from Vice Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton and partly by reason of his visit to Manila. Prior to leaving for the Philippines the C.-in-C. E.F. ordered the Repulse with destroyers Vampire and Tenedos to prepare for a short visit to Darwin, a move originally suggested by the Admiralty to disconcert the Japanese and to increase the security of the ships. Accompanied by two staff officers he then left Seletar in a Catalina of No. 205 (F.B.) Squadron at 0700 hours 4th December, and having alighted en route at Labuan, arrived Manila 1955 hours the next day.

Meanwhile the Repulse accompanied by the two destroyers sailed for Australia on 5th December escorted by three Vildebeestes of No. 36 (T.B.) Squadron as an anti-submarine patrol. She was recalled, however, as soon as the air reconnaissance of 6th December reported the approach of the invasion convoys. Air escort was resumed at 0915 hours 7th December, this time by two aircraft of No. 100 (T.B.) Squadron. These Vildebeestes were duly relieved by a further pair and the patrol was augmented with a Singapore III of No. 205 (F.B.) Squadron<sup>(1)</sup>. Repulse finally anchored at Johore Shoal Buoy 1430 hours. By this time the C.-in-C. E.F. had also been urgently recalled and his departure from Manila was perforce so hurried that one of the navigators was left behind. The Catalina, without recognition signals made an all night return trip and touched down at Seletar 1055 hours 7th December.

In conference the following morning the Admiral outlined to his Chief of Staff (Rear Admiral Palliser), together with the Captain of the Fleet (Acting Captain Bell) and the Commanding Officers Prince of Wales and Repulse his plans for a naval offensive. Japanese units in the Gulf of Siam were assessed as one battleship, seven cruisers and twenty destroyers, but little was known of the enemy air forces. Admiral Phillips considered that 'given fighter support and surprise' the two ships stood a good chance of 'smashing the Japanese forces landing at Singora and Kota Bahru': he therefore proposed to attack shortly after first light 10th December - a decision unanimously supported by those present especially when it was agreed the Navy could not remain inactive whilst the Army and the R.A.F. were sorely beset. The question of fighter protection had already been

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(1) The two Singapore III Flying Boats allotted to the Royal New Zealand Air Force eventually left Seletar 0703 hours. 13th December on the first stage of their ferry. By 29th December the two aircraft had arrived safely in New Zealand.

IIJ50/17/6  
 'Prince of  
 Wales' and  
 'Repulse'  
 Enc. W X 3114  
 d/d 12 Dec. 41.

Brooke-Popham  
 Despatch. para.  
 108.

discussed with the A.O.C., Far East from whom the Admiral had required:-

- (a) Reconnaissance 100 miles to the north of the Force from daylight 9th December;
- (b) Reconnaissance to Singora and beyond, 10 miles from the coast, starting first light 10th December; and
- (c) Fighter protection off Singora at daylight 10th December.

The A.O.C., gave tentative replies that they could supply the first requirement, hoped to be able to provide the second, but could not give the third. Thereupon it was decided that the matter should be thoroughly investigated and definite replies given to the naval Chief of Staff, who was not sailing with the Fleet. The doubt concerning the reconnaissance to Singora from first light on the Wednesday was occasioned by the uncertainty of the future circumstances at Kuantan from which airfield the search aircraft would operate. The third task - fighter protection, could not be provided mainly because the northern airfields were by this time untenable or had been damaged thus making it obligatory for the Buffaloes to operate from more remote bases. Under these latter conditions their endurance might possibly have allowed a very limited patrol over Singora but it would have fallen far short of appreciable fighter cover. On the evening 8th December the A.O.C., in such terms, confirmed to the naval Chief of Staff his earlier and tentative replies.

It would be no exaggeration to state that the R.A.F. endeavoured to the utmost to ensure the safety of the Fleet and in fact exceeded in most instances the already agreed commitments. G.H.Q., requested the Commanding General, Manila (General MacArthur) to make available the maximum long range air forces to deal with airfields(1) in southern Indo-China from which it was believed the Japanese could send a minimum of one hundred bombers to attack the Fleet (but confined to one sortie in the day). G.H.Q. plans are clearly revealed in an appreciation by the senior R.A.F. staff officer(2). This officer assessed the R.A.F. strength in the North as twelve Blenheims, with twelve Vildebeestes at Kuantan and six to eight fighters in the Butterworth area. A complete Buffalo Squadron was available from Singapore, he considered; this was No. 453 which had already been nominated as Fleet Defence Squadron(3). Group Captain Darvall went on to recommend a reconnaissance effort based on Kuantan to locate enemy surface forces, in conjunction with a striking force of Vildebeestes

II K/18/8  
 Appendix 'D'

IIJ50/39/16  
 'Organisation  
 and  
 Requirements'

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
 2012  
 Encs. 8a, 5a.

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- (1) No record can be found in the U.S.A.F. historical files or in the U.S. Historical Records Branch of such an attack by American Air Units on enemy-occupied airfields.
  - (2) Group Captain Darvall; the appreciation is undated but it can be deduced as written during the afternoon 8th December. His calculations are very similar to the retrospective assessment at Appendix "B" Part II which shows the air strength in the North on the evening 8th December as - Bombers: twelve Blenheims, Fighters: three Blenheims, four Buffaloes, Torpedo-Bombers at Kuantan: sixteen Vildebeestes.
  - (3) The Squadron Commander had arranged R/T communication between Prince of Wales and the Squadron, and was prepared, given the use of Kluang, Kuantan and Kota Bahru to keep a small patrol over the Fleet within 80 miles of the coast to a point 80 miles north of Kota Bahru.

and Hudsons standing by. Bombers, the appreciation continued should be employed on the night of 9th December and first light of 10th to attack the fighter airfields at Singora and Patani from which the enemy fighters would be endeavouring to give cover to their bombers attacking the Fleet. Furthermore, it was proposed a maximum number of fighters in the North should be operated from Butterworth to give fighter cover for the ships as far north as Singora. To implement this it would be necessary for one fighter squadron to move from Singapore to Butterworth the same afternoon and every effort made to provide the strongest anti-aircraft defences for that airfield<sup>(1)</sup>.

It may be of interest now, to examine and to summarize the extent to which A.F.Q., was able to implement these proposals. Much of the story has already been related<sup>(2)</sup>. The 11th Division did in fact send eight Bofors to Butterworth on the morning 10th December but the fighter concentration which these guns were to protect no longer existed - even at that moment the remnants were moving southwards: the last four Buffaloes of No. 21 (F) Squadron on their way to Ipoh whilst the single fighter Blenheim of No. 27 (N.F.) Squadron was flying back to Singapore. The Dutch Fighter Squadron (nine Buffaloes) did not arrive at Kallang until 9th December where the effective fighter defence consisted of only two Squadrons - Nos. 453 and 243 (No. 488 Squadron at this time was not operationally trained).

The bombers carried out the task to the very best of their ability; we have already seen how, on 9th December six Blenheims from Tengah lost half their number in attacking Singora, whilst the second raid, staged from Butterworth, was dramatically reduced to the token of one aircraft whose captain gained the Victoria Cross in a valiant attempt to strike the enemy. The three Dutch reinforcing Squadrons (twenty-two Glen Martins) were unable to help for they only arrived at Sembawang on the day of the Singora raid (9th December). Then the decision by A.H.Q. not to use unescorted Blenheims for further daylight raids had to be equally applied to the Dutch, hence they could not be used on the following day. And as far as night flying was concerned, the crews were untrained, consequently one Squadron of eight Glen Martins was returned to Batavia for the necessary training on the day after their arrival.

Neither was it possible for the seaward striking force to stand by at Kuantan for the airfield had been evacuated on 9th December although the Hudsons and Vildebeestes remained to operate until the very last moment. Even so, these Squadrons continued to stand-by after their return to Singapore and did indeed operate as a striking force in the Kuantan area during the night 9th-10th December.

The reconnaissance effort was more effective: appropriate orders were given to Seletar and Kuantan for searches on 9th December by a Catalina and Vildebeestes respectively, whilst on 10th December a flight of Blenheims were to operate specially from Kuantan.

Prince of Wales and Repulse together with the destroyers Electra, Express, Vampire and Tenedos (the latter two ships replacing Jupiter and Encounter undergoing repairs) left the

(1) In this respect discussions with the G.O.C., were already in hand to move the A.A. Regiment, 11th Division to Butterworth.

(2) See 'Early Withdrawals' and 'The Retreat Commences'.

Ibid  
Appendix 'D'

C.32519/46  
'Report on  
loss of  
'Prince of  
Wales' and  
'Repulse'  
Encs. 7b, 17a

IIJ53/4  
'Nc. 205  
Squadron  
Diary"

Naval Base at 1735 hours 8th December. This Fleet - to be known as Force 'Z' - was at the maximum strength for the cruisers on the station were fully engaged on escort duties and the Exeter was not due in until two days later. Course was set to pass eastwards of the Anambas. At 0125 hours 9th December the first important signal was received from the naval Chief of Staff. This had resulted from the A.O.C's deliberations and confirmed that R.A.F. reconnaissance to the depth of 100 miles north-westward of the Force would be provided by a Catalina from 0800 hours onwards 9th December; also, it was 'hoped that a dawn reconnaissance of the coast near Singora can be carried out on Wednesday 10th December;' and finally, 'fighter protection on 10th December will not repeat not be possible(1). The Admiral was advised at the same time of large enemy bomber forces in Southern Indo-China together with the request made to General MacArthur to subject them to long range bomber attack. Kota Bahru had been evacuated, the signal continued, and other northern airfields seemed to be in danger of falling. Despite the absence of fighter support Admiral Phillips decided to carry on, unless he was spotted by enemy aircraft; accordingly, at 0400 hours the Force altered course to northward leaving the Anambas to port. It was then his intention to detach the destroyers, vulnerable to air attack, at midnight 9th December and make a high speed descent upon Singora with the two heavy ships, relying on speed and surprise to avoid damage. Japanese aircraft would not be carrying anti-ship bombs and torpedoes, it was anticipated, and the only opposition during the retirement would be from the hastily organised long range bombers in Indo-China. Such was the plan - but it was soon to be spoiled for at 0620 hours the Vampire's look-out men momentarily spotted an aircraft. Low clouds and heavy rain, however, provided suitable conditions for evasion, therefore the Force held course. The Catalina of No. 205 (F.B.) Squadron was also operating in this weather in accordance with the pre-arranged reconnaissance plan. The flying boat had left Seletar at 0637 hours that morning but only one motor vessel was sighted throughout the long day's patrol, although at 1737 hours a supposedly hostile aircraft was encountered and an attack expected. The Catalina eventually returned to base at 2137 hours without further incident. But other air searches were carried out, which even if they were not specifically ordered for Force Z did much to contribute indirectly towards the reconnaissance effort. As already recounted two Vildebeestes left Kuantan at 0155 hours on an extended search in the Gulf of Siam; the prevailing bad weather restricted their efforts; however. Then later, three Hudsons of No. 8 (G.R.) Squadrons sighted a force of naval vessels and merchant ships off Kota Bahru(2). This sighting was indeed passed to Force 'Z' in a signal,

(1) The latter part of this signal, by the omission of the words "off Singora at daylight" differed from the final answers given by the A.O.C. to the naval Chief of Staff (which were to the effect that fighter protection off Singora at daylight 10th December could not be provided). Although such conditions were inferred in the light of the C.-in-C. E.F.'s original request it is conceivable - even though it cannot be proved - that this abbreviated message may have led Admiral Phillips to believe fighter cover would not be possible anywhere or at any time throughout 10th December. Possibly this may be the reason why he never advised Singapore of his movements, and in consequence the fighter Squadron standing by for Fleet protection remained at Sembawang until it was too late.

(2) See 'Early Withdrawals' for a more detailed account.

originated at 1917 hrs. by the naval Chief of Staff but some delay must have occurred for the enemy ships were first seen between 1030 and 1100 hours and not, as Admiral Palliser stated, at 1630 hrs.

The Japanese knew, from air photographs taken on 8th December, that the two capital ships were in Singapore. But once they had sailed it fell to an enemy submarine to make the first sighting during the afternoon 9th December in a position approximately 7°N, 105°E. The message was not received at the 22nd Air Flotilla Headquarters until two hours later(1). The Genzan Group at this time was loading bombs for an attack on Singapore Harbour but on receipt of this dramatic news the Navy 96's were rearmed as quickly as possible with torpedoes and at dusk the aircraft were ready for a night operation. The situation was especially urgent for it was expected the Fleet was about to attack the invasion transports. Battleships Haruna and Kongo(2) were also ordered to make contact with the British Force. Although the Group was airborne that night they failed to locate H.M. Ships owing to bad weather conditions, and so returned to base at midnight.

United States  
Strategic  
Bombing Survey:  
"Interrogations  
of Japanese  
Officials"  
Vol. II  
pp. 333, 334

II J.50/17/6  
Enc. M.I.10  
d/d 5 Mar. 46

C.B.1815.  
April, 1943  
'Particulars of  
Foreign  
War Vessels'.

Prior to this search, however, the weather had cleared and between 1700 and 1830 hrs. 'three enemy naval reconnaissance aircraft' were sighted from the Prince of Wales(3). On this account the C-in-C. E.F. decided the risk of attacking Singora was no longer justified because all hope of surprise had been lost and in consequence a heavy scale air attack had to be anticipated. The Tenedos had already been ordered to return to Singapore on account of her low endurance when at 2015 hrs. the remainder of Force 'Z' altered course for the return to base. But shortly afterwards, at 2335 hrs. the situation was completely altered by a signal from the naval Chief of Staff which reported an enemy landing at Kuantan. Admiral Philipps decided to investigate especially in view of the fact that the Japanese would hardly expect the Force (which they had last seen heading northwards) to be so far to the south

(1) The 22nd Air Flotilla comprised the following naval air forces:-

Air Group	Flights	Aircraft	I.E.	I.R.	Location
Genzan	Mikkaido Ishihara Takai  Makino(recco)	'Nell' (Type 96)	36	12	Saigon
Mihoro	Takahashi Takeda Ohira Shipai	'Nell' (Type 96)	36	12	20 miles north of Saigon
Kanoya	Nabeta	'Betty' (Type I)	26	9	On same air- field as Mihoro Group

Notes: (a) Attached to the Flotilla were 18 + 6 fighters.  
(b) The Kanoya Group were short of ten aircraft based in Formosa and taking part in the Philippines campaign.

(2) Haruna and Kongo were sister ships with a speed of 27 knots and armament comprising: 8 x 14.2 in., 14 x 5.9 in. and 8 x 5 in. high angle guns.

(3) The identity of these aircraft is at once put in doubt by Japanese account which states that 'bad weather' on 9th December, prevented any form of air search.

by daylight; furthermore Kuantan, besides being a great distance from the enemy airfields in Indo-China, was close to the return track. Course was altered, therefore, at 0052 hrs. 10th December, and the ships made ready for action. The R.A.F. were already engaged in this operation and an account has been given of the bombing missions of the Vildebeestes and Hudsons to Beserah<sup>(1)</sup>. But the southerly movement of Force 'Z' had been seen - and again by an enemy submarine which had disclosed their position during the night. Nine reconnaissance aircraft of the Makino Flight, armed with 4 x 60 kg. bombs took off at 0600 hrs. on a sector search and about an hour later a striking force of thirty-four bombers and fifty torpedo-bombers from all three Groups was ordered to the estimated position of the Fleet.

IIK/18/8  
para. 10

II J.50/17/6  
Enc.  
WX 3530  
d/a 14 Dec. 41

II J.50/4  
Entries d/a  
9 Dec. 41

Prince of Wales and Repulse with the three destroyers were some 60 miles ENE of Kuantan at dawn and rapidly closing the shore when, at 0630 hrs. an unidentified aircraft was seen from Repulse<sup>(2)</sup>. But long before the warships were approaching the coast, the R.A.F., without definite knowledge of this major alteration in plan, was carrying out the pre-arranged dawn reconnaissance of Singora<sup>(3)</sup>. This important task had been given to No. 34 (B) Squadron, Tengah where the orders, were received 1510 hrs., 9th December. Three Blenheim IVs were to carry out a reconnaissance 50 miles to the northward and southward of Singora at a distance 10 miles from the coast. The search was to commence at its most southerly point first light the following day. Warning was given of enemy fighters on Patani and Singora; any warships or vessels within the area were to be reported. Of the three aircraft, crewed by N.C.O. pilots, which left Tengah for their temporary base at Kuantan, only two arrived on the evening 9th December;<sup>(4)</sup> the third was lost in a heavy storm and force-landed in the darkness on a beach 15 miles south of Mersing. When the remaining two aircraft were airborne at 0448 hrs. next morning the poor weather conditions forced them to carry out the reconnaissance independently. These N.C.O's did a really good job of work on that fateful morning, and although their reports did little more than confirm the sightings of the previous days they carried out the search in a most conscientious manner. The leading aircraft noted a concentration of six vessels lying some 20 miles north of Patani, and to the north-east of Singora a 10,000 ton ship was on the move - this he machine-gunned until driven off by heavy fire. Another merchantman was seen close in to the shore, whilst near the further-most limits of the search area a cruiser was moving at very slow speed. Other than this no more shipping was to be seen; Kota Bahru seemed to be quiet. These sightings were mainly confirmed by the second Blenheim whose wireless, because of a broken aerial, had become unserviceable only 15 minutes after take-off. This pilot saw what he thought to be an aircraft carrier or

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- (1) See 'The Retreat Commences'.
  - (2) The Captain of Repulse refers to this as an 'enemy reconnaissance aircraft' but it is more likely to have been one of the three Hudsons from Sembawang which were in the area at that time.
  - (3) G.H.Q. had reason to suspect the cruise had been altered because of a signal from Tenedos. Before being detached from Force 'Z' the destroyer had been given a signal by the C-in-C. E.F. for transmission at 0800 hrs., 10th December. This was to the effect that the Fleet would pass through a point some 30 miles S.S.E. of the Anambas at 0900 hrs. 11th December, and as many destroyers as possible were to meet the Force. G.H.Q. inferred that the ships had not proceeded as far north as Singora even though there was no positive information.
  - (4) See also 'The Retreat Commences'.

battleship but the sighting was open to doubt. Engine trouble prevented completion of the northerly section of the area. As the leading aircraft passed over Kuantan on its return flight at 0930 hrs. everything appeared quiet, although unknown to the pilot Force 'Z' had been in the area for some appreciable time.

II K/18/8  
para. 10

The Fleet had been rapidly approaching the shore at 25 knots when, at 0730 hrs. Prince of Wales catapulted one of her Walrus amphibians to reconnoitre; later the Express which had moved inshore for the same purpose reported a state of 'complete peace' at 0845 hrs. Course was then shaped northwards and out to sea again in order to examine a tug and some barges which had been sighted earlier during the run-in. About this time the Repulse's first Walrus was despatched for an anti-submarine patrol, and shortly after 1000 hrs. reports were received from Tenedos then being bombed 140 miles to the south-east. Events began to move fast: Prince of Wales sighted a shadowing aircraft at 1020 hrs. and 'first degree readiness' was assumed (but still no signal to base for air protection). Soon afterwards Repulse had a radar plot of aircraft bearing 220°. This was in fact the enemy striking force which had flown down the 105th meridian until, arriving within sight of Singapore, it had turned on to a reciprocal. Near the Anambas the Mikkaido Flight (nine aircraft) attacked what was thought to be a minelayer thus expending the single 500 kg. bomb carried by each aircraft (th 'minelayer' was in all probability the Tenedos). The main body of the striking force continued northwards and at 1100 hrs. sighted their target in the approximate position 4°N, 104°E, heading 160°.

Action commenced at 1113 hrs. when all ships opened fire; 5 minutes later the first attack was delivered against the Repulse by eight aircraft of the Shipai Flight. The Naval 96's flew in line abreast and simultaneously each dropped one 250 kg. bomb from approximately 10,000 feet. All were near misses except one bomb, which, striking the port hangar started a fire in the catapult deck - in order to avoid a petrol fire action was taken to get the remaining Walrus over the side. The first torpedo attack took place at 1144 hrs. The Ishihara Flight of eight torpedo-bombers made 'a well executed attack unperturbed by our gunfire' against the port side of the Prince of Wales. She was struck by two torpedoes (the Japanese claimed four hits) and as a result her speed dropped to 15 knots, the steering gear disabled and all but one of her 5.25 inch A.A. guns put out of action. She claimed two enemy aircraft shot down. Repulse had turned to avoid this particular drop, but at 1156 hrs. eight aircraft of the Takai Flight launched their torpedoes against her port beam - these were successfully 'combed' although the enemy claimed five hits and admitted one aircraft lost. Two minutes later the same formation which had already bombed her came in again at high level to drop their remaining bombs - all were misses. The two ships by this time had drawn apart, so that the Captain of the Repulse was unaware what signals had been made by the flag ship; therefore, on his own initiative he made an emergency signals to base at 1150 hrs. - 'enemy aircraft bombing'.

II J.50/4  
Entries d/d  
10 Dec. 41

The first positive news of Force 'Z' came at 1130 hrs., in the form of a report to A.H.Q. from the pilot of the Walrus which, having been launched from the Prince of Wales some 30 miles north of Kuantan, started a coastal search at 0740 hrs; this had extended down to Mersing. Hardly had this report been considered when, at 1219 hrs. the A.O.C. received the startling message (originating from Repulse) that the ship was under attack sixty miles east of Kuantan. Fighter Operations were instructed to take immediate action and by 1225 hrs. the



eleven Buffaloes of No. 453 (F) Squadron had taken-off from Sembawang.

Even whilst the fighters were flying to the scene of action, the two ships were receiving the final attacks. At 1222 hrs. eight aircraft of the Takahashi Flight approached the Repulse in two formations; she was able to 'comb' the first drop of torpedoes, but in doing so her port beam was open to the other section which turned in to launch an attack against which no avoiding action was possible - the ship was hit by one torpedo (the enemy claimed four rather uncertain strikes). Then fresh waves of torpedo bombers came in from several directions - twenty of the Kanoya Group were engaged two of which were claimed by the ships' A.A. fire (corroborated by the Japanese). The first torpedo jammed the steering and although speed was maintained, three more hits abreast of the superstructure brought the order to abandon ship. She rolled over and sank at 1233 hrs. Destroyers (Electra and Vampire) rescued 796 of her complement of 1309, unimpeded by the Japanese.

Simultaneously with this attack the other 6 aircraft of the Group were torpedoing the Prince of Wales. Incapable of taking avoiding action she was hit twice at 1223 hrs. and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  minutes later a further pair of torpedoes struck. The ship could claim only one Japanese aircraft shot down. When the final attack came at 1244 hrs. the ship was heading north: nine Takeda Flight aircraft claimed two hits from their 14 x 500 kg. bombs - the ship recorded only one. A signal was made at 1250 hrs. for the assistance of tugs from Singapore; but it was too late - after Express had disembarked wounded the ship turned turtle and sank at 1320 hrs.

D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2012  
Enc. 8a

C.32519/46  
Enc. 1k

The Squadron Commander of No. 453 (F) Squadron (Flt. Lt. Vigors), after a flight of 55 minutes reached the scene just in time to see this tragic event. No enemy aircraft were sighted but the arrival of the Buffaloes was noted by a Japanese reconnaissance aircraft which had purposely remained until both ships had gone down; thus was cancelled further operations by six or seven bombers which had returned to base to reload for another attack(1). The three destroyers continued unmolested to pick up survivors: 1285 of the crew of 1612 were saved but neither Admiral Phillips nor Captain Leach were amongst them(2).

Nearly an hour after the first news of Repulse the A.O.C. was requested at 1312 hrs. by the naval Chief of Staff to provide fighter cover. No. 243 (F) Squadron had already been standing by for 17 minutes at Kallang, but even so, when Fighter Operations was required to maintain this cover doubt was expressed if the ship could be found and even then the standing patrol would have to be restricted to two aircraft, and at the same time the defence of the Island, of necessity would devolve upon the Dutch Fighter Squadron(3). Apart from this request an anti-submarine patrol for the Repulse was required at 1335 hrs. the C-in-C. Far East endorsed the instructions to Seletar to provide a Catalina and a Singapore III for the task. These two flying boats must have

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- (1) In all probability these were aircraft of the Mikkaido Flight which had bombed Tenedos and then returned to Saigon for re-arming.
  - (2) Vice Admiral Layton was ordered to re-hoist his flag as C.-in-C. Eastern Fleet as soon as the loss of Admiral Phillips was recieved in the Admiralty.
  - (3) To such straits were the defenders reduced; No. 488 (F) Squadron, it will be recalled, was not operationally trained at this stage.

taken off some time prior to the return of No. 453 (F) Squadron (which was before 1450 hrs.). Ten of the Squadron landed at Sembawang, but the Squadron Commander put down at Kluang, possibly because he had remained above the rescuing destroyers for an hour. The two flying boats found no trace of the ships, of course, but they did sight a Walrus, at 1645 hrs., down on the water through lack of petrol, near the Sedili River. This was the amphibian sent off from the Repulse with the intention of retrieval at 1215 hrs. It was finally towed in to Singapore by H.M.S. Scorpion.

By this time the first destroyer carrying survivors was on its way back, and as the result of her signal requesting air cover until dusk fighter aircraft were sent off. This duty was carried out mainly by No. 243 (F) Squadron, from Kallang (who had already been patrolling the scene of action after the ships had sunk), but with some help from No. 453 (F) Squadron. Cover by sections of two Buffaloes at a time continued until after dusk.

Thus ended one of the greatest disasters ever suffered by the Royal Navy - indeed it might well be considered the greatest defeat in the history of that Service when account is taken of the cost. On the third day of hostilities two ships-of-the-line had been sunk, with the attendant loss of life, by the (R.A.F.) equivalent of eight Squadrons of aircraft, operating more than 500 miles from their bases(1). With the exception of one bombing run by eight aircraft of the Ohira Flight whose bombs, because of a premature drop missed the target by 3000 yards, all attacks were brilliantly executed. Captain Tennant himself describes them as 'being magnificently carried out and pressed well home'. That the Japanese were well practised in this type of air warfare is shown by the statement of the Genzan Group Commander who described the Unit as 'manned by competent and experienced pilots trained in day and night bombing and torpedo attacks against shipping', together with the fact that the Japanese continued to have confidence in this particular arm. This perhaps is disclosed by a comparison of the tactics used in December, 1941 and those of the succeeding two years, from which it may be deduced that the enemy's conception of attacks against shipping changed but little(2).

The full reasons for the loss of the great vessels were not known at the time but nevertheless the news came as a terrible shock to all sections of the community in Malaya when the information was broadcast the same evening by the chairman of the newly appointed War Council(3). He pointed out that the sinkings must not lead to despondency but to a determination to avenge their loss. Such brave words could do little to minimize the inevitable results of the catastrophe. Thereafter the enemy had undisputed command of the sea: the entire littoral of Malaya - and indeed Singapore Island

II J.50/19/6  
Enos. WX2949  
and  
WX3205 d/a  
12 Dec. 41

(1) The Japanese admitted the destruction of three Torpedo-Bombers in the action and a further two force-landed in southern Indo-China. Our claim 'believed that about eight aircraft were shot down'.

(2) For details of this comparison see Appendix 1, para. 6.

(3) The formation of the War Council took place 10th December, 1941. It comprised: Mr. Duff Cooper (Chairman), Governor of Malaya, C-in-C., Far East, C-in-C., Eastern Fleet, G.O.C. Malaya, A.O.C., Far East.

The Commanders remained responsible to the Chiefs of Staff in London as the War Council was fundamentally a consultative and co-ordinating body.

was now open to seaborne invasion. This was bound to effect the strategical dispositions of the land forces many of which, it will be seen later, were perforce retained to guard Johore and Singapore instead of moving to the aid of their already hard pressed comrades in the North. Furthermore, the position of these same land forces was to be further aggravated by lack of air support; the diminished strength of the air forces had to be conserved to ward off enemy seaborne expeditions and to convoy desperately needed reinforcements - duties which normally would have been discharged by the Fleet now destroyed before it had chance to strike a blow.

#### Summary

Events of the next few days were to centre around 'Norgroup', therefore in order to exercise fuller control the Group moved forward, on the evening of 8th December, from Kuala Lumpur to an advanced Headquarters at Bukit Mertajam. Next morning the already overcrowded Butterworth received what was left of the No. 62 Squadron Blenheims. At this juncture A.H.Q. planned two raids to destroy the enemy fighters which were a menace both to the northern air forces and the newly arrived Eastern Fleet. One raid was mounted from Tengah at 1245 hrs. 9th December, with six Blenheims of No. 34 Squadron, partly crewed by No. 60 Squadron (newly evacuated from Kuantan). The fighter cover from Butterworth was not available, consequently the unescorted bombers faced by heavy A.A. fire and enemy fighters were reduced by 50 per cent. The second raid was never launched: before the mixed force of No. 34 and 62 Squadron could take-off from Butterworth it was attacked by enemy aircraft. Only one Blenheim was airborne, whose captain pressed on to bomb Singora; on his return flight he was mortally wounded by enemy fighters and crash landed.

Meanwhile Kuantan, alarmed by the overnight news of the successful landings was considering evacuation. A.H.Q. agreed only to the extent of ordering away the detachments of No. 36 Squadron and No. 4 A.A.C.U. together with No. 60 Squadron, but the Hudsons - Nos. 1 and 8 Squadrons - and the No. 100 Squadron Vildebeestes were to remain as a striking force. Some of these aircraft carried out seaward reconnaissances throughout the morning of 9th December, mainly, it would seem, in search of non-existent ships. The first bombing raid came at midday; besides damaging Station buildings, it destroyed five aircraft, whereupon the A.O.C. agreed to the remaining eleven Hudsons and seven Vildebeestes being flown to Singapore. In comparison the evacuation of the ground crews was a disorganized affair, a semblance of order being enforced only when they had met the party moving back from Kota Bahru.

On all fronts the Army was faring no better than the air forces. Defence of Northern Malaya had been entrusted to IIIrd Indian Corps. In the East, at Kota Bahru, 8th Indian Brigade (9th Division) was forced to withdraw early on 9th December to a position south of Machang and Gong Kedah. With the cancellation of MATADOR 11th Division had to revert to a defensive on the Jitra position. Small forces were then moved forward across the Border. On the Kroh-Patani road the column aiming to occupy the 'Ledge' position was delayed for sufficient time by Siamese police to allow the Japanese to arrive first. The other column on the Singora road made contact with the enemy, but was then forced to withdraw. Again at Chaglum and Asun the enemy success continued during 10th and 11th December, and it was at this juncture that their medium tanks made a surprise - and effective - appearance.

On 10th December, A.H.Q. decided to withdraw from Butterworth, through which No. 62 Squadron moved on their way to Taiping. No. 21 Squadron had evacuated by rail to Ipoh, whilst the few remaining Blenheims of Nos. 21 and 34 Squadrons flew back to Singapore. Demolitions now commenced starting with ~~Penang~~ and Alor Star, but subsequently destruction by fire had to be discontinued owing to its adverse effect upon Army morale.

Meanwhile, on the previous night (9th December) Kuantan had seen much activity; a Japanese landing was reported with the result that an air striking force was despatched from Singapore. Of the six Vildebeestes of No. 36 Squadron two came to grief in the night take-off; in addition a small mixed force of Hudsons left from Sembawang. In all cases the operations were very unsatisfactory for no enemy forces were identified. Thereafter Kuantan reverted to a comparatively peaceful existence and efforts were concentrated upon salvage of equipment.

Higher on the East coast the 8th Brigade was withdrawn from the State of Kelantan partly because the main threat was developing on the other coast against inadequate forces. After the failure of 'Krohcol', command was assumed by 12th Infantry Brigade and reinforcements had to be moved to cover the now exposed Grik road. The enemy attacked the main Jitra position at midnight 11th December; 15th and 6th Brigades failed to hold them, whereupon 11th Division commenced a difficult withdrawal to Gurun.

Within these first few days the initially high state of morale of the air forces began to deteriorate. Air superiority allowed the enemy to make practically unopposed attacks on the northern airfields which led to their premature evacuation. This unfortunate state of affairs was accentuated on the West Coast and was the subject of a Court of Inquiry.

On 2nd December, H.M. Ships Prince of Wales and Repulse accompanied by four destroyers had arrived at Singapore as an interim measure until the despatch of a larger fleet. For security purposes Repulse then left for Australia, but the sighting of the Japanese convoys on 6th December, led to her recall and a decision by the C.-in-C. Eastern Fleet for offensive naval action at Singora. Air co-operation was requested and as a result reconnaissances promised, but the Fleet had put to sea before A.H.Q. was able to confirm that no fighter cover could be made available. G.H.Q. planned to give all possible air support, nevertheless, and A.H.Q. implemented these proposals to the extent of mounting two bombing raids on Singora together with seaward reconnaissances on both 9th and 10th December. Fighters could not be made available in any case because at the time fighter strength in the north had almost been wiped out, and with the forward airfields untenable the two effective Units on Singapore Island (Nos. 453 and 243 Squadrons) were outranged. The Fleet was spotted on 9th December first by a submarine and then by aircraft so that a decision was made to abandon the operation. An enemy torpedo-bomber unit made an unsuccessful attempt to locate the Fleet during the night, but the ships had altered course towards Kuantan in order to investigate the report of an enemy landing. Once again their movements were reported by a submarine and at dawn 10th December, nine enemy reconnaissance aircraft preceded a striking force of thirty-four bombers and fifty torpedo-bombers in an attempt to locate the Fleet. The ships had received very little warning of the enemy's approach when, at 1100 hours, contact was made. Bombs were dropped on the Repulse but with only one hit. Then Prince of Wales was hit by two torpedoes; but the Repulse was able to 'comb' the first attack, and she was

equally fortunate against the second bombing run. Unaware of any signals made from the flagship she then wirelessly to Singapore the first news of the air attack whereupon No. 453 Squadron hurriedly took-off from Sembawang. Torpedo attacks were then directed on Repulse from different directions; unable to avoid them all she was hit first by one torpedo and then by four more from fresh waves of aircraft, with the result that she sank at 1233 hours. Simultaneously the already disabled Prince of Wales received four torpedoes, quickly followed by a high altitude bombing attack, after which she turned turtle at 1320 hours. No. 453 Squadron arrived on the scene just as she sank and could only give cover to the rescuing destroyers. This protection was continued by No. 243 Squadron during the destroyers' return journey to Singapore whilst a flying-boat patrol was instrumental in saving a force-landed Walrus launched earlier by the Repulse.



A MOMENTARY HALT IS CALLED

II J50/4  
Entries  
d/d 11 Dec. 41

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2014  
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II K/18/8  
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II M/E.100/1  
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Squadron

II J.50/4  
Entries dated  
13 to 16  
Dec. 1941

II J553/4  
War Diary of  
No. 205 Squadron  
pages 6, 7, 8

After the withdrawal from Northern Malaya of what was left of the Squadrons, the R.A.F., on 11th December, 1941, was reduced from an offensive to a reconnaissance rôle, and even that was confined to the Units on Singapore Island. One of the first sorties of the day was by two Hudsons of No. 8 (G.R.) Squadron now stationed at Sembawang; these were ordered to take-off at 0700 hours for a coastal search from Kuala Trengganu down to Kuantan. They were restricted by bad weather and only a negative report could be given. Later in the day another Hudson, this time from No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron patrolled the Mersing coast-line but without revealing fresh incidents. The Buffaloes were also kept busy: at 0742 hours Fighter Operations received information of a force of four Warships, and towed lighters, about 60 miles east of Singapore. Orders were given for an air striking force totalling twenty-nine aircraft to be made available and in the meantime a section of Buffaloes took-off. One of these fighters quickly sighted the convoy and identified four destroyers and four barges, yet no record exists of any subsequent action, probably because A.H.Q. rather belatedly accepted the explanation offered earlier by the Naval Liaison Officer that the Warships were United States destroyers<sup>(1)</sup>. At 1320 hours, in the same area, an enemy submarine was sighted and subsequently two Vildebeestes of No. 100 (T.B.) Squadron failed to locate it, possibly because of a delay of over an hour and a half in taking-off, due to armament difficulties.

Similar troubles were the cause of a No. 205 Squadron Catalina being late off from Seletar in search of six merchant vessels which had been reported moving south off Setul (West Coast); this convoy was also not located. To augment the reconnaissance and anti-submarine forces, A.H.Q. made arrangements for the use of two Dutch seaplanes, recently arrived at the Naval Base, together with the Walrus amphibians, one of which had been flown off from the Prince of Wales, and two from the cruiser Mauritius (docked until 25th Dec.).

It was in the late morning of 13th December, however, that most important news reached the A.O.C. The Far East Combined Bureau at 1030 hours had received information from a reliable source of a very large convoy of over one hundred and forty ships heading S.S.W. off the coast of Indo-China. The force consisted of one hundred transports, one cruiser, one or two aircraft carriers, eight destroyers and several submarines; their position was not known but it was assumed to be off Saigon, covering a 30 mile front. In consultation with the C-in-C. China Station it was agreed that flying boats should search a line Singapore to Cap Saint Jacques (a point on the estuary of the Saigon river). The movement of this fleet was a most serious threat to Singapore especially if it were aimed against the unguarded East coast of Malaya. Orders were issued for No. 205 (F.B.) Squadron to send out Catalinas to locate and shadow the convoy until darkness - but no attacks were to be made. Accordingly two flying boats left from Seletar at 1302 hours, but the search which lasted nearly ten hours was unsuccessful. On return to base one of the boats was almost immediately sent off again but no better results were yielded. Late that evening assistance was requested from the Dutch - Seletar was in no position to

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(1) Four United States destroyers were in this area indeed - they had been sent there by Admiral Hart in response to Admiral Phillips' appeal for an anti-submarine screen for our Far Eastern Fleet.

The lighters, in all probability were part of a fleet of thirty which had left Endau, bound for Singapore on the previous evening. (A.H.Q. had been so advised at 1640 hrs. 10th Dec.)

maintain sustained reconnaissances, for only three experienced crews were available, added to which, on that very same day, the last two Singapore flying boats (which had been reconditioned), left for allocation to the New Zealand Air Force. The next morning a considerable striking force of sixty-two aircraft was brought to 'readiness' in anticipation of a sighting report<sup>(1)</sup> from the reconnaissance aircraft (comprising three Catalinas, two Hudsons from Sembawang and one Blenheim from Tengah), which were now concentrating on the seaward approaches to the North-East coastline. But no contact with the main enemy fleet was made although one of the Catalinas sighted six enemy cruisers heading south approximately 200 miles S.S.W of Cap Saint Jacques as well as two battleships and one cruiser in the same locality, but steering north. The flying boat was then attacked by a Japanese naval aircraft and was forced to return to base at 1740 hours without completing the search. The striking force, after a day's stand-by, was finally released at 1821 hours.

During the 15th December, the search area was shifted to the South-Easterly approaches to Malaya, no doubt to gain warning of any movement towards the highly vulnerable Endau - Mersing beaches. One Catalina, two Hudsons and three Glen Martins, were engaged but no sighting reports could be passed to the maximum - strength striking force waiting at Seletar, Tengah and Sembawang and alternating throughout the day between states of 'available' and 'ready'.

On the following day a pair of Catalinas carried out a diverging search along the anticipated path of a convoy moving from Saigon to Endau but without success. The Japanese were not in that area simply because the time for a landing in force in Southern Malaya had not yet come. Instead they were launching yet another offensive - the fleet which might have been threatening Singapore was heading towards one more British possession. On 16th December, news was received of its arrival off Miri - the invasion of Borneo had begun<sup>(2)</sup>.

Quite apart from these seaward reconnaissances, the solitary P.R. Buffalo operated from Butterworth onwards from 11th December, 1941. It was fitted with a camera having a 20 inch lens, and it was hoped to have a second aircraft with a range of 800 miles ready by the end of the week. This Buffalo did great work. On 12th December, low clouds and attacks by what was thought to be Messerschmitt fighters prevented photographs being taken of Singora; again on the next day bad weather was experienced over the whole of the route, but even so no aircraft were seen on Singora airfield although several transports were inshore. Another dawn reconnaissance took place on 14th December, this time covering the area Ipoh - Kroh - Kota Bahru - Grik - Ipoh. Over Kota Bahru (which apparently the enemy air forces had not yet occupied) the P.R. aircraft was attacked by a M.E. 110 yet despite this the pilot returned with his photographs. In addition to our own P.R. activities, liaison with the American Volunteer Group in Burma produced information from time to time - on 11th December, in particular, A.H.Q. was advised of

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(1) Seletar: Twenty-two Vildebeestes - torpedoes.  
 Sembawang: Seven Hudsons - 4x 250lb. S.A.P. bombs.  
 Fifteen Glen Martins - 2x300 kilo. and 3x100 kilo. bombs.  
 Tengah: Nine Blenheim IV - 2x500 lb. S.A.P. bombs  
 Five Blenheim I - 4x250 lb. G.P. bombs.  
 One Blenheim I - 4x250 lb. S.A.P. bombs  
 Three Blenheims - 4x250 lb. S.A.). bombs.

(2) See also in Section: 'Borneo is Over-run'.

II J.50/4  
 Entries d/d  
 12, 13, 14, 15  
 16 December

II U.50/18/7  
 Encl. d/d  
 19 Dec. 41



a reconnaissance over Don Muang (near Bangkok) which had revealed a concentration of no less than eighty to one hundred aircraft on that airfield. Such intelligence emphasized the meagre resources of the R.A.F. Five Albacores allotted from the Fleet Air Arm to No. 36 (T.B.) Squadron on 12th December were considered to be a welcome addition to the antiquated Vildebeestes. Strenuous efforts were made to get the Flight operational, the object being to adapt the aircraft to the dual purpose of bombing or torpedo dropping. No difficulty was experienced in fitting the bomb racks but advice on the technicalities of the torpedo control gear had to be sought from Air Ministry. Such information was received within 24 hours but even so the torpedoes could not be modified in less than a week.

Also, the amalgamation of Squadrons was beginning; on 14th December, the C-in-C. decided to send the Squadron Commanders and personnel of No. 60 (B) Squadron back to Burma in order to reform the Unit with aircraft arriving from Westwards; their Blenheim I's were to be retained in Singapore to make up the depleted strength of No. 34 (B) Squadron. Improvisation was carried a stage further when the A.O.C. proposed to make up a Dive Bomber Squadron out of the eleven now discarded Wirraways and station it at Kluang. And the scheme received the tacit approval of the C-in-C. who expressed a wish that the Unit should be established as a Flight of six with five reserves, rather than a complete Squadron(1).

II J.50/4  
Encs. dated  
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But the R.A.F. were not reduced to a completely defensive rôle for on the afternoon 11th December, Tengah had been instructed by A.H.Q. to prepare a plan for yet another raid on Singora airfield with Blenheim IV aircraft. This was to be a night operation, routed over the sea off the East Coast, with a direct return, or if needs be, night landings at Ipoh or Taiping to re-fuel. At the same time, Norgroup was advised of the project and impressed with the necessity for speedy re-fuelling and re-arming so that the bomber aircraft should not be exposed to attack whilst grounded. That evening, at 1800 hours, the A.O.C. spoke to G.C. Watts, O.C. Tengah, to amplify the original orders: eight aircraft were to be used, taking-off singly between 0130 and 0215 hours so that the attack might be delivered at 0500 hours. Not more than 30 minutes was to be spent in the target area thus enabling the aircraft to be well clear by first light. A high patrol by a section of Buffaloes was also ordered for 0630 hours the next morning to attack any enemy aircraft following the returning Blenheims. By 2020 hours Norgroup revealed a serious defect in the plan - Taiping could neither refuel nor re-arm and Ipoh could only re-fuel! The O.C. No. 34(B) Squadron, who was to lead the raid, was informed accordingly and impressed that his aircraft must spend only the minimum time on the ground at Ipoh.

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page 2

When the raid eventually took-off only six Blenheims of No. 34 (B) Squadron were available; two of the crews were from No. 60 (B) Squadron. The first aircraft to leave crashed into the top of a hill at Tanjong Gul at 0158 hours, another failed to leave the ground, whilst the third was still flying around the Seletar area with navigation lights on over an hour after take-off. Three Blenheims did get through to bomb the target, however, but low clouds obscured the results. One of these aircraft, on the return flight landed at Ipoh 0733 hours, whilst the other two reached as far south as

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(1) The Flight was in fact formed at Kluang on 18th December, 1941, and four days later four aircraft were ready for operations.

Kluang before landing to refuel. For some inexplicable reason the Buffaloes did not take-off at the appointed time - subsequently they were ordered into the air.

Maltby Report  
paras. 235, 236

In view of the disastrous raids on Singora a few days earlier it may fairly be asked why A.H.Q. mounted a further attack on this distant and well protected airfield. A.V.M. Sir Paul Maltby both in his Report and at an interview has emphatically declared that at the time of the raid the Air Staff of A.H.Q. favoured the policy of attacks on shipping and troop concentrations in the Singora area as opposed to co-operation with the land forces in delaying the Japanese advance; furthermore the meagre striking forces were insufficient to produce any real effect upon the enemy airfields(1). The A.O.C. shared these opinions but felt 'he could not alter the policy which was selected to meet the wishes of the G.O.C. who was anxious ... to reduce the scale of air attack on our troops'. But the G.O.C. in denying this imputation points out that because there had been no air attacks upon his ground forces he was hardly likely to have asked for relief of the troops. His contention was that attacks on enemy airfields should be made only to gain sufficient air superiority to allow unmolested strikes against shipping and troop concentrations in the Singora area. Beyond this no evidence exists concerning the reluctance of A.H.Q. to bomb the airfields. On the other hand there are minutes of a conference between A.O.C., S.A.S.O. and O.C. Tengah, which clearly reveal that even on 19th December, offensive action was still being contemplated on airfield targets; no action was taken, however, because of the failures of the earlier day and night attacks and the impossibility of the only other method - by cloud flying. Then again on 22nd December, in answer to a query by Air Ministry concerning air attacks upon our troops, the A.O.C. not only admitted such attacks had only been spasmodic but explained he was unable to deliver the scale of attack anticipated against enemy airfields and shipping, because the northern airfields were untenable.

II J.50/3  
'Minutes of  
a conference'  
19 Dec. 1941

Ibid  
Encs. 7A d/a  
21 Dec. 41  
8A d/a  
22 Dec. 41

Brooke-Popham  
Despatch  
para. 117

II J.50/39/16  
Paper on  
'Employment of  
aircraft in  
Malaya' d/a  
9 Dec. 41

II J.50/18/7  
Enc. d/a  
12 Dec. 41

II J.50/3  
Enc. 1A d/a  
12 Dec. 41

II J.50/18/7  
Enc. d/a  
14 Dec. 41

But to what extent was A.H.Q. policy influenced by G.H.Q.? It is quite evident that not only was the C-in-C. in close touch with air operations but many plans had received his direct approval. From there it is but a step to examine the opinions of G.H.Q. Staff who had consistently advocated the policy of direct support for the Army in the form of airfield raids. Appreciations stressed the need for such attacks, but even when the night raid on Singora proved abortive, the C-in-C., in a signal to Air Ministry, described it as 'a good attack'. And upon that very same day he issued a directive stating that assistance to 11th Indian Division was to take precedence over other R.A.F. tasks, as well as personally instructing the A.O.C. that his first offensive task was in Kedah. The A.O.C. could not meet this requirement however. The Singora raid on 9th December had tragically demonstrated the need for fighter cover, and with practically no fighters left in the North, the dwindling force of bombers could not be risked. The offensive envisaged by the C-in-C. would have to be carried out by those fighters about to be moved into Northern Malaya and which were destined to check momentarily the overwhelming flood of the Japanese invasion.

With the striking power of our air forces reduced to negligible proportions the Japanese switched their major air effort from airfield attacks to raids on shipping in the port of Penang. Commencing at 1000 hours, 11th December, the island received its baptism of machine gunning, followed by

(1) Such views were impressed, in retrospect, upon A.V.M. Maltby by S.A.S.O., Air Commodore B. J. Silly and G.C. Operations, Group Captain A. G. Bishop.

II J.50/4  
Entries  
d/a 11, 12  
Dec., 41

II J.53/8  
page 47

pattern bombing with 250 kilo and 40 pound bombs from aircraft flying at 5000 feet in three waves of 26, 27 and 24. No ships were hit when bombs fell in the harbour, but severe fires broke out in Georgetown and there were extensive casualties amongst the civilian population. The raid was repeated on the morning of the following day; on every occasion there was no opposition from our fighters simply because they did not exist; and there was no A/A defence: Penang was completely at the mercy of the enemy raiders(1). No. 21 (F) Squadron, it will be remembered, had fallen back to Ipoh on the morning 10th December; only four Buffaloes were then serviceable whilst a few others in a doubtful state of repair were scattered at Butterworth and Sungei Patani. On the day which was to see both the commencement of the Penang raids and the Battle of Jitra No. 21 (F) Squadron had no aircraft available for tactical reconnaissance for IIIrd Corps, and only a doubtful promise of three Buffaloes could be given for the following day. In consequence the A.O.C. gave orders for the Squadron to be brought up to strength (16 I.E.) as soon as possible: replacement aircraft were to be drawn from the precious reserve of Buffaloes, and the reformed Squadron was to remain under the control of Norgroup. Furthermore Ipoh would be defended by eight newly arrived Bofors guns. But until these reinforcements were ready to leave No. 151 M.U., interim measures were necessary to deal with the rapidly deteriorating situation in the North-West. A detachment of three Buffaloes of No. 243 (F) Squadron flew to Butterworth leaving Kallang first light 12th December. Their primary task was that of tactical reconnaissance on the Alor Star - Haadyai road, after which the detachment was to be under Norgroup control. At 1200 hours the three Buffaloes flew to Ipoh, but on that afternoon because of the insistence of the C-in-C. in giving close support to the Army, orders were transmitted to Butterworth for these Buffaloes to be diverted from their reconnaissance mission to low-flying attacks upon troops north of the frontier on the Alor Star - Haadyai road. Bad weather prevented a sortie being flown that afternoon, but the next day was to produce more gratifying results.

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II J.53/8  
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Meanwhile, No. 453 (F) Squadron, stationed at Sembawang for the air defence of Singapore, received orders to move temporarily to Ipoh where the aircraft would be serviced by the ground crews of No. 21 (F) Squadron. This detachment was expected to last only two days after which the Unit was to be relieved by No. 1 N.E.I. Fighter Squadron from Kallang. Sixteen aircraft left Singapore during the early morning of 13th December, but not all of this sorely needed force were to reach their destination. The first flight of three took-off at 0643 hours for Butterworth from where it was intended to carry out yet another reconnaissance of the Alor Star - Haadyai - Jitra area at the request of 11th Division. Upon arrival, however, a more urgent task confronted them - Penang was undergoing its third bombing raid(2), consequently the

(1) The Japanese state they raided Penang on 11, 12, 13th Dec. Total of thirteen ships were claimed as sunk and harbour establishments destroyed. Forces deployed were:-

- (a) 11th Dec.: 7th Air Brigade; seventeen, Type I fighters and forty-one Type 97B bombers.
- (b) 12th Dec.: 3rd Air Brigade; Five, Type I fighters and twenty-one Type 99 bombers.
- (c) 13th Dec.: 3rd Brigade; Twenty-six, Type 99B bombers.

(2) Admission of five aircraft lost on 13th December, after an engagement with ten R.A.F. fighters is made by the Japanese,

fighters were immediately diverted to the defence of the Port. At the cost of one Buffalo damaged (which returned to Ipoh) one enemy aircraft was shot down and two others were claimed. After refuelling at Butterworth the two remaining aircraft continued the ground strafing programme. Of the other thirteen aircraft of the Squadron only ten landed at Ipoh: a complete flight of three aircraft was missing; this had been led by the Officer Commanding (designate) Ipoh and had crashed at Teleok in central Sumatra. A.H.Q. were first to receive the news in the form of a report from the Dutch Liaison Officer to the effect that 'three Buffaloes, Squadron unknown, had crashed', yet it would seem that no-one connected this incident with the move of No. 453 Squadron<sup>(1)</sup>. The first Flight of five was successfully brought in to Ipoh at 1100 hours by the acting Squadron Commander - Flt. Lt. Vigors. This airfield had been instructed to organize a warning system with the local Observer Corps as well as adequate dispersal and ground defence in view of the anticipated operations. It was the intention, however, of O.C. Norgroup to operate the majority of the fighters from Butterworth, consequently the five Buffaloes were flown to that airfield. On arrival two aircraft remained airborne as a standing patrol whilst the other three landed to refuel. This was in progress when a warning was received (by an airman on the boundary waving a handkerchief) of the approach of enemy aircraft: twenty-seven were heading towards Penang. The Squadron Commander took-off immediately, followed by his No. 2, but the third aircraft was still refuelling. The standing patrol was also about to land for more petrol, consequently only two Buffaloes were available to counter the Japanese. Even so, one enemy aircraft was shot down, but unfortunately the balance was evened for Flt. Lt. Vigors was almost immediately brought down by an Army 97. His aircraft caught fire and he was burned before baling-out, and during the descent wounded by machine-gun fire from enemy aircraft.

Whilst this action was taking place the other Flight of five had landed at Ipoh, but not without mishap: one aircraft had crashed on landing. No. 243 (F) Squadron detachment, meanwhile, had been far from inactive: in the morning, at the cost of only slight damage to one Buffalo the section had shot down two Japanese aircraft and possibly accounted for two others. Three separate Observation Posts had reported the crash of another enemy aircraft, whilst a fourth was reported as flying out to sea rapidly losing height. The combined efforts of Nos. 453 and 243 Squadrons were doing much towards restoring morale, but their losses were proportionately high. By late afternoon the much-needed force had already been gravely reduced - only thirteen Buffaloes were available for operations<sup>(2)</sup>.

Back in Singapore, every effort was being made to produce Buffaloes from the reserve for No. 21 (F) Squadron. Pilots from the Squadron had arrived at Seletar to ferry their new aircraft back to Ipoh, but despite the efforts of No. 151 M.N., there were delays and it was not until 14th December that a decision could be made for the six replacement Buffaloes to

(1) It was not until 15th December, that it was confirmed the Flight had flown into bad weather and become lost. After turning back towards Singapore the aircraft ran out of petrol and force-landed. Two of the Buffaloes turned over in a paddy field and caught fire; the occupants were killed, but the pilot of the third aircraft was only slightly injured.

(2) No. 453 Squadron: Serviceable - Ten, unserviceable - Two, Shot down - One, Lost - Three. No. 243 Squadron: Serviceable - Three.

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2012  
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dated  
28 Jan. 46

II J.50/4  
Entries d/a  
14, 15 Dec. 41

take-off next morning. Realizing the reinforcements were soon to be on the way to Ipoh, orders were given for the other units to return to Singapore: No. 453 (F) Squadron were to withdraw as soon as the new aircraft of No. 21 (F) Squadron had landed and the detachment of three Buffaloes of No. 243 (F) Squadron could return to Singapore immediately. Furthermore, the projected move of the Dutch fighter squadron was cancelled and the ground personnel ordered back to Singapore. The No. 243 (F) Squadron detachment left without further ado and duly arrived back at Kallang in the evening 14th December, but the other Squadron was fated to remain in the North, for the reinforcement plan was not to work as smoothly as had been anticipated.

D.S.D. (MRS)  
2012 paras. 14,  
15, 16

S/Ldr. Allshorn, O.C. No. 21 (F) Squadron, alleges that he was ordered by the Fighter Group Commander to move his six Buffaloes to Ipoh on the morning 15th December, whatever the weather conditions. Be this as it may, the fact remains these aircraft took-off from Sembawang at 0610 hours into what was evidently bad weather. After some 26 miles the O.C. and his No. 2 became detached from the other four Buffaloes. Of these, three rightly turned back to Sembawang because of the poor weather, but the fourth crashed at Pontian Kechil (in Johore). The leading pair of fighters had elected to press on, however, but it was not until their height was reduced to fifteen feet above the beach that it was decided to abandon the flight and land at Port Swettenham. Even then their troubles were not over: the first pilot landed successfully on the 1000 yard strip, but the second was less fortunate. After three precautionary approaches he came in for a landing but even then the aircraft over-ran the end of the strip and turned on to its back. S/L. Allshorn, leaving his undamaged Buffalo on the airfield, finished the journey to Ipoh by road, with his urgently needed aircraft scattered throughout Malaya in various states of repair. 'With God's Help' the harassed Controller entered in his diary, 'and the assistance of Repair and Maintenance No. 21 Squadron will operate at Ipoh shortly' - a remark perhaps not unjustified! But help indeed was to be forthcoming in the person of S/L. Harper, O.C. No. 453 (F) Squadron, who had just been recalled from Australia where he had been trying, without success, to obtain replacement pilots for his Unit. Gathering the three Buffaloes which had been forced back to Sembawang, together with three more reinforcements for No. 21 (F) Squadron and six for his own Squadron this officer safely led the twelve aircraft into Ipoh at 1655 hours that evening to reinforce the fast-dwindling fighter resources on the Station. Lack of adequate maintenance was combining with enemy action to reduce the availability of the Buffaloes. On the 14th December, the day prior to the arrival of the new aircraft two main sorties had been made. The morning ground strafing operation had started with five aircraft but two were turned back by bad weather. The remainder successfully attacked a convoy and then in turn were set upon by JU. 87's with the result that an aircraft of No. 21 (F) Squadron was lost. A similar operation was carried out at 1630 hours; the success of this was unknown, but one aircraft was forced to return to base with engine trouble. And as if to make a contemptuous gesture against the meagre opposition twenty-four Japanese aircraft flew over Penang, but instead of raiding the Island they gave a demonstration of aerobatics.

D.S.D.  
M.R.S)  
Enc. 8A  
Dated 25 Feb.  
46 and  
Enc. 2A  
dated 31 Dec.  
45

The enemy ground forces were also advancing steadily; at 2140 hours O.C. Norgroup reported from Bukit Mertajam that G.O.C. IIIrd Corps had estimated only seventeen hours would elapse before Sungei Patani was over-run; he therefore urged authority for the demolition of the airfield as well as Kuala Ketil and Lubok Kiap. This measure was immediately agreed upon - equipment from Butterworth and Sungei Patani was to be moved back to Kuala Lumpur and warning of evacuation

given to Taiping. Flt/Lt. Scott at Butterworth had already anticipated this move and throughout the day he and a small working party, in the total absence of railway employees, took over the rolling stock at Prai station. Trucks were shunted and loaded by these amateur railwaymen, but so effectively that a train of forty trucks was made up. This action resulted in large quantities of R.A.F. equipment being moved off towards Singapore. Following O.C. Norgroup's call to A.H.Q. the evacuation of Butterworth commenced and by 0300 hours 15th December, the first of the road convoys moved off; a total of sixty-five vehicles left the station and these, together with the train, evacuated two hundred and fifty tons of material. In addition three flyable Buffaloes were ferried back to Ipoh by volunteer pilots of No. 62 (B) Squadron. After ensuring Sungei Patani and Butterworth had been cleared as effectively as possible Norgroup moved its headquarters to the swimming club at Ipoh, adjacent to the airfield.

The intensive bombing of Ipoh airfield now commenced; on the morning of 15th December the petrol dump was hit, and at 1345 hours A.H.Q. was informed the number of operationally serviceable Buffaloes had been reduced to three. Even with the twelve reinforcements which were to arrive that evening there was obvious need to conserve strictly the fighter force, consequently G.H.Q. issued an order to the effect that the task of the fighters was primarily reconnaissance for IIIrd Corps; it was not to be used to attack land targets (as the C-in-C had directed only three days earlier) and wastage would not be made good at the expense of the fighter squadrons allotted for the defence of Singapore<sup>(1)</sup>.

II J.50/3  
Enc. 3A  
dated 15th Dec.,  
1941

D.S.D. (M.R.S)  
2012  
Enc. 6A

The problem to which the newly arrived Squadron Commander had to concentrate his attention was that of stopping the heavy losses of Buffaloes whilst on the ground. No satellite airfield existed for the dispersal of aircraft, and on Ipoh itself the pens could only be reached by a very narrow taxi track which required extreme care to negotiate with any degree of safety; in consequence it took 20 minutes to get a Flight airborne by which time it would have been impossible to make an interception. An improvement on the existing warning system (by which reports of approaching enemy aircraft were received from the Observer posts through the Station Master at Kuala Lumpur) was imperative. So a fighter control operations room was set up one mile from the airfield and arrangements made for all information to be passed to the Controller who in turn was linked with the airfield. At the same time additional armourers did much to improve the serviceability of the guns in the Buffaloes. But the Squadrons were not to stand and fight at Ipoh for unbeknown to them the Japanese advance was steadily progressing - the fighter force were to make yet another move southwards.

Percival Despatch  
paras. 177, 178,  
187, 179, 191,  
180, 189, 190,  
191

The Army meanwhile had been faring no better than their R.A.F. comrades. Following the retreat from the Battle of Jitra<sup>(2)</sup> the 11th Division took up the previously reconnoitred position of Gurun by the morning of 14th December. The 28th Brigade were on the right, whilst the left was held by the 6th Brigade, with a weak 15th Brigade in reserve. That same night the enemy made a deep penetration down the road and at dawn attacked the Headquarters 6th Brigade so effectively that all officers except the Brigadier himself were killed. The forward troops moved back to block the road, and subsequently

(1) For the Strength of the air forces in Malaya on 15th Dec., 41, see Appendix V.

(2) See also in Section: 'The Retreat Commences'.

the Division, with the exception of 28th Brigade, was in such confusion that the Commander decided to withdraw behind the River Muda during the following night. With the troops in an exhausted and disorganized condition there was a distinct likelihood of the Division being overrun. There was also the increasing danger of the threat from Kroh which might well cut their communications in the Kuala Kangsar area, thereby giving the enemy a clear run down the West coast (so cutting off the 9th Division on the other coast) until he reached Johore. The choice lay between fighting both on the mainland and on Penang Island or concentrating all these forces in Kedah. The latter course was decided in War Council on 14th December - if this defence failed then Penang would have to be evacuated. The IIIrd Corps Commander was accordingly authorized to use any part of the Penang garrison<sup>(1)</sup>. Withdrawal behind the River Muda was thereafter covered by the Independent Company and a squadron of 3rd Indian Cavalry. Units of 28th Brigade and 2nd East Surrey Regiment also did great work in covering the withdrawals, and by the morning of 16th December, the Division was on the south bank. To protect the right flank 12th Brigade was moved back to the river; one battalion of 5/2 Punjab Regiment held the bridge at Batu Pekaka, where heavy fighting developed in the late afternoon, whilst the Argylls remained at Baling until withdrawn to Titi Karangan.

II J.50/17/7  
'Evacuation of  
Penang'

Brooke Popham  
Despatch para. 116

Enemy Publication  
No. 278 Page 22

Following upon orders from the Commander IIIrd Corps the evacuation of Penang took place during the night 16/17th December. Most of the Garrison were moved to the mainland, and all Europeans, (numbering about five hundred and twenty), except a few who voluntarily remained, were evacuated. The majority of the Asiatics in the Volunteers decided to stay to protect their families. Fixed defences were destroyed and smaller weapons withdrawn, but there were two unfortunate omissions: the Broadcasting Station was left intact (and used subsequently by the Japanese for propaganda purposes) whilst failure to destroy small vessels and barges in the harbour allowed them to be used for future operations against us. According to enemy accounts the Island was then taken over by the fifty-three Japanese residents who, until then had been interned. They made contact with their advancing countrymen at Sungei Patani and advised them of the British evacuation. The Japanese Army eventually landed at Penang without loss on the afternoon 19th December.

By this time the 11th Division was not longer fit for operations. The troops were tired and dispirited and time was badly needed to reorganize and refit after the heavy losses of vehicles and weapons. The IIIrd Corps Commander on 16th December, decided to withdraw the Division behind the Krian River (about 25 miles north of Taiping). Covered by 28th Brigade the troops moved back from the Muda River and Bukit Mertajam into the Taiping area. The 12th Brigade Group fought a rear guard action back from Batu Pekaka Bridge and by 18th December, all troops were across the River Krian.

#### (1) Penang Garrison.

Fortress H.Q. and Signals.  
11th Coast Regiment, Royal Artillery (2x6" batteries)  
36th Fortress Company, Royal Engineers (search lights)  
1st Company 5/14 Punjab Regiment.  
1st Malayan Independent Company.  
Detachment of 3rd Indian Cavalry.  
3rd Battalion Straits Settlements Volunteers.



The Last Stand in Northern Malaya

II J.50/4  
Entries  
d/d 12 to 17  
December, 41

II J.53/8  
page 46

Compared with the rapid march of events on the western side of the peninsula, the situation at Kuantan remained fairly quiet and persisted in such manner for the week following the O.C.'s re-assuring report on 10th December. There were indeed almost daily attacks by low flying aircraft but the damage was only superficial being confined to the runways and the unserviceable aircraft which had been abandoned when the Squadrons left<sup>(1)</sup>. The main objective of the Kuantan personnel during this period of grace was to prepare the thirty spare torpedoes for return to Singapore and to move heavy equipment back to Kuala Lumpur. The limited staff were fully occupied in this work, together with the repair of aircraft and the maintenance of the landing facilities<sup>(2)</sup>. As trollies became available to load the torpedoes, Vildebeestes from Seletar, timing their arrival at Kuantan for a dusk departure on the return journey, evacuated a substantial proportion of these valuable weapons; and as well as this means of transportation, fifteen torpedoes were sent to Kuala Lumpur by road and rail. The efforts of the ground crews to repair some of the damaged aircraft produced excellent results: a Vildebeeste and a Hudson were evacuated, and with the assistance of the M.V.A.F., which flew in firstly a special tool kit and then a ferry pilot, a Blenheim I was sent back to No. 151 M.U. Seletar to be made operationally serviceable again. Final evacuation was not far distant however, and preparations for demolition were well in hand when the decision to evacuate Kuantan was taken by A.O.C. (after a conference with the C-in-C. and G.O.C.) during the evening of 17th December, 1941. At the same time it had been decided to withdraw all personnel (mainly No. 62 (B) Squadron) and equipment from Taiping and to demolish the airfield.

Ibid  
Entries dated  
16 to 21 Dec.

D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2024  
Enc. 8a d/d  
25 Feb. 46

II J.53/8  
pp. 43, 53

The final evacuation of equipment from Kuantan had been carried out in an unhurried and systematic fashion - circumstances which owed much to the absence of any direct threat by the enemy. But on the West Coast where the Japanese were advancing with an ever quickening pace the evacuations were now being succeeded by demolitions often bearing the stamp of hasty and disorganized preparation. It will be recalled how on 14th December, O.C. Norgroup was authorized to destroy Sungei Patani, Kuala Ketil and Lubok Kiap which had been prepared as far back as 10th December, yet on 16th December, IIIrd Corps, when asked for confirmation of the demolition of these airfields, could only state that Sungei Patani was half destroyed - there was no news of the other stations. Forewarned no doubt by this apparent disorganisation A.H.Q. issued timely instructions for the preparation for destruction of the civil airfields in the North which included Sitiawan, Port Swettenham, Kerling, Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur, Taiping and Jenderata. Late the same night Norgroup confirmed the information about the airfields' serviceability - only Alor Star and Sungei Patani had been denied to the Japanese<sup>(3)</sup>.

(1) These attacks were probably mounted from Kota Bahru for the Japanese record one such raid on 14th Dec. when 64th Regiment, Type 1 fighters, made an attack.

(2) On 14th December, 1941, O.C. Kuantan reported a strength of himself and three officers, twenty-one armourers and nine fitters.

(3) On 19th December, it was confirmed by IIIrd Corps. that both Machang and Butterworth had been 'blown'. Because of "flooding and bombing" the Japanese had difficulty at first in using Sungei Patani, but by 15th Dec. it was operational.



There was no further news the next day, but definite orders were given for Kuantan and Taiping to be 'blown' and the petrol run to waste. By the early hours of 18th December, Kuantan was able to report the successful demolition of the airfield, and although the Officer Commanding wished to remain for another 48 hours to arrange the transportation of some petrol, he was ordered away by A.H.Q. and advised to use H.M.S. Hungjao (due at Kuantan) to evacuate personnel and equipment: by 0425 hrs. 20th December, A.H.Q. was advised of the final evacuation of personnel and the complete demolition of the airfield with all petrol run to waste. Taiping airfield was destroyed on 18th December<sup>(1)</sup>: all the 90 octane was uplifted and of the 100 octane fuel only twenty barrels were left behind. Unfortunately the same measure of success was not experienced at either Sungei Patani or Butterworth. Following upon a report made to A.H.Q. that fuel stocks at both airfields were still intact Norgroup was required on 19th December, to report on the results of the demolitions at these stations as well as Alor Star. Two days later it was revealed at least one large petrol dump was still intact at Sungei Patani - 'lack of time and the hostility of the enemy' were the reasons given for its survival<sup>(2)</sup>. Alor Star and Butterworth had been able to demolish their petrol, however;<sup>(3)</sup> likewise the Asiatic Petroleum Company's staff at the Bagan Luar depot (near Butterworth) had run off the main installations, although the civilians at neighbouring Bagan Dalam had been forced to leave some 56,000 gallons of 90 octane and 160,000 gallons of M.T. petrol.

II J.50/30/4  
Enc. d/d  
22 Dec. 41

Enemy Publication  
No. 278  
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The inevitable evacuation of 'Norgroup' H.Q. and Ipoh airfield commenced early on the 18th December. A.H.Q. had been advised of this contingency during the previous evening and had confirmed the need to run to waste the surplus petrol. That morning O.C. Norgroup reported an operational state of only three Buffaloes<sup>(4)</sup>. In a last minute effort to retrieve the situation a Rapide of the M.V.A.F. had flown in with armament spares, but, arriving during a raid it was unfortunately mistaken for an enemy aircraft and attacked by Buffaloes. There was no serious damage but shortly afterwards a second raid took place and bombs falling nearby not only destroyed the Rapide<sup>(5)</sup> but killed the pilot and mortally wounded his passenger. Fully realising the importance of evacuating equipment O.C. Norgroup was making arrangements for transportation by rail to Sungei Besi (Kuala Lumpur), and upon his instigation A.H.Q. transferred the control of that airfield from No. 153 M.U. to 'Norgroup'. Although an Operations Room

II J.53/1  
'M.V.A.F.'  
page 14

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- (1) Taiping was occupied by 25th Army on 22nd Dec.
  - (2) This stock presumably fell into Japanese hands for their occupation of the airfield was reported by the P.R. Buffalo on 19th Dec., 41, and on the next day a photographic reconnaissance showed a total of fifty-one enemy aircraft on the airfield; these included four Bombers and forty-three or forty-four Fighters.
  - (3) This is contradicted by the Japanese account of the capture of Alor Star, which states: 'the enemy (R.A.F.) fled without burning their gasoline supply, and our air unit made use of the airfield and the thousands of drums of high octane spirit ... to bomb the fleeing enemy and attack their positions'.
  - (4) By 1810 hours the same evening the serviceable aircraft had been reduced to two. Of the remaining nineteen, eleven were damaged, one written off and seven awaiting spares.
  - (5) The 'Rapide' was the civil counterpart of the R.A.F. Dominie (D.H. 89a)

and the necessary communications were being organized, the former civil airfield was not altogether suitable for fighter operations - the single 1315-yard runway was of grass and there were no dispersal pens. At 1730 hrs. 18th December, ground personnel of No. 453 (F) Squadron were ordered to prepare to move back to Kuala Lumpur the next afternoon and to await the arrival of the Squadron aircraft. At the same time it was the intention to withdraw No. 21 (F) Squadron from Ipoh back to Sembawang; all unserviceable aircraft capable of flying were also to return to the Island. Ipoh was again raided during the morning of 19th December, but this time there were fewer casualties for the squadrons were on the move: No. 453 flew to Kuala Lumpur with its five remaining Buffaloes whilst twelve unserviceable aircraft, amongst which was included the total strength of No. 21 (F) Squadron returned to Singapore. The last stand on the mainland by the air forces had now begun<sup>(1)</sup>.

Instructions were then given for No. 453 (F) Squadron to be made up to establishment (16.I.E.) from Buffaloes held at Sembawang and earmarked for No. 21 (F) Squadron, with the balance supplied from the fast-diminishing reserve at No. 151 M.U. These arrangements were expected to be implemented during 20th December: Six Buffaloes were to leave for Kuala Lumpur that morning whilst a further two at Sembawang plus three from Seletar would be ready to move in the afternoon, thus raising the Squadron strength from five to sixteen. Their role thereafter was defined as: tactical reconnaissance for IIIrd Corps and the defence of the Kuala Lumpur area. 'Norgroup', now with only one Unit to control, was disbanded and the personnel, with the exception of a liaison officer attached to IIIrd Corps, sent back to Singapore. Control of the fighter operations was vested in the Station Commander, Kuala Lumpur<sup>(2)</sup> where there was also retained under the orders of No. 153 M.U. a mobile salvage section of No. 81 R. and S.U. which was to move down to Kahang from Ipoh.

D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2014  
Enc. 21a

To afford some measure of relief to the hard pressed fighters, plans were made to bomb enemy-occupied Sungei Patani at first light 21st December. Only a pathetically small force of three Blenheim IV's from No. 34 (B) Squadron could be spared. Crews were briefed over night at Tengah and in the darkness set off individually and unescorted on the long haul to the North. Bad weather and not the enemy forced them back to base after getting as far as Kuala Lumpur<sup>(3)</sup>.

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(1) Using Nakong (Siam) as a base and operating aircraft of 59th, 90th and 27th Regiments (Types 1, 97, 99) the 3rd Air Brigade made six attacks on Ipoh between 15th and 20th Dec. Claims were made of fourteen R.A.F. aircraft destroyed on 28th Dec. 5th Division occupied the airfield.

(2) Wing Commander H.S. Darley who had been a staff officer in No. 224 Group, Singapore.

(3) A similar attempt was to be in the early hours of 23rd December. The aircraft reached the target but no results were recorded. It is likely that the attack was of little real value because A.H.Q. decided to postpone further raids until the moon period, commencing 27th December.

II J.50/30/4  
Entry d/d  
22 Dec. 41

D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2014  
Enc. 13a  
pages 40, 41

Ibid  
Enc. 6a  
page 5

II J.50/4  
Entries d/d  
20, 21, 22 Dec.  
1941

The final air operations started at Kuala Lumpur on the morning 21st December<sup>(1)</sup> No. 453 (F) Squadron, by this time, was up to a strength of sixteen Buffaloes and ready for another defiant gesture against the overwhelming Japanese air forces. The enemy were soon to be engaged for at 1155 hours a raid by a mixed force of approximately twenty-five Zeros and Ju. 87's took place. The dive bombers came down to 250 feet to release their bombs but little damage was done. Five Buffaloes took-off and these combined with the heavy A.A. fire quickly broke up the formation. One bomber was destroyed and two damaged with one more probably brought down by the A.A. guns. The cost was one Buffalo whose pilot was saved. Undoubtedly the Squadron pilots - now numbering thirteen - were heartened by this comparative success, but A.H.Q. realising the end was not far distant signalled to the remaining five mainland stations<sup>(2)</sup> a warning to make adequate arrangements in advance for 'the demolition or denial not only of airfield surfaces but all facilities at Stations ...' And by this time Sitiawan was already 'blown' and suitable preparations made for Kerling and Port Swettenham.

The Japanese came again to Kuala Lumpur in strength the next day and there was no need for No. 453 (F) Squadron to observe the injunction by A.H.Q. that their aircraft were not to be used for strafing enemy airfields - every Buffalo was needed on the defensive against the attacking fighters bent upon the final destruction of the Kuala Lumpur defenders. Ten Buffaloes went up to meet the Japanese and perhaps it was the sight of such an unusually large force that deterred a formation of bombers, approaching from the North, from reaching its target. Certainly it was the first occasion on which a reasonably strong force of Buffaloes had been able to meet the enemy in the air. A series of individual combats then took place the issue of which was so confused that even our own casualty figures were conflicting, and it was all the more difficult to assess enemy losses. However, it is quite clear that five Buffaloes were destroyed, either through being shot down or crash landing after combat - one of the latter casualties struggled all the way back to Sembawang before crashing. Of the pilots, two were killed and four injured. This raid was quickly followed by a surprise low level attack at 1215 hours: one Buffalo just taking-off, spun in after being engaged by one of the four Zeros - the pilot was badly injured and subsequently died. The total number of enemy aircraft brought down was never truly ascertained, but three were claimed as destroyed besides seven 'probables'. Even so, to the Japanese this was but a small proportion of their available force; but on the other hand the losses of No. 453 (F) Squadron meant a terrible reduction. Of the fifteen aircraft which had started that fateful day only four were operationally serviceable by evening. Six were lost or written-off and five badly shot up on the air combats; the urgent need was for at least four immediate replacements. The crews had courageously fought their aircraft against a vastly superior enemy but all the time they must have realised they were waging a losing battle against better equipped and equally determined opponents. The time had come when these

II J.50/10  
'Aircraft  
Casualties'  
Entry d/d  
22 Dec. 41

(1) At this stage (21st Dec.) without consulting the R.A.F. the Dutch ordered four Curtiss Hawks at Pakan Bahro (Sumatra) to carry out an offensive reconnaissance of HAADYAI JUNCTION. It was an ill-starred operation for only one fighter returned to base; two crashed near MEDAN following a night take-off, and one was shot down by A.A. fire near IPOH.

(2) Kluang, Kahang, Batu Pahat, Port Swettenham and Kuala Lumpur.

heavy losses could be replaced only by seriously weakening the defences of Singapore itself - A.H.Q. therefore had no alternative but to give instructions, on 22nd December, for a withdrawal from the North. Ipoh was to be abandoned and demolished and No. 453 (F) Squadron - with the concurrence of the C-in-C - was to evacuate Kuala Lumpur at 0800 hours 23rd December. This airfield, together with Port Swettenham thereafter would be used only as an advanced landing ground by aircraft carrying out forward reconnaissance for IIIrd Corps. That same afternoon the remnants of the Squadron - seven aircraft in various states of repair - were back at Sembawang. And as if to consolidate their recent successes the Japanese struck again and again at the town and airfield of Ipoh(1). Yet despite their attentions the airfield was well demolished; IIIrd Corps managed to get some three hundred drums of petrol away and those which could not be moved in time were machine-gunned and so run to waste. The fighter force had not been driven from Northern Malaya - rather, they had been wiped out as they fought reeling from one improvised station to another until finally, above the capital of the Federated States the Squadron was so reduced and broken that it could fight no longer.

F. 540  
R.A.F. Station  
Sembawang

At this stage it might be advantageous to pause in order to examine some of the reasons for the overwhelming superiority of the Japanese air forces. Inadequate maintenance and the lack of warning systems, which put the fighters at a disadvantage even before they had taken off, have already been mentioned. The inferiority of the Buffalo likewise stands revealed. But one other factor must be given prominence, which is the question of intelligence concerning the Zero fighter. This may well be epitomized in the words of Flight Lieutenant Vigors O.C. No. 453 (F) Squadron. The seasoned experience of this officer was further strengthened by his somewhat bitter reflections whilst lying in hospital after his initial and disastrous encounter with a Japanese fighter(2). 'I am of the opinion,' he later reported, 'that many aircraft and lives were lost during the first few weeks of the war owing to the complete absence of any sound intelligence reports on the performance of Japanese fighters and the ability of their pilots...'. Our aircrews were indeed unaware both of the calibre of the enemy pilots and the performance data of the best of the enemy fighters - the Zero. And the reasons for this lack of information can be traced to the inadequacies of the Intelligence organisation.

II J.50/51  
'Zero Fighter-  
Intelligence  
Enc. 15  
d/d 4 Mar. 46

In May, 1941, a Zero fighter was shot down at Chengtu in China. Details of its armament, tankage, and oxygen equipment (but no performance figures) were sent in Chinese script to the Far East Combined Bureau at Singapore. When translated the results were passed on to Air Ministry on 26th July, 1941, as well as to A.H.Q.; a provisional silhouette was there-upon made up and issued. Later the Air Attache, Chungking supplied to F.E.C.B. the estimated performance figures obtained by calculations made after an examination of this same Zero (it subsequently transpired these figures were reasonably accurate). F.E.C.B., on 29th September, 1941, transmitted this data to the same two authorities(3) and although there can be no doubt that A.H.Q. had been given the

Ibid  
enc. 9  
d/d  
2 April 47

Ibid  
Enc. 5 6,  
7, 11, 12, 13

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- (1) Ipoh was the richest tin mining town in the world.
  - (2) See also in Section: 'A Momentary Halt is Called'.
  - (3) Not only are these letters recorded in Air Ministry but officers once on the staff of F.E.C.B. can recollect the existence of their Recognition Handbook as well as the fact that considerable and accurate data had been compiled and given to A.H.Q.

Ibid  
Enc. 12  
d/d 17 Feb. 47

data it seems almost certain that it was not disseminated to those who needed it most - the fighter and bomber crews. Evidence from authoritative officers engaged in the conduct of operations points to the fact that the only details made available were a silhouette and dimensions - data concerning performance and armament were not known to them. 'Pilots of No. 453 (F) Squadron' another Squadron Commander goes so far as to say, 'were astonished to meet monoplane fighters'. As already shown, the nucleus intelligence organisation set up at A.H.Q. shortly before the out-break of hostilities was inadequate<sup>(1)</sup>. Therefore it is not unlikely the more comprehensive details supplied by F.E.C.B. were not even discovered by this very small staff at A.H.Q. by the time war broke out. And prior to this the sparse information on the Zero was not brought to the notice of the aircrews simply because there was no intelligence officer serving with the Squadrons.

Percival Despatch  
paras:  
194, 197, 200,  
201, 204

Before concluding this episode of the final withdrawal of the air forces from the North it would be as well to examine briefly the position of the land forces. On 17th December, the G.O.C., had authorised IIIrd Corps to withdraw, if absolutely necessary from the Krian River to the line of the Perak River. At this time the strength of the land forces on the West Coast was barely one Division (including 12th Brigade). The enemy probably had one Division on the main coast road and another on the Grik Road, with equal forces in reserve. Also a division had landed in the Kelantan area. The morale of 11th Division was 'not as high as one would have wished' for they were exhausted by continuous fighting and by day and night movement, whilst the Indian troops were dismayed to find the British without armour on the ground and outclassed in the air. By now the enemy's strategy was clear - the advance down the West Coast was to continue with a view to attacking Singapore from the North. Forces on the East Coast would move simultaneously; or seaborne attacks might be delivered against the Kuantan and/or the East Johore areas.

II J.50/19/6  
Entry 122/7  
dated  
23 Dec. 41

In order to discuss this rapidly developing situation with the IIIrd Corps Commander the G.O.C. visited Ipoh and some of the forward areas on 18th December. The policy of withdrawal behind the River Perak was confirmed: positions were to be prepared between Ipoh and Tanjong Malim, whilst the 9th Division would continue to hold Kuantan and secure the 11th Division's communications against attack from the East. Owing to the reduced strengths of the 6th and 15th Brigades they were to be amalgamated at Ipoh, and certain Units, notably the East Surreys and the Leicesters were to be merged. 12th Brigade (once the Command Reserve) was to be incorporated into 11th Division the command of which was taken over by Brigadier Paris from Major General Murray Lyon. The G.O.C. also produced, as the result of his visit, an appreciation on Japanese tactics and the methods to be used in dealing with them. He likened the enemy to highly trained gangsters well equipped with tommy guns and mortars, supported by occasional light tanks and a minimum of artillery. The enemy, according to the General, 'were full of low cunning' in the use of artificial noises such as mortars with loud explosions, Chinese crackers and bullets making violent noises on impact. Their tactics were to locate our positions by means of a screen of men often dressed as civilians; the main force would then deploy in rear and pass around the flanks of our positions. They could move rapidly through the jungle and

(1) See also in Section: 'The Problems and Work of G.H.Q. Far East'.

in crossing rivers sometimes used rubber belts. Living on the country was fully accepted consequently there was less dependence upon lines of communication than in the case of the defenders. The G.O.C. then went on to outline the methods to be used in countering such unorthodox tactics. Rigid discipline and no premature withdrawals were the primary essentials, with quick and resolute counter-attacks as the best means of defence. Too much digging-in was deplored because the war was essentially one of movement and attack. The efficiency, alertness and cunning of the individual soldier were the keynotes of success.

Percival Despatch  
paras: 192, 193  
208, 210, 211

D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2014

Enc. 3a d/d  
20 Dec. 45

II J.53/8  
pp. 54, 55

Brooke Pophom  
Despatch  
para. 119

II J.50/19/6  
Encs. 180/7  
d/d 21 Dec. 41

and

C.O.S. 63  
d/d 22 Dec. 41

The actual fighting, meantime, was now at its fiercest on the Grik Road where our forces consisted of only one company ('C') Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and a detachment of Armoured Cars<sup>(1)</sup>. These two fighting vehicles were under the command of Squadron Leader Boxall, No. 62 (B) Squadron (which by this time had no aircraft) with orders to patrol the 60 miles of road between Kuala Kangsar and Grik. They joined the Argylls, and on 17th December, faced by the main body of the Patani Force bent upon the encircling drive to cut off the 11th Division at Kuala Kangsar, the small force fell back to the Sumpitan area. To counter this serious threat 12th Brigade, which was to have moved into reserve at Taiping, was sent through to Kuala Kangsar, whilst No. 1 Malayan Independent Company was sent to reinforce the Grik Road. On 19th December, the force was again obliged to withdraw, this time to Lenggong. Next day the Argylls had to counter-attack the enemy who had rafted down the river and reached Kota Tampan in their rear. The Highlanders held this area all next day until forced to withdraw covered by 5/2 Punjab Regiment. By moving through the Chenderoh Lake the Japanese could now by-pass Kuala Kangsar and so threaten the rail and trunk road bridges over the River Perak; they were only 12 miles from the junction of the Grik Road with the main road and the 28th Brigade were in danger of being cut off. This position was so grave on 21st December, that the Divisional Commander decided upon immediate withdrawal across the river: the 28th Brigade moved over that evening to cover the withdrawal of 12th Brigade twenty-four hours later, and by the morning of 23rd December, all troops were in positions east of the River Perak. A gap was subsequently blown in the Iskander Bridge, and the pontoon bridge swung over and sunk<sup>(2)</sup>.

The realisation by the commanders in the field of the enemy's unusual but highly successful methods of campaigning was matched at last by similar considerations on a higher plane. The Inter-Allied Conference at Singapore on 18th December, had already stressed the importance of the Base in the conduct of the Far East war. The broad plan even then was to hold the enemy as far north as possible and especially to deny him the airfields from which could be threatened the arrival of urgently needed reinforcements. Also, China was to be asked to contain as many enemy divisions as possible. These terms were defined in much sharper detail a few days later in the C.-in-C's cable to the War Office. The primary and vital object, he declared, was to ensure the security of the Naval Base. H.M. Government, through the Chiefs of Staff, were in immediate agreement with this policy,

(1) See also in Section: 'The Retreat Commences'.

(2) The Japanese reckoned the destruction of this bridge would delay the Campaign by one month. A tank Unit together with aircraft and ground crews of 3rd, 7th, and 12th Air Brigades were sent ahead of the 25th Army to capture it intact, but they arrived too late. Eventually their forces crossed the River in boats by 27th Dec.

emphasizing that no other consideration must compete. And at the same time, whilst advocating the rigid application of a 'scorched earth' programme they endorsed the C.-in-C's conception of prolonged opposition to the enemy on the mainland in order to cover the arrival of reinforcements. The G.H.Q. plan was to delay the Southward movement and only yield ground when the fighting formation of 11th Division was in danger of being destroyed. IIIrd Corps was to be concentrated in the Kuala Lumpur area to form a reserve to hold off as long as possible an enemy free to reinforce on the land front(1). Although the Command Reserve (12th Brigade) had been used to strengthen the 11th Division, the Fortress Troops and Australian Forces were being held against the chance of a heavy seaborne attack on Johore and Singapore, now made possible by Japan's command of the sea.

II J.50/4  
Entry d/a  
20 Dec. 41

II J.50/19/6  
Enc.  
C.O.S. 62  
d/a  
21 Dec. 41

Such were the dispositions of the High Command but perhaps an even more ominous note was sounded by the Chiefs of Staff when they advised the C.-in-C. not only to consider proposals for evacuation of all non-essential civilians, but to consult the Dutch on the question of land and air reinforcements for Java and Sumatra 'in present conditions and in the event of a Japanese occupation of Singapore'!

#### Summary

By 11th December, the R.A.F. was reduced to a reconnaissance rôle. Hudsons of Nos. 1 and 8 Squadrons patrolled the East coast, and considerable alarm was occasioned by four United States destroyers which were mistaken for an invasion force. Such a fleet was indeed on the move on 13th December, and, fearing it was directed against the Mersing area a maximum air striking force of sixty-two aircraft stood-by. With this threat in view reconnaissance efforts were directed on the eastern approaches to Malaya but without result for the enemy fleet was moving much further to seaward, bent upon the invasion of Borneo.

Quite apart from these searches P.R.U. aircraft made daily flights over the northern areas, thereby revealing the overwhelming enemy air strength compared with which our own forces were extremely weak. Efforts were made to use every available aircraft: Five Albacores were allotted to No. 36 Squadron and proposals made to retain the Blenheims of No. 60 Squadron after the personnel had returned to Burma. Even the discarded Wirraways were not overlooked, for it was planned to convert them to a dive-bomber unit.

The only offensive operations possible were night raids. No. 34 Squadron carried out the one and only attack on the night of 11th December, when six Blenheims left for Singora. Only three reached the target however, thus emphasizing the weakness of a policy which had arisen despite the conflicting opinions of G.H.Q. and A.H.Q. After this unhappy event the A.O.C. could no longer risk his diminished bomber force in support of the northern Army, consequently plans were made to move No. 453 Squadron to the forward area. This unit arrived at Butterworth just in time to oppose the Japanese in their air attacks on Penang. These raids had started on 11th December, when the local Squadron - No. 21 - had been reduced to a minimum. Orders were given for this unit to be brought up to strength, and in the interim No. 453 Squadron would provide the air co-operation for 11th Division. En route to the North one

(1) Intelligence revealed on 20th December, the presence of five hundred enemy aircraft concentrated on Phukok Island, whilst a total of five thousand troops were moving from Tonking to Singora by sea.



flight was lost, whilst on arrival the remaining thirteen had varying success against the Penang raiders. A detachment of No. 243 Squadron was also operating from Butterworth in an offensive rôle having been diverted from tactical reconnaissance. The combined efforts of these two units did much to restore morale but at the expense of heavy losses which could ill be afforded. As the numbers diminished so the reinforcement plan for No. 21 Squadron proceeded apace at Seletar, but the efforts of the Maintenance Unit were frustrated by bad weather which not only delayed the ferrying but caused two of the six Buffaloes to crash. Eventually twelve reinforcing aircraft were flown into Ipoh on the evening 15th December. But despite these extra Buffaloes the Japanese maintained air superiority together with such a steady advance on the ground that action was taken to demolish Sungei Patani, Kuala Ketil and Lubok Kiap. The evacuation of Butterworth then followed on 15th December, from which large quantities of equipment had been moved; 'Norgroup' was transferred to Ipoh. This was in effect the signal for intensive bombing to commence and so precarious was the state of the Buffaloes that they were restricted to reconnaissance duties; strenuous efforts were made to improvise operational facilities.

The Army was in no better plight. The Gurun position proved to be untenable by 28th and 6th Brigades, consequently 11th Division had to fall back behind the River Muda. With a distinct threat from Kroh and every likelihood of the Division being over-run, IIIrd Corps Commander withdrew the Penang garrison to augment the forces on the mainland. Penang Island itself was evacuated on 16/17th December; most of the Asiatics remained behind. Yet another withdrawal was taking place on the mainland - the River Muda position could not be held and so by 18th December, a tired and dispirited Division crossed the River Krian.

All this time the East Coast had been comparatively quiet and at Kuantan not only had Vildebeestes flown in to collect the spare torpedoes but damaged aircraft had been repaired. It was not until 17th December, that A.H.Q. decided to evacuate this station, as well as Taiping on the other coast where demolitions were far from satisfactory in many cases. Neither was all the petrol destroyed: much of it was run to waste at Alor Star, Butterworth and Taiping but many thousands of gallons remained elsewhere to fall into Japanese hands.

'Norgroup' evacuated from Ipoh on 18th December, when only three Buffaloes were serviceable; and the next day the P.R.U. reported Sungei Patani in use by enemy aircraft. No. 453 Squadron also moved on 19th December, this time to the rather inadequate airfield at Kuala Lumpur. Only five aircraft were serviceable - the remaining twelve (including the survivors of No. 21 Squadron) flew back to Singapore.

Plans were then made to bring No. 453 Squadron up to establishment for the purpose of tactical reconnaissance and the defence of Kuala Lumpur. 'Norgroup', its control now diminished, was disbanded. An abortive attempt was made at this time to bomb the enemy-held Sungei Patani. Final air operations in the north started on 21st December, when No. 453 Squadron, now at full strength, successfully engaged a Japanese raid. Next day the enemy came in even greater strength to be met by all available Buffaloes. Five of our aircraft were destroyed and one more brought down in a further low-level attack. The Japanese could afford their losses, but not so No. 453 Squadron, which, by evening was reduced to four aircraft. A.H.Q. could no longer make good these Buffaloes without jeopardizing the Singapore defences, consequently on 23rd December the Squadron was withdrawn back to Sembawang.



On land, the IIIrd Corps now reduced to the strength of one Division, were still retreating. Morale was by no means high when the G.O.C. visited the forward area on 18th December. Orders were given for the depleted 6th and 15th Brigades to be amalgamated, whilst certain regiments were also to be merged. 12th Brigade was incorporated into 11th Division and the Commander relieved. The G.O.C., as a result of his visit, produced a lengthy appreciation on enemy tactics. Unlike the coastal route, the Grik Road was the scene of fierce resistance by the Argylls aided by two R.A.F. - ~~remanned~~ armoured cars. But they were forced back first to Sumpitan and then to Lenggong. By this time the Japanese were in a position to by-pass Kuala Kangsar thereby creating such a grave situation on 21st December, that the new Divisional Commander decided to withdraw across the Perak River.

The whole strategy of the Campaign then underwent revision. Security of the Naval Base was defined as the primary object; opposition on the mainland was to be prolonged in order to cover the arrival of oversea reinforcements and ground was only to be yielded when 11th Division was threatened with actual destruction. Fortress Troops and Australian Forces were held in reserve against Seaborne attack in Southern Malaya, and for the first time the possibility of retreat from Singapore itself was considered.



BORNEO IS OVER-RUN

It will now be necessary to turn aside from the Malayan story in order to examine the march of events in Borneo. Even if this was but a minor part of the Campaign a great number of aircraft were indirectly concerned in the opening stages, and as the only measure of defence available a handful of R.A.F. and Dutch aircraft went into action in a determined but ineffectual attempt to hold back the weight of the enemy expedition.

Brooke-  
Problem Despatch  
paras 130, 131.  
IIJ50/4  
Entries at 10,  
11, Dec, 41.

As the first stage in their invasion of the Netherlands East Indies the Japanese had chosen the British protected state of Sarawak. The problem was not a difficult one for morale in Kuching, according to the C-in-C. Far East, was in a bad state, partly due to the absence of its ruler, Rajah Brooke. Defence forces consisted only of 2/15th Punjabis for the Sarawak Rangers were to prove unreliable. With such meagre resources it had been decided not to defend the oilfields in the North consequently the greater part of the oil output was destroyed prior to the outbreak of hostilities (1).

Final details of the oil denial scheme were completed by 11 December by which time the landing ground at Miri had also been demolished. The troops at Lutong were evacuated in H.M.S. Lipis to Kuching where the company of 2/15 Punjabis rejoined its Battalion; en route the ship had been attacked by an enemy aircraft but survived to dock safely (2).

IIJ53/4  
'No. 205  
Squadron Diary'  
pp. 10, 11.

D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2024 Encl. 5A  
d/d 8 Jan 46.

IIJ50/4  
entries d/d  
25, 26 Dec. 46.

It has already been explained how the reconnaissance effort from Singapore concentrated the search for the invasion fleet upon the vital approaches to the East coast of Malaya (3). Patrols by Catalinas of No. 205 (F.B.) Squadron were continued for several days after the actual landings in Borneo in order to guard against any similar expedition. And the Japanese were not inactive in this area for indeed on 18th December one of a pair of Catalinas was attacked, without serious results, by a Japanese aircraft. On 25th December the same crew again encountered a twin-engine enemy reconnaissance aircraft which attacked with cannon and machine-gun beyond the range of the Catalina. Hits on the port wing and turret started fires which, after an action lasting 20 minutes, forced the flying-boat down on to the water where she exploded in a position some 200 miles east of Kuantan. Destroyer H.M.S. Thanet together with another Catalina were sent out to locate the survivors, and a Dutch submarine operating in the area was also required to assist. The flying-boat found the crew and dropped a further dinghy and supplies, but it fell to the submarine K. 12 to make the actual rescue on 26th December. All the crew were suffering from burns or wounds as the result of this action, which gained the awards of two 'immediate' D.F.Cs.

(1) See also in section: 'Factors Affecting the Defence of British Borneo'.

(2) The Lipis was to sail from Kuching on 17th Dec. carrying details of Straits Settlements Police, Royal Artillery and Loyals. Next morning she was given fighter cover from Sinkawang II airfield; then escort was taken up by a Vildebeeste during the approach to Singapore where she arrived safely on 20th December.

(3) See in section: 'A momentary Halt is called'.

IIJ50/4  
entries d/d  
11, 14, 15, 16,  
17 Dec. 41.

To return now to the actual invasion of Borneo: the first positive indication of the presence of a fleet was a D/F bearing on the evening 15th December and in consequence Sinkawang II airfield - now under the control of A.H.Q. - was required to carry out a coastal reconnaissance at first light next morning (1). These plots were confirmed when, on the afternoon 16th December, a fleet of ten warships and a tanker was sighted by coastal watchers off Miri and Lutong, together with three warships near Eclait. Thereupon A.H.Q. ordered the petrol stocks at Labuan, Sandakan and Kudat to be destroyed by the Asiatic Petroleum Company. News was received at 2105 hrs. of Japanese landings at Miri and Lutong, and there was an expectation of the early occupation of Labuan. By this time an R.A.F. officer had arrived at Sinkawang II to exercise operational control of the Dutch aircraft; (2) three Glen Martins were sent off by this Station at 0710 hrs. 17th December to search for warships in the Miri area whilst six bombers and five Buffaloes stood by - and later were airborne - as a striking force. Attacks were carried out but with inconclusive results and A.H.Q. Singapore directed that such efforts should continue the next day, target priority being aircraft carriers, tankers and then transports.

Ibid Entries  
d/d 18, 19,  
20, 22, 23,  
Dec. 41.

Interview  
with  
W.C. Duncan  
12 March 48.

Air attacks on 18th December were from two bases. A Bomber flying from Samarinda (East Borneo) claimed a hit on an enemy destroyer, whilst from Sinkawang II eight Glen Martins took-off for Miri but due to bad weather did not locate their target. Urged by A.H.Q. to continue the air offensive at the northern beachheads eight Dutch bombers operated from Sinkawang II the following day and claimed a direct hit on a cruiser as well as near misses; two enemy aircraft were destroyed for the loss of one Glen Martin. By this time the Japanese had begun to move southwards and at 1155 hrs. came news of the first raid on Kuching by fifteen bombers and one seaplane: apart from casualties a large petrol store was left burning. Pontianak (Dutch territory) was simultaneously raided by sixteen aircraft which caused extensive damage. The presence in these waters of an enemy aircraft carrier was suspected consequently Sinkawang II was required to locate and destroy this vessel - three Glen Martins and five Buffaloes flew on this operation but without results. Bad weather on 20th December prevented further reconnaissance but the coastal searches were continued whenever possible, mainly on the initiative of Sinkawang II from which airfield a twice-daily coastal reconnaissance was flown embracing the Tambelan Islands and the coastline of West Borneo. Such efforts were not without result for during the morning of 23rd December these same Dutch aircraft sighted a force of at least twelve vessels (including warships) 150 miles north of Tanjong Sirik. A.H.Q. ordered an attack to be made (3) and at the same time

IIJ 53/4  
Page 10.

(1) 'Sinkawang II (Borneo) was so named to distinguish it from the coastal town of Sinkawang, which was 95 miles (by road) to the West. On the morning of 10th December the Dutch had placed the airfield under A.H.Q. control; nine Glen Martins and four Buffaloes were available that day.

(2) Wing Commander J. Duncan who had previously commanded No. 62 (B) Squadron and then Alor Star. After this Squadron had arrived at Taiping without its aircraft, this officer under A.H.Q. orders was transferred to Dutch Borneo.

(3) The signal for the attack, although recorded at A.H.Q., was not received by Sinkawang II (possibly because the raid at 1140 hrs. may have interrupted the W/T traffic.)

Nevertheless the liaison officer passed on the sighting information to Pontianak for the possible use of Dutch submarines.

IIJ50/4  
entries d/d  
24,25,26,27,  
Dec. 41.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2014  
encl. 21A

sent two Catalinas to shadow the fleet. One of the flying-boats sighted a force of two cruisers and one destroyer heading south and in fact came under fire but without suffering damage. At 1140 hrs. that morning Sinkawang II was bombed by a force of twenty-four bombers; no aircraft were destroyed (the Buffaloes were airborne at the time) but the airfield was so badly damaged that the N.E.I. authorities, even though the situation was critical, urged the transfer of their aircraft to Palambang (Sumatra). And all the time the Japanese expedition was closing on its objective - at 1735 hrs. the ships were barely 45 miles North-West of Sirik. A signal was made from A.H.Q. for the Sinkawang force to attack the fleet at first light 24th December afterwards flying on to Sumatra; and at the same time instructions were given for the immediate destruction of Kuching airfield. Also Sembawang was required to send out three Hudsons to locate the fleet but without taking offensive action. Shortly afterwards, however, the Japanese themselves disclosed their whereabouts - Kuching urgently reported a warship lying off-shore. Profitable targets were now within easy reach of Sinkawang II, but the enemy bombing attack of the previous day was to prove highly effective for the Glen Martins were unable to take-off with a bomb load. The only course was to evacuate to Palambang and with this A.H.Q. was in ready agreement. As an alternative a striking force of Blenheim IV's was considered but it was doubtful if these aircraft had sufficient range to fly to Kuching. But the Japanese were not to remain entirely unscathed for a Dutch submarine, K.14, operating off Tanjong Po on 23rd December attacked a force of three cruisers, a destroyer and merchant ships and sank no less than three transports and one tanker. Despite these losses the invasion continued and early next morning landings were attempted in the Kuching area. Desperate measures were now required and the possibility of sending a striking force from Singapore had to be considered. Tengah was therefore ordered to attack with five Blenheim IV's; No. 34 (B) Squadron aircrews were briefed with target priority of transports, tankers and warships, and 500 lb. S.A.P. bombs loaded. Meanwhile Kuching was hourly expecting attack; all documents were destroyed and A.H.Q. informed of the movements of the hostile warships. By 1355 hrs. 24th December O.C. Troops had reported the complete demolition of the airfield, but at Sinkawang II the R.A.F. liaison officer was endeavouring to repair the airfield and to keep intact the defences (1). Five Blenheims of No. 34 (B) Squadron then carried out an attack on the shipping off Kuching: claims were made of a hit on a transport together with near misses on other vessels but possibly because no encouraging and positive results were forthcoming the raid was not repeated. All aircraft returned safely to base with margins of petrol varying between 102 and 130 gallons. The following day an aircraft from the same Squadron carried out a high photographic reconnaissance of Kuching and Sinkawang II. It was the intention of the Dutch to maintain this latter airfield as an advanced base for strikes upon the Japanese at Miri and Kuching but such hopes were set back when the airfield was made unserviceable by a heavy bombing attack. Next morning (26th December) no W/T contact could be made with the airfield and by 1101 hrs. A.H.Q. had received a signal from the Dutch to the effect that Kuching was in enemy hands - casualties were negligible but

(1) Thus were the Dutch aircraft enabled to leave for Sumatra during the afternoon on 24th December. Eight Glen Martins eventually landed at Palembang I - one bomber was lost; and by next day all five Buffaloes had arrived safely.

IIJ50/17/8  
Enc. d/d  
4 Jan. 42.

IIJ50/4  
Entries dated  
28, 29, 30, 31,  
Dec. 41 and  
9 Jan. 42.

fighting was continuing inland and seventy-five Europeans had been evacuated to Pontianak. Two reconnaissance flights were made by No. 34 (B) Squadron which confirmed the total unserviceability of the airfield. There followed then a temporary lull during which A.H.Q. considered the plan of a raid on Kuching by Dutch bombers from Singapore. A decision was reached to send five Glen Martins from Sembawang and although bad weather prevented the operation taking place on 27th December it was again ordered for the next day but no record exists of the task being carried out. By this time Labuan had been subjected to air attack, possibly by the enemy fighters which were using a newly made airstrip south of Miri.

When Kuching fell the garrison of some eight hundred 2/15 Punjabis, in accordance with orders, made good their escape into the interior towards Sinkawang in order to join the Dutch. Practically all their equipment had to be abandoned, and when it was known they were somewhere between Bau and Siluas the Dutch were requested to locate them and drop food and water. Eventually these troops reached Sinkawang where the urgent requirement was to supply them with food and ammunition. Once again the ubiquitous No. 34 (B) Squadron was selected for the task: at Tengah the Blenheims practised supply dropping and on the evening of 30th December, after one of their Blenheims had carried out another reconnaissance of Kuching and Sinkawang II, three aircraft were to be loaded with containers holding a total of 1200 lbs. of food and ammunition, but it was found that only 75 per cent of this amount could actually be carried. The supplies were eventually dropped by the three Blenheims on Sinkawang II airfield on 31st December. This operation - which must have done much to improve the morale of the Indian troops - to all intents and purposes marked the finish of air action in Borneo (1).

#### Defensive Preparations in Southern Malaya

IIJ50/2 'Far  
East Apprecia-  
tions' Enc. 43a  
d/d 15 Dec. 41.

Ibid  
Encl. 50a  
d/d 29 Dec'41.

The Chiefs of Staff, on 15th December had required the C-in-C Far East to compile an appreciation 'covering the operational and administrative problems associated with the protracted defence of Singapore'. Nearly a fortnight was to elapse before this was produced and in the time, as already recounted, the situation had undergone such drastic change that the Higher Command had come to realize the siege of the Island was not far distant. The answering signal clearly outlined the new strategy as envisaged by G.H.Q. and may well be considered as the basis for the latter part of the Campaign. The Japanese, according to the C-in-C, aimed to over-run the Philippines in order to secure the sea communications to Malaya and the N.E.I., whilst the invasion of Borneo was but a step pointing towards Singapore. Action against Rangoon 'was probable if only to hamper the Chinese war effort'. He stressed the need for the security of Sumatra both as a means of defence of the convoy route through the Sunda and Banka Straits as well as a base for future offence. And in order to hold Java the full co-operation of the Dutch was required. Enemy air superiority in Malaya was admitted, and this, together with command of the sea allowed the enemy great freedom of movement, the facility to reinforce his air and land forces, and a choice of objectives. Nevertheless, although Sir Robert Brooke-Popham was of the opinion the enemy strength in Malaya at the time was unlikely to capture Singapore he pointed out that our lack of destroyers and submarines

(1) One Blenheim of No. 34 (B) Squadron carried out a photographic reconnaissance of Kuching on 9th Jan. 42.

Brooke-Popham  
Despatch:  
para. 133

together with long-range aircraft and fighter cover precluded attacks on Japanese convoys and so gave rise to the danger of substantial landings. Singapore was regarded as the main port of entry by reason of the concentrations of food resources, ammunition stocks and administrative holdings, (1) but even so the considerable quantities of workshop facilities, ordnance stores and vehicles at Kuala Lumpur were a matter of grave concern should that city be lost. Civilian morale was tending to break under the bombing, and Asiatic labour had begun to disappear - a serious matter for there were insufficient Europeans to run the country. A joint civil and military committee existed to help maintain essential services (2).

The C-in-C then went on to re-affirm his plan (for the land forces) already outlined on 21st December. The enemy were to be held as far north as possible by IIIrd Corps but without drawing upon the Fortress garrisons (3); such delaying action was to cover the arrival of re-inforcements. The first defence line was 20 miles north of Kuala Lumpur - if this failed then the next positions would only cover the airfields at Kahang, Kluang and Batu Pahat; the 'last ditch' before the Naval Base would be from Kota Tinggi to Gunong Pulai.

IIJ50/4  
para. 179a  
'Appreciation  
by A.O.C.  
Far East.'

Next there was reviewed the air defence problem. Not only had the Japanese won air superiority but they could be re-inforced both by sea and air beyond the reach of our striking forces. Long range bombers enabled the enemy to operate from safe airfields whereas our own air forces were confined to three airfields in Johore and four on Singapore Island all of which, besides being congested were open to air attack (4). Commitments included fighter cover for vital convoys anywhere within range of enemy occupied airfields together with protection of the Naval Base and other Island targets. Bombing was restricted to night operations because of the strength of enemy fighters which would soon reduce the small numbers of bombers; and a further over-riding factor

IIJ50/3  
Enc. 5a d/d  
21 Dec. 41.  
Enc. 6a d/d  
22 Dec. 41.

(1) The Report estimated that sufficient food was stored in Singapore to last the civil and military population four months. Ammunition was adequate; in the case of light A.A. until mid-February, heavy A.A. as far as the end of June, and other ammunition up to mid-April. Stocks of petrol, bombs and S.A.A. were adequate for three months.

(2) This Committee had in fact been formed on 16th December and comprised:

Mr. Duff Cooper - Chairman  
Fortress Commander  
Inspector General of Police  
One Civilian.

(3) Of the IIIrd Corps, 11th Division needed to be withdrawn for rest and re-equipment; 9th Division had suffered few casualties.

The Fortress Garrisons included:

Johore - 8th Division A.I.F. less one Brigade  
Singapore - two Infantry Brigades.

(4) Singapore Island : Seletar, Sembawang, Kallang, Tengah.  
Johore : Kluang, Batu Pahat, Kahang.

was the need to conserve air strength against the possibility of seaborne attacks (1).

The immediate and most acute problem which confronted the A.O.C. was the adequate dispersal of aircraft - not only for the existing strength but for the expected re-inforcements. Perhaps the only advantage of using the seven local airfields lay in the reasonably good means of communication and control. He well appreciated the advantages to be gained by dispersing the bombers in Sumatra but at the same time it was realized the difficulties to be overcome were immense. Communications, except by air, were poor. Airfields had to be provided with bombs, petrol, oil and other equipment, as well as ground and A.A. defence, supplied in every case by air and sea routes over both of which the Japanese had command. Furthermore the Bomber Squadrons so disposed would have only relative security for all the Sumatra airfields were within range of air attack, (2) - they could in fact be considered only as relief landing grounds. Until these difficulties were overcome, and until facilities for erection, repair and maintenance were established in Java, it was the opinion of the A.O.C. that the air forces would be forced to continue operations from Singapore and Johore.

These views were subsequently endorsed in the G.H.Q. appreciation which summarized the air plan as follows:-

IIJ50/3  
'Instructions  
to A.O.C.'  
Enc. 9a  
d/d  
27 Dec. 41.

(a) Dispersal of the air forces on the Singapore and Johore airfields, with priority tasks: (i) safe arrival of re-inforcements (3) (ii) defence of naval base and vital targets in South Malaya (iii) defeat of seaborne attacks.

(b) Provision of facilities, including ground and A.A. defences to enable substantial bomber forces to operate from Sumatra.

(c) Establishment of aircraft erection and repair facilities in Java.

Suggestions for extensive land re-inforcements were couched in less definite terms. A further Division (in

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(1) So concerned was the Air Ministry at the air effort being confined almost exclusively to reconnaissance that the V.C.A.S., on 21st December, in a signal to the A.O.C. strongly suggested that attacks on shipping should be attempted, quoting the effectiveness of such tactics both at home and in the Middle East.

In replying the A.O.C., re-affirmed his policy, however. Ten Blenheim IV's were the only aircraft he could use to reach the invasion ports, and even then, through lack of fighter cover, the attacks would have to be by night, with its attendant restrictions. The Dutch Glen Martins were not night trained. Hudsons and Catalinas had to be flown on reconnaissance to sight the approach of convoys to the vulnerable East Coast, in which event an air striking force would come into action. Therefore, until re-inforcements arrived the bombing of good targets - either shipping or enemy occupied airfields - detected by P.R.U., of necessity would have to be confined to the dark hours.

(2) Sumatra airfields: Lho Nga, Sabang, Medan, Pakan Bahru, Palembang.

(3) The executive order giving top priority to 'air protection for convoys bringing re-inforcements' was issued as 'G.H.Q. Instruction No. 3' to G.O.C., A.O.C., and C-in-C., E.F. dated 27th Dec. 41.



addition to the expected 18 Division) was recommended and should consist of war experienced troops such as the Australian Division from the Middle East. Forces would be required for Sumatra and possibly Java; the A.A. defences for Sumatra would be provided from the re-inforcements - it was not the intention to deprive Malaya of any such weapons. Lastly, there was the general requirement for bombers, torpedo-bombers and naval light forces to strengthen the N.E.I. defences which were quite inadequate to prevent Japanese landings.

IIJ50/2  
Enc. 52a  
d/d  
4 Jan. 42.

In replying the Chiefs of Staff were in general agreement with the C-in-C's appreciation especially as it was so much in accord with their own conclusions. Two points are outstanding in the signal: the first is that they attached much importance to the whole of Sumatra as a base for future operations, and assumed the airfields and their defences were being developed. Secondly, whilst agreeing to the need for the conservation of air strength against the possibility of seaborne attacks it was pointed out that such an invasion might be within range of the Singapore-based Vildebeestes. This obsolete aircraft was considered to be equal to the Swordfish which was still effectively employed (1).

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2161  
Enc. 5a

For the time being, then, the disposition of the air forces was to remain fundamentally unaltered, but as A.H.Q. well realized, such concentration at the best could be only a temporary expedient. Adequate dispersal was of paramount importance and no effort could be spared to produce a long-term plan for the deployment overseas of the striking force. The Sumatra project was not a new one; we have seen already how in June 1941 preparations were made to improve the northern airfields (2). It is true the primary consideration had been to establish an alternative air re-inforcement route, but their strategical position on the flank of a Japanese advance had not been overlooked. Six months later, in mid-December the remote possibility was so dramatically transformed into reality that once more A.H.Q. looked westwards towards the Netherlands East Indies. A small reconnaissance party was sent, on 16th December, to report upon the state of readiness of the Dutch airfields in Sumatra. They found little progress had been made, but even so A.H.Q. had to take action even though the emphasis was still upon the preparation for a re-inforcement route rather than the establishment of battle stations (3). Medan was stocked with ten thousand tons of 90 and 100 octane petrol; likewise the quantity already at Sabang was increased. Both those airfields, as well as Pakan Baroe were staffed with R.A.F. routeing officers and handling parties. Air transportation for these movements was provided

D.S.M.(M.R.S.)  
2018  
'Landing Grounds  
in Sumatra'  
Encs. 4a, 2a.

IIJ50/4  
Entries d/d  
14,16,19,22,  
23 Dec. 41.  
IIJ50/8  
Enc. d/d  
22 Dec. 41.

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- (1) This assumption was to be tragically contradicted when on 26th Jan. 42 at Endau both Squadrons were virtually annihilated in their first major action against well-protected convoys. (See also in section: 'Siege of the Island'.)
- (2) See also in section: 'Developments in N.E.I., Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal'.
- (3) The re-inforcement route Rangoon - Sabang - Medan - Pakan Bahru was considered suitable when, on 23rd December, five Blenheim IVs arrived safely at Singapore. (See also in Section: 'Air Re-inforcements Begin to Arrive'.)

II J55/15/19  
Enc. 19a d/d  
12 Dec. 41

by Dutch Lodestars stationed in Sumatra. Consideration was given for the formation of Bomber and Fighter Groups as well as the possibility of transferring No. 153 M.U. from Kuala Lumpur. Such schemes, of necessity were rather vague, but on 23rd December the rapidity of the Japanese advance dictated a move and the Maintenance Unit was ordered to leave for Tjilatjap (Java). By this time the reconnaissance party had returned from Sumatra, and based upon their recommendations action was put in hand to equip the Dutch airfields in the priority Sabang, Medan then Pakan Baroe.

But events were so fast-moving that A.H.Q. decided to establish a nucleus Bomber Group in Sumatra without further delay - it was to be the resurrected 'Norgroup' but under the original title of No. 223 Group, with Headquarters eventually at Pakan Bahru. Also a fifth airfield was to be established at Palembang. To accelerate these plans two staff officers (1) flew on 27th December to Bandoeng, where, next day they met the R.A.F. liaison officer newly evacuated from Sinkawang II. This officer, it will be remembered, had accompanied the Dutch aircraft on their flight to Palambang I, and having inspected the hitherto secret airfield at Palambang II had made a report to A.H.Q.F.E. who thereupon required him to negotiate with Dutch Air Headquarters at Bandoeng. Having completed administrative arrangements for the supply of rations, pay and accommodation for the incoming R.A.F. personnel, the Mission then flew northwards to Sumatra, on 29th December, to select a location for the Bomber Group. A tour of the airfields was made. Pakan Baroe, already earmarked by Singapore as the Group location, was served by a thrice-weekly air service run by the M.V.A.F. Apart from this there were no other communications, poor weather was prevalent, accommodation scanty and the local township had no garrison. Medan on the East Coast was thought to be wrongly sited (it was raided by seventeen Japanese bombers on 28th Dec.). Sabang in the North was still being extended, whilst Lho Nga was short of accommodation. The choice of a Headquarters site therefore fell upon the town of Palembang with the accepted risk that it would probably be the focal point of the initial Japanese attack. It had a good port, with road and rail communications to the south - and what was even more important, an oilfield and high octane refinery. At this time (31st December) an A.M.W.D. officer, Wing Commander Wightwick, had arrived in order to carry out extensive work on the airfields and accommodation in preparation for the ultimate move of the Squadrons (2).

The narrative of events must now be resumed from the point, when, with the evacuation of Kuala Lumpur by No. 453 (F) Squadron the role of the R.A.F. once more went over to the defensive. Apart from the major threat of East Coast landings and the invasion of Borneo - both of which have been recounted - the Japanese had begun to infiltrate down the coasts of Malaya thus necessitating an extensive reconnaissance effort by the G.R. and Bomber Squadrons. Furthermore it was anticipated the Japanese might well spread across to the weakly defended Sumatra bases which were an integral part of the re-inforcement route. Dutch aid was sought on 22nd December

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- (1) Wing Commander Wills-Sandford (Air)  
Squadron Leader Briggs (Organisation)
  - (2) On 8th Jan. 1942 Wing Commander Duncan was to replace Wing Commander Wills-Sandford with orders to reform No. 223 Group pending the arrival of Group Captain Bishop.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2161  
Enc. 4a  
d/d 16 Jan. 46.

Interview with  
W/C Duncan  
12 Mar. 48.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2169 "A.M.W.D.  
in N.E.I."

IIJ50/4  
 Entries d/d  
 20 to  
 26 Dec. 41.

when A.H.Q.F.E. requested a daily reconnaissance of the Sumatra coastline, to a depth of 50 miles, from Sabang to Medan. Three Glen Martins from Pakan Baroe thereafter flew a patrol each day of the month but no sightings were made of any importance.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
 2014 Enc. 10a  
 pp 16, 17  
 and Enc. 13a  
 p. 46.

Similar operations were carried out along the East Coast of Malaya: from 21st to 23rd December these searches were flown by single Hudsons from Sembawang and by formations of three Glen Martins from the same Station. Then, because these flights were becoming increasingly hazardous on account of frequent attacks by enemy fighters, the Hudsons flew in pairs for mutual protection. Apart from coastal searches these Hudsons of Nos. 1 and 8 (G.R.) Squadrons, particularly towards the end of December, reached out into the South China Sea to distances of nearly 300 miles on diverging searches for enemy convoys; on these occasions the aircraft often flew in two pairs.

IIJ50/4:  
 Entries d/d  
 22 to 31 Dec. 41.

As an additional commitment the IIIrd Corps had requested offensive patrols up the West Coast to guard against enemy infiltrations. Once again the Hudsons were operated but the task was shared to a great extent by Blenheims of Nbs. 34 and 62 (B) Squadrons at Tengah. And almost every day the P.R. Buffalo made long flights to the North <sup>(1)</sup> to provide valuable information of the enemy air forces. On 27th December one hundred aircraft were photographed on Sungei Patani <sup>(2)</sup> and four days later Gong Kedah was shown to contain thirty-four bombers and transports <sup>(3)</sup>.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
 2021 Enc. 1a  
 d/d 26 Dec. '45.  
 Enc. 3a d/d  
 1 March 46.

About this time the Air/Sea Rescue Service began to operate. This, like other measures had suffered from lack of equipment: the six launches, which in Autumn 1941 were to form the Service, never arrived and although efforts were made by the A.S.R. Administrative Officer, Flight Lieutenant Moore, to promote a voluntary organisation with the help of Customs and Harbour officials, his efforts were frustrated by the delays of the civilian authorities. However, the withdrawal of the Squadrons into the Singapore area, together, it would seem, with the prompting of O.C. No. 243 (F) Squadron resulted in A.H.Q. directing that an Air/Sea Rescue Service should be set up. A shadow organisation had already been laid down so it was only a matter of fitting out the two craft and establishing a base before the Service could operate. This it did on 24th December when High Speed Launch No. 105 (33-36 knots) took up station at Pulo Bukum Island and Pinnacle No. 53 (13 knots) at St. Johns Island, after which date marine craft remained continuously on station and a 24 hour watch was kept at Fighter Group Headquarters with whom

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
 2012 Enc. 3a  
 d/d 30 Dec. 45.

(1) On 26th December the P.R.U. Buffalo reported thirty-four ships off Singora. From this it was deduced that at least one re-inforcing Division had been landed thus raising the enemy forces in Northern Malaya to not less than four Divisions.

(2) Sungei Patani: six medium twins (span 65 feet),  
 Forty twins (span 45 feet); sixty fighters.

(3) Gong Kedah: Two Bombers (or transports); Fifteen B.R.  
 Twenty heavy bombers; seventeen twins.

communication was maintained by R/T via Seletar (1).

Apart from the formation of this new service there was a limited redistribution of the existing Units on the Island. Following the C-in-C's plan to send back to Burma the Squadron Commander and spare crews of No. 60 (B) Squadron (but at the same time retaining their aircraft), instructions were given on 17th December for these personnel to prepare to return to Mingaladon. About sixteen Blenheim I's were taken over by No. 62 (B) Squadron, Tengah, on 23rd December, but they were in such a poor state of repair that only eleven survived the process of 'cannibalism'. Evidently it was planned to move the Squadron up to Kluang; training there stopped when four Wirraways had completed a dive-bombing course, and this coupled with the installation of eight Bofors guns on 22nd December, together with the generally improved condition of the landing ground made it suitable for the operation of a bomber Squadron. Fortunately the Unit had not arrived on 29th December for on that day the enemy bombing attacks were resumed and Kluang became their objective. A raid of fifteen to eighteen Army 97's dropped some fifty bombs from 1000 to 1500 feet but without damage to the airfield. The newly arrived A.A. Battery broke up the formation but did not succeed in bringing down any of the raiders. Simultaneously the Station's dummy airfield was bombed by nine aircraft and this time the Japanese succeeded in hitting the runway! Next afternoon eleven Blenheims of No. 62 (B) Squadron flew in to their new base without further incident. Prior to this move No. 81 Repair and Salvage Unit had been transferred to the neighbouring station of Kahang on 24th December.

The Dutch Squadrons were also shifted. On 29th December eight N.E.I. Buffaloes at Kallang were ordered to move on the following day to Palembang where the Unit was to revert to Dutch control (2). On that day, in response to a query from A.H.Q. concerning the progress of the night training of the Dutch bomber Squadron, a signal was received from the Air Liaison Officer Bandoeng (Wing Commander Farrow) to the effect that although the training of No. 375 Squadron (ex Singapore) was not fully completed the moonlight conditions were so highly favourable for night bombing that it was proposed to return these Glen Martins to Sembawang on 30th December. In exchange the N.E.I. authorities required the bomber Squadron 'Wolf' (nine aircraft) to be sent to Kalidjati (Java). The total strength of Glen Martins after this 'exchange' was then sixteen.

In addition to these changes in location the reduced ranks of Nos. 453 and -21 (F) Squadrons were in need of such drastic re-organisation after the evacuation of Kuala Lumpur that the

(1) The flotilla was augmented in January and early February 1942 by four other craft:

- Pinnance No. 54 - 13 knots
- Seaplane Tender No. 257 - 28 knots
- Seaplane Tender No. 258 - 28 knots
- Marine Tender No. 941 - 18 knots.

Excellent co-operation was given by the Malayan Volunteer Air Force despite the lack of R/T and special rescue gear. Reports of crashed aircraft or pilots baling-out would be telephoned to the Flight stationed at Kallang and if the subsequent search proved fruitful marine craft would be guided by means of visual signals. Altogether a total of twenty-five airmen were rescued.

(2) These fighters were specially stationed in Southern Sumatra for protection of the incoming convoys through the Banka Straits.

ILJ50/4  
Entr. d/d  
14, 17, 22,  
28, 29 Dec. 41.  
D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2014 d/d  
1 Feb. 46.

Form 540  
"R.A.F. Kluang"  
Entries d/d  
29, 30 Dec. 41.

D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2014: Enc. 13a  
pp. 47, 48.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2012 Enc. 6a  
page 5.

Ibid Enc. 3a

Commander, Fighter Group decided to merge the two Units. This temporary measure established a combined Squadron of sixteen aircraft known as No. 21/453 (F) Squadron, under the command of one officer, and based at Sembawang. O.C. No. 21 (F) Squadron - S/Ldr. Allshorn, was relieved of his command and O.C. No. 453 (F) Squadron - S/Ldr. Harper assumed the tactical control of the composite Squadron. Their primary task was to co-operate with IIIrd Corps, using Kuala Lumpur as an advanced landing ground. No important operations were carried out during the latter part of December thus enabling the Unit to re-organise and take steps to improve the performance of the Buffaloes. The all-up weight of the aircraft was reduced by approximately 1000 lbs. by the expedient of replacing two of the four .5 inch Brownings with .303 inch guns, as well as reducing the ammunition and petrol loads (1), removing wireless posts, mirrors, parachute flare bins, Very tubes and cockpit heaters; R/T was also discarded. It was then found, to quote the Station Commander, 'that the aircraft would even loop!'. Even so nothing could improve the petrol system for which pressure had to be pumped by hand at altitudes over 18,000 feet; and the armament troubles persisted. The Buffalo, although improved was still no match for the Zero.

Air Ministry  
signal X 761  
d/d 6 Nov. '41.

Air Ministry  
signal X 230  
d/d 12 Nov. '41.

The most outstanding change of all and one far removed from the comparatively minor redispositions of the Units came about on 27th December when Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham was replaced by Lt. General Sir Henry Pownall. It must be emphasized that the policy to relieve the C-in-C., Far East was not the result of the conduct of the campaign but a decision made nearly a month before the outbreak of hostilities. In a signal dated 6th November the C-in-C. was advised: 'recent developments in the Far East make it advisable that the duties of the C-in-C. should be entrusted to an army officer with up-to-date experience'. The Minister of Defence consequently approved that such an officer should be Lt. General Sir Bernard Paget. The C-in-C was of the opinion that news of the impending change should not leak out and so encourage ill-informed gossip; and indeed it was the intention of the Chiefs of Staff to defer the announcement until the General's arrival which was likely to be delayed by visits en route. Even so the C-in-C considered that the change became known in the Army and Air Forces, by the end of November.

Air Ministry  
signal X 528  
d/d 29 Nov. '41

But the new Commander was not to be General Paget for he was appointed C-in-C Home Forces and his place taken by General Pownall whose Chief of Staff designate was Air Vice Marshal P.C. Maltby. The new C-in-C was instructed 'to deal with matters of major military policy and strategy' and it was not the intention he should assume operational control. The General left England on 3rd December and after being delayed in Cairo by War Office instructions arrived at Singapore on 23rd December (2).

Cable 140/7  
d/d 25 Dec. '41.

Before relinquishing his command the C-in-C Far East brought to the notice of the Chiefs of Staff a summary of the main factors of the campaign. The integrity of Singapore,

(1) Ammunition was cut down from 650 to 350 rounds, and petrol from 130 to 85 gallons.

(2) A.V.M. Maltby remained in Cairo awaiting further Air Ministry instructions: he left by B.O.A.C. for Singapore on 26th December, and was expected to arrive on 2nd January but in fact did not land until 4th Jan. 42.

the signal stated, had been classified as vital by the C.O.S., yet the G.O.C's estimate of the land forces required, although agreed by them, had not been attained. Similarly the aircraft in the Far East, including reserves, at the outbreak of hostilities were some three hundred and seventy short of the estimate made by the C-in-C. and agreed by C.O.S.

Brooke-Popham  
Despatch  
para 153 and  
'Notes on  
Future of  
G.H.Q. by  
C-in-C F.E.  
d/d 27 Dec.'41.

At this stage Sir Robert felt that location of G.H.Q. should no longer be in Malaya but should be moved to Java, near Bandoeng. With the transfer of Burma to C-in-C India (15th Dec'41) and the fall of Hong Kong (25th Dec'41) the work of G.H.Q., according to the C-in-C's appreciation, resolved itself into relations with the Allies and Dominions; co-ordination of operations with C-in-C Eastern Fleet; and the preparation of reports for the Chiefs of Staff (1). This hardly justified the retention of G.H.Q., which, he felt, should give place to a combined staff who would draw up inter-Allied projects and plans of operations. Such a staff should consist of representatives of the three Services from the British, American and Dutch and would be responsible to two Commanders - the C-in-C., Eastern Fleet (controlling all the Allied Fleets in the Far East) and a C-in-C land and air forces (2).

With these final notes accomplished Sir Robert Brooke-Popham published a Farewell Order, and after visiting several of the Island's R.A.F. Stations eventually left Singapore on 31st December.

#### Air Re-inforcements Begin to Arrive

At this juncture, with the change in High Command effected and the air forces generally reduced to the defensive within the Singapore area it may be convenient to examine the air re-inforcement problem and the extent of the aid given to the Far East during the month of December 1941. Hardly had the results of the first day's operations been received in Singapore than the C-in-C F.E. once again renewed his plea for re-inforcements (3). Both the Chiefs of Staff and Air Ministry were urged to send the maximum which should include two Squadrons of long-range bombers and two Squadrons of night fighters together with adequate reserves and spares. Already, on 6th December, Admiral Helfrich had agreed to the temporary transfer of three N.E.I. Catalinas (to be manned by our crews) - an offer gratefully accepted by the C-in-C.

There was immediate response to the C-in-C's request from both Chiefs of Staff and Air Ministry. The former decided that night fighters could not be provided especially as not one such unit had been established in the Middle East where-in Malta had survived for eighteen months. Furthermore, air superiority could not be gained by long-range bombing of air-fields. Rather, the effective form of attack was by low flying fighters and short range bombers, both of which the C.O.S. would make every effort to sustain (4). The reply

(1) G.H.Q., it will be recalled, was not responsible for the detailed operational control in Malaya.

(2) Thus was foreshadowed the South West Pacific Command ('Abdacom') which was to form on 15th Jan'42 under a Supreme Allied Commander - General Sir Archibald Wavell.

(3) See also in Section: 'Air Attacks from Siam'.

(4) In his reply the C-in-C accepted the decision not to send night fighters but could not agree that long-range bombers were useless. These were needed, he stressed, to put the enemy on the defensive by forcing the withdrawal of some fighters from Siam to protect important objectives in Southern Indo China.

IIJ50/22/10  
Encs. 423/6  
419/6 d/d  
8 Dec. 41.

IIJ50/22/9  
Enc. 394/6  
d/d 6 Dec. 41.

IIJ50/22/10  
C.O.S.F.E. 53  
d/d 9 Dec. 41.

II J50/22/8  
Enc. 487/6  
d/d 17 Dec. 41

II J50/22/10  
Enc. X221 d/d  
8 Dec. 41. and  
Enc. 5a d/d  
9 Dec. 41

from the Air Ministry was more encouraging for their proposed re-inforcement plan was an extensive one. Fifty Kittyhawks were to be diverted to the Far East from the quota supplied by the U.S.A. to the Middle East; another fifty would follow in January and thereafter thirty a month. These aircraft, together with the Buffaloes, could also be used as night fighters after flame dampers had been supplied. Efforts would be made to accelerate the production of Beauforts in Australia (to re-equip the Torpedo-Bomber Squadrons). Bombers were to be in reasonably adequate supply. Six Blenheim IV's ex No. 52 Squadron, Iraq would be flown out at once, after which it was the intention to re-equip two of the Far East Blenheim I Squadrons with Hudsons (16 + 2 each.) For this purpose thirty-six Hudsons would be ferried out, and in addition to these, twelve Hudsons per month sent to replace wastage. Sixteen ferry crews would be supplied by No. 139 (B) Squadron, No. 2 Group, after they had converted from Blenheims to Hudsons. Lastly, four Catalinas with two spare crews were being sent from U.K. or Gibraltar.

Ibid Enc. 7a

Such was the immediate reaction from the Directorate of Organization, but next day, 10th December, at a meeting presided over by the Chief of Air Staff the plans for re-inforcing both the Middle East and Far East were correlated. In the opinion of the C.A.S. it was too early to reach positive conclusions, and he was doubtful whether it was either advisable or possible to re-inforce Singapore other than by the few Blenheim aircraft which had been ordered to proceed. Other areas in the Far East came under consideration such as the Indian Ocean, Ceylon, Calcutta and Rangoon. Initially it was decided to make India the concentration area and base for any reinforcements which might be spared for the Far East. It was then proposed to divert to Karachi or Bombay the four Hurricane Squadrons, in convoy W.S. 12Z, earmarked for the Caucasus or Northern Persia. Generally, the emphasis lay upon the importance of building up the Middle East strength in Fighters, and Medium and Heavy Bombers to meet the threat which was likely to arise by Spring.

Ibid Encs. 16a,  
16b d/d  
17 Dec. 41.

Eventually, the Chiefs of Staff, after advice from V.C.A.S. drew up a re-inforcement plan which was signalled to the Far East on 17th December. All arrangements would be made to despatch to Singapore the land forces requested by the C-in-C<sup>(1)</sup>; the details of the air re-inforcement plan were as follows:-

- (a) Four Catalinas and two spare crews from the U.K. or Gibraltar were due to leave at an early date.
- (b) Six Blenheim IV's had left Egypt on 12th December, and six more on 14th December; a further six would be sent if and when they could be spared.
- (c) Fifty-two Hudsons were under orders to fly out from U.K. as early as possible.
- (d) Middle East were preparing thirty-two cased Kittyhawks with spares, but their destination would be decided later.

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(1) Two infantry Brigade Groups and re-inforcements for 9th and 11th Divisions.  
85 Anti-Tank Regiment 6 Heavy A.A. Regiment (sixteen guns)  
32 Light A.A. Regiment (twenty-four guns).

(e) A Fighter Squadron from convoy W.S. 12. Z. with ground personnel and generous technical equipment plus fifty-one Hurricanes and eighteen pilots would go direct from Durban to Singapore.

Fighter re-inforcements for India were also outlined in the same signal (1) which concluded on a warning note: possibly the flow of Hurricanes might not be maintained, in which case the squadrons would have to exist on the initial supply of fifty-one. Accordingly the C-in-C F.E. was asked if a depot might be established at Padang (Sumatra) with a view to erecting American fighters which, it was hoped, would eventually replace the Hurricanes. The C.O.S. also instructed the Joint Staff Mission in Washington to urge that the ninety United States four-engined bombers which had arrived in Brisbane should be sent to Malaya or the N.E.I.

It may now be of interest to examine how these long-term plans were implemented; for the sake of clarity the various re-inforcements are classified by aircraft types.

Ibid Enc. 24a  
d/d 20 Dec. 41.

Ibid Enc. 33a  
and II J53/4  
'No. 205  
Squadron Diary'  
pp. 5, 6, 12.

(a) Catalinas

(i) Dutch: Following the offer by the N.E.I. authorities, three skeleton crews of No. 205 (F.B.) Squadron flew to Sourabaya on 10th December in a Dutch Lodestor in order to ferry the three Catalinas to Singapore. These aircraft were safely delivered on the afternoon of 12th December.

(ii) R.A.F.: The four flying boats ex Gibraltar were at Aboukir (Egypt) on 21st December with an expected date of arrival at Ceylon on 30th December. Here one of the boats was retained and based at Kogalla whilst the remainder continued to Seletar where they landed at 0805 hours the next day. These three Catalinas were taken on the strength of No. 205 (F.B.) Squadron.

(b) Hudsons

(i) Mark II: On 19th December seven officers of No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron, together with five officers of No. 8 (G.R.) Squadron left Singapore in a Quantas Airway's aircraft for Darwin with the object of taking delivery of eight replacement Hudsons for ferrying to Sembawang. On 21st December the first four aircraft left Australia for Koepang. On the next leg to Sourabaya a suspected airframe defect caused the flight to return to Koepang. All aircraft eventually landed at Sourabaya and finally arrived safely at Sembawang on 23rd December. Two other Hudsons which had left Darwin on 22nd December arrived at Singapore the same time as the main delivery. Five Hudsons were allotted to

D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2014 Enc. 10a  
p.p. 15

IIM/dS5/1  
'O.R.B. -  
Sembawang'

(1) Wing H.Q. with three Fighter Squadrons, less aircraft, would proceed from Durban to Bombay for the disposal of C-in-C India. Aircraft for these three Units would be provided from Takoradi from which port H.M.S. Athene would transport forty Hurricanes. A further thirteen aircraft en route to the Middle East would be diverted to India, and to complete the quota Athene would ship a further forty Hurricanes from Port Sudan. Middle East had also been instructed to prepare the despatch of six Blenheim IV Squadrons to India, at a later date, for use in Burma.



No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron and the remaining aircraft to No. 8 (G.R.) Squadron.

II J50/22/8  
Enc. 4a d/d  
8 Dec. 41.  
Encs. 5a, 9a  
d/d 9 Dec. 41.  
and Enc. 21a  
d/d 12 Dec. 41

Ibid Enc. 46a  
d/d 24 Dec. 41

Ibid Encs. 33  
33(a) (b) (c)  
d/d 17 Dec. 41

Ibid Encs. 63a  
d/d 19 Dec. 41  
64a d/d  
29 Dec. 41  
66a d/d  
6 Jan. 42.

(ii) Mark III: The first step to implement the plan to reinforce Singapore with these aircraft was in the form of Air Ministry signals to M.A.P. and No. 2 Group for No. 139 Squadron at Horsham St. Faith to be re-equipped with 16+0 Hudson III's. The primary need was for these Blenheim pilots to be converted to the new aircraft and for this purpose two dual Hudsons had to be transferred to the Squadron together with two experienced crews. It would seem, however, that the extreme urgency of the plan dictated a speedier method of crewing for on 12th December the Director of War Organization (D.W.O.) decided that Coastal Command should provide thirty-six trained and experienced crews whilst Bomber Command should proceed with the conversion of sixteen crews of No. 139 Squadron. Accordingly Far East was advised of the preparation of the first thirty-six aircraft which, it was presumed, would re-arm both Nos. 60 and 62 Squadrons at 16+2 (1). The estimated departure date of the first six aircraft was the end of the first week of January 1942. A further sixteen Hudsons were earmarked as special reinforcements thus making a total of fifty-two.

It is interesting to reflect how this very same policy of re-inforcement from other Commands had been first advocated in 1926 by Lord Tranchard (2). But apart from the less hurried moves of Nos. 34 and 62 (B) Squadrons from the U.K. in 1939 the route had never before been used in its entirety as an emergency 'pipe-line'. Considerable problems had to be overcome not the least of which was the actual ferrying. It was calculated these delivery flights would cover a period of fifteen to twenty-one days on a basis of fifty-five to sixty-five hours flown mainly in the mornings. This would necessitate at least one 30-star inspection being made, preferably at Habbaniya. Five or six aircraft would make up each formation for which essential facilities had to be provided in the form of accommodation, fuel, D/F aids, meteorology and briefing at each staging airfield (3).

Whilst these preparations were being made the C.A.S. began to urge the need to speed-up deliveries, and in fact on 19th December it was his aim to send sixteen or eighteen Hudsons within the next three weeks. Coastal Command crews were standing-by, but apart from two completed aircraft the majority were deficient of items for the Bendix wireless sets,

(1) By 24th December A.H.Q. had decided that the fifty-two Hudsons should be used to re-equip No. 62 (B) Squadron at 16 I.E., and to bring Nos. 1 and 8 (G.R.) Squadrons (whose combined strength was then fourteen aircraft) up to 16 I.E. each. The balance of eighteen would cover wastage during ferrying and after arrival. Blenheim I's of No. 62 Squadron would be converted to fighters for No. 27 (N.F.) Squadron.

(2) See also in section: 'Conflicting Policies'.

(3) Proposed route: U.K. - Gibraltar - Malta - Egypt - Habbaniya - Basra - Sharjah - Karachi - Allahabad - Calcutta - Mingaladon - Sabang - Singapore.

whilst Vickers gas operated guns were in the process of being mounted. It was proposed, however, to despatch the first Hudsons without these items, but adverse weather imposed further delay so it was not until 29th December that the first five aircraft left Portreath for Gibraltar and the Far East. Subsequently three more left by the end of the year, and by 6th January, 1942, a total of twenty-three had flown from the U.K.

(c) Blenheim IV's

Ibid Encs. 6a,  
9a, d/d  
9 Dec. 41  
12a d/d  
11 Dec. 41;  
22a d/d  
12 Dec. 41.

Six of these light bombers were selected by Air Ministry as the immediate re-inforcements for Singapore. No. 52 Squadron in Iraq was detailed to give up these aircraft, and at the same time the C.A.S. asked the A.O.C.-in-C Middle East to give up an additional six if they could be spared. Unfortunately Air Ministry had overlooked the fact that No. 52 Squadron was only a cadre. In consequence Middle East had to provide a total of twelve Blenheim IV's from Egypt. Six left on 12th December and the remainder on the 14th; it was hoped to send a further six at a later date. Not all were destined to reach Singapore. The majority of the crews were straight from O.T.U. even though the formations were being led by more experienced personnel. After they had set off there followed a period of silence, until, in response to an Air Ministry enquiry to the four Commands, it transpired that only nine Blenheims had flown Eastwards from Karachi; the remaining three had respectively crashed, force-landed and become lost between Bahrein and India. Between 19th and 22nd December seven aircraft left Calcutta, but when routed onwards from Rangoon the formations had diminished, temporarily, to five aircraft. Led by acting Flight Lieutenant C.W. Harper the first flight of three Blenheims, closely followed by the remaining pair, flew through to Pagan Bahru and finally to Tengah where a safe arrival was made on 23rd December. The route was opened - but at a cost - and No. 34 (B) Squadron had received its first reinforcements. Two further Blenheim IV's came through on 30th December thus bringing the total re-inforcements up to seven (1).

Ibid Encs. 37a  
d/d 20 Dec. 41.

39a d/d  
20 Dec. 41 67a  
d/d 5 Jan. 42

IIJ50/4 Entries  
at 22, 23 Dec. 41  
and IIM/E34/1  
'O.R.B.No.34  
Squadron'.

IIJ55/15/19  
Enc. 44a d/d  
23 Dec. 41.

(d) Kittyhawks

IIJ50/22/7  
Encs. 3a d/d  
10 Dec. 41.

4a d/d  
13 Dec. 5a d/d  
14 Dec. 15a,  
7a, 8a  
d/d 17 Dec. 41

Within a day of the Director of Organization deciding to send fifty Kittyhawks to Singapore from Egypt the plan was cancelled. In its place Middle East was required to hold thirty-two of these aircraft, packed, with spares to meet 'a possible Far East emergency demand' (2). It then transpired how the Kittyhawks in Egypt had arrived from the U.S.A. deficient in Appendix 'A' items. Consequently it was proposed to hold these thirty-two aircraft packed, but without Appendix 'A' items, which would have to be prepared when available. Even so the other small parts would need be provided from Far East resources. In this state the fighters could be shipped from Port Sudan on 7th January, 1942 (3).

(1) With the exception of F/Lt. Harper's aircraft all these Blenheims were captained by N.C.O. pilots.

(2) G.H.Q.F.E. was quick in pointing out that such an emergency demand had already been made!

(3) A.H.Q. provisionally planned to assemble these Kittyhawks at Tjilatjap (Java).

Far East was eager to receive such re-inforcements; on 17th December the C-in-C, in a signal addressed to the Chiefs of Staff, emphasized the urgent need for re-inforcements. Fighters were the chief anxiety, for out of his dwindling reserve of Buffaloes seventeen were unserviceable awaiting spares from America (1). As an interim measure he suggested the Kittyhawks should be transported in an aircraft carrier thus enabling them to be erected and flown-off whilst in transit. In answer to such requests Air Ministry had to point out that the Kittyhawks were in fact only a stand-by measure. The absence of operational experience of this fighter as well as deficiencies in Appendix 'A' items and engine spares were given as reasons why it was undesirable the Far East should have to rely upon such aircraft. Instead, it was planned to send the well-tried Hurricane in its place.

(e) Hurricane II's

Ibid Encs.  
9a d/d  
17 Dec. 41.  
12a d/d  
18 Dec. 41.

These re-inforcements were obtained by diverting a Hurricane Wing already at sea. On 17th December shipping authorities at Durban were advised by Air Ministry signal of a change of plan for convoy W.S.12Z, and on the day following, these instructions were amplified for the benefit of the Officer Commanding No. 267 Fighter Wing. The original plan for this Wing to go to Iraq was cancelled. Instead, No. 232 (F) Squadron (six pilots) with eighteen pilots from the other three Squadrons - Nos. 17, 135 and 136, plus maintenance equipment sufficient for two Squadrons, would go to Singapore. In addition this composite Squadron would take all the available aircraft, which amounted to fifty-one cased Hurricanes (2).

Such was the position of the re-inforcements by the end of December 1941 (3). The initial long-range policy of supply, mainly of Kittyhawks and Hudsons, had to some extent broken down. Early aid, of necessity, took the form of Catalinas and Hudson II's already in the Eastern theatres. These were followed by a handful of Blenheim IV's spared from Middle East reserves, whilst the main flow of bombers - the Hudson III's - did not commence to move until the end of the month, and then only in small quantities. The fighter project collapsed simply because the newly delivered Middle East Kittyhawks were lacking in essential components, and the breach could only be filled by diverting Hurricanes already earmarked for another destination.

Before concluding this story of what might well be considered the meagre and insufficient help to the Far East in the early and critical stages of the Campaign it might be advantageous to consider, briefly, the Air

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- (1) In Burma twenty-four of the thirty-two Buffaloes similarly were out of action, it was stated.
  - (2) The remainder of the Wing was to go to Bombay from whence it would move to Burma or to some location in India. Aircraft would be provided there and likewise pilots sent in from the Middle East.
  - (3) Strength of Units at the end of December 1941 may be seen in detail at Appendices VI and VII.

IIJ50/22/8  
Encs. 27a d/d  
13 Dec. 41  
50a d/d  
30 Dec. 41  
69a d/d 5 Jan. 42  
71a d/d  
9 Jan. 42

IIJ50/6  
"Reinforcements  
of Far East  
in War-Policy"

Ministry policy for future re-inforcements. Bomber Squadrons in Malaya were to be increased to a total of eight. To the present strength of Nos. 27, 34, 62, 1 and 8 Squadrons would be added a new Unit of sixteen I.E. Hudsons drawn from the re-inforcements then en route. The remaining two Squadrons would be sent by air from the Middle East in the shape of Nos. 84 and 211(B) Squadrons. (twenty-four I.E. Blenheim IV's each). The existing fighter strength of Nos. 243, 21, 453, and 488 Squadrons was to be increased to eight. The first of the four new Units to arrive would be No. 232 Squadron (ex convoy W.S. 12Z); it was due on 9th January 1942. Ground personnel and equipment, plus a pool of fifteen pilots, of Nos. 258, 242 and 605 Squadrons (ex convoy W.S. 14D) were to arrive in Singapore at the end of January. Forty-eight pilots and forty-eight Hurricanes would arrive later in H.M.S. Indomitable, and finally H.M.S. Athene was to transport another forty Hurricanes from the Middle East, their final destination being Malaya or Burma, according to the strategic situation.

#### A Limited Air Offensive

As recounted in an earlier Chapter (1) the evacuation of Kuala Lumpur airfield preceded an 'air' commitment which grew in size as the enemy rapidly infiltrated down the West coast of Malaya. Had this been the only task then the R.A.F. might well have given a much fuller measure of support to the retreating land forces. But there were other, equally important operations required. Air reconnaissances in the South China Sea, and the defence of the Island itself were factors which could not be disregarded, whilst the convoy protection alone had been given top priority, by G.H.Q., over all other duties. These circumstances combined to reduce substantially the number of aircraft available for the direct support of the Army, nevertheless it will be shown how these operations grew in volume as the enemy drew nearer to Singapore and so within easier reach of the carefully conserved air defences.

Percival  
Despatch  
Paras. 212,  
213, 214, 215.

Ibid, paras.  
257, 276, 277,  
278, 279, 280,  
284, 285, 286,  
288.

Enemy Publi-  
cation No. 278  
Page 27

To appreciate fully the West Coast air operations it will be necessary to review briefly the movements of the land forces from the time when the troops were withdrawn across the Perak River on 23rd December (2) until their entry into the State of Johore. The IIIrd Corps Commander, on 22nd December, had decided to hold areas south of Ipoh and at the same time the Kampar position was rapidly prepared. A delaying action was fought north of Ipoh by the 12th Brigade on 26th and on the day following, the Kampar position was occupied by both 12th and 28th Brigade. An attack in strength by the enemy was repulsed by 12th Brigade who were forced, nevertheless, to withdraw into reserve at Bidor. This Brigade had borne the brunt of the fighting since the Battle of Gurun; its rearguard actions now gained time for the re-organisation of the remainder of 11th Division and the occupation of Kampar. This locality, to quote the G.O.C., 'was the strongest of any occupied in Malaya', with the newly reorganised 6/15th Brigade in the main position, supported by 28th Brigade on the right flank and 12th Brigade (although tired) in reserve. Attacks started on 31st December but throughout that day and the next the enemy was held. The Japanese, realizing that Kampar could withstand a frontal attack, planned another of their encircling

(1) 'Defensive preparations in Southern Malaya'.

(2) Recounted in the section - 'The Last Stand in Northern Malaya'.

movements. On the afternoon of 1st January, six steamers and other craft anchored at the mouth of the River Bernam and in the evening troops were landed. Next day an enemy force landed at Telok Anson after moving down the River Perak. This movement was met but could not be held by the 12th Brigade. As a result of this outflanking manoeuvre, the withdrawal from Kampar began on the evening of 2nd January. Twenty-four hours later the three Brigades fell back to the Slim River Village area.

Enemy Publication No. 278  
Pages: 29, 30.

Percival  
Despatch  
Paras. 258,  
262, 270, 271,  
272, 273, 274.

A similar landing was made late on 2nd January by two steamers and twelve landing craft. The Japanese claim this 'boat striking force had sailed from Taiping, some fifty strong'. One steamer was sunk by shore artillery off Kula Selangor, but a landing in force must have been made for patrols were beaten back and 6/15th Brigade, recently withdrawn from Kampar, disposed to counter this new threat (1).

The scene must now change to the East Coast. Here the Kelantan Force was resting in the Kula Lipis - Jerantut area (2). The enemy were known to be moving south through Trengganu, and the Kuantan Force (22nd Brigade) had received orders to hold the airfield until 10th January. Contact had been made with the enemy advancing along the coastal road and it was apparent there was a distinct threat from the north. On 30th December, whilst the bulk of the force was being redispersed west of the River Kuantan, the enemy attacked 'in greater strength than they had previously shown' (3). Events on the West Coast then had effect; the Brigade had to be withdrawn from Kuantan to prevent its communications being cut. Very heavy fighting took place (in which a Victoria Cross was won), and on the night 6/7th January the rearguard crossed the Jerantut ferry.

Ibid Paras.  
293, 294, 295,  
296, 298.

To revert now to the West Coast: on 4th January, 12th Brigade moved into the Trolak sector and 28th Brigade into the Slim River Village. All units were gravely deficient in both men and weapons, but even so the first attack on 5th January was repulsed. On the night 6/7th January a moonlight attack was made with at least thirty tanks. Although seven were destroyed the remainder broke through and, followed-up by infantry, covered 15 miles until their unimpeded progress to Kuala Lumpur was stopped by a single 4.5 inch howitzer! Withdrawal to Tanjong Malim now began with the remnants of the Division. Battalions in 12th Brigade could muster only one

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(1) These 'amphibious boat striking operations', as the Japanese termed them, were one of the marked features of the Campaign. Many of our strongholds could withstand a frontal attack, and realizing this the enemy planned for a boat striking force to sail along the West Coast in step with the main Yamashita Group. This amphibious force was manned by Army personnel alone, without naval escort; the majority of their craft must have been requisitioned as they moved down the coast and there is no doubt that the quantities of undamaged vessels in Penang Harbour gave them great advantage. They were extremely vulnerable to attack but the Japanese calculated that their opponents would never expect such operations in 'an area where they (the British) had command of the sea and air'!

(2) See 'The Retreat Commences'.

(3) The Japanese claim that Kuantan fell to the Takumi Force (that which had landed at Kota Bahru) on 31st December. This Force, after taking Kuala Krai, made a difficult advance through the jungle and they consider it was to these surprise tactics of attack from the rear they owed success. The airfield, the report goes on, was captured on 2nd January.

company each. The 28th Brigade had lost a complete battalion whilst the remaining two were reduced to half strength. As a fighting formation 11th Division had ceased to exist (1).

It was now planned to withdraw what remained of IIIrd Corps into Johore. For this purpose there were two main roads available:

Ibid, paras.  
306, 308, 309,  
310, 311, 312.

(a) The trunk road Kuala Lumpur - Serampan - Tampin - Gemas - Segamat.

(b) The coastal road, Klang - Merib - Port Dickson - Malacca.

Enemy Publi-  
cation No. 278.  
Page 37.

The 9th Division had the little - used road, Bentong - Durian Tipus - Kuala Pilah or Bahau - Tampin. Soon after dawn on 10th January the enemy attacked the 28th Brigade at Serendah and the troops were forced to withdraw to Tampin. They were followed through Kuala Lumpur by 6/15th Brigade, the last bridge in the Federal Capital being blown in the early morning of 11th January (2). The depleted 12th Brigade were in position on the Mantin Pass. Port Swettenham, on the coastal road, was evacuated on the afternoon of 10th January and the troops withdrawn to cover Port Dickson. On the night 12/13 January 6/15th Brigade withdrew to the Alor Gajah area and the remnants of 12th Brigade entrained at Gemas for Singapore. Malacca was covered by the 9th Division. By 14th January all troops of IIIrd Corps had passed either through Segamat or over the Muar ferry into Johore.

Percival  
Despatch  
Paras. 290,  
301, 337.

It had already been proposed by the Commander A.I.F. (Major General Gordon-Bennett) that he should have command of all troops in Johore. To this the G.O.C. had not agreed. On 10th January a conference was held at Segamat and as a result the troops in Johore were reorganised as follows:-

(a) West force (3) under General Gordon-Bennett, whose task it was to hold North-West Johore, the main line of resistance being Batu Anam - Muar.

(b) IIIrd Indian Corps (4) under General Sir Lewis Heath, was charged with the defence of Johore, South of a line Endau - Beremban - Kluang - Batu Pahat. At the

(1) The G.O.C. reports that during this period our troops were entirely without air support whereas the enemy maintained continuous air support not only for their troops but also for the craft moving down the West Coast.

(2) The fall of Kuala Lumpur, from the enemy viewpoint, marked the end of the first half of the Campaign. Their West and East Coast Forces joined at this stage. Airfields at Kuantan and Kuala Lumpur brought their bombers within range of Singapore, whilst the land forces were facing comparatively flat terrain of Southern Malaya.

(3) Westforce: 9th Indian Division.  
A.I.F. (less 22nd Australian Brigade.)  
45th Indian Brigade.  
2nd Battalion. The Royal Regiment (less one Company)  
Artillery, Engineer and Administrative Units.  
The Indian Pioneer Battalion.

(4) IIIrd Indian Corps:  
11th Division  
22nd Australian Brigade } to be known as "East-  
2/17th Dogra Battalion } force"  
Corps troops, which included Artillery,  
Engineer and Administrative Units.

15th January the strength of these forces may be summarized as:-

Eastforce: one Brigade at full strength.  
 Westforce: one strong Division.  
 11th Division: equivalent to  $1\frac{1}{2}$  Brigades.  
 Singapore Fortress: two weak Infantry Brigades and the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force.  
 Fixed and A.A. Defences: full strength.  
 Command Reserve: one Brigade.

Having drawn a general picture of the fortunes of the land forces it will now be the aim to show in some detail, how air operations were integrated with these Army tactics.

In order to take advantage of the slight depth of defence offered by the Stations in Southern Johore, A.H.Q. made every effort to exploit their comparatively forward positions. Each evening Kluang received a flight of three Dutch Glen Martins for night flying training; the return to Sembawang was made next morning. Dive bombing practice was also recommenced by the Wirraway Flight at this Station by dropping practice bombs on the dummy landing ground. Then the satellite airfield at Batu Pahat was to be opened as a night landing ground for refuelling after raids. Two Blenheims of Nos. 62 and 27 Squadrons had visited the airfield on 28th December and considered its 1400 yard runway suitable for night flying even though no control organisation existed. Subsequently, orders were given for its opening on 1st January 1942. At the same time it was decided that Tebrau should be used. On 2nd January six Sharks and two Blenheim I's of No. 4 A.A.C.U. were ordered to move to Batu Pahat; these aircraft, less one Shark, arrived that evening. This allowed a wider dispersal, throughout the night, for the remaining aircraft at Tengah. Next morning the detachment returned to the Island, and thereafter repeated the move each evening.

Even though these Johore airfields were in use adequate preparation had to be made for their possible destruction. On Kluang the demolition scheme was completed by 1st January naval mines and bombs being used. Kahang and Batu Pahat were also ready; in the case of the former 112 lb. and 250 lb. bombs were in position. Similar explosives were employed at Kuala Lumpur, but at that time the special bombs for Port Swettenham were only just about to leave Singapore. Petrol, on this station, was to be reduced to two thousand gallons, whilst ammunition and bombs were to be returned to Singapore (1).

Coupled with this reorganisation, long-distance bombing operations were undertaken against Sungei Patani upon which airfield the Japanese had stationed approximately one hundred aircraft. Six Blenheims of No. 34 (B) Squadron were briefed for a night raid on 27th December. All the aircraft returned

IIJ50/4  
 Entries d/d  
 27, 28, 31.  
 Dec. 41., 1,  
 2, 3, Jan. 42.

IIJ53/5  
 'C.E.O's War  
 Diary'

Entry d/d  
 3 Jan. 42

IIJ50/4  
 Entries d/d  
 27, 28 Dec. 41.  
29, 30, 31.

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(1) The A.O.C. had been misinformed as to the exact size of Port Swettenham airfield. With a 1000-yard grass strip he had considered it as a relief for Kuala Lumpur, but when it transpired the runway was only 700 yards its value diminished to that of a force-landing ground. His orders were for it to be prepared for demolition at the shortest notice. It was saved from immediate destruction only by the need to avoid the spread of alarm and despondency in Port Swettenham itself.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2014 Enc. 21a.

safely after the attack which started large fires in the target area. Claims by the Squadron amounted to fifteen aircraft destroyed and several badly damaged. So successful was this raid that it was repeated the following night by a further six Blenheims crewed by Nos. 34 and 62 Squadrons flying personnel. This was not such a success as the previous attack; three aircraft returned owing to bad weather or engine trouble (one of the latter was replaced). Three of No. 34 (B) Squadron delivered their attack but on return to Tengah one of the bombers collided with a Buffalo. One Blenheim failed to return and a coastal search by two Swordfish revealed no trace. A further raid was to have been mounted on 30th December, this time by three aircraft leaving at irregular intervals. But they never took-off for at 2000 hrs. Tengah was raided by the Japanese themselves, who, besides putting the airfield unserviceable for night flying, damaged three Blenheim IV's (1). Simultaneously with this Blenheim operation a raid by two Catalinas of No. 205 (F.B.) Squadron had been staged. The first aircraft was to take-off at 1620 hrs. and the second an hour later with loads of sixteen 250 lb. G.P. bombs. After these had been dropped it was proposed the Catalinas should adopt a low-flying role to machine gun suitable targets! The task of arming the flying boats (which normally carried A/S and S.A.P. bombs) was long and difficult especially as no proper winch was available. Consequently the first Catalina was late off, and after a five hour flight arrived over the target at 2229 hours. Subsequently P.R. reports showed only two craters and no enemy aircraft destroyed.

IIJ53/4  
'205 Sqdn.  
Diary':  
page 12

Gong Kedah was the next airfield to be raided by the Catalinas. On 1st January two flying boats were ordered to destroy the runway with eight 500 lb. bombs each, one aircraft dropping from 6000 ft. and the other as low as 1500 feet. The first Catalina had only slight A.A. opposition and having dropped the full bomb load, left two enemy aircraft burning. The second was not so positive for the visibility was obscured by smoke. Damage was inflicted by A.A. fire, but by jettisoning all equipment the aircraft managed to return to Seletar on one engine. As a result of this raid the Squadron Commander recommended that future raids should be made in formation, dropping the bombs in one run from 4000 feet.

IIJ50/4  
Entries d/d  
1, 2, 5 Jan.

IIJ50/10  
'Aircraft  
Casualties'

These strikes were isolated instances in the general conception of air operations, which, at this time were predominantly on the defensive. Under these strained circumstances it is not surprising that mistakes were made in aircraft recognition. On 28th December a Blenheim of No. 62 (B) Squadron was shot down over the sea off Port Swettenham by our own A.A. fire. A suggestion was then made to the effect that this area as well as Kuala Lumpur should be prohibited, but this was not acceptable to A.H.Q. Instead, instructions were given to all Stations for aircraft to carry and use Very pistols and the correct recognition cartridges, and in addition to flash their identification letter. Even more acute difficulties beset the Dutch aircraft for the orange triangle on the fuselage as well as both upper and lower surfaces of the mainplanes was easily confused with the Japanese marking. Three Glen Martins, returning from a West Coast reconnaissance on 27th December were attacked by a Buffalo from Kallang; as this was the second occurrence of such an incident the Dutch pilots 'were most upset'! Schemes were in hand to paint suitably distinctive markings but it was not until 2nd January that A.H.Q. directed this additional precaution.

IIJ 50/4  
Entries d/d  
28, 29 Dec.  
1 Jan.

(1) See also 'Air Attacks on Singapore are Resumed.'



was to take the form of 'a broad, pale blue band around the fuselage forward of the orange triangle.'

Ibid  
Entries d/d  
31 Dec. ,  
1, 2 Jan.

On 1st January the line of unrestricted attack on surface vessels on the West Coast was defined as the Dindings River; naval authorities considered there were no friendly ships north of Sungei Bernam. In response to requests from IIIrd Corps armed reconnaissance flights were made but lack of fighter escort, in two cases, proved their undoing. Three Glen Martins, with orders to attack any shipping north of the Dindings left Sembawang in the early morning of 1st January. Two were shot down by fighters in the Port Swettenham area. At first it was alleged that one of these Dutch bombers had been attacked by two R.A.F. Buffaloes but later the surviving Dutch pilot considered the attackers 'may have been Zeros'.  
(1).

Enemy Publi-  
cation No. 278  
page 31.

At the same time as the Glen Martins were lost, two Blenheim I's of No. 62 (B) Squadron took-off from Kluang to bomb and machine-gun two launches towing small craft off the Berman River as well as four other boats grounded near Kuala Perak. Warning of enemy aircraft was given but the Blenheims were never seen again (2).

IIJ50/4  
Entries d/d  
2 Jan. 42.

When, on the afternoon of 2nd January, reports from Kuala Selanger indicated the arrival of an enemy amphibious force off the coast no air support could be given by the R.A.F. owing to the likelihood of other commitments. As a result of this landing the airfield at Port Swettenham was ordered to prepare for demolition at first light 3rd January. This was in fact done although at 0955 hrs. it was reported that some of the gelignite, through being damp, had failed to explode.

Some measure of air support was given, however, when on the night of 2nd January three Blenheim IV's were ordered to attack three ships anchored off Morib. The aircraft arrived singly over the target area, but even from a comparatively low altitude and in good visibility no ships were seen. The next night the operation was repeated; any vessels north of Morib were to be attacked (3) and Sungei Patani was an alternative target. Vessels were bombed at Penang, but one Blenheim failed to return.

IIJ50/4  
Entries d/d  
1, 2, 3 Jan.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2014 Encs. 10a,  
13a.

Meanwhile on 3rd January, the first reinforcement convoy had arrived at Singapore and the 45th Indian Infantry Brigade was safely landed (4). Extreme measures were taken to maintain the secrecy of the movements of this and subsequent convoys. Few detailed records were made and even these studiously refrained from any direct references. It can be established, however, that the Dutch Fighter Squadron at Kallang moved to Palembang on 29th December for the purpose of protecting the ships as they moved through the extremely vulnerable Banka Straits. Intense reconnaissance activity took place for the three days preceding the arrival of the convoys. On 1st and 2nd January Hudsons of Nos. 1 and 8 Squadrons flew 'endless chain' patrols out to the Natuna

(1) The Japanese amphibious forces did indeed have adequate air cover.

(2) According to the Japanese, several boats were lost as a result of this operation.

(3) By this time the bomb line had been moved down to Port Dickson.

(4) This was a newly formed brigade, only semi trained, and with no experience of jungle warfare.

Islands, and on the third day carried out parallel track searches due south of Singapore. Catalinas and Dutch Glen Martins were similarly used (1). As the convoy made its final approach on Singapore A.H.Q. (with the C-in-C's concurrence) directed that the top fighter priority should be for the ships - the defence of Singapore itself, in the event of a raid, would have to be entrusted to what remained of the fighter force. In a similar manner all available aircraft were kept at short notice as a striking force should the convoy be attacked by enemy naval forces (2). This was in conformity with G.H.Q. Instruction No. 3. which ruled that 'air protection for the convoys.....will take precedence before other tasks'. In these circumstances there was no alternative but to use aircraft which otherwise might have been employed in direct air support of the retreating land forces.

IIJ50/3  
Enc. 9a d/d  
27 Dec. 41.

Maltby  
Despatch  
Paras. 272-  
276

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2014 Enc. 13a.  
p.50.

Percival  
Despatch  
Paras. 330,  
332.

Arrangements for the arrival of the second convoy on 13th January were very similar, but on this occasion the reinforcements were even more substantial. From first light on 13th all available fighters were employed to protect the convoy as it reached Keppel Harbour. At the time one hundred enemy aircraft were reported in the vicinity, but the extremely bad weather completely obscured the ships. The fifty-one crated Hurricanes, from S.S. Sussex together with twenty-four pilots of No. 232 (F) Squadron were disembarked after their remarkable voyage from Durban (3). Army reinforcements included 53rd Infantry Brigade (of 18th Division)(4) which had left U.K. in October, also bound for the Middle East, but which had been diverted en route. The voyage had lasted eleven weeks.

Maltby  
Despatch  
Para. 276.

Air Vice Marshal P.C. Maltby, who had arrived at Singapore on 4th January remarks upon 'the sense of tension which prevailed as these convoys approached Singapore, and the exultation at their safe arrival'. 'It was the feeling,' he continues, 'that at least the Japanese were going to be held on the ground if not driven back, whilst many confidently expected the Hurricanes would sweep the Japanese from the sky'.

IIJ50/4  
Entries d/d  
2, 4 Jan. 42.

An account of the limited air operations of this period would be incomplete without reference to the P.R.U. which continued, with practically no interruption, to make daily reconnaissance flights. Many of these long trips were almost a matter of routine, but frequently new and valuable information was obtained and whenever cloud formations permitted, photographs taken. For example, on 1st January, an East Coast flight revealed twenty-eight vessels off Singora, ninety small craft at the quays and twenty-seven aircraft on the airfield. Lower down the coast, at Trengganu, seventy small vessels were plotted. Again on 4th January the P.R.U. report showed no less than one hundred small craft in Penang Harbour.

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- (1) The daily average of aircraft so employed was two Catalinas, six Hudsons and four Glen Martins.
  - (2) At Palembang alone twenty-four Glen Martins stood-by as a striking force.
  - (3) See also 'Air Reinforcements Begin to Arrive'.
  - (4) Total Army re-inforcements:-
    - 53rd Brigade
    - Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment
    - Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment
    - Anti-Tank Regiment.

Ibid  
 Entries d/d  
 5 Jan.

IIJ53/5;  
 Entries at  
 4, 5, 6, Jan.

On 5th January, with the decisive battle of the Slim River in progress and the threat against Kuala Lumpur developing, A.H.Q.'s policy in regard to the few up-country stations underwent a drastic change. Only the day previously new Station Commanders had been appointed to Batu Pahat and Kluang. Both stations were to be used only as advanced landing grounds, whilst Kahang would be open for refuelling only. The practice of flying aircraft from Tengah to Batu Pahat each evening and returning to the Island at first light next morning was to continue, but all surplus personnel and equipment was to be withdrawn. A similar arrangement was made for Kluang, from which No. 62 (B) Squadron withdrew their five serviceable Blenheim I's on the morning of 6th January and returned to Tengah. Orders had already been given on the 4th for the move of No. 153 M.U. to Singapore (preparatory to a final evacuation to Java) to be completed with the utmost despatch. The airfield was to be retained solely for refuelling, whilst the mobile Repair and Salvage section would move down to Kluang. From this Station the Wirraway Flight had orders to transfer to Tebrau, but later, on 7th January this was altered to Kahang. Even so there was a delay for the roads and aircraft pens at this airfield were unsuitable for Wirraways and all the necessary enlarging had to be done by the R.A.F. in the total absence of coolie labour.

The tempo of air operations now speeded-up considerably; between the 8th and 12th January a series of what might be termed 'strategical' bombing raids took place, which, considering the small numbers of aircraft involved, yielded good results. The Army had fallen back behind the River Bernam by 8th January and with the experience gained from previous coastal infiltrations, recommended the immediate denial of all small craft along the whole Malacca coastline<sup>(1)</sup>. At the same time IIIrd Corps called for air reconnaissance as far north as the River Bernam. This was carried out by Buffaloes from Sembawang; and again on 9th and 10th four aircraft of No. 243 (F) Squadron flew on a similar operation in the Slim River and Kuala Selangor areas.

IIJ50/4  
 Entries d/d  
 Jan. 8, 9.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
 2014 Enc. 10a.

IIJ50/4  
 Entries at  
 8, 9, 10, 11,  
 15, Jan.

Thereafter the strikes were further afield. On the 8th four Hudsons attacked a Japanese beam radio ship, the Momu Maru, off the coast of Trengganu. As well as machine gun fire four direct hits were claimed, but the 250 lb. G.P. bombs simply bounced off the heavy armour. Nevertheless, the ship's crew sent out an urgent radio message in 'plain language' asking for help. This was answered by Sembawang sending off six Glen Martins, which, unfortunately, failed to locate the vessel. Next day the Hudsons went off again, but the ship had made good its escape.

During the night 7/8 January two Catalinas carried out another raid on Gong Kedah. Unfavourable weather partly spoiled the operation: one aircraft, after circling the target area returned with its bombs, whilst the other dropped eight bombs on to a runway through a gap in the clouds.

IIJ50/30/4  
 Signal A.529  
 d/d 11 Jan.

On the following night 9/10th January, there were three simultaneously mounted operations. No. 34 (B) Squadron sent six Blenheim IV's to Sungei Patani. Three aircraft returned

(1) As a result the Civil Government issued orders for the removal or destruction of such craft but only as far south as Malacca Settlement.

IIJ50/4  
 Entries d/d  
 8,9,10,11,  
 12,13,15. Jan.

owing to bad weather but two pressed on to the target to start several fires. One Blenheim was lost. From Seletar went twelve Vildebeestes of No. 36 (T.B.) Squadron, fitted with long-range tanks, to bomb the airfield at Ipoh with twenty 250 lb. and eight 500 lb. bombs. These started three big fires visible for 50 miles <sup>(1)</sup>. One of the Vildebeestes, unable to locate the target, bombed a column of M.T. vehicles. There were no casualties from the heavy A.A. fire over the airfield, but one aircraft force-landed owing to fuel shortage. Four Catalinas of No. 205 (F.B.) Squadron made a long-distance raid on Singora to attack railway yards and storage areas; armament for each flying-boat consisted of eight 500 lb. G.P. bombs. One aircraft was unable to locate the target, but the other three unloaded all their bombs on the marshalling yards and started several fires. All the Catalinas returned safely to Seletar after flights of nearly 12 hours. A similar operation was mounted on the night 12/13 January with three Catalinas. Results of this raid are not recorded, but one flying boat was lost.

IIJ50/4  
 Entries d/d  
 8,9,14. Jan.

It is inevitable that reference must be made once again to the P.R.U. activities which continued daily through this period under review. Two Buffaloes were now in use, one for long-range and the other for short-range flights. There was a tendency, when the weather precluded high altitude photography, for these aircraft to be used for visual reconnaissance. This practice was stopped by A.H.Q. as such was considered an unwarrantable risk in view of the shortage of these particular aircraft. Extremely useful information was obtained on 8th January when fifty enemy aircraft as well as four A.A. installations were photographed on Ipoh airfield. And such flights were not always undisputed: on 9th January a P.R. Buffalo was damaged in an encounter with a Zero 50 miles north of Kuantan.

IIJ50/4  
 Entries d/d  
 9,11. Jan. 42.

With the fall of Kuala Lumpur imminent the Commander IIIrd Corps, on the morning of 9th January, considered it essential for the demolition of the airfield to be ordered without further delay. By the same evening such instructions were put into effect and shortly after midnight on 10th January the former Station Commander was able to report that the airfield was 'well and truly blown, with booby traps in position'. No. 153 M.U. was given final instructions for the ultimate move to Djocartarta in Java. Port Swettenham was next to be evacuated and by 1600 hrs. 11th January A.H.Q. received a report that IIIrd Corp and the Navy had destroyed all petrol stocks of both the Asiatic Petroleum Company and R.A.F. This could not have been true however, for by evening Malaya Command required the R.A.F. to bomb these oil installations! (2) A.H.Q. detailed Tengah to send three Blenheim I's to finish the job with 250 lbs. and incendiary bombs. Three Blenheims left early on 13th, but two returned owing to technical and weather difficulties.

IIJ50/17/8  
 Signal No. 78.

Enemy Publication, No. 278  
 p.p. 33. 34.

This narrative must now focus upon Kuantan on the East Coast, which, as already recounted, the Japanese claim to have captured on 2nd January. A convoy bringing ammunition to this Force arrived off Kuantan on the morning of 7th January. On the following day these ships were located

(1) Subsequently, on 14th January, a P.R.U. reconnaissance reported that the damage appeared negligible.

(2) Reports are somewhat conflicting on this issue. In response to an inquiry from the Colonial Office, the Governor stated that he had been advised that 95 per cent of the A.P.C.'s stocks had been denied by the Navy.

IIJ50/4  
 Entries d/d  
 8,9 Jan.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
 2014 Enc. 13a,  
 page 49

by the Glen Martins (which had failed to find the beam radio vessel). Six Dutch bombers were ordered off at first light on 9th January to deliver an attack, but on take-off one collided with a Hudson and was burned-out. Only three went to Kuantan, but a direct hit on a large ship with the 100 Kilo bombs was claimed (1). Another attack was made that afternoon but no results are recorded.

It was then decided to make a low-flying attack on Kuantan. Sembawang was required to send fourteen Buffaloes to Kluang that evening with the object of taking off at first light next morning for the attack; six Blenheims of No. 62 (B) Squadron were also to take part. After these aircraft had left Tengah it was realized that Kluang was not completely serviceable because of rain - a fact which was duly confirmed when two of the Buffaloes nosed over! Subsequently the operation had to be abandoned owing to low cloud and mist. The Station Commander at Sembawang was eager to repeat this raid, but when on 11th January a further attempt was made with four Buffaloes low cloud once again prevented the attack.

IIJ50/4  
 Entry d/d  
 12 Jan. 42.  
 et seq.

In order to detect further infiltrations down the East Coast (which might well precede a major landing in the Endau - Mersing area) A.H.Q. ordered daily coastal reconnaissances. These were flown from 12th January onwards by Nos. 1 and 8 (G.R.) Squadrons. Often as many as six Hudsons as well as two Glen Martins were employed over the stretch of coast between Endau and the Redang Islands.

IIJ50/3  
 Enc. 10a

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
 2014 Enc. 10a,  
 13a.

When the Army crossed into Northern Johore on 14th January the Japanese were barely 100 miles from their final objective. The urgency of the situation demanded a maximum of air support from the R.A.F. which was given to the utmost of their capacity, especially as the convoy commitment was temporarily relaxed. Coastal infiltrations had intensified and on the afternoon of the 15th a comparatively large striking force was ordered to attack eighteen boats being towed in the Linggi River estuary. Six Hudsons of Nos. 1 and 8 (G.R.) Squadrons together with six Glen Martins, and three Blenheim IV's of No. 34 (B) Squadron were escorted by twelve Buffaloes. Reports on this action are vague; Australian sources state that the targets were never located.

IIJ50/4  
 Entries d/d  
 15,16,17,  
 18. Jan. 42

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
 2024 Enc. 9a

By this time the final evacuation of Batu Pahat was drawing near. Close liaison was maintained with the local military commander and all available M.T. mustered. At mid-day on 16th January the airfield, which held no aircraft, was ready for blowing. Between the town and the airfield was a force of one hundred and fifty Japanese so that the order from the A.O.C. to commence the demolitions came as no surprise. On the following morning Kluang was instructed to report on this operation and it was confirmed that the airfield and all fuel had been destroyed. Yet early on the 18th January Kluang reported a salvage party was returning to Batu Pahat at dawn to complete the demolitions!

Meanwhile, tactical support by Buffaloes was arranged for 16th January in respect to the Tempin - Gemas road. This precluded a similar operation against Kuantan which was still being contemplated for the Sembawang Fighters. Orders were

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(1) The Japanese state that two attacks were made: one on 7th and the other on 9th. In the first attack one ship was sunk, after which the convoy moved north to Kemaman. Here the second attack was received and one ship hit.

Percival  
Despatch  
Paras. 347.

Enemy Publi-  
cation No. 278  
p.p. 38, 39, 40.

given for all available Buffaloes, (totalling fifteen) of No. 21/543 (F) Squadron to have at first light to strafe everything moving on the road. Besides this force of Buffaloes, Tengah had to send a maximum number of Blenheims (nine in all) to the area, armed with 40 lb. bombs and escorted by No. 488 (F) Squadron. Similarly, six Glen Martins, carrying 100 kilo bombs, were to be sent off from Sembawang covered by No. 21/453 Squadron Buffaloes. This concerted action was in support of a major ambush laid at Gemas by the 2/30th Australian Battalion. Here great slaughter was done, the enemy losing between four hundred and five hundred men as well as eight or nine tanks. The G.O.C. states that 'the R.A.F. co-operated gallantly in this action'.

On this same day (16th) four Buffaloes did good work against seven barges on the Muar River estuary as well as forty barges off Ketapang. These were strafed at the request of the Army and heavy casualties to personnel inflicted.

Operations continued in this energetic manner when on 17th January nine Vildebeestes took-off with 250 G.P. bombs to attack any vessels sixty miles northwards of Batu Pahat. An escort of six Buffaloes was provided from Sembawang and on the return flight these fighters claimed the destruction of three enemy aircraft which had attacked the Torpedo-bombers.

Three Blenheim IV's carried out a low-flying attack on troops east of Gemas on the morning of 18th January; they were escorted by four Buffaloes from Sembawang. Marshalling yards at Gemas were also successfully bombed. In their endeavours to bomb accurately the Blenheims were dived as low as 250 feet, which in one case resulted in damage to the aircraft itself and a subsequent crash on return to base. One of the bombers was shot down over the sea north of Batu Pahat by six Navy Zeros. The crew escaped injury even though they were machine-gunned whilst in the water; they in turn claimed damage to three of the enemy. That same day three Hudsons of No. 8 G.R. Squadron with three escorting Buffaloes attacked shipping in the River Muar. Results were unobserved but one Hudson crashed on landing and one Buffalo was missing.

Meanwhile there had been certain redispositions of the air forces. The release of the N.E.I. Buffalo Squadron had been required by South-West Pacific Command to meet Dutch needs and in consequence, on 17th January, A.H.Q. gave instructions for their return to Buitenzorg. The composite No. 21/453 (F) Squadron was separated into two units: No. 21 Squadron remained under A.H.Q. for Army Co-Operation duties whilst No. 453 Squadron was to be controlled by the Fighter Group through Sembawang. Finally on 16th January the Wirraway Flight, still at Kluang, was ordered to bomb up with armour piercing and fragmentation bombs - a project which surely emphasized the urgent need for every available aircraft to be used in an operational role.

Book - 'The  
Army Air Force  
in World War  
II' Page 379

Upon such an alarming note this account of the air operations in support of a desperately resisting Army must end. Not all of the operations have been recounted (1). There were many, in particular those of the Buffaloes, of which only the

(1) No R.A.F. account can be found of the - U.S.A.A.F. raid on Sungei Patani. On 14th January seven B17's flew from Malang (Java) to Palembang to refuel and arm. After take-off on 15th January two aircraft were forced to return but the other five reached the target to make some twenty hits resulting in fires.

vague information was recorded. The mounting tempo of events left little time for such details. But none the less, the effort was there, and as will be shown later, it was intensified as every day brought the Japanese nearer to their final victory.

#### Summary

Air operations in Borneo were but a minor part of the Far East campaigns. The country was only lightly defended and in consequence its main asset - the oil wells - was destroyed by 11th December. The undetected Japanese invasion fleet suffered little damage at the hands of the small Dutch air unit at Sinkawang which was ultimately forced to withdraw to Sumatra.

In Malaya the unexpected speed of the enemy advance caused G.H.Q. to revise drastically the defence plans for the South. It was now a question of delaying action until the promised reinforcements arrived. Concentration upon the remaining few airfields together with a wide range of commitments demanded a more adequate dispersal of the air forces. Sumatra was the obvious choice but its many limitations precluded immediate use despite the wishes of the Chiefs of Staff who conceived it to be a potential stronghold. But it was inevitable that the striking forces ultimately would have to operate from the N.E.I. so intensive measures were put in hand to prepare Sumatra both as a section of the air reinforcement route as well as a bomber base. It must be remembered how this policy had first been advanced by A.H.Q. in June, 1941, but the many delays and the leisurely conception of the need for 'air' development had allowed the Dutch airfields to remain in the same state of insufficiency. And it must not be forgotten how earlier deliberations (in 1936) at Government level would never admit of any active co-operations with the Dutch.

After the evacuation of Kuala Lumpur airfield air operations went over to the defensive. Certain redispersions of Units on Singapore emphasized the trend to concentrate all available air resources to the best advantage. And in the High Command, as the result of pre-war decisions, the C-in-C was replaced by an Army Officer.

Air reinforcements were slow in arriving. A desperate call had gone out on the outbreak of hostilities: the Air Ministry response was in the form of a somewhat hasty promise of a generous measure of all types of aircraft. But there were to be many delays. Kittyhawks from the Middle East source were operationally untried; the air route to Singapore not only took grave toll of the few Blenheims spared from Egypt but imposed many hold-ups upon the U.K. based Hudsons. The major contribution, in fact, was the ultimate diversion of a Hurricane Wing whilst still at sea; but this did not arrive at Singapore until mid January. Indeed, the only immediate measure of support was a small quantity of replacements sent from Australia and the N.E.I. Had the Far East route - first envisaged as long ago as 1926 - been kept in constant use by periodical flights, even of token numbers, the experience gained and recorded might well have been used to great advantage when the final emergency arose.

January saw the intensification of air operations on the West Coast in support of the fast retreating Army. IIIrd Corps had fallen back through Ipoh to Kampar but coastal infiltrations had reduced this strong point and forced another withdrawal to the Slim River. Here the unexpected action of enemy tanks had won the day. In the East, Kuantan fell to an

exactly opposite manoeuvre for instead of the expected sea-borne landing the Japanese successfully broke through the jungle from the North. In the fighting before Kuala Lumpur 11th Division almost ceased to exist and in consequence IIIrd Corps was withdrawn into Johore to refit, whilst the Australians went up to the front line.

A.H.Q. was now exploiting the use of its remaining airfields in Southern Malaya. At the same time long-distance night bombing was undertaken against enemy occupied airfields, but only limited patrols could be flown up the West Coast on account of the priority task of escorting the reinforcement convoys. However, with the second convoy safely in on 13th January and the needs of the retreating land forces becoming more urgent every day the R.A.F. was able to give a much fuller measure of close support to the Army as well as to increase the strategic bombing of distant airfields. These tasks were made easier by the very proximity of the enemy to Singapore, yet this same momentum brought in its train a new threat of invasion in the vulnerable Mersing area and in consequence a need for unceasing air reconnaissances.



AIR ATTACKS ON SINGAPORE ARE RESUMED

A short account must now be given of an aspect of the Campaign which substantially effected both civilian and service communities alike. Bombing raids on the Island recommenced on 30th December. As already shown, the first raid had taken place during the early hours of 8th December when damage had been done to the City and the airfields(1). Thereafter Singapore enjoyed a respite from such activities and it was not until 29th December that enemy bombers again flew in strength so far south. On this day long-distance attacks on the airfields began with a raid on Kluang by approximately eighteen enemy aircraft(2). To judge from the pattern of ensuing raids it is evident the Japanese were first concentrating upon the destruction of the Singapore airfields(3). Seletar was bombed at 0055 hours 30th December; the formation consisted of nine aircraft (which proved to be the strength of the majority of the subsequent night raids). No damage was recorded but on the same evening, (at 2000 hours) Tengah was not so fortunate when craters were made in the runway and three Blenheim IV's put out of action.

This was followed by an attack on the night of 31st December when twenty-seven aircraft flew over the Island; and there was a further raid just before dawn on 1st January by at least four bombers. No bombs fell on the airfields. Anti-aircraft fire, according to the Operations Room staff appeared to be "extremely inaccurate". Such an observation may, of course, have been biased, yet an American news correspondent expressly mentions the poor standard of the A.A. shooting.

These small raids by night continued to be directed against Tengah which, it would seem, the Japanese fully realised was the base for the offensive Blenheims. In the main they were of a nuisance value, but even so, the small number of aircraft engaged inflicted a fair amount of damage(4). For example, at 2136 hours 1st January about five aircraft managed to destroy two Swordfish (of No. 4 A.A.C.U.) and damage two others, as well as put the runway unserviceable. Again in the early hours of next morning a force of only a pair of raiders damaged two Blenheim I's with a mixed load of bombs(5).

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- (1) See also: 'First Bombs on Singapore'.
  - (2) A full report on this raid can be read at 'Defensive Preparations in Southern Malaya'.
  - (3) A Japanese estimate of our air strength at the beginning of January was: Fighters - sixty; Bombers - twenty; and Flying Boats - ten. It was believed, however, that the air strength in Singapore was growing and it was on this account the surprise night attacks were ordered. Such raids, up to 9th January were made by the 3rd and 7th Air Brigades. Naval Units participated up to 3rd January. (For actual air strengths at 3rd, 10th and 18th January see Appendices VII, VIII, IX.)
  - (4) According to Japanese reports the night attacks were mainly by Light Bombers which approached from the Straits of Malacca then glided in to dive-bomb the easily recognised targets. By this means a measure of surprise was achieved and no aircraft were lost.
  - (5) Bombs dropped (approximate numbers)
    - Four 100 kilo.
    - Six 50 kilo. incendiaries
    - Five 50 kilo. blast
    - Twenty 10/15 kilo anti-personnel

IIJ50/4  
Entries dated 30,  
31 Dec.  
1, 2, 3, 5 Jan.

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page 5

IIJ53/8  
"Japanese Air Ops.  
in Malaya" pp. 59,  
60, 61.

"Suez to Singapore"  
by Cecil Brown.  
page 383.

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in Malaya"

IIJ53/8

There was to be no respite for on the same night (2nd January) even though the other Stations were not effected, the Operations Room at Tengah suffered a direct hit, other buildings were damaged and four M.T. vehicles destroyed.

Thereafter the Japanese switched these night raids to other targets. Three enemy aircraft flew over the Island at 2130 hours 3rd January and dropped a few bombs on a village which burst a water main. They were picked up by the searchlights but once again the A.A. was ineffectual. Kluang suffered badly in the early morning of 5th January. First came a single aircraft to drop six 100 kilo. bombs; these did practically no damage possibly because the clay soil cushioned the explosion. Four hours later, at 0925 hours, eleven bombers came over, escorted by three fighters<sup>(1)</sup>. This time the result was more serious: One Blenheim I was burned out and another damaged. Three Wirraways were destroyed and three damaged. Singapore itself was also bombed on this particular morning; at 0430 hours two aircraft dropped bombs near Kallang, killing six and injuring seven Asiatics.

IIJ50/17/8  
Telegram d/d  
5 Jan. et seq.

The possibility of the existence of lights to guide the Japanese, first reported on 1st January, was now taken up and Seletar required to send off a Vildebeeste after dark on 5th January to report on lights in the Singapore Straits and on the north-east corner of Pulo Bintang<sup>(2)</sup>.

IIJ50/4  
Entries d/d  
6, 9, 12 Jan.  
41.

These nuisance raids continued on 6th January when a small force bombed from above 20,000 feet cloud layer; there were no casualties and little damage. A further attack on the city occurred at 0400 hours 9th December in which six people were killed by the three or four bombs dropped. After this there seems to have been a lull for although there were frequent warnings no record of bombing has been made<sup>(3)</sup>.

IIJ53/8  
'Japanese Air  
Operations in  
Malaya' pp. 61,  
62, 63, 64, 65,  
66, 70.

A message from Batu Pahat on the morning of 12th January heralded the second of the day raids<sup>(4)</sup> - twenty-three Army 97's escorted by approximately eight fighters were seen heading towards Singapore. They reached the Island at 1245 hours. Dutch fighters from Kallang made an interception and claim to have shot down three fighters for the loss of one Buffalo.

(1) These fighters, thought to be ME.109's, were fitted with extra petrol tanks, which were afterwards jettisoned.

(2) Quite apart from this reconnaissance the report of a Sembawang pilot on the night of 6th January discloses serious discrepancies in the "Black-Out". This was 'getting worse and worse' and was nowhere nearly as effective as during peace time practices. The City and the Naval Base were particularly bad; a large light showed near Tengah. Navigation lights disclosed a channel in the Singapore Straits, and on Pulo Bintang two strong lights were burning on the North coast.

(3) At this stage the Japanese were preparing for their 'annihilating' attacks upon the air defences of Singapore. Simultaneous operations were to be conducted by the Army and Navy Air Forces. The former was to comprise the 3rd, 7th and 12th Air Brigades based on Kuantan and the Kota Bahru area. Their targets were Tengah and Kallang airfields. Naval aircraft were to operate from Saigon, Sungei Patani and Kota Bahru their targets being Seletar, Sembawang and shipping. Initially, three assaults were planned, starting on 11th January.

(4) Earlier on, at 0812 hours, there had been a raid of sixty-seven + enemy aircraft; in all probability this was the occasion referred to in the Governor's telegram, when there had been seven civilian casualties.

IIJ50/10  
 Entries at  
 16 Jan. 42  
 IIJ50/9

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 Encl. 50

IIJ50/30/4  
 Signal  
 A544

Another raid quickly followed when, at 1442 hours thirty-five enemy aircraft returned to their familiar target at Tengah; the bombing fortunately was not very accurate. But in the course of the day the fighter defences had suffered grievous loss: No. 488 and 243 (F) Squadrons had five Buffaloes destroyed and two damaged with one pilot killed and one missing. Six Japanese Army 97 fighters were claimed as destroyed, in addition to four 'probables' (1).

Having gauged the strength of the air defences the Japanese pressed home their attacks with mounting intensity. On 13th, it will be remembered, an additional and highly important target was presented in the shape of the incoming re-inforcement convoys. One hundred enemy aircraft were reported over the Island, states the Officer Commanding Sembawang (2), but due to the rapidly deteriorating weather the bombers were unable to locate the ships. 'As if ordered especially for the protection of this convoy', the report goes on, 'the weather for the next twenty-four hours transpired to be the worst since R.A.A.F. Units had been in Malaya, and this circumstance undoubtedly saved the convoy'. This is borne out by the Governor's telegram to Whitehall which, after reporting the one hundred and eighty one casualties, specifically mentions that the enemy could not have seen their targets in the rain and cloud. Four Buffaloes were lost and one damaged from the two defending Squadrons.

Twelve aircraft came over at 1050 hours on 14th January but although they were intercepted at 19,000 feet by No. 488 (F) Squadron, the Buffaloes could claim only one damaged. Next day the Japanese concentrated upon military targets (3): The Naval Base was hit - but not seriously - at 0936 hours when fourteen bombs of 50/60 kilos, as well as incendiaries, were dropped. There was no major damage but seven Asiatics were killed and amongst the twenty-two injured were two naval ratings. Almost simultaneously with this raid Tengah was attacked by twenty-seven high level bombers which damaged the Domestic area, Operations Room and Station Headquarters. Contrasting with this a low-flying attack was delivered in the

(1) It is extremely difficult to reconcile this account with the Japanese record of the operations; although their plans are shown in great detail only the briefest mention is made of results. For instance, it is simply stated that the first days attacks were delivered on 12th January and 'enemy aircraft did not take any positive action - consequently only sixteen were shot down'. On the other hand, the plan for this first phase called for a total force of thirty heavy bombers and one hundred and ten fighters to be flown from Kuantan and the Kota Bahru area. For the second phase (on the same day) the Army was to supply seventy fighters from Kuantan and the Navy a force of fifty-four medium bombers from Kota Bahru and Saigon, together with twenty fighters from Kota Bahru.

(2) The enemy force did indeed consist of eighty-one bombers and twenty Zeros.

(3) According to Japanese sources it was because of the lack of resistance that objectives were changed, from 14th January onwards, and the Japanese air forces ordered to concentrate upon "military key-points in Singapore city and to mop-up the remaining air power in the Singapore district". The forces to be used were as follows:-

Army: Heavy Bombers - sixty from Alor Star and Butterworth  
 Type 1 fighters - Forty from Ipoh  
 Type 97 fighters - seventy from Kuantan  
 Navy: Medium Bombers - twenty-seven from Kota Bahru  
 Zero fighters - twenty from Kota Bahru

mid-afternoon; although the six "Zeros" were deceived into machine-gunning the dummy Blenheims there were some real casualties in the shape of damage to two Sharks and one Blenheim<sup>(1)</sup>. On this day two Buffaloes and the pilots were lost in action.

Ibid Signal  
WX 3554

IIJ50/4  
Entries at  
17 Jan.

Enemy raids were now a daily occurrence for the Japanese were bent upon sustained assaults on all military and air force targets on Singapore Island. The 3rd, 7th and 12th Air Brigades continued in this task and on 17th January in particular, inflicted serious damage. It would seem the first raid at 0410 hours was by a single aircraft - only four bombs fell near the Alexandra Hospital. But this was the forerunner of a much heavier raid on Tengah at 0900 hours when the now familiar pattern of twenty-seven bombers came over together with a fighter escort. Two hours later the main attack was delivered 'by fifty-three Navy 96's plus fighter escort', bombing from the usual height of 20,000 feet. Each of the four airfields was attacked but Kallang escaped undamaged with twelve bombs in the sea and a few near the Sea View Hotel. Sembawang, in its first raid bore the brunt of the attack. No. 453 Squadron's hangar was razed whilst a bomb hit the Station Commander's office. Works and Buildings had a direct hit which not only started a fire in the M.T. Section but dislocated the water supply. Electrical Services and communications were also disrupted. Four Buffaloes were burned out and four damaged. Excellent slit-trench systems kept down the casualties to six. Although no bombs fell at Seletar the moored flying-boats proved an attractive target for the two enemy fighters which emerged from low cloud to set fire (and sink) two Catalinas as well as badly damage two others. A sergeant on one of the burning aircraft engaged the fighters with a machine-gun and continued to fire until he went down with the flying-boat<sup>(2)</sup>. Thirty-two bombs fell on the long-suffering airfield at Tengah damaging some Married Quarters and a Barrack Block. Curiously enough the airfield itself was not effected but shortly after the bombers had gone, six Zeros adopting the tactics used so effectively at Seletar damaged three Blenheim I's, three Blenheim IV's two Sharks and a Swordfish. The Naval Base escaped with little damage; fourteen bombs were dropped and those which were not near misses fell on living quarters. Apart from the few casualties in these military target areas, the Government reported a death-roll of one hundred and twenty three civilians killed and sixty-six injured in the City. To date this had been the most serious raid but even so the Governor was able to report there "was no sign of panic and business was as usual". Perhaps the only gratifying feature of the whole day was the enemy air losses: At the cost of a No. 488 Squadron Buffalo (pilot saved), the Fighters claimed one destroyed, two probable and two damaged. The A.A. defences also claimed two certain and one probable.

IIJ50/4  
Entries at  
18 Jan.

No less serious were the two raids on 18 January. Starting at 0955 hours, approximately one hundred and thirty nine bombers and fighters raided Singapore and concentrated

(1) Later that same afternoon a Japanese fighter force landed in a swamp, possibly brought down by the ground defences at Tengah. The pilot was uninjured, but to avoid capture he shot himself.

(2) As a result of this raid all serviceable Catalinas, on receipt of an Air Raid Yellow warning were required to fly to a "Special Area" until recalled.

Note: Only three serviceable Catalinas remained after this incident.

ILJ50/30/4.  
Signal A.599

upon the Naval Base where three oil tanks were set on fire. In the second raid at 1147 hours Keppel Harbour was bombed. Fixed Defences, water supplies and communications were hit but, exceptionally, none of the airfields were raided. Even so, there were heavy losses in aircraft. No. 21 (F) Squadron lost a Buffalo and its pilot; No. 243 Squadron had six damaged, whilst two aircraft of No. 488 Squadron were destroyed, although one of the pilots was safe. These latter two Squadrons were able to claim a total of two enemy aircraft destroyed, three probablos and three damaged<sup>(1)</sup>.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2019  
Encl. 3a, 7a.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2012 Enc. 2a  
page 4  
and  
Enc. 5a  
page 6

As will be recounted later, these raids were to continue in ever increasing weight, but for the moment it may be of advantage to examine some of the factors associated with the operations to date. Perhaps the most important was that of the Command communications. This had already been outlined<sup>(2)</sup> but it may be appropriate to stress the shortcomings which particularly effected the defences of Singapore. The most outstanding deficiency was the lack of V.H.F. This was not available prior to the outbreak of the Far East war; and when hostilities did commence, more equipment than was needed left England - but never arrived. Consequently the fighters had to depend upon the existing T.R.9. sets, which, because of high-level static interference were ineffective beyond a range of 9 to 10 miles. This meant the fighters could not be informed of the movement of enemy raids, plotted by radar, at the range necessary to intercept. The radar station at Mersing gave cover one hundred miles to the north thereby offering 32 minutes warning to the Island's defences<sup>(3)</sup>. But due to its many limitations - already described in detail - the Buffalo took nearly all this time to reach the average height of the raiders, which was 25,000 feet. In order to overcome this difficulty the Station Commander Kallang suggested to A.H.Q. that standing patrols be instituted. This idea was not accepted because the shortage of pilots and aircraft would have led to undue fatigue as well as wastage of aircraft hours. The scarcity of telephone lines was also a

(1)	Date	Japanese claims	Our actual losses	Our claims	Japanese Admissions
	12 Jan.	20 Blenheims, Buffaloes	6 destroyed 2 damaged	6 certain 4 probables	nil
	13 Jan.	1 Buffalo	4 destroyed 1 damaged	nil	nil
	15 Jan.	15 aircraft	2 destroyed 3 damaged	nil	3
	17 Jan.	26 aircraft	7 destroyed 15 damaged	3 certain 3 probables	1
	18 Jan.	19 aircraft	3 destroyed 6 destroyed	2 certain 3 probables	2
	Totals	81	22 destroyed 27 damaged	11 certain 10 probables	6

(2) See Vol. I - 'Aircraft Warning System and Operational Control'.

(3) Until the Endau landings, Mersing continued to function. It was then removed to the Radio Installation and Maintenance Unit at Singapore and converted into a mobile station at Tuas on 29th January. High flying cover on the approaches down the Straits of Malacca and the mainland was given but even so the warning was reduced to 20 minutes.

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serious limitation in the control of air operations. Strong but unavailing representations had been made to the highest quarters in the Government for the allocation of special lines for the use of the R.A.F. outside the Island. Even for normal Service organisation, sufficient land lines did not exist. An illustration of this is given by a war correspondent who quotes an incident of the C.-in-C. telephoning to General Percival. Sir Robert, in the middle of a vital military conversation was interrupted by the operator who advised him that his three minutes had expired - and then cut the connection! To offset such obvious deficiencies, as far as Radar was concerned, short wave (3 metre) wireless reporting links were designed and manufactured by radar personnel. The roof of the Cathay Building in Singapore was used as an exchange and radar reports passed through it to the Filter and Operations Rooms with reasonable success.

Another aspect of the air defences which must not be overlooked was a hurried attempt to organize night fighter interceptions. We have already seen how the first raid on 8th December, 1941 revealed the paucity of this means of defence<sup>(1)</sup>. A report from the Officer Commanding Kallang describes how night fighter patrols were organized in mid December using Buffaloes of No. 243 (F) Squadron and Blenheims No. 27 (N.F.) Squadron (at the time recently evacuated from Butterworth)<sup>(2)</sup>. They met with no success, partly due to radar and R/T inadequacies, but mainly, to quote this officer, "because the A.A. Commander would not agree to friendly aircraft patrolling the Island".

Quite apart from this passing attempt to specialize part of the fighters, the force was divided into spheres of special responsibilities. For instance, Nos. 243 and 488 (F) Squadrons stood by for the air defence of Singapore and were stationed at Kallang<sup>(3)</sup>. Sembawang was the base for the two Australian Units - Nos. 453 and 21 (F) Squadrons whose primary duties were West Coast Army co-operation and the escorting of bomber operations. A task shared in common by all fighters was that of the periodical convoy escorts, but apart from this the strength, of necessity, was diminished by the two-fold division of the fighter commitment. To the individual such a policy appeared extremely disheartening; an officer who had commanded No. 488 (F) Squadron considered that the divided effort resulted in such wastage that air parity could be attained neither over the front line nor over Singapore. Yet another Squadron commander deplored the fact that his unit, earmarked for Army support, might not retaliate when the bombing raids were in progress against his own Station. Summarising the efforts made by his Force, the Fighter Group Commander estimated that as an average his pilots were out numbered six to one; and in the latter stages of the Island's defence, as much as fifteen to one.

A final, but by no means unimportant aspect which must be touched upon concerns the attitude of the civilian population to the raids. Local labour on the airfields was the first to be affected. An officer of the Organization Branch of A.H.Q. reports that when real danger arose the civilian employees disappeared in a body - a contingency which had been expected but which, none the less, had a disastrous effect

(1) See 'First Bombs on Singapore'.

(2) On 16th December three Blenheim I's together with personnel had moved from Tengah to Kallang with a view to reforming as a night fighter Squadron.

(3) Kallang had lost its Dutch fighters when the Unit was transferred to the N.E.I. on 17th January.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2012  
Enc. 5a  
page 5 and  
Encl. 7a

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2012 Enc. 2a  
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Enc. 6a  
page 5.

Ibid  
Enc. 13a  
page 11

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2161  
Encl. 4a

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2014  
Enc. 13a  
page 52

"In 70 Days"  
by  
E. M. Glover.  
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C.28801/45  
Enc. 1b  
Enc. 27a  
Despatch by  
Supreme  
Commander.  
ABDA, on 'Ops.  
in S.W.  
Pacific'.

IIJ50/5  
Enc. 7a  
d/d 3 Jan.  
Ibid  
Enc. 5a  
d/d 3 Jan.

Ibid  
Enc. 13a  
d/d 3 Jan.

upon airfield repairs. At Seletar a few Asiatics returned during the quiet period in December, but with the resumption of the raids they disappeared never to return. This defection so intimately concerned the Officer Commanding Sembawang that he expressed himself in much more forceful terms than the Air Staff Officer when he wrote - 'They (the Asiatics) deserted almost en masse, with the expedition of rats abandoning sinking ship'.

On the other hand, there were no reports of any serious effects on the morale of the civilian population of Singapore during these early raids. The death roll was slowly mounting up to 18th January the Governor had recorded three hundred and forty three killed and five hundred and sixteen injured - but even so a responsible judge of public feeling was able to state that morale 'was keyed up to withstand any Japanese terroristic tactics'. 'Reports from all quarters', he goes on, 'continued to praise the work of the A.R.P. and A.F.S. personnel'. Although they could not know it at the time, these were comparatively light attacks - far worse was yet to come.

#### High Command Changes, and More Reinforcements Arrive.

An important event contemporary to the period under review was the formation of a United Command in the South-West Pacific on 15th January, 1942. This decision had been made in principle by the Combined Chiefs of Staff at the outbreak of war with Japan. A single Command was to direct operations of all Allied forces in the general area of Burma, Malaya, the Netherlands East Indies and the Philippines. Its Supreme Allied Commander was to be General Sir Archibald Wavell (hitherto, C.-in-C. India), and the Command known by the name of "ABDA". This formation would abolish the appointment of Commander-in-Chief Far East.

General Wavell was first told of his appointment on 30th December in a telegram from the Prime Minister. Official instructions from the Combined Chiefs of Staff reached him on 4th January. At the same time General Pownall, then C.-in-C. Far East, was appointed Chief of Staff. The C.O.S. Directive to the Supreme Commander included these main features: The basic conception of the conduct of the war was to hold the Malaya barrier<sup>(1)</sup> as the defensive position of the Abda area, and to operate as far forward as possible to oppose the Japanese. To gain air superiority was the first essential. General Wavell was to co-ordinate the operations of the armed forces of the Abda Governments with a staff of officers of each of the Powers<sup>(2)</sup>. His responsibility to these Governments was to be through the agency of the Chiefs of Staff both in Washington and London. Joint opinions of the two Committees would be submitted both to the President and the Prime Minister (the latter would obtain the views of the Dominions and Dutch Governments in London). When agreement had been reached the necessary orders to the Supreme Commander would follow.

Whilst these instructions were still being defined at C.O.S. level, General Wavell had sent them an appreciation, which, besides inquiring of the Allied resources available, had considered that his primary objectives would be attacks upon shipping and enemy air bases. He thought that airfields in Northern Sumatra could not be held with the enemy already in

(1) Malaya Peninsula - Sumatra - Java - North Australia.  
(2) The American account of the formation of Abdacom may be read at Chapter 10 of the book 'The Army Air Forces in World War II' by W. F. Craven and J. L. Cate.



IIJ50/2  
Enc. 57a

Penang. Information on resources could not be supplied by the C.O.S.; and at the same time they held the emphatic view that air bases in Northern Sumatra must be held. Despite the Supreme Commander's recommendation that Burma should not be transferred to the Abda Command it was ruled, for political reasons, that it should no longer continue under C.-in-C, India. He was also responsible for the defence of Port Darwin<sup>(1)</sup>.

IIJ53/4  
Entry at  
7 Jan.

IIJ50/5  
Enc. 10a  
d/d 5 Jan.

After leaving Delhi early on 5th January, the General flew via Koggalla in one of a pair of flying boats of No. 205 Squadron, arriving at Seletar 0850 hours 7th January. In the meantime General Pownall had taken early action to transfer his staff to Java as the nucleus of a combined staff. A.V.M. Maltby who had arrived on 4th January as Chief of Staff designate to General Pownall had elected to remain in Singapore to assist the A.O.C. Under the instructions of the C.-in-C, he had investigated the air situation. His report emphasized two main features: A. V. M. Pulford had thoroughly overworked himself and indeed was a sick man; secondly the highly centralized control of operations was overloading the Headquarters. There were insufficient experienced staff officers to properly decentralize the work to Bomber and Fighter Groups and a request was made outlining the immediate requirements. Until these arrived an interim solution had to be found. Consideration was given to A. V. M. Maltby taking-over command but he preferred to work as Deputy A.O.C. mainly because A. V. M. Pulford was already handling the operational situation well, and his primary need was relief in respect to his other duties. General Pownall agreed with this arrangement.

IIJ50/18/4  
Signals  
WX 1184  
WX 1164 d/d  
9 Jan.

Maltby  
Despatch  
Draft (Copy  
No. 15)  
Appendix 'D'

IIJ50/18/4  
Signals  
WX 4397  
d/d 5 Jan.  
WX 1602  
d/d 10 Jan.

IIJ50/3  
Enc. 11b  
IIJ50/18/4  
Sig. WX 3455  
d/d 18 Jan.

With regard to the command of all Allied Air Forces within Abdacom, the British and American Chiefs of Staff were of the opinion that a senior R.A.F. officer should be appointed and suggested Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Peirce. To this General Wavell agreed and designated the Air Marshal as his Chief of Air Staff and Commander of all the Allied air forces. Until his arrival on 28th January Major General Brereton (U.S. Air Corps) acted on his behalf. Air Headquarters at Bandoeng was known by the short title of 'Adbair' and the area controlled divided into six Groups<sup>(2)</sup>. Central supply and maintenance was supervised by the Intendant General - General Brett (U.S. Air Corps), who was also Deputy to the Supreme Commander.

Sig. WX 3054  
d/d 29 Jan.

Urged by the need for instant decisions the Supreme Commander lost no time in visiting the Malayan front. On the 8th January, the day after his arrival in Singapore, he saw the Commanders of 9th and 11th Divisions, and visited 12th and 28th

(1) Ceylon went over to India Command 18th January.

(2) Groups controlled by Adbair:-

- (a) Norgroup: Comprised No. 221 Group Rangoon and was responsible for Burma.
- (b) Wesgroup: at Singapore, and controlled all formations previously under A.H.Q.F.E.; Nos. 224 (F) and 225(B) Groups; Palembang I and II in Sumatra.
- (c) Cengroup: at Bandoeng, was a Dutch Command for West Java.
- (d) Easgroup: at Sourabaya, was the U.S. Command for East Java.
- (e) Recgroup: at Batavia; the Dutch Command for all reconnaissances in Abdacom area.
- (f) Ausgroup: Australian or U.S. Command from Darwin.



IIJ50/19/6  
Signal  
267/7  
d/d 8 Jan.

Infantry Brigades. As a result he decided to withdraw IIIrd Corps to Johore to refit and rest. From the Mersing area the 8th Australian Division (A.I.F.) was to move into N.W. Johore where it would be supported by the freshest troops of 45th Brigade. After withdrawal IIIrd Corps would take over responsibility for the defence of Johore south of the Mersing-Batu Pahat line leaving the Australians free to fight in the North West (1). This plan allowed the Japanese an undisputed passage to the North boundary of Johore but with IIIrd Corps so diminished no defence could be offered. Westforce under General Gordon-Bennett was by no means at full strength but it was hoped to prevent a further advance of the enemy until the arrival of the 18th Division at the end of January.

IIJ50/2  
Enc. 58a  
d/d 16 Jan.

Back in Singapore General Wavell was concerned to find no defences had ever been made - or planned - for the north side of the Island. Orders were given for the Garrison Commander to prepare an appreciation showing the number of troops required; details of the defences to prevent crossing of the Johore Straits; Naval and R.A.F. plans; ammunition stocks; plans for demolitions and for the evacuation of civilians.

IIJ50/18/4  
Enc. WX 1821  
d/d 11 Jan.

On 10th January the Supreme Commander flew from Singapore to Batavia to meet his newly formed staff; it was thereupon decided to establish his Headquarters at Lembang some 10 miles north of Bandoeng. General organisation of the staff was agreed. Discussions on general strategy followed and the chief point for immediate action concerned the amount of effort to be spared for holding forward air bases in North Borneo and North Sumatra. The General was of the opinion such bases could not be held with the limited forces available; in this he differed to the Dutch and the Americans. His idea for the final distribution of land forces was to have a complete Australian formation for a counter-offensive in Malaya and to use the Indian troops (then in Malaya) to garrison the N.E.I.

IIJ50/19/6  
Signal  
WX 1994  
d/d 11 Jan.

WX 2131  
d/d 12 Jan.

IIJ50/18/4  
NX 2695  
d/d 14 Jan.

Abda Command officially opened at 1200 hours G.M.T. 15th January, after the Supreme Commander had told the C.O.S. on the day previously of his proposal to assume command. An appreciation then followed the main feature of which was a definition of the aim to stage a counter-offensive. This, of course, was dependent upon the safe arrival of convoys; prevention of East Coast landings and the ability to hold Johore and Singapore. Also there was included a general disposition of the forces available, which, as far as the air forces were concerned, was amplified in a directive to the Abdair Groups three days later. First priority was given to the protection of incoming convoys, but it was laid down that "if new expeditions are located threatening the East Coast of Malaya or endeavouring to pass south of Singapore all available air effort should be directed to destroying such targets". In addition, by attacks on enemy shipping, and action against the Singora bases, as well as close support to the Army, the air forces were required to slow up the advance of the Japanese land forces. (2)

IIJ50/19/6  
Signal  
WX.2985  
d/d 15 Jan.

IIJ50/3  
Enc. 11a  
d/d 18 Jan.

(1) See also 'A limited Air Offensive' for the G.C.C's. detailed disposition.

(2) In his Despatch, Air Vice Marshal Maltby points out that such tasks were beyond the means of the air forces available. Concentration had to be made upon one task at a time in the order of priority set down in the directive but influenced by the situation.

Note. Air strength at 18th January.  
Bombers - Forty-one; G.R. - fourteen; Fighters - Twenty-six.  
(See also Appendix IX).

IIJ50/19/6  
Signal  
026007  
d/d 14 Jan.

These, then, were the plans evolved by the new High Command not only to stem the rush of the enemy advance but ultimately to stage a counter offensive. But could such plans be implemented? Air strength had shrunk to desperately low figures and on the land front the new dispositions were not holding ground. On 13th January the Supreme Commander, having flown to Singapore, went on by road to Segamat to meet the commanders of IIIrd Corps and 8th Australian Division (A.I.F.). His earlier plan had indeed been carried out, but, to quote his cable to the C.O.S.: "9th and 11th Divisions have been further weakened both in numbers and morale by fighting north of Kuala Lumpur and the enemy's advance has been more rapid than I had hoped.... Gordon-Bennett and Australians in good heart and will handle enemy roughly". Significantly, the message added: "Battle for Singapore will be a close run thing and we shall need luck in getting in convoys safely and up to time".

IIJ50/6  
'Reinforce-  
ments of Far  
East in War-  
Policy'.

At this stage it would not be inopportune to examine the question of air reinforcements to the Far East. The early programme has already been described in some detail, an account having been given of those aircraft which had arrived by 31st December, 1941 together with a forecast of future reinforcements<sup>(1)</sup>.

IIJ50/22/10  
Signal X 143  
d/d 15 Jan.

Responding to a query by A.C.C. Middle East the Air Ministry, on 15th January, outlined the long-range policy for support of the air forces in the Far East. Fifty Hurricanes each month were to be sent to Singapore from U.K. via India. Only if the need were serious would Middle East stocks be used. There was no wish to curtail the limited supply of Blenheims to Middle East whilst there was a temporary gap in the light bomber output; but even so, the policy for this flow was indefinite. Hudsons were likely to continue to the Far East when the end of the first fifty-two was in sight.

IIJ50/22/7  
Enc. 24a  
d/d 31 Dec.

Enc. 31b  
d/d 3 Jan.

Enc. 36a  
d/d 5 Jan.

Signal  
WX 1852  
d/d 26 Jan.

Plans for reinforcements, however, seemed to concentrate upon fighter aircraft. A total of forty-eight Hurricanes was to be brought to the Far East by the aircraft carrier, H.M.S. Indomitable; these had been supplied from Middle East. The plan of the operation - known as SEMOLINA - was for the carrier to leave Port Sudan and proceed to a position not more than 500 nautical miles from the destination, the Hurricanes then being flown off in batches escorted by two suitable aircraft. Shortage of Blenheim IV's for this navigational escort led A.H.Q.F.E. to suggest the fly-off should be in three batches of sixteen. Furthermore, it was planned that upon the expected arrival of the forty-eight fighters on 27th January, Nos. 488 and 243 (F) Squadrons should be re-equipped, and all the remaining Buffaloes thus thrown-up would be concentrated into No. 453 (F) Squadron. Not one aircraft would then be available for No. 21 (F) Squadron and with no object of its retention in Singapore the Squadron was to prepare to return to Australia to re-arm.

Enc. 46a  
d/d 8 Jan.

Enc. 66a  
d/d 28 Jan.

In addition to the fighters from Indomitable, thirty-nine Hurricane IIB's were to be shipped in crates from Takoradi to the Far East aboard H.M.S. Athene. She left on the 8th January for Capetown, but even upon arrival at Mauritius on 28th January her final destination was by no means clear. General Wavell wanted the ship to put in at Singapore whilst the Air Ministry favoured Karachi (in order to eventually re-inforce Burma). Because of the urgent need for reinforcements

(1) See 'Air Reinforcements Begin to Arrive'.

in Malaya, the C.A.S. himself made the final decision for Athene to be sent to Singapore<sup>(1)</sup>.

Enc. 47a  
d/d 8 Jan.

Ground personnel for the aircraft on both Indomitable and Athene were being transported in Convoy W.S. 14 D; included were No. 266 Wing, No. 242 Squadron, No. 258 Squadron, and No. 605 Squadron as well as No. 62 R. and S.U., No. 41 A.S.P., No. 47 Embarkation Office and a Pool of fourteen pilots. Equipment consisted of two Hurricane pack-ups each with spares for three months.

Enc. 70a  
d/d 25 Jan.

Enc. 71a  
d/d 29 Jan.

Enc. 74a  
d/d 30 Jan.

Enc. 75a  
d/d 31 Jan.

Enc. 76a  
d/d 1 Feb.

This policy of reinforcements was to gather strength for it was planned for Indomitable to make a further voyage to the Far East carrying fifty Hurricane IIB's and pilots from the Middle East. In the opinion of the A.O.C. (Air Marshal Tedder) such a diversion could not be got ready until the end of February and even then it would absorb all his Hurricane IIB's and so endanger the whole situation in the Middle East. But priority had to be given to Abdacom, and the C.A.S. insisted that the fifty Hurricanes should be prepared for the return of the carrier to Port Sudan; Hurricane I's, however, might be sent if so desired. The final outcome was that Middle East expected to load the Hurricanes ready for shipment by 12th February.

Ibid  
Enc. 80a  
d/d 2 Feb.

But this was not all, for Washington had been asked to spare Kittyhawks, together with the necessary spares and equipment, to re-arm the four Buffalo Squadrons in Singapore - although it was doubtful if such a request would be met in view of the numbers of aircraft the Americans were already putting into the Abdacom area.

IIJ53/5  
Entries at  
11, 17 Jan.

Maltby  
Despatch  
paras: 313 to  
316

Leaving these plans of the future, it might now be of interest to note how those of December were implemented. The fifty-one Hurricanes, as we have read, arrived safely on 13th January accompanied by twenty-four pilots drawn in equal numbers from Nos. 232, 17, 135 and 136 (F) Squadrons. Two days before the convoy docked their final destination was undecided - it was to be either Tebrau or the Johore Rifle Range. Seletar, however, was the final choice and it was to this airfield the crated Hurricanes were sent by road. Some were dispersed to concealed positions in the rubber plantations south of the airfield whilst the majority went into the already crowded Maintenance Unit. Despite the lack of special tools, and in conditions aggravated by the blackout, the speed with which these aircraft were assembled was truly remarkable. On the afternoon of 15th January - less than 48 hours after docking - the first Hurricane was air tested; by the 17th twenty-one aircraft were ready, and on 20th January the Squadron went into action!

Air Vice Marshal Maltby writes how A.H.Q. had planned originally to give the aircrews time to acclimatize themselves and to shake off the effects of the long voyage before flying on operations. But such was the pace of events that the Hurricanes had to be fought immediately they had been erected and tested. The composite unit, now designated No. 232 (F) Squadron was divided into three Flights - 'A' and 'B' operated from Seletar and 'C' from Kallang.

D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2012 Enc. 1a

Additional to No. 232 (F) Squadron a small force of Hurricanes was to arrive at Seletar on 28th January fifteen aircraft of No. 258 (F) Squadron flew in from the carrier Indomitable - the remainder of the forty-eight stayed at

(1) Athene was expected to arrive Abdacom about 10th February.

*unloaded at Malacca 8/2/42*

D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2024  
Enc. 5a  
IIJ50/22/77 Enc. 64a  
d/d 29 Jan.

D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2168  
Enc. 1a

IIJ50/22/8  
Encs. 77a, 87a,  
94a.

D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2014 Enc. 10a  
Page 22.

IIJ50/4 Entry at  
19 Jan.

IIJ50/22/8  
Enc. 79a, 79b, 79c.  
d/d 10 Jan.

IIJ50/22/8  
Sig. X7508  
d/d 15 Jan.

IIM/E.84/3  
"F. 540 of No. 84  
SqdnJ" Appendix.

IIJ50/22/8 Enc. 82a  
d/d 12 Jan.  
Enc. 91a 23 Jan.

Palembang. These reinforcements were without ground crews and with guns packed with grease the removal of which was a long task for the small armament staff.

In anticipation of congestion on the Island (due to fighter re-inforcements as well as other considerations) A.H.Q. had decided, in the latter half of December, to augment the number of airfields by the use of Fighter Strips. Seven sites had been selected and work put in hand, but construction was slow because of labour difficulties, and although two were actually finished none were ever used<sup>(1)</sup>.

The Hudson reinforcement plan did not come up to expectations. Five aircraft had left U.K. on 29th December and by 11th January a total of thirty were on the way to the Far East. Six arrived in Singapore on 19th January, but apart from those along the route, one had crashed at Allahabad and another at Malta. Their movements were finally recorded on 5th February, by which time thirty-six had left England, of which five had crashed, and a total of only sixteen had reached Singapore. About 22nd January No. 8 (G.R.) Squadron was re-equipped with these new Mark III Hudsons, after handing over its old Mark II's to No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron<sup>(2)</sup>. No. 62 (B) Squadron also was re-armed with six Hudson III's.

Sumatra and not Singapore was to be the destination of the two re-inforcing Blenheim Squadrons - Nos. 84 and 211 - from the Middle East. They were scheduled to fly ahead of their ground personnel and equipment and A.H.Q.F.E. was advised accordingly. Seventeen aircraft left Heliopolis on 14th January; a further fifteen were due to leave within 48 hours and in fact had taken off by 18th January. On the afternoon of 23rd January the first five Blenheims landed at Palembang I having flown the normal route<sup>(3)</sup>. Port Tewfik (Suez) was the port of embarkation of the sea party which left on 17th January to arrive at Oosthaven (Sumatra) on 14th February.

The ground echelon of No. 211 (B) Squadron was to sail from Suez on 16th January, and after a delay the first six Blenheims left on 25th January, and the remaining eighteen left

#### (1) Fighter Strips:-

- (a) Johore Rifle Range. - earth strip of 1,000 yards was made by the New Zealand Airfield Construction Unit in three weeks but abandoned 26th January.
- (b) Payer Lebar satellite for Kallang, completed to a length of 900 yards by 25th January.
- (c) Sungei Buloh - Satellite for Tengah; 900 yard strip projected but when nearly ready for use it was abandoned on 30th January.
- (d) Bekok - work on 1,000 yard strip stopped on 5th January.
- (e) Yeo Chu Kang - satellite for Seletar, commenced by the N.Z. Construction Unit mid-January, but abandoned 7th February.
- (f) Senai Kulai (Johore State) - work on 1,400 yard strip commenced 8th January but abandoned on 20th January.
- (g) Kampong Choh (Johore State) - work on 1,400 yard strip abandoned 16th January.

(2) No. 8 Squadron was expected to transfer a total of fourteen aircraft but in actual fact only five were in a reasonable state of repair. This gave No. 1 Squadron a strength of fourteen Hudson II's.

(3) Heliopolis - Habbaniya - Bahrein - Sharjah - Karachi - Allahabad - Dum Dum - Toungoo - Mingaladon - Ihonga - Medan - Palembang.

during the ensuing three days. Palembang was also the destination of this Unit(1).

IIJ50/3  
Loose papers.

Percival  
Despatch  
para. 407

Before concluding this section mention must be made of the arrival of three more convoys on 22nd, 24th and 29th January. Although not carrying air reinforcements their protection demanded a major air effort(2). Each day, commencing on 21st January, a total of eight Hudsons and Glen Martins patrolled as far as the Natunas from first light to dusk. A Catalina carried out an anti-submarine patrol, and during the final approach on Singapore a fighter escort of six Buffaloes was flown. In constant readiness was a striking force of all available Blenheims, Vildebeestes, Glen Martins and Albacores armed with 500 lb. S.A.P. bombs or torpedoes, as appropriate.

#### Air Co-operation Reaches its Peak

From mid-January onwards the air support of the retreating land forces, even if diminishing in weight, lacked for nothing in determination and whenever attacks could be mounted they were pressed home in the same resolute spirit which was to inspire the ultimate and tragic action over Endau.

IIJ50/4  
Entries at  
19 Jan.  
D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2014 Enc. 13a.

IIJ50/9,  
IIJ50/10  
Entries at  
19 Jan.

Attacks against landings on the West Coast were continued on 19th January when a force of twelve Buffaloes from both Kallang and Sembawang took off at 1315 hours to strafe ground targets(3). Their objectives lay between Bakri and Muar and the route was to be over our own troops to improve morale. A section of Buffaloes broke away at Muar to reconnoitre Kuala Lumpur airfield. As a result twenty fighters were reported on this airfield and later the P.R. Buffalo raised this figure to thirty four. Heavy anti-aircraft fire emphasised the value of this airfield to the Japanese. On the same day a mixed force of three Glen Martins and five Wirraways flew to the Muar area and as the result of an interception all three Glen Martins were lost as well as one Wirraway and two Buffaloes(4).

IIJ50/4  
Entries at 19,  
20, 21 Jan.  
D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2024 Enc. 5a  
D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2014  
Encs. 5a, 21a.

Resulting from the sighting of the concentration of enemy aircraft at Kuala Lumpur a raid was planned for the night 19/20th January using all the available Vildebeestes from Seletar. Twenty-two aircraft were flown, the No. 100 Squadron contingent refuelling at Kluang on the outward flight. It was not a success: ground mist obscured the target and the parachute flares were of no great help. Even more unfortunately, many bombs failed to explode because of fusing and distributor defects.

On the night following, (20/21st January) the striking

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- (1) Further account of the operations of these two Squadrons is to be found in the Section dealing with the N.E.I. Campaign.
  - (2) These convoys brought Army re-inforcements.
    - (a) 22nd Jan. - 44th Indian Brigade  
7,000 Indian re-inforcements.
    - (b) 24th Jan. - Australian Machine Gun Battalion  
2,000 Australian reinforcements.
    - (c) 29th Jan. - 18th British Division,  
(less machine-gun reconnaissance and  
anti-tank Units. These were to arrive  
5th February, 1942).
  - (3) Previous operations in this area are described in 'A Limited Air Offensive'.
  - (4) Enemy losses in this engagement cannot be stated with certainty - one source of information gives five destroyed.

force went out in even greater numbers. No. 36 (T.B.) Squadron sent twelve Vildebeestes to Kuala Lumpur which was also the target for seven Blenheim IV's from Tengah. Kuantan was attacked by a force of eleven Vildebeestes of No. 100 (T.B.) Squadron and six Hudsons. The results were far better than those of the previous night. Reports from the returning aircrews were enthusiastic: No. 34 (B) Squadron claimed that "the enemy was taken completely by surprise" when the seven Blenheims went in singly to a dusk attack. Twenty-five destroyed was their claim, but a P.R. report modified this to five destroyed. At Kuantan six were shown to be damaged. One Blenheim IV failed to return from the Kuala Lumpur operation and another crashed on landing at Tengah.

IIJ55/15/30  
Encs. 11a, 4a.

Percival  
Despatch  
paras: 354,  
357, 360, 364  
to 367.

A desperate situation had now come about in the Bakri area. From here the untrained 45th Indian Brigade had been ordered to withdraw owing to an outflanking movement of the enemy who had landed a few miles north of Batu Pahat. Withdrawal started early on 20th January and at this juncture a Blenheim IV of No. 34 (B) Squadron carried out a very successful reconnaissance. There was heavy fighting with the Imperial Japanese Guards; urgent demands were made upon the fighter force for air support against the incessant low-flying and dive-bombing attacks upon the beleaguered Muar force. Three sections of Buffaloes were ordered off and left at 1518 hours. Six Army 97 bombers were intercepted over Bakri: one was shot down whilst the remainder had to jettison their bombs. But even more help was needed, for when at 0600 hours 21st January the head of the retreating column reached the bridge at Parit Sulong it was to find it held by the enemy. Throughout the day desperate efforts were made to force the crossing, but without avail. A scratch force of two Albacores, each carrying six 250 lb. G.P. bombs attacked troops and transport near this bridge: at least four vehicles were destroyed. Six Buffaloes had also carried out sweeps in the area - from one operation in the early morning they had 'nothing to report in the air or on the ground' (1). Relief of the hard-pressed force (in which a V.C. was won) could not be managed. A night drop of medical supplies and food was ordered, but there was a delay in the delivery to Kallang so that it was not until 0655 hours 22nd January that the two Albacores got away, each with four containers. These were successfully dropped at the bridge and all collected by the troops. Even so the Force was beyond help and at 0900 hours orders were given for the destruction of heavy arms equipment after which the remnants of the Brigade made their way through the jungle to Yong Peng.

IIJ50/4  
Entries at 21,  
22, 26 Jan.

IIJ55/15/30  
Enc. 15a, 19a,  
5a, 6a, 8a,  
9a, 20a.

Yong Peng was the position occupied by 27 Australian Brigade on 21st January after it had been withdrawn from the River Segamat. Again came the call for air support but few fighters were available owing to the needs of the incoming convoys. On 22nd January, however, two Albacores and one Shark provided air support on the Yong Peng/Muar Road with six Buffaloes for fighter escort; an M.T. convoy was seriously damaged by this attack. Next day this success was followed up by five Buffaloes which protected a bridge at Yong Peng. Twelve enemy fighters were encountered with the result that one Buffalo was lost.

Percival  
Despatch  
paras. 371,  
372.

In order to gain time for the preparation of positions in Southern Johore the G.O.C. directed that a general line from Jemaluang (on the East Coast) through Kluang and Ayer Hitam

(1) Surely a remarkable statement in view of the desperate fighting at the bridge!

to Batu Pahat (West Coast) should be held. At the same time he made a request to Abdacom for continuous attacks by Fortress bombers on Kuala Lumpur and Kuantan<sup>(1)</sup>.

IIJ53/1  
'M.V.A.F.'

IIJ50/4,  
Entries 20,  
21, 22, 23,  
24, 25, 26.  
28 Jan.

IIJ53/8  
Page 73

Such rapid advance by the enemy had dictated withdrawal from the two airfields remaining in Johore. Wirraways were moved from Kahang to Kluang on 21st January and A.H.Q. ordered the former station to be destroyed at 1250 hours. Kluang was 'thinned-out', preparatory to evacuation, by moving the M.V.A.F. Flight down to the Johore Rifle Range strip. By midnight 21st January the withdrawal from Kahang was well in hand and demolition preparations almost complete. By first light on 22nd January the evacuation was finished and at 1205 hours the airfield destroyed. Kluang soon followed suit. Orders to 'blow' the airfield were given in the early morning of 23rd January. Personnel and equipment were to be sent to Singapore and the Wirraways flown to Seletar. Petrol and oil stocks were to be destroyed immediately. By 1420 hours seven Wirraways and three light aircraft of the M.V.A.F. landed at Tengah, and at 2030 hours the final report of the destruction of Kluang was received<sup>(2)</sup>.

Percival  
Despatch  
paras. 374,  
375.

There was every likelihood that the Batu Pahat area would now have to be evacuated by 6/15th Infantry Brigade. To attack enemy communications south of Muar a composite force of all available Wirraways, Albacores and Sharks was operated from Seletar in two waves during the afternoon 23rd January. Again, on 24th January a mixed force of eleven Vildebeestes and three Albacores made a night attack with 250 lb. bombs on a bridge at Labis.

Offensive patrols against dive bombers on the Ayer Hitam-Kluang road were requested by IIIrd Corps throughout 25th January but still the convoy had to take precedence. Later, at 1647 hours, and with a changed objective, twelve Buffaloes took off on an offensive sweep of the roads north and west of Batu Pahat only to find them clear of all transport except one lorry!

Percival  
Despatch  
paras. 381, 394

During the night 25/26th January the Batu Pahat force withdrew to Senggarang only to find the road blocked and securely held. A relief force moving up from Benut failed to break through. Orders were given for units to make their way to Benut on foot. One contingent arrived there on the night 27/28th January, but the remainder of the Force comprising about two thousand men reached the sea at the mouth of the River Ponggor, whence they were evacuated by units of the Royal Navy and taken to Singapore. Air support for this operation was given by a force of three Vildebeestes, three Albacores and one Shark which attacked Muar and Batu Pahat on the night of 25th January<sup>(3)</sup>. At the same time three Hudsons

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- (1) Such attacks by eight American bombers had indeed been ordered by Abdair for 22nd and 23rd January. It was the plan to refuel and arm this force at Palembang. From the absence of records, together with an ensuing query from Westgroup it would appear that these sorties did not take place.
- (2) On 30th January the Japanese occupied Kluang with 27th Air Combat Unit. Two days later two more air units moved in and a further two arrived on 3rd February.
- (3) It is possible that a strong force of Vildebeestes, twenty-four all told, also made attacks upon Batu Pahat to divert Japanese attention from the sea evacuation. Existing records of this particular night are few and contradictory, therefore the operation must be treated with reserve. Certainly, at a later stage in the evacuation - on the morning of 28th January - twelve fighters gave air cover for the three naval vessels at Batu Pahat.



and an unspecified number of Vildebeestes attacked Kuala Lumpur. On the day following, two Vildebeestes from Seletar dropped medical supplies to the body of troops which had reached Senggarang. The supply drop was a complete success and enabled many troops to rejoin their comrades. Both Squadrons were congratulated by A.H.Q.

Ibid, paras. 384,  
386, 387.

We come now to the final action of the air striking force. Mersing, on the East Coast, was regarded as the 'back door' to Singapore which was only 100 miles distant. The position could be outflanked by enemy penetration up the Endau River. On 14th January contact had been made with the enemy moving down the coast from Kuantan. An ambush inflicted heavy casualties upon the enemy approaching Mersing on 21st January and on the following day an attempt to cross the river was repulsed with heavy loss.

IIJ50/10  
Entries at  
24, 26 Jan.

D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2014 Enc. 13a  
Page 56

IIJ55/15/30  
Encs. 24a, 33a.

D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2014 Enc. 10a  
pages 23, 24.

Ibid:  
Enc. 8a page 4.

Enc. 5a page 2.

Enc. 1a.

D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2012 Encs. 1a, 3a.

D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2024 Enc. 5a

IIJ53/8 page 75

After the Japanese occupation of Kuantan, A.H.Q. took every precaution against East Coast landings, and as we have seen, from 12th January onwards daily coastal reconnaissances were flown<sup>(1)</sup>. These continued to operate and on 26th January the long anticipated invasion convoy was sighted. Two Hudsons, at 0745 hours, sighted a force of two cruisers, eleven or twelve destroyers and two merchant vessels of 10,000 tons in a position approximately 20 miles N.E. of Endau<sup>(2)</sup>. Indeed, this Fleet had actually arrived at Endau for three barges were moving out from the shore. Fighter cover was flying over the ships and was probably land-based for no carrier was in the vicinity. An attack by three fighters was made on the Hudsons which suffered no serious damage; one Navy Zero was possibly shot down. Jamming of the W/T reports prevented this important sighting news reaching A.H.Q. until it was telephoned from Sembawang at 0920 hours. After 45 minutes 'consultation' the Senior Air Staff Officer gave these orders:-

- (a) All available Vildebeestes to be rearmed with 250 lb. G.P. or S.A.P. bombs.
- (b) All available Hudsons to arm similarly.
- (c) Fighter escort to be arranged.
- (d) Signalled No. 225 (B) Group, Sumatra to send all Blenheims and Hudsons to Endau<sup>(3)</sup>.
- (e) Requested Abdacom, by signal, to send a force of American bombers to the target.

The striking force available at Singapore at 1030 hours consisted only of thirty-six aircraft<sup>(4)</sup>. Priority of targets was decided as: Transports, barges, then troops ashore. Because the enemy ships were lying in shallow water torpedoes

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- (1) See 'A Limited Air Offensive'. Two Hudsons of No. 8 (G.R.) Squadron were 'missing' from this operation on 24th January, and on the following day two Hudsons of No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron were attacked by fighters.
  - (2) 2 deg. 50 mins. North; 103 deg. 47 mins. East. This fleet, according to Japanese sources, had left Saigon on 22nd January and reached Singora midnight 25th January carrying the 18th Division. It was escorted by units of the 12th Air Brigade based at Kuantan.
  - (3) As will be recounted later, the three Blenheim Squadrons - Nos. 27, 34 and 62 as well as No. 1 and 8 Squadrons, at this time were based in Sumatra.
  - (4) Stirling force available at 1030 hours:- eleven Vildebeestes, two Albacores, six Hudsons, one Shark, seven Buffaloes, nine Hurricanes.



were not to be used; instead, the Vildebeestes were loaded with 250 lb. bombs - a lengthy process in view of the shortage of bomb trollies and tractors. Refuelling after the previous night's raids was another delaying factor<sup>(1)</sup>. It was not until the early afternoon that the first wave took off<sup>(2)</sup>. This consisted of nine Hudsons of Nos. 1 and 8 (G.R) Squadrons; twelve Vildebeestes (of which ten were No.100 Squadron aircraft), fifteen Buffaloes of Nos.243, 21 and 453 Squadrons; and eight Hurricanes of No.232 Squadron. This force flew up the coast at an average height of 1,000 feet, just below cloud, the 90 m.p.h. cruising speed of the torpedo-bombers giving some difficulty to the escorting Buffaloes. The Hurricanes reached the target area just as the Vildebeestes were going in. Heavy fighter and A.A. opposition was encountered, yet despite this two direct hits were claimed on a 10,000 ton vessel, one hit on an 8,000 ton ship and one hit on a cruiser<sup>(3)</sup>. Unfortunately, the primary target - the troops which had been carried on board these ships - by this time were ashore<sup>(4)</sup>. A dump of stores on the bank of the River Endau, as well as enemy troops, was also bombed. Enemy air casualties claimed were: seven Army 97's destroyed, two probables and one damaged. But our losses were very heavy. Five Vildebeestes of No.100 Squadron were missing and two of the crew of a Hudson killed.

II J53/8  
page 75

Later that afternoon, the second wave took-off from Singapore consisting of nine Vildebeestes (the majority from No.36 (T.B) Squadron) led by a flight of three Albacores. Fighter escort was given by four Buffaloes and eight Hurricanes<sup>(5)</sup>. No cloud cover was available, but a large patch of cumulous just beyond the target concealed Navy Zeros and Army 97's. The antiquated Vildebeestes were easy prey to these fighters and in a very short space of time five Vildebeestes, three Albacores and one Hurricane were shot down. Four enemy fighters were claimed as destroyed and one damaged. Eight hits on a transport were claimed.

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(1) Normally, aircraft were refuelled and re-armed overnight. Also, on this occasion crews had been 'stood-off' until 1000 hrs.

(2) A remarkable feature of this day's operations is that few details are recorded in the Operations Room Diary. From a consensus of personal reports the take-off can be fixed only at an indefinite time between 1300 and 1500 hrs. One pilot reports that he was briefed to attack at 1502 hrs.

(This latter time agrees with the Japanese report which mentions the first attack was delivered at 1505 hrs.)

(3) Later, two transports, one cruiser and two destroyers were seen to be stationary and high out of the water.

(4) The Japanese state that the first wave of thirty aircraft came in approximately  $4\frac{1}{2}$  hrs. after the start of troop disembarkation. Their fighters consisted of nine aircraft of 11th Air Combat Unit plus a similar number of the 1st Air Combat Unit. For the loss of two fighters they claim the destruction of twenty-four R.A.F. aircraft.

(5) Two and a half hours later, at 1730 hrs., their account continues, the second wave of eighteen aircraft attacked the ships. Air defence comprised the 1st Air Combat Unit and 47th Independent Air Squadron, who between them shot down fifteen aircraft and suffered no losses.

The final attack (by the six Hudsons) was met by 11th Air Combat Unit who shot down one Hudson.

Their final summing up of the operation says - "Nearly all of the remaining enemy air force in Singapore, which had been hiding until now, was destroyed."

A force of six Hudsons of No.62 (B) Squadron and five Blenheim I's of No.27 Squadron (manned by No.84 (B) Squadron crews) had been organised at Palembang II by mid-afternoon. There was sufficient time for the Hudsons to deliver their attack at Endau, but even so two of them crashed when making dusk landings at Sembawang. The Blenheims were late in getting airborne and so were ordered to land at Sembawang to be at the disposal of A.H.Q.(1).

II M/E84/3  
Appendix,  
page 2.

II J50/9  
II J50/10  
Entries at  
26th Jan.

Both Nos.36 and 100 Squadrons had suffered grievous losses in this action. The Commanding Officers of each Unit had been killed and apart from the other casualties, three of their aircraft were damaged and many crews wounded. The A.O.C., in congratulating the survivors, told them that they would not again be sent on a similar operation. It is a bitter reflection when it is remembered that these two Squadrons, with the exception of No.205 Squadron, were the oldest R.A.F. units at Singapore. Many years of training had brought them to a peak of efficiency in their task of torpedo dropping. Yet when ultimately they were involved in war, their aircraft were so antiquated they stood no chance against modern weapons. Off Kota Bahru, on the first day of hostilities, a few of their number made an ineffectual torpedo attack upon transports. After this the force was conserved to strike against an invasion fleet, but when the critical time arrived the attack was not delivered with the well-practised torpedo but with small bombs against ships emptied of the invading troops. Their sacrifice was in vain(2).

We must turn now to the other air effort which reached its climax during the second half of January - the air defence of Singapore. In the main this had been entrusted to Nos.243 and 488 (F) Squadrons but due to the prodigious efforts of No.151 M.U. this dwindling force was strengthened on 20th January by the first Hurricanes. On this day there were two raids by ninety heavy bombers with fighter escort. Bombs fell on the Naval Base, Seletar and Sembawang, the airfields suffering considerable damage to buildings; one Hudson was destroyed. In the City sixty were killed and one hundred and fifty injured. Buffaloes did not make an interception in the morning raid but a Flight of No.232 (F) Squadron, going into action for the first time, was able to claim one Zero and three bombers shot down. Three of the Hurricanes were brought down in a dog fight but the pilot of one was saved. One enemy bomber crashed during the second raid, probably brought down by A.A. fire as there was no fighter interception.

II J55/15/30  
Encs. 4a, 11a

II J50/17/8  
Signals d/d  
21, 22 Jan.

II J50/9  
Entries at  
20 Jan.

(1) On 27th January these Blenheims were ordered to beat up Kuantan airfield, paying particular attention to enemy fighters in order to 'avenge the Vildebeestes'. Four of the Blenheims took off at 0030 hrs. 28th January and despite thick cloud bombed Kuantan. Results were difficult to observe.

(2) Surely this order to employ bombs instead of torpedoes was an unfortunate one? In addition to the unfamiliar technique of loading bombs on to Vildebeestes the pilots were inexperienced in the role of bombing. One of them reports that 'he had never practised dive-bombing with a loaded aircraft'!

But in the first instance the decision not to use torpedoes because of shallow water can hardly have been correct. At the time of sighting, the transports were lying some 20 miles off-shore. Allowing for their progress towards the coast would it not have been preferable to launch a torpedo attack into water which, in any case, was of sufficient depth to float a 10,000 ton ship?

Two Hurricanes were shot down and one damaged on the day following when Singapore was raided by approximately one hundred aircraft. Tengah was hit again and an aircraft destroyed. Fighters claimed four destroyed and one probable whilst the A.A. defences logged a hightr score - nine shot down. Civilian casualties amounted to three hundred and four killed and seven hundred and twenty five injured.

The 22nd January was a day of even greater disasters. Two waves of twenty-seven Navy 96 heavy bombers flew to Singapore from French Indo-China bombing Kallang and Sembawang from 22,000 feet. Our fighters claimed six destroyed and two probables, but at the heavy cost of five Hurricanes and four Buffaloes lost. Two Glen Martins and two Buffaloes were destroyed on the ground at Kallang and eight damaged.

And so throughout the month of January this sorry tale goes on, each day bringing its quota of losses both in aircraft and casualties to service personnel and civilians. From 20th to 31st January civilian casualties were six hundred and two killed and one thousand five hundred and twelve injured. In the defence of Singapore over the same period twenty-six enemy aircraft were claimed with five probables. In the air and on the ground we lost twenty-six with ten damaged.

Maltby  
Despatch  
para. 352.

Writing of the Hurricane effort in the defence of Singapore the Deputy A.O.C. admits that too much had been expected of these fighter aircraft which, "civilians and armed forces alike had anticipated... would carry all before them." It was no fault of the pilots, he goes on, that this was not achieved. "Nevertheless, the false hopes which had been placed in them reacted keenly when they were not realised", he concludes.

D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2012  
Enc. 1a.

Above 18,000 feet, the Commander of No.232 (F) Squadron reports, the Hurricane was more than a match for the Zero, but below that altitude the Japanese fighter was more manoeuvrable than the British aircraft. Desert oil filters (fitted because the original destination of these Hurricanes was the Middle East) reduced their speed by some 30 m.p.h. Factors which effected the operational strength of the Hurricanes were the lack of spare parts, glycol, oxygen, and oil for the hydraulics; shortage of tools and the inefficiency of the R/T.

II J50/22/7

Encs. 61a,  
64a, 65a.

As the Hurricanes were assembled so they were put on to operations and by 22nd January No.151 M.U. had assembled the first batch of fifty-one. In response to a personal inquiry which had originated from the Prime Minister it was shown on 29th January that only twenty-one were available for operations(1).

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(1) Hurricane state on 29th January:-

17 Written off  
2 repairable on Unit  
7 repairable at Depot  
21 available for operations  
4 available in 24 hours

51

R.A.F. Units Move to Netherlands East Indies

When the enemy crossed the border of Northern Johore on 14th January there came the realization that the R.A.F. would henceforth be confined to the four airfields on Singapore Island itself. Not only would these stations become easy targets for the rapidly advancing Japanese Air Force, but the likelihood of incoming reinforcements would aggravate still further the dangers of congestion. Dispersal beyond the dangerous limits of the Island was imperative.

II J55/15/30  
encl. 1B.

Already it has been told how at the end of December, A.H.Q. decided to reform 'Norgroup' for the control of operational Units in the contemplated move to Sumatra<sup>(1)</sup>. Palembang had been the site chosen for Group Headquarters. On 16th January the Deputy A.O.C. issued an Administrative Instruction, the main points of which were as follows:-

Bomber Squadrons would be based in Sumatra using the Singapore airfields as advance bases. No.223 Group was to be reformed<sup>(2)</sup> under the command of Group Captain Bishop for the control of these Units. Group Headquarters was to be located at Palembang with stations at Palembang I and II and Pakan Baroe. The disposition of the Squadrons, both in Singapore and those arriving from the Middle East was planned as follows:-

<u>Squadron</u>	<u>Base</u>	<u>Advance Base</u>
34	Pakan Baroe	Tengah
27	Pakan Baroe	Tengah (3)
84	Palembang I (PI) (4)	Seletar
211	Palembang I	Seletar
1	Palembang II (PII)	Sembawang
8	Palembang II	Sembawang
62	Palembang II	Sembawang
M.V.A.F.	Pakan Baroe	

Moves of the air parties from Singapore was expected to start on 23rd January and finish on 25th.

Maltby  
Despatch  
paras. 400  
and 401.

A nucleus staff of No.225 Group, headed by Group Captain Bishop, left Singapore by air on 18th January<sup>(5)</sup>. The A.O.C.'s instructions to the Group Commander were:-

- (a) to establish a Group Headquarters;
- (b) to accelerate arrangements for operating not only all the bombers then in Singapore but Nos.84 and 211 Squadrons and the Hudson III's which at the time were en route from Egypt and the U.K. respectively.

II J50/4  
entries d'd 22,  
23, 24, 25, 26,  
27, 28, 29, 30,  
31st Jan.

- 
- (1) See "Defensive Preparations in Southern Malaya".
  - (2) This Group was later designated "No.225 Group".
  - (3) The destination of Nos.34 and 27 Squadrons was subsequently altered to Palembang I on account of the vulnerable position of Pakan Baroe which was heavily raided on 17 January.
  - (4) Distance from Singapore to Palembang is 310 miles.
  - (5) The post of Group Captain Operations at A.H.Q., relinquished by Group Captain Bishop, was taken over by Group Captain G. E. Nicholletts who had arrived in Singapore about 17th January.

D.S.P (M.R.S.)

2014

enc. 10A

page 21.

Enc. 21A

page 2.

Enc. 3A

page 3.

II J55/15/30

enc. 40A.

DSD (M.R.S.)

2014

enc. 10A

page 26.

Dutch Units were first moved from Singapore. Between 17/19th January the fighters left Kallang for Buitenzorg (Java) and on 23rd January the two Glen Martin Squadrons also left for Java. The advance sea parties of Nos.1 and 8 (G.R.) Squadrons, together with No.34 (B) Squadron's ground party embarked at the Naval Base on 20th January in accordance with A.H.Q. orders. They sailed in S.S.'s Kedah and Pandah and arrived at the port of Palembang on the afternoon 22nd January; personnel then entrained for the two airfields. Six Blenheim IV's of No.34 (B) Squadron flew to PI on 24th January as well as No.27 (N.F.) Squadron. On or about 23rd January No.62 (B) Squadron arrived at PII. Two Dutch Lodestars gave invaluable but limited help in moving ground personnel. No.8 (G.R.) Squadron, after transferring its remaining Hudson II's to No.1 (G.R.) Squadron, moved to PII on 29th January. No.1 (G.R.) Squadron now with a strength of sixteen aircraft, also transferred to Sumatra on the same day when twelve aircraft left Sembawang. Four other operationally unserviceable Hudsons were moved - one carrying Group Captain McCauley to command at PII - so that by 31st January R.A.A.F. Station Sembawang was empty except for No.453 (F) Squadron.

Ibid

enc. 13A

page 59.

No.21 (F) Squadron, which was due to leave for Australia to re-arm, handed over its remaining aircraft, spares and equipment to No.453 (F) Squadron. The Unit embarked on S.S. Taklimaa on 30th January, but contrary to the original intention did not proceed directly to Australia but was sent to Palembang to assist in the maintenance of R.A.F. Blenheims (until relieved by the proper ground crews, then en route from the Middle East).

II J55/15/30

enc. 31A

d/d 26 Jan.

Owing to the vulnerable position of the Catalinas on the Seletar moorings A.H.Q. had suggested to Abdair that the Unit should be based at Batavia. No.205 (F.B.) Squadron duly moved and by 31st January four Catalinas had arrived at Tanjong Priok harbour<sup>(1)</sup>. One flying boat had remained at Seletar in connection with an incoming convoy, as well as two unserviceable aircraft.

II J53/4

pp. 38, 39,

and 40.

DSD (M.R.S.)

2014

encs. 5A

and 8A.

The remnants of the Torpedo-Bombers - five Vildebeestes and two Albacores of No.36 Squadron, eight aircraft of No.100, together with two Vildebeestes which had been used for radar calibration - were all loaded with torpedoes and at 04.30 hours 31st January flew, via PI, to Kemajoran (near Batavia)<sup>(2)</sup>.

Java was also the destination of the Wirraways, but the few Sharks were to be stripped of all useful equipment and left as dummy aircraft. Six Wirraways flew from Tengah on 31st January bound for Kenayaru. No.151 M.U. resurrected four Swordfish, which were to become operational in the Island's defence. Apart from these (and the Fighter Force) all other aircraft had gone to the N.E.I. by 31st January. Any unserviceable aircraft which remained in Singapore at this juncture, unless repairable within seven days, were to be struck off charge.

II J50/2

encs. 58A and

59A.

When the Supreme Commander found no defences had been prepared to resist an invasion of Singapore from the north, his subsequent orders for action required, amongst other

(1) Four Catalinas left Tanjong Priok for Oosthaven (Sumatra) on 1st February 1942 for operations under the Dutch controlled 'Regroup'. One remained, damaged, at Batavia.

(2) Ground crews of the two Squadrons, on 1st February, left for Palembang on S.S. Perak and ultimately rejoined their aircraft in Java.

things, information on the arrangements for evacuating stores from the Island<sup>(1)</sup>. An appreciation embracing the part to be played by the R.A.F. in this ultimate defence was submitted to General Wavell on 18th January by the Deputy A.O.C. One significant paragraph read:-

"Evacuation of Stores from Singapore - Arrangements are already under way for transferring some, and plans are in hand for the remainder. If shipping space is not available for all, the unremoved balance will be demolished."

A simply worded directive but it was to cover an exodus the like of which had never before been seen in the R.A.F. To move the bomber squadrons by air was a comparatively easy matter but their very capacity limited the lift to the bare essentials. The majority of the maintenance crews and the bulk of equipment, of necessity had to follow by sea. How welcome would have been a fleet of air transports; they at least might have lifted the Squadrons' ground personnel, but nothing short of an enormous number of vessels could have transferred the vast accumulation of stores which had been collected by the three Services over the period of some thirteen years.

Preliminary arrangements to move men and materials to Sumatra had been made as far back as 5th January but even by the 18th they were still waiting in Singapore owing to the lack of shipping. It was estimated by the Chief Equipment Officer, A.H.Q., that 30,000 shipping tons space would be needed for the proposed moves from Singapore<sup>(2)</sup>. Already there was an accumulation of 1,000 tons awaiting transfer, and no shipping was available!

Orders were given on 21st January for two-thirds of Nos. 151 and 152 M.U.s. to be sent to the region of Batavia; the Aircraft Repair Section would be housed in civilian hangars and it was proposed to use a large warehouse as a Transit Section<sup>(3)</sup>. Base Accounts and the Pay Office would also move to Java if accommodation could be found. An explosive depot would also form in the N.E.I. Advice from Palembang on conditions in Sumatra led to a directive that all parties of personnel should carry thirty days rations together with bedding, cooking utensils and fire-fighting equipment.

Everything had to be moved by sea, but although under the direction of the Deputy A.O.C. the initial arrangements were methodical and orderly the confusion soon to become apparent in the Singapore Docks rapidly disorganised the transfer of Units. Towards the end of the month work at the Docks had been almost non-stop night and day. No. 153 M.U. had got away; loading was concentrated upon R.I.M.U. equipment, heavy machinery, vehicles and airfield construction equipment as well as explosives. Then the position was aggravated and thrown into confusion by the bombing raids. Dock labour disappeared but was replaced to some extent by Service personnel who carried out bunkering and loading. Some ships had to be loaded by lighters in the roads whilst others, despite the

II J53/5  
entries at  
5, 18, 21, 22  
24 Jan.  
1, 2, 3 Feb.

Maltby  
Despatch  
paras. 359 and  
379.

(1) See "High Command Changes and More Re-inforcements Arrive."  
(2) Such would comprise all equipment in excess of ninety days requirements.

(3) At Djocjacarta (Java) No. 153 M.U. was ready to receive personnel by 26th January. No. 151 M.U. was similarly placed at Batavia to which an advance party was ready to move on 29th January.

bombing, came right into the godowns (berths). Crews deserted - even the R.A.F. auxiliary S.S. Tung Song had trouble in this respect. There were many vessels sunk and damaged in the harbour despite precautionary dispersal. Embarkation plans became disorganised and Units were scattered and separated from their equipment. Even when shipping had put to sea the danger was not past for the Japanese air attacks inflicted heavy losses on shipping bound for the N.E.I. so that large quantities of equipment, including M.T., never reached its destination.

DSD (M.R.S.)  
2161 enc. 4A  
page 3.

Maltby Despatch  
paras. 412 to  
417, 418 to  
419.

A senior Staff Officer in Sumatra reports how the influx of our forces started in mid-January; during that time and the first few days in February about five thousand R.A.F. personnel landed at Palembang. There were no delays in unloading despite the brief warning (of about three hours) which was given of their expected arrival. They were fed and housed, mainly on Dutch Army rations and in billets for there was an acute shortage of our own food and no tentage. Another primary need was for M.T. - but with the exception of three refuellers none arrived from Singapore. Personnel were in great disorder for they reached Palembang not as Units but as a mass of individuals in many cases without even nominal rolls. They were hungry, exhausted, and in a low state of morale. The situation was greatly complicated by the arrival at Palembang of men destined for Java - these had to be organised, entrained for Oosthaven and shipped thence to Batavia.

II J50/4  
entry at  
24th Jan.

DSD (M.R.S.)  
2023

'Bomber  
Operations  
in N.E.I.'  
Encs. 1A.

Originally it was planned to station Nos.27 and 34 (B) Squadrons on Pakan Baroe, then later their destination was changed to PI. This airfield received its first air attack at 1000 hours 23rd January when twenty-seven unescorted Army 97 bombers accurately dropped their loads causing only superficial damage to the airfield surface. Nevertheless, it was evident to A.H.Q. that the airfields in southern Sumatra were about to be bombed, probably with increasing severity. It was decided, therefore, to redispense the bomber force between the two Palembang airfields as follows:-

PI:- This was best adapted to fighters and so was earmarked for the Hurricanes from H.M.S. Indomitable, soon to arrive. Bombers were minimized to Nos.84 and 211 (B) Squadrons (which commenced to arrive 23rd January) and the M.V.A.F. detachment.

PII:- Suitable for all types of medium bombers, with a location believed unknown to the Japanese, and adequate dispersal facilities, was to be the base for Nos.1 and 8 (G.R.) Squadrons together with Nos.27, 34 and 62 (B) Squadrons.

The account of the arrival of Nos.84 and 211 (B) Squadrons in Sumatra shall now be amplified. As already described the first flight left Heliopolis on 14th January and arrived at PI on 23rd January only to find it had been bombed that morning. In consequence, the Blenheims left for PTI next morning. Of the remaining seventeen aircraft only eleven reached Palembang<sup>(1)</sup>.

(1) Movement of No.84 (B) Squadron:-

- 16 - reached PI and PII between 23rd January and 10th February.
- 2 - force-landed in Sumatra due to bad briefing.
- 1 - was shot up on Pakan Baroe.
- 1 - remained u/s in at Magwe (Burma).
- 1 - crashed at Rangoon (Burma).
- 1 - crashed near Allahabad (India).

DSD (M.R.S.)  
2023  
enc. 6A.

No.211 (B) Squadron, until the beginning of December 1941, had formed the basis of an O.T.U. in the Sudan. It was then reformed as an operational Squadron at Helwan (Egypt) with twenty-four Blenheim IV's. For the move to the Far East it was split into four Flights, the first of which left on 25th January. Only nineteen of the original twenty-four arrived in Sumatra: engine trouble, crashes, bad briefing and lack of maps accounted for the rest.

Finally, on 30th January Air Commodore H. J. F. Hunter assumed command of No.225 Group, Group Captain Bishop becoming S.A.S.O. He had flown from England in the same aircraft as Air Marshal Sir R. Peirse and after leaving this officer at Batavia, he and Air Commodore S. F. Vincent flew on to Singapore on 28th January. They discovered upon arrival that the A.O.C. had neither been advised of their coming to Singapore nor of their appointments as Commanders designate of the Bomber and Fighter Groups respectively.

#### Final Air Operations over Malaya

Percival  
Despatch  
paras.  
390 to 396.

'Who Dies  
Fighting' by  
Angus Rose.  
page 116.

C.28801  
Encl. 1b.  
para. 21.

Without a description of the disposition of the land forces - the ultimate defenders of Singapore - no story of the final days of the Island would be complete. By 27th January the West Coast road was open to the enemy for after the dispersal of the Batu Pahat Force the troops on the road were not strong enough to stop the Japanese. There were no reserves available and at the time the 18th Division had not arrived. A telegram had been received by the G.O.C. in which the Supreme Commander gave him discretion to withdraw on to the Island. This he decided to do. Certain preparations for the immediate defence of the Straits of Johore had already been made when the overall plan for the withdrawal was approved on 28th January. This provided for a co-ordinated move to take place simultaneously on all four routes with the final crossing on to the Island on the night 30/31st January. Focus point of this critical operation would be the Johore Causeway which was to be covered by an outer and inner bridgehead. The 22 Brigade suffered in this evacuation for it was encircled and cut off in the Layang area and despite a forced march they could not catch up. Although every effort was made to save them the force was captured in the neighbourhood of Johore Bahru<sup>(1)</sup>.

Final withdrawal was without incident. The inner bridge-head was defended by that veteran battalion - the 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders - but in this tragic and almost final incident they did not have to go into action. Instead, their pipers, standing at the lock gates, played the rear-guard across the Causeway. By 0815 hrs. 31st January all troops had been withdrawn on to the Island, and 70 foot gap was blown in the Causeway. The siege of Singapore had begun.

III55/15/30  
Encl. 38a.

On the last day in January an air directive from Abdair was sent to Wesgroup Singapore setting out the now-modified tasks of the air forces. Their objectives were: to reduce the scale of air attack on Singapore; to assist in reducing the sea movements of the Japanese, and the direct support of

(1) Many requests for reconnaissances were made by IIIrd Corps at this juncture. In particular the R.A.F. was asked to search for the missing Brigade during the morning 29th January. This task had to be deferred owing to the priority of the approaching reinforcement convoy. But in the evening (1800 hrs. approximately) seven Hurricanes covered the area Ayer Hitam - Johore Bahru Road but no enemy aircraft were encountered neither were any movements seen on the roads. In fact the only incident was over Johore when the Hurricanes were engaged by our own Bofors!



the land forces. The principal task of the bomber force was to attack enemy airfields (in which there might be assistance from American heavy bombers). Fighters were required to protect bomber airfields in Sumatra, escort bombers in the defence of Singapore and carry out sweeps in the Straits of Malacca to oppose enemy landings. The directive went on to anticipate that Island airfields would come under artillery fire and in consequence at least one base should be maintained, beyond range, to refuel the fighters engaged in the defence of the Island.

IIJ53/5  
Entries at  
26, 27, 28 Jan.

To revert now to the transference of Units to Sumatra it must be mentioned that A.H.Q. was planning to establish a rear Headquarters in the N.E.I. A site had been chosen at Oosthaven by 26th January and staff officers selected, but later the proposed location was altered to Palembang where the H.Q. would be attached to No.225 Group. Most branches of A.H.Q. were to send two-thirds of their staff and an immediate move was contemplated until the Deputy A.O.C. ruled that more detailed and orderly preparation was necessary for such an operation. Subsequently it was confirmed that the move of A.H.Q. should take place on 30th January after loading had been completed the day previously. And at this stage it was decided to leave in Singapore a Repair and Salvage Unit together with an Air Stores Park for the maintenance of the Fighter Force.

C.28801  
Encl. 1(b)  
para. 21.

IIJ50/3  
Encl. 12a.

General Wavell visited Singapore on 30th January accompanied by Air Marshal Peirse. He discussed plans for the withdrawal on to the Island and conferred with the G.O.C., the Governor, Rear Admiral Malaya and the A.O.C. on the defence of the Island. Realizing the dangers to aircraft left on the exposed airfields he gave orders (subsequently confirmed by signal after his return to Bandoeng) for all fighters to move to Sumatra leaving a token force of eight Hurricanes and eight Buffaloes to operate from the most secure location on the Island. Air Vice-Marshal Maltby - the Deputy A.O.C. was to proceed to Abdacon as soon as he could be spared whilst the A.O.C. Wesgroup, Air Vice-Marshal Pulford, was to establish his Headquarters in Sumatra leaving a rear Headquarters at Singapore(1)

Maltby Despatch  
paras. 372  
373 (a) (c)  
375.

Such orders by the Supreme Commander only endorsed the action already taken by A.H.Q. to send the Headquarters' staff to Palembang as well as to move No.151 M.U. to Batavia(2). That evening, however, to implement the new policy, it was decided to form immediately No.226 (F) Group in Palembang under Air Commodore Vincent. Staff would be provided from the personnel of No.224 (F) Group, Singapore as well as by No.266 (F) Wing soon to arrive in the N.E.I.

IIJ55/15/30  
Encl. 56a 52a,  
44a.

Because of the lack of ground defences(3) at Palembang Air Vice-Marshal Pulford (in cable No.27 of 4th Feb.) advised

(1) Air Commodore Silly - designated Commander of the Rear H.Q. at Palembang - together with A.H.Q. personnel left Singapore on S.S. Takliwa shortly after mid-day 30th January. Whether or not this move anticipated the Supreme Commander's orders is uncertain. General Wavell, however, had left Kallang at 1450 hrs.

(2) These points are emphasized because Air Vice-Marshal Maltby's Despatch gives the impression that this action was taken after General Wavell's visit, whereas in actual fact such plans were not only made prior to this date but had been implemented.

(3) Abdair had warned Wesgroup on 2nd February that 'every endeavour is to be made to perfect the defence of aerodromes (in Southern Sumatra) against parachute and air landings'. It is not absolutely certain, however, that Air Vice-Marshal Pulford was alluding to this factor in his signal of 4th February.

IIJ50/3  
Encl. 13(a),  
(b), (c).

Abdair that the bomber Squadrons should move back to Java accompanied by the few remaining fighters<sup>(1)</sup>, whilst a token force would still be retained in Singapore. On 5th February, referring to this signal and to General Wavell's directive of 30th January, he again signalled Abdair to the effect that he was shipping a large portion of his staff to Batavia to re-organise there. He proposed to fly to Palembang, accompanied by his Senior Air Staff Officer, to grasp the situation in Sumatra, thereafter continuing to Batavia.

Ibid  
Enc. 19a.

Maltby Despatch  
Draft Copy No.15  
Appendix 'D'  
para. 20.

At this juncture (5th February) a signal had been sent from Abdair requiring Air Vice-Marshal Pulford to hand over command of Wesgroup temporarily to Air Vice-Marshal Maltby as soon as convenient. He was then to report to Abdair. Air Vice-Marshal Maltby records that he and the A.O.C. were on the point of complying because they agreed a convenient moment for such a change would occur in the immediate future when A.H.Q. had been transferred to Batavia.

IIJ50/3  
Encls. 15a, 16a.

Then followed an exchange of signals - all on 5th February which completely transformed the situation. Air Marshal Peirse advised the A.O.C. that he had been considering the wisdom of moving Wesgroup from Singapore. He felt the air operations should be planned in relation to the best means of defence of Singapore and close contact with the G.O.C. was desirable. Although recognizing Batavia as an alternative location for Wesgroup, his inclination was to leave A.H.Q. at Singapore. The view of the A.O.C. on these proposals was invited. Accordingly, Air Vice-Marshal Pulford replied that the value of Wesgroup in Singapore would be small. Firstly because the fighters had been reduced to a token force; and secondly, all the bombers were in Sumatra, which according to Abdacom, was in danger of being attacked, thus involving a further move back of the Squadrons into Java. He was convinced that a move of his Headquarters to Batavia would enable the striking forces to be re-organized.

IIJ55/15/30  
Encls. 59a  
52a, 56a,  
72a.

Then came a signal, dated 5th February, from Abdair to the A.O.C. and repeated to the three Groups, which read: 'Personal from Peirse - Your 27, 4th February. It is essential to retain control of southern area Sumatra - I do NOT take so gloomy a view of possibilities. But should attack on Sumatra develop your forces must be used in the most energetic way to repel it. Please impress on everyone that we intend to stop the enemy<sup>(2)</sup>.

This was answered by Air Vice-Marshal Pulford to the effect that the Sumatra Squadrons would energetically repel any attack. Furthermore, he had cancelled the move of what

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- (1) For air strength on 3rd February see Appendix XI.  
(2) It must be stressed that this signal answered the one from Air Vice Marshal Pulford (Cable No.27. d/d 4th February) in which he proposed the bombers and the few remaining fighters should fall back to Java.

Air Vice-Marshal Maltby considers the signal had a profound effect on the A.O.C. who 'took it as a personal and public rebuke administered for suggesting that he and his H.Q. should abandon Army H.Q. in Singapore, and for suggesting that his Squadrons would have to withdraw from Southern Sumatra'.

Careful scrutiny reveals that Abdair's signal did indeed refer to Cable No.27 of 4th February where-in no mention was made of moving Wesgroup from Singapore, and in which a request was made for Abdair to repeat their answer to Nos.225 and 226 Groups.

was left of his Headquarters' staff and that he would . instruct Air Commodore Silly to proceed to Batavia to take administrative charge and to receive reinforcement personnel together with Units transferred from Singapore.

The story of the final air operations over Malaya, from the last few days of January until the Surrender, must, for the sake of clarity be divided into two parts which should be read in conjunction with each other. These concern the fighters based on Singapore, and the bomber force now almost entirely stationed in Sumatra.

IIJ50/4  
Entries at  
2 Feb.

IIJ55/15/30  
Encls. 49a,  
50a.

Kluang was the target for the only raid mounted by Singapore - based bomber aircraft. The Swordfish flight, under Army control for coast defence spotting, was released to A.H.Q. for a raid on night 2/3rd February. Four of these aircraft each armed with four 250 lb. bombs made a night attack on Kluang, at this time occupied by a strong force of Japanese fighters. Bombs were dropped on the airfield as well as upon a road convoy but results were unobserved. Two Swordfish returned with their bombs owing to defective bomb releases.

Maltby  
Despatch,  
para. 402, 421.

Operations staged from Sumatra were controlled by No.225 (B) Group who selected the targets (if within the policy laid down by A.H.Q.) and briefed the pilots. Alternatively, if Squadrons used Singapore for refuelling the briefing would be done there under A.H.Q. direction.

IIM/E84/3  
Appendix,  
pp. 2,3.

For the passage of the reinforcement convoys through the Sunda Straits during the last week in January and the first few days of February it was the responsibility of the Group to provide reconnaissances in this area. No fighter cover was available as the Dutch Buffaloes had been withdrawn to Java on 1st February. Therefore, an average of five aircraft of No.84 (B), Squadron had to stand-by all day from 30th January to 3rd February to give protection to the convoys should they be attacked. No.1 (G.R.) Squadron and a Catalina of No.205 (F.B.) Squadron also participated.

The Group also took part in the attacks against the landings at Endau by sending six Hudsons and five Blenheims. This action has already been described<sup>(1)</sup>. In addition, on the same day (26th January), six Blenheims of No.34 (B) Squadron and two Blenheims of No.84 (B) were withdrawn from operations and detached to Batavia in connection with the arrival of H.M.S. Indomitable with its forty-eight 'Opponent' Hurricanes.

IIJ55/15/30  
Encls. 29a, 39a,  
39b

Book - 'The  
Army Air  
Forces in  
World War II'  
page 383.

A series of operations against Malaya were mounted from Sumatra commencing on 30th January. Before describing these, however, it would not be inopportune to mention the effort by American B-17's of the 19th Bombardment Group. They were stationed at Malang (central Java) but for the raids on Malaya it was proposed to land these B-17's at each of the Palembang airfields, there to refuel (at 800 to 1000 gallons each aircraft) and arm with fourteen 100 kilo Dutch bombs. On the afternoon of 28th January three aircraft bombed the Kuala Lumpur runways and buildings but because of poor visibility results were doubtful. Four bombers attacked Kuantan on 29th January starting numerous fires. No opposition was met and all aircraft returned safely.

This was followed by an R.A.F. operation against Ipoh on 30th January. It was planned to mount this night raid

(1) See 'Air Co-operation Reaches its Peak'

IIJ50/4  
Entry at  
30th Jan. 31  
1, 2, 3, 4,  
5 Feb.

from PI with the six Blenheim IV's refuelling at Medan(1). The raid on Alor Star was more definite, however. Five Hudsons of No.1 (G.R.) Squadron left PII on 31st January for Medan where the aircraft were refuelled for the night operation. Taking-off at 0200 hrs. the Hudsons were forced to break formation over Malaya. One pair of bombers went in at 4500 feet to score eight hits on the hangars and runways. Dive bombing was used by the other three Hudsons for their individual attacks, and numerous and effective hits were made on the airfield and buildings.

IIM/E84/3  
Appendix,  
pages, 2, 3.  
D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2014  
Encl. 21a  
page.3, and  
Enc. 10a  
pp. 29, 30.

Penang, now a base for enemy submarines and shipping was bombed by six Blenheims of No.84 (B) Squadron and one aircraft of No.34 (B) Squadron which had refuelled at Medan on the outward flight(2).

Another raid on Singapore was planned by No.225 Group for the night of 2/3rd February seven Blenheim IV plus three Hudsons were to leave PII and refuel at Medan. No.84 (B) Squadron supplied five Blenheims, one came from No.34(B) Squadron and three Hudsons of No.1 (G.R.) completed the force. After refuelling one of the Hudsons had to force land on the airfield with an engine out of action, but the remaining Hudsons, together with the six Blenheims, went on to the target to hit buildings, stores and rolling stock. Distance covered was approximately 1800 miles to deliver - as one Blenheim pilot says - 'four 250 lb. bombs each'!

IIJ55/15/30  
Encls. 49a  
53a.  
IIJ50/4  
Entries at  
2, 3, 4, 5 Jan.  
  
IIJ55/15/30  
Encl. 49a, 53a,  
69a.  
  
D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2015  
Encl. 11a,  
page 5.

Kluang was fast becoming the concentration point for enemy fighters. The Swordfish night raid on 2/3rd February could have had little effect for a P.R. reconnaissance next day revealed fifty-one fighters on the airfield, (the previous report had shown thirty-four). It was decided to mount a combined bomber and fighter attack upon the airfield. Two Blenheims and six Hudsons landed at Sembawang during the late afternoon of 3rd February and at the same time No.258 (F) Squadron, with ten Hurricanes flew in to Tengah from PI(3). Briefing for all crews was carried out at Sembawang the same evening in view of an early morning departure. Unfortunately the fighters never got airborne on this important operation. From the report by the Officer Commanding No.258 Squadron it would seem that overnight the gun panels had been removed and not replaced. There were neither armourers nor even tools available to put the aircraft serviceable and so the operation had to be abandoned. It was decided, then, to cancel the entire raid, but before this could be done the bomber force of seven aircraft had taken-off from Sembawang. Altogether the information on this raid must have been very confused, for, contrary to instructions, the bombers returned direct to Sumatra instead of Singapore. Subsequently No.225 Group reported that the Hudsons had bombed the runway at Kluang and the Blenheims hit a road south of Yong Peng as well as a railway south of Kluang. One Hudson was missing.

IIM/E84/3  
Appendix,  
page 3.

Efforts to strike at enemy targets were maintained almost daily. No.84 (B) Squadron mounted an operation against Singora for the night of 5th February. Eight Blenheims left PII for the usual refuelling at Medan, but at the last moment bad weather intervened and the force had to return to Palembang on the following day.

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- (1) There is no further record as to whether this raid was actually carried out.
  - (2) The date of this raid is uncertain it being either 30th January or 1st February.
  - (3) For the circumstances of No.258 Squadron's location at PI see the pages dealing with Fighter activities.

ILJ50/4  
 Entries at  
 5, 6, 7 Feb.  
 D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
 2014.

Encl. 10a  
 pages 32, 34.

ILJ55/15/30  
 Encls. 61a, 76a,  
 88a, 105a, 93a

IIM/E84/3  
 Appendix  
 page 3.

A constant threat to the N.E.I. was the probability of a Japanese seaborne invasion. Information obtained by A.H.Q. of an enemy convoy in the Anamba Islands resulted in a Hudson of No.1 (G.R.) Squadron being sent off from PII at 0620 hrs. 6th February. There was no cloud cover en route so a climb to 15000 feet was made. Warning of the Hudson's approach may well have been given from the Repon Islands (on the track) for as soon as the Anambas were reached ten fighters were seen climbing to attack. Diving into a patch of cloud some 5000 feet below the pilot successfully evaded these Japanese and at the same time (1700 hrs.) the second pilot made a most accurate sketch map of Matak Bay and of the ships anchored there-in. These consisted of: one cruiser, four destroyers, four transports of 10,000, 5000, 3000 tons (and one of unknown tonnage). A successful landing was made at Kallang and the information conveyed direct to the A.O.C. Nine Blenheims were ordered to attack by moonlight on 8th February considerations of range and bomb load precluded a similar operation by No.8 (G.R.) Squadron. Meanwhile, a P.R. flight was planned for midday on 7th to obtain photographs, but this was never flown for the Buffalo was destroyed in a raid on Kallang before it could take-off. Eventually the Blenheims attacked the enemy ships at 0410 hrs. 9th February. This timing gave the best moonlight but considerable cloud was over the target and results are not recorded. Another force of nine Blenheims set off to attack the same target in the early hours of 12th February. These aircraft were from Nos. 84 and 211 (B) Squadrons at PII; three crashed on take-off and a fourth pilot returned to make a hazardous landing with all blind-flying instruments unserviceable. His only landing aid in a pitch black night was the flashes from the lightning. Of the five remaining Blenheims which flew on to the Anambas, four dropped their bombs in the target area, but again, low cloud obscured results; the fifth aircraft jettisoned its load<sup>(1)</sup>.

ILJ55/15/30  
 Enc. 105a.

What might well be described as the last offensive operation over Malaya was mounted from Palembang on 12th February (at the same time as the Blenheim strike in the Anambas). Eleven aircraft - four Hudsons of No.1 (G.R.) Squadron, five of No.62 (B) Squadron and two of No.8 (G.R.) Squadron took off at 0215 hrs. to raid Kluang where all but one dropped their 250 lb. bombs on the runway, hangars and buildings.

D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
 2015.  
 Enc. 1b.

The account of the final air defence of Singapore must centre mainly around the Hurricanes but because these were maintained from Sumatra it might be helpful to digress in order to explain the fighter organization at Palembang. It will be remembered how the executive order to establish No.226 (F) Group had been given at the time of the Supreme Commander's visit to Singapore on 30th January. Two days prior to this event Air Commodore S. F. Vincent, commander designate of the Fighter Group had arrived in Singapore only to be told by the A.O.C. that no post existed<sup>(2)</sup>. This state of affairs was completely revised with the formation of No.266 Group and on 1st February Air Commodore Vincent, accompanied by three staff officers flew to Palembang I. The object was to form the

(1) The attack on this concentration of enemy shipping was a prelude to the invasion of Sumatra which began on 13th February. Seaborne forces converged north of Banka Island for a landing in the Palembang River to take place simultaneously with our airborne operation. Details of these actions are described in the section on the N.E.I. campaign.

(2) Air Commodore Vincent flew out in the same Catalina as Air Commodore Hunter. At Batavia, Air Marshal Sir Richard Peirse and Air Commodore T. M. Williams deplaned to take up their appointments in Abdacom.

Group from personnel withdrawn from No.224 (F) Group Singapore together with No.266 (F) Wing soon to arrive in convoy W.S.14 D(1). The majority of aircraft in No.226 Group flew in from H.M.S. Indomitable; the remainder were part of the original fifty-one (which had arrived crated on 13th January. The Carrier left Port Sudan about 12th January with forty-eight Hurricane II's and pilots drawn from Nos.232, 242, 258 and 605 (F) Squadrons. These were to operate as two composite Squadrons as follows:-

D.S.D. (M.R.S.) No.232 (F) Squadron, O.C. Sqdn. Ldr. Llewellyn, comprising Nos.232, 242 and 605 Squadrons(2).  
2012  
Enc. 1a.

No.258 (F) Squadron, O.C. Sqn. Ldr. Thompson.

D.S.D. (M.R.S.) No.258 (F) Squadron was originally bound for the Middle East via Malta. Aircrews sailed in H.M.S. Athena to Gibraltar. Thereafter the destination was changed to Takoradi whence they flew by Pan American Airways to Khartoum and onwards by R.A.F. transport aircraft to Port Sudan. A fortnight was spent on board H.M.S. Indomitable after which the Hurricanes were 'flown-off', on 27th January, from a position three hundred miles S.W. of Batavia. Blenheims IV's provided a navigational escort (as already described, they were detached to Java on 26th January for this purpose). The flight to Singapore was by way of Batavia and Palembang. Fifteen of the sixteen Hurricanes which had flown off the Carrier arrived at Seletar on 28th January(3). All the guns, which were packed with grease, then had to be stripped, cleaned, tested and harmonized, consequently the Squadron did not carry out its first patrol until 1st February and then with only eight Hurricanes.

IIJ50/4  
Entry at  
27 Jan.

IIJ50/22/7  
Encl. 64a.

D.S.D. (M.R.S.) A further seven aircraft of No.258 (F) Squadron plus two of No.232 Squadron (II) landed at Tengah 1745 hours, 30th January. 2015  
Encls. 2a, 7a  
IIJ50/4  
Entry at  
30 Jan.

These were the survivors of a batch of sixteen which had flown from Indomitable. Due to inexperience on the part of the pilots five were damaged at the Batavia Civil Airport. And a further two turned over in the ruts on PII, so that only nine reached Singapore. Meanwhile the greater part of No.232 (F) Squadron (II) had arrived at PI.

(1) Operations by No.226 Group during the first fortnight in February were mainly concerned with the defence of PI against Japanese air attacks. These culminated in the parachute assault on 14th February. Therefore, the description of the organisation of Group H.Q. together with the establishment of an Operations Room, warning system, airfield lay-out and ground defences will be dealt with at their appropriate sequence in the section on the N.E.I. campaign.

(2) An explanatory note is needed in respect to No.232 (F) Squadron. It will be remembered how the first batch of fifty-one crated Hurricanes, after assembly, were flown by a Unit composed of twenty-four pilots drawn in equal numbers from Nos.232, 17, 135 and 136 (F) Squadrons and designated 'No.232 (F) Squadron'. For the sake of clarity this shall be referred to as 'No.232 Squadron (I)'. Its original O.C. was killed on the first day's operations and thereafter the Squadron was led by Sqn. Ldr. Brooker.

The balance of No.232 Squadron's pilots went to the Far East on Indomitable and as we have seen, were augmented by pilots of Nos.242 and 605 (F) Squadrons to a total of twenty-four aircraft and crews.

Thus it came about at the end of January there were two Units in the Far East bearing the same number: No.232 Squadron (I) Sqdn. Ldr. Brooker, at Seletar/Kallang, and No.232 Squadron (II) Sqdn. Ldr. Llewellyn, ex Indomitable, at PI.

(3) See also 'High Command Changes and More Reinforcements Arrive'.

D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2015  
Enc. 16  
paras: 18, 16,  
23, 40.

The A.O.C. No.226 Group reports that the majority of the Hurricane pilots (with the exception of the Squadron and Flight Commanders) were without operational experience. As an example, one Squadron had twenty-two of its twenty-six pilots in this category. Servicing of aircraft was extremely difficult for Hurricane tool kits were almost non-existent. Spares, glycol and oxygen were equally difficult to obtain. Four of the twelve Browning guns were removed for it was considered that eight guns were sufficient to deal with the unarmoured Japanese machines. This measure could give additional manoeuvrability as well as a more rapid rate of climb. Until the arrival from Batavia on 10th February of Group H.Q. Staff and ground personnel of Nos.242, 258, and 605 Squadrons, the Hurricanes were serviced by ground crews from Buffalo Squadrons - a factor which inevitably contributed to a low serviceability state.

IIJ50/4  
Entries at  
1 Feb.

D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2012  
Encl. 6a.

IIJ55/15/30  
Encl. 45a.

The story must now revert to Singapore to examine the state of the fighters on the Island. On 1st February the total strength mustered was eight Hurricanes and six Buffaloes - of Nos.232 Squadron (I) and 453 Squadron respectively. All the serviceable Buffaloes of Nos.243 and 488 Squadrons had been transferred to No.453 Squadron. Ground personnel of No.488 Squadron maintained the Hurricanes of No.232 Squadron (I) whose ground staff, together with those of No.243 Squadron, were shipped to Palembang on 2nd February. As already recounted, No.21 Squadron personnel had gone to PI at an earlier date.

IIJ55/15/30  
Encls. 41a,  
53a, 49a.

No.258 (F) Squadron had shifted to Tengah by 30th January, but on 1st February orders were received to evacuate to Sumatra. By 1730 hours that same day the sixteen Hurricanes, with a Blenheim escort, arrived at PI<sup>(1)</sup>. Raid warnings were almost continuous during this phase. Five separate attacks took place on 3rd February varying between low-level strafing of villages to high altitude bombing of the docks. On this particular day only nine fighters were available; considering this lack of aircraft was aggravated by the shortness of the warnings it is not surprising that no sorties were made. Only one enemy bomber was claimed by the A.A. guns. Again, on 4th February there was the same scarcity of fighters - six Hurricanes did manage to take the air but no interception was made. Unchallenged, enemy formations of eighteen to twenty aircraft bombed the city and Keppel Harbour; and on the north of the Island our troops were dive-bombed.

D.S.D. (M.R.S.) 2015,  
Encl. 2a.  
Encl. 7a page 3;  
Encl. 1a. page 4.

IIJ50/4  
Entries 4, 5 Feb.

Singapore's next air defenders were provided by No.232 Squadron (II) which, led by Sqdn. Ldr. Llewellyn flew in from PI on 5th February escorted by two Hudsons<sup>(2)</sup>. This relieved Sqdn. Ldr. Brooker who, with the six remaining aircraft of No.232 Squadron (I) left Kallang for PI. When 'A' Flight No.232 Squadron (II) landed at Tengah it was immediately

(1) As already told, this Unit was required to return once again to Tengah on the evening 3rd February to take part in what proved to be the abortive operation against Kluang. Finally, on evening 4th February the Squadron returned to PI.  
(2) The departure of No.232 Squadron (II) from PI was most provident for on the day following the Japanese raided that airfield. Because of the lack of warning the Hurricanes were at a disadvantage and four were shot down.

On 7th February the notice of enemy attack again was short and as a result seven Hurricanes and five Blenheim IV's were destroyed on the ground; one Blenheim IV and two Hurricanes crashed and were written-off; eleven Hurricanes, one Blenheim IV and one Hudson were damaged, and three Hurricanes missing.



IIJ55/15/30  
Encl. 79b

D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2015  
Encl. 1a.  
pp. 3, 4.

D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2012 Enc. 13a  
pp. 61, 62, 63,  
64.

Ibid Enc. 6a  
page 7.

ordered off to patrol above the Empress of Asia. This ship, part of the re-inforcement convoy, had been set on fire (and burned-out) by enemy dive bombers when in the Sultan Shoal. Casualties were few, the majority of personnel being landed by the Navy. 'A' Flight Hurricanes were engaged by enemy fighters and two damaged in this action. Meanwhile 'B' Flight, having landed at Sembawang only to come under shell fire, flew across to Tengah to find this station also being shelled. Both Sembawang<sup>(1)</sup> and Seletar were under artillery fire so the only alternative was to fly to the south of the Island and operate from Kallang. Accordingly two Hudsons, thirteen Hurricanes and five Buffaloes took-off, leaving four Buffaloes and two Hurricanes still at Tengah. There was just a possibility the immediate evacuation to Sumatra would be necessary. This did not take place, however, but the remaining four Buffaloes of No.453 (F) Squadron left for Palembang that same afternoon escorted by two Hudsons<sup>(2)</sup> - the air defence of Singapore now rested solely upon No.232 Squadron (II) with a strength of fourteen serviceable Hurricanes.

IIJ55/15/30  
Encl. 70a, 75a  
78a, 127a

D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2015  
Encl. 1a.  
pp. 9, 10.

Disaster overtook the Squadron on the 6th February. Taking-off from Kallang to intercept a raid the Squadron Commander hit a crane and was killed. Another Hurricane force-landed and was destroyed, although the pilot was safe. One Japanese fighter was claimed as destroyed and four damaged. By this time Kallang, now subjected to frequent bombing, was in a very desperate state. Only one strip of approximately seven hundred yards was serviceable but even so aircraft had to be bounced over the craters when taking-off - landings were even more precarious. There was no possibility of using the other airfields for by this time the Japanese were flying an observation balloon to direct their gunfire!

By 7th February the Hurricanes were becoming more accustomed to the enemy's tactics and frequent interceptions were made. Nevertheless two fighters were lost; one enemy aircraft was claimed as destroyed, with one 'probable'. More bombs dropped on Kallang, which, in the words of the new Squadron Commander 'now resembled a sieve'; as an alternative, a strip at Grove Road was in the course of preparation. The P.R. Buffalo, it will be recalled, was destroyed in the morning's raid.

D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2015  
Encl. 1a.  
pp. 11, 12, 13.

IIJ55/15/30  
Encls. 94a  
125a, 83a, 86d

IIJ53/8  
page 83

Air defence of Singapore came to an end on 9th February. On this day No.232 Squadron (II) fought continuously against such odds that their last stand might well be compared with the most epic achievements of the Service. On the previous night, at 2045 hrs. the Japanese had succeeded in making landings at several points on the N.W. side of the Island<sup>(3)</sup>. Further progress was supported by dive-bombing and low-flying attacks and at midday these forces had reached Tengah airfield thus necessitating the denial of the station and destruction of the four Swordfish aircraft. Hurricanes, now reduced to eight,

(1) Sembawang had first been shelled during the previous evening (4th February).

(2) Ground personnel of No.453 Squadron thereafter were organized for the ground defence of Sembawang. At 1600 hours 7th February the Squadron was ordered to move to Java. Personnel embarked in the cruiser H.M.S. Danae and S.S. City of Canterbury which left Singapore at midnight. After a hazardous voyage they arrived at Tanjong Priok (Batavia) early on 9th February.

(3) As soon as the crossing of the straits of Johore commenced the Japanese 7th Air Brigade gave immense support to the land forces. Island strong points, including the Fortress guns, were bombed and constant attacks made upon the retreating shipping as well as the Dock area. A total weight of 773 tons of bombs was dropped between 1 and 15th February.



D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2012  
Enc. 12a  
'Combat Report'

took-off at first light to engage a force of no less than eighty-four aircraft approaching from Johore. Although a measure of surprise was achieved one of the fighters was shot down, but the pilot was safe. Hurried re-fuelling and re-arming allowed the same force to be attacked once again and when the results of these two assaults were assessed the Squadron was credited with two destroyed, three 'probables' and nine damaged<sup>(1)</sup>. These seasoned pilots - for only the most experienced had survived - again went up in the afternoon. But overwhelming odds were bound to tell and it is remarkable that not more than one Hurricane was shot down. Although badly injured, the sergeant-pilot lived. As if to round off this eventful day and in ready response to the Army's call for help, four Hurricanes took-off in the late afternoon. By using the cover offered by the pall of smoke rising from the Naval Base this handful of aircraft successfully drove off dive bombers which were harassing the troops.

In the evening Air Vice-Marshal Maltby specially visited this Squadron to discuss the operations of a remarkable day. Realizing the hopelessness of the situation he gave orders for these few to evacuate to Sumatra next morning<sup>(2)</sup>. Accordingly, at first light the remaining eight Hurricanes took-off from Kallang for the last time, and, led by two Hudsons, set course for Palembang. Their aircraft were in a deplorable state, 'patched and held together by wire' the Officer Commanding writes. But this unserviceability was no adverse reflection on the ground crews. Indeed, had it not been for their magnificent and untiring efforts the fighters would long since have been grounded. These men of No. 488 Squadron had no prior experience of the Hurricane, yet despite this and the lack of special tools and spare parts they somehow managed to keep their aircraft at 100 per cent serviceability. Of the eight Hurricanes which made the sea crossing to Sumatra only one failed to reach PI - within a few miles of the airfield it burst into flames! Fortunately the pilot managed to escape by parachute and landed in a native village. So ended the air battle of Singapore.

ILJ53/8  
pages 84, 91.  
D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2012  
Enc. 13a.  
para. 35.

An accurate summary of the damage inflicted upon the enemy by the Fighters in the defence of Singapore cannot be given<sup>(3)</sup>. Similarly it is impossible to assess correctly our own losses. Group Captain Rice who commanded the Fighter Group in Singapore gives the figure of one hundred and eighty-three enemy aircraft destroyed as an absolute minimum, and at the same time admits the loss of 100 per cent of our original air strength in Malaya. From a comparison with the fighter strength at the outbreak of war and in consideration of the

(1) A.H.Q. thought it possible that a further one destroyed and four damaged might be claimed.

(2) For air strength at 9/10th February see Appendix XII.

(3) No official record of enemy losses exists other than the Operations Room Diary and Situation Reports. These documents however, maintain no continuity in the registration of casualties neither of our own nor those of the enemy. The Operations Diary is extremely 'sketchy' towards the end of the Campaign, and many of the Situation Reports are missing.

Enemy sources give a statement of total air losses from 8th December 1941 to 15th February 1942 as:-

Shot down in combat: 233  
Destroyed by A.A. defences: 279

Of these totals the Army Air Force lost 331 aircraft in combat and a further 46 as the result of bad weather. A summary of aircraft states throughout the Campaign may be found at Appendix XIII.

Hurricane re-inforcements it may be deduced that one hundred and twenty-two Buffaloes and forty-five Hurricanes were lost in air operations over Malaya<sup>(1)</sup>.

C.28801/45

Enc. 27a  
para. 27.

Maltby Despatch  
paras. 392, 449.

IIJ50/4  
pp. 403a, 404,  
405.

D.S.D. (M.R.S.)  
2014

Enc. 10a  
page 33.

General Wavell visited Singapore for the last time on 10th February. Rapid progress was being made by the enemy and although a counter attack was to be mounted he had little confidence in any prolonged resistance. He ordered the immediate evacuation to the N.E.I. of all remaining R.A.F. personnel and at the same time instructed the Deputy A.O.C. to take charge as soon as possible. Next morning he left Singapore in a Catalina. On the previous day Air Vice-Marshal Pulford had ordered Air Commodore Staton to leave Singapore by air for Palembang<sup>(2)</sup> there to act as Senior Air Staff Officer to Air Commodore Silly for with the Japanese already on the Island it had become imperative to move A.H.Q. to Sumatra. Before dawn on 10th February two Hudsons of No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron left PII for the special task of bringing away the A.O.C. This was no ordinary mission. Not only were the pilots responsible for the safe evacuation of the senior officers of A.H.Q. but the flight itself was extremely dangerous because of the virtual air supremacy of the Japanese and the dangers of enemy shelling. The A.O.C. was not prepared to leave, however, but the Air Commodore Staton together with the Senior Engineer and Armament officers left for Palembang at 0600 hrs., escorted by the Hurricanes of No. 232 Squadron (II). Later, the same aircraft returned to Kallang to fetch the A.O.C. but he was still adamant in his intention to remain to the last. Instead, Air Vice Marshal Maltby and other officers made use of this Hudson to leave Singapore. (He was appointed A.O.C. Wesgroup with effect from 11th February.)

The last few days' events in Singapore, from the R.A.F. viewpoint, must for all time be recorded only in the memories of the handful of officers who remained almost until the end<sup>(3)</sup>.

(1) At the outbreak of hostilities the Buffalo strength on Squadrons and M.U's totalled one hundred and twenty-six. On 5th February the last four aircraft of No. 453 Squadron (which had become a pool for the remnants of the other Buffalo Units) flew to Palembang.

Hurricanes losses may not be computed as readily as those of the Buffaloes because, it will be recalled, that although the reinforcing Squadrons from Indomitable were primarily based on P.I they sustained losses both in the defence of that airfield as well as in Singapore. The calculation, therefore, centres upon No. 232 Squadron (I) which started operations with fifty-one Hurricanes, and on 5th February finally left Singapore with only seven aircraft.

(2) It is interesting to note that Air Commodore Staton was also required to preserve certain A.H.Q. documents for historical purposes.

These included:-

- 'Instructions to A.O.C. by G.H.Q.F.E. and Abdaom' (IIJ50/3)
- 'Malayan Tactical Appreciation S/2563' (IIJ50/2)
- 'Operation Room Controllers' Diary' (IIJ50/4)
- 'Supreme Command, Abda' (IIJ50/5)
- 'Reinforcements of Far East in War, Policy' (IIJ50/6)

The above Files all survived the many hazards of the evacuation and ultimately were used as basic documents in the compilation of this Narrative.

(3) The copy of the Operations Room Diary saved by Air Commodore Staton contained the record up till 2115 hrs. 7th February. Only one copy of the Diary was continued thereafter, but this was destroyed at about 0930 hrs. 11th February by orders of the A.O.C. Later, this gap was filled by notes prepared from the recollections of officers who ultimately reached Wesgroup H.Q. at Soekaboemi.

From this source we read how airfields were ploughed up - Seletar, the oldest Station was the first to be destroyed - how equipment including torpedoes and bombs were denied, and of the successful efforts by the Armament staff to deny the power house and petrol installations. On 11th February came the decision to evacuate the Operations Room at Sime Road and to destroy equipment, documents, and the telephone switchboard. A stand-by Operations Room at the house 'Seven Vales' was used for the short time before the staff embarked for Batavia on the night 11/12th February. Although much vital equipment was destroyed Air Vice-Marshal Maltby reports how it was impossible, under the prevailing circumstances, to deny the bulk of the stores which had been accumulating in Singapore throughout its occupation by the R.A.F. Large quantities salvaged from the up-country stations had been temporarily housed within the city itself and in consequence destruction by fire was impossible.

Report by  
A/Cdre. Modin.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)  
2160  
Encs. 7a, 10a,  
11a.

Maltby  
Despatch  
para. 394.

The last incident must turn upon the A.O.C. himself. A.H.Q. had finally transferred to Borneo Motors Garage close to Fort Canning (H.Q. Singapore Fortress) by 1200 hrs. 12th February when Air Vice Marshal Pulford ordered the A.O.A. - Air Commodore Modin to leave Singapore in High Speed Launch No.105. He was in company with Group Captain Rice (who commanded the launch) and three other officers. The boat left Kallang Pier at 1715 hrs. In his report Air Vice-Marshal Maltby tells how the A.O.C. himself left on 13th February at the instigation of General Percival. He sailed at 1130 hrs. in a Fairmile launch No.310 together with Rear Admiral Spooner, seven other officers and thirty-five 'other ranks' of the three Services. Then, to quote the well chosen words of the Despatch: 'They were unaware that the Japanese Fleet had interposed itself between Singapore and their destination in Sumatra - Palembang. They were detected, attacked from the air and their boat stranded on an island of the Seven Brothers Group, 100 miles north of Banka Island. There the whole party, some forty in number, lived as best they could, the fisherman inhabitants having deserted it. It was malarial, unhealthy and contained little food. The party had few stores, practically no medicines and no doctor. After remaining at large for more than two months the survivors were compelled to surrender. By then eighteen had died, including Air Vice-Marshal Pulford and Rear Admiral Spooner. The remainder were in a bad way. Thus it was that these gallant officers lost their lives and the former was unable to rejoin his Command in the N.E.I.'

Percival  
Despatch  
paras. 580,  
581, 582.

On the morning of 15th February the G.O.C. received from the Supreme Commander a telegram which read:

'So long as you are in a position to inflict losses and damage to the enemy and your troops are physically capable of doing so you must fight on. Time gained and damage to enemy are of vital importance at this juncture. When you are fully satisfied that this is no longer possible I give you discretion to cease resistance... Inform me of intentions. Whatever happens I thank you and all your troops for your gallant efforts of the last few days'.

A deputation had already been sent to the Japanese lines. General Percival was required to meet the Japanese Commander (Lt. Gen. Yamashita). This he did in the Ford Factory north of Bukit Timah Village and the unconditional surrender took place. Hostilities ceased at 2030 hrs. - Singapore had fallen.

SUMMARY

Enemy bombing raids on Singapore recommenced at the end of December special attention being given to the airfields. They usually took place by night and with small numbers of aircraft, but after the strength of the defences had been gauged the Japanese changed to day raids with much larger formations and a corresponding increase in damage. No really effective defence could be found for a legacy of poor communications, restricted raid warning systems, ineffectual control of the fighters and defection of native labour were foremost amongst the many factors which detracted from the efficiency of the Island defences. And of course, the primary arm - the fighters - were so few and ill-equipped that the Japanese airmen were more than their match. Interception was but one of several of the fighters' tasks - the meagre and diminishing force of Buffaloes had to be spread between air defence, convoy protection, close support for the Army and bomber escorts. There is no doubt they were employed on the most suitable operation the occasion demanded, but the quantity of aircraft was so hopelessly inadequate that alternative commitments had to suffer.

At this juncture, 15th January, the South West Pacific Command was set up to implement a policy laid down at the outbreak of the Far East war; and the post of Commander-in-Chief, Far East was abolished. A Supreme Commander was required to co-ordinate the war efforts of the American, British, Dutch and Australian forces to stem the tide of Japanese aggression and later to stage an offensive. Staffed by officers from the Powers concerned Abdacom had a dual responsibility to both the British and American Chiefs of Staff. General Wavell's first orders required immediate re-disposition of the land forces in Malaya. IIIrd Corps, having fought continuously right down the length of Malaya, was withdrawn into Johore, whilst the Australians, hitherto in the quiet area went forward to hold the enemy until reinforcements arrived. Primary task of the air forces was now the protection of convoys but with the ever-present commitment to destroy any East Coast landings. Stocks of aircraft were so quickly diminishing that reinforcements became imperative therefore a total of one hundred and thirty-seven Hurricanes were to be diverted from the Middle East. The original consignment of fifty-one fighters had already arrived but the flow of bombers was far less satisfactory. Only sixteen Hudsons flew in to Singapore whilst the two reinforcing Squadrons from Egypt came in small numbers.

In passing it is interesting to reflect that the Allied Command was not formed until the Japanese were at the outskirts of the State of Johore. Until then the Far East Command had functioned with control limited to the land and air forces. It is a matter of conjecture to visualize what might have happened at the outbreak of war if a Unified Command had existed. But reviewing the events of those first momentous days it is thought that had the Commander-in-Chief, Far East been able to exercise control of the Naval forces, he as airman (and knowing the hazards of the lack of air cover) would hardly have sent the two capital ships on their ill-fated cruise.

Close co-operation with the Army had been very limited until the rapid retreat down the West Coast brought the Japanese within striking distance of the Singapore-based fighters. Bombers also reached out to hit the enemy air forces assembling on the Kuantan and Kuala Lumpur airfields. But coastal infiltrations together with a swift frontal advance meant the airfields in Southern Johore had to be abandoned.

At the same time it was inevitable that such tactics would isolate considerable numbers of our troops. Limited but valuable air support was given in re-supplying and covering the evacuation of such forces.

On the 26th January came the long-anticipated landing on the East Coast, which, even if it were no surprise certainly found the striking force very unprepared. On the staff side plans for co-ordination of the fighters and bombers had to be made, and at Seletar the aircraft were without fuel and unarmed! At the last moment, as if to add to the confusion, Air Headquarters decided that bombs and not torpedoes should be used. When the Vildebeestes eventually arrived at Endau the invading troops had been given a start of some four and a half hours to get ashore. Empty ships were the target - almost to be described as the 'bait' - for above the fleet waited a strong force of Japanese fighters to strike down the practically defenceless and certainly ancient torpedo-bombers.

This of all the Malayan operations was surely the most ill-conceived. There had long existed ample time to plan it to the very last detail, yet when the emergency arose the Operations staff, it would seem, had to start from the very beginning. With land-based fighters patrolling at Endau it was inevitable the cost would be heavy, but at least, had the Vildebeestes arrived in reasonable time and during the disembarkation, the hits (which indeed were ultimately scored) would have resulted in far greater destruction. The Air Officer Commanding's statement that such aircraft never again would be used on a similar mission was ironically true; there were insufficient survivors to constitute such a force!

Another operation which greatly resembled the hurried despatch of the torpedo-bombers was the deployment of the first fifty-one Hurricanes. Little preparation was made for their arrival, but the shortcomings of the air staff were amply compensated by the technicians who assembled the fighters in rapid time thus enabling the planners to send them into the air in small numbers and flown by pilots who thus had no opportunity to become acclimatized to tropical flying conditions. Might not these Hurricanes have given a better account if restraint had been exercised until they had been built into a fighting unit? Indeed, the same might be said of the other reinforcements - the Hudsons and the Blenheims - all of which were used piecemeal and in consequence destroyed before they could assume the cohesion of a Squadron.

With the enemy streaming across the Johore frontier on the 14th January dispersal of the striking force to the Netherlands East Indies could no longer be delayed despite the unsuitability of that country. A new Group was formed to control a force which, although based in distant Sumatra, would use the Singapore airfields as advanced re-fuelling points. Ground personnel moved by sea to Palembang and in due course were followed by the Bomber Squadrons, eventually to be concentrated on PII. Catalinas moved to Batavia, and what was left of the torpedo-bombers and the Wirraways, also flew to Java. On the Island the Buffaloes were pooled to re-equip No.453 Squadron whilst the ground crews of the three denuded fighter Units were spread between existing and newly arrived Squadrons. Only a token force remained in Singapore by 31st January.

Transportation of redundant personnel and equipment to the Netherlands East Indies was manifestly beyond the

capacity of existing shipping. Transport aircraft - which had been consistently denied the Command - would have been invaluable; the few such aircraft loaned by the Dutch did little more than emphasize a desperate need. Practically everything and everyone had to be moved by sea - months of work was to be reduced to the span of weeks or even days. Lack of shipping space presented a thousand difficulties which were only aggravated when the Japanese started to bomb the docks. Confusion at the comparatively well ordered base of Singapore, if anything, was exceeded by the disorganization in Sumatra when the mass of Royal Air Force started to flood into the Netherlands East Indies.

Final withdrawal of the land forces across the Causeway on the 31st December minimized the tasks of the Royal Air Force to those of reducing the scale of air attack on the Island and direct support of the land forces. Plans were accelerated for the establishment of a rear Headquarters in the Netherlands East Indies leaving only a token force of fighters in Singapore. General Wavell endorsed this policy and in consequence the Air Officer Commanding proposed the bomber force should transfer to Java. Abdair was not in agreement, however, and directed that the bombers must stand fast in Sumatra, and likewise Air Headquarters should remain in Singapore. But how dramatically prophetic the considered advice of the Air Officer Commanding proved to be. Devastating blows soon were struck against PI and its aircraft as a prelude to a parachute operation which was to drive the British right out of Sumatra.

Bomber Squadrons at PII, to implement the Abdacom policy of reducing air attacks upon Singapore, had mounted a series of raids upon the Malayan airfields. These operations were perhaps more intensive than any before, but even with a measure of help from the United States Air Force the limited weight of bombs, though resolutely delivered from the meagre force of Hudsons and Blenheims, had little effect upon the enemy aircraft now massed in Southern Malaya. In the light of subsequent events, how much better it might have been if this force had been conserved in Java in order to strike at the invasion fleets then known to be gathered in the Anambas.

Initial activities of number 226 Group after its establishment at Palembang included the provision of a fighter force in Singapore. This was made possible only by the arrival of two reinforcing Squadrons from Indomitable. Suitable interchanges of Units kept a small number of Hurricanes on the Island until the 10th of February. Determination and skill on the part of a handful of pilots was of no avail against the Japanese swarms which by weight of numbers alone could almost disregard the fighters. Valuable aircraft were lost daily with a regularity which threatened totally to eliminate the force. But they remained fighting to the end until finally withdrawn by order of the Supreme Commander.

Amongst the last Royal Air Force personnel to leave was Air Vice Marshal Pulford. Determined to remain with the remnants of his Command he left only when he considered his duty done. The Royal Air Force in the Far East had grown beyond the capacity of one man's control yet this very expansion did not bring decentralization in its train. Only towards the end were responsibilities delegated to hastily formed and inadequately staffed Groups. Tired by his vast efforts, dispirited because of apparent lack of faith shown by the superior Command and virtually relieved of his duties, Air Vice Marshal Pulford died in bitter isolation.

SUMATRA

In the foregoing pages it has been seen how, from the commencement of war with Japan, Dutch forces in Sumatra and Java were closely involved in the operations in Malaya and in the defence of Singapore. Three Dutch bomber squadrons and one fighter squadron flew from Java to Singapore as a reinforcement for the Royal Air Force immediately after the Japanese landings at Singora and Kota Bharu, although two of the former had to be returned to Java for further training in night flying. This immediate response was indicative of Dutch determination to honour their obligations under terms of the agreement, known as Elenaps, which had been reached at the A.D.B. Conference. (1) In addition a detachment of flying boats arrived at Seletar to take their part in the reconnaissance of an allotted area in the South China sea, namely - Kuantan - Great Natunas - Kuching. Flying boats from Batavia also carried out convoy escorts and anti-submarine patrols in the Indian Ocean, and kept watch over the Straits of Macassar and along the East Borneo coast as far as Balikpapan.

Sumatra too, early in the war, had to provide landing grounds as alternatives to those of the Far East reinforcement route which had been established for some years by the Royal Air Force but which, owing to the Japanese advance into Thailand, were not available. From the N.W. corner of Sumatra at Sabang, a line of airfields was provided through Lhonga - Langsa - Medan - Pakanbarol, to the civil airport at Palembang, through which reinforcing aircraft from India and the Middle East were flown to Singapore. At all these places, with the help of the Dutch, R.A.F. care and maintenance parties were established and the more southerly of the landing grounds were later used for refuelling by R.A.F. bomber aircraft, based at Palembang, in their attacks on targets in Malaya.

Fall of Singapore

The rapid Japanese advance down through Malaya, and the capture of Singapore with practically all its defending troops, made it almost certain that the enemy would next attempt to overrun the rich islands of the Netherlands East Indies. This was expected by ABDACOM, not only because it was the logical sequel to success in Malaya, but also because Sumatra and Java were the probable objectives of large Japanese convoys which had been reported as assembling off the N.E. and N.W. coasts of Borneo. Singapore had fallen on 15 February, but on 14 February a heavy Japanese attack was launched on Sumatra, at Palembang which, in a few days was to give the enemy mastery of the whole island.

Defence of Sumatra

Before describing this attack in detail it is necessary to examine the defence position in Sumatra with particular reference to the disposal of available Royal Air Forces. In the account of operations in Malaya it has been seen that Japanese pressure had compelled the Royal Air Force to withdraw its squadrons within the perimeter of Singapore

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(1) A.H.B. File II J50/4 -- entries dated 2 and 3 December 1941.

Island, with the result that there was the greatest congestion and confusion on the few airfields. This, together with the increasing scale of Japanese attack, made it necessary to find a new dispersal area for existing squadrons, and accommodation for reinforcements which were due to arrive. Bomber squadrons were therefore moved from Malaya to Sumatra and, for their administration and operation, No. 225(B) Group, early in January, was formed in Singapore, under the Command of Group Captain A. G. Bishop, with Wing Commander K. Powell as S.A.S.O. and Squadron Leader Briggs as S.A.O. This nucleus staff moved to Palembang, in Sumatra, on 18 January and, on 30 January, Air Commodore H. J. F. Hunter, who had been sent out from the Air Ministry as commander of a Bomber Group in the Far East arrived to take over command, Group Captain Bishop becoming S.A.S.O.

### Palembang

This was one of the few important towns in Sumatra. In the south-east, it contained large oil production plants, refineries, and rubber factories and was connected by rail with the port of Oosthaven at the S.E. extremity of the island. Communications were poor and, although there was a Dutch observer system, the outer circle of which extended to Banka Island, it was not fully effective owing to large gaps in the ring, and to poor communication between the posts and Palembang.

There were two airfields known as P.1 and P.2. The former was the Dutch civil airport, and had two hard runways with a few small buildings and stores, but its dispersal possibilities had not been considered, and with limited labour available at the time, small progress could be made in their development. There was little accommodation at the airfield and personnel had to be billeted in the town about 12 miles away. P.2 was a large natural clearing in the jungle about 40 miles from P.1. Although the Japanese knew there were two airfields in use near Palembang they never discovered P.2, in spite of many reconnaissances, until after their paratroop landing on 14 February. Although there was a road between P.1. and P.2, the Palembang river had to be crossed by a ferry, which took about 15 minutes for the crossing, and could carry only four to six medium sized vehicles at a time. It was also intended to extend, for the use of bombers, an existing landing ground at Lahat on the railway about 65 miles S.W. of Palembang.

Much administrative work of all kinds was necessary to make these landing grounds fit for the operation of bomber units. Given time this could have been carried out, but the speed of the Japanese advance was such that little was possible. To make matters worse, the evacuation of air forces from Malaya had been carried out under continuous enemy bombing. Ships were hastily loaded as they were able to come alongside the jetties, and such was the confusion that squadrons' equipment and personnel sometimes became separated and placed on different vessels, bombs, for example, on one vessel, components on another. Ships were sent away, whether fully loaded or not, mostly at night and during intervals in the intensive air attack. During passage across to the Netherlands islands attacks by air, surface vessels, and submarines were carried out on the retreating convoys, with the result that ships were scattered and of those that were not sunk, some, intended for Sumatra, arrived at Java and vice-versa. Equipment was lost, and the tremendous dislocation, both in the embarkation at Singapore and in the ports in Sumatra and Java, completely disorganised the plans for establishing the bomber wing at Palembang.



Organisation of No. 225 (B) Group

Immediately on his arrival at Palembang on 18 January Group Captain Bishop had sent to Air Headquarters at Singapore his suggested plans for the establishment of No. 225(B) Group at Palembang. These proposals, which received immediate approval, included the following arrangements:-

- (a) To establish Group Headquarters at Palembang, and, in co-operation with the Dutch, to set up an operations room.
- (b) To expand, as rapidly as possible, the accommodation at P.1 and P.2, and to arrange for aircraft dispersal sites.
- (c) To develop Lahat as a bomber airfield.
- (d) To reconnoitre the area south of Palembang for the selection and development of additional landing strips.

Besides the maintenance of the Group, provision was also to be made for the siting of an ammunition park, an air stores park, and an R.S.U.

In the execution of these plans the greatest assistance was rendered by the Dutch, but while a good deal of progress was made and much improvisation effected, the R.A.F. in Sumatra was in no condition to meet the heavy attacks it was to sustain from 6 February onwards.

Operations carried out by No.225(B) Group over Malaya from airfields in Sumatra have already been described. Mention has also been made of the arrival and establishment of the headquarters of No.226(F) Group at Palembang on 1 February, under Air Commodore S. F. Vincent. The personnel of this group, consisted of the remnants of No.224(F) Group, withdrawn from Singapore, and detachments of a new fighter wing - No.226 (F) Wing - advance parties of which, with an A.S.P. and R.S.U. with all equipment were beginning to arrive in Java and Sumatra from the United Kingdom.

Function of No.226(F) Group

The role of No.226(F) Group at Palembang was to be:-

- (a) Defence of Palembang area.
- (b) Protection of shipping in Banka Straits.
- (c) Up to 8 February, the maintenance of a token force of fighters on Singapore Island.

When Air Commodore Vincent arrived in Palembang he found that No.225(B) Group, with the helpful co-operation of the Dutch, had arranged a fighter operations room for him. For communication with his aircraft the operations room controller was connected to a naval transmitter in the docks area some miles away. Later, this arrangement was improved, the controller having direct connection to his own transmitter. An A.A. gun operations room was also established close by in the same building. Efforts were also made to improve communications for the Dutch observer system which has already been mentioned. Additional posts were sited, W/T sets were to be manufactured locally, and personnel to be trained in their

use, but all this was never operative. When the Japanese attack developed on 14 February the original system was the only one in use.

There were not many fighter aircraft available for No.226 Group. On its formation, it had in Palembang about 50 Hurricanes some of which had been in action in Malaya. These Hurricanes were mainly from a reinforcement of fifty which had been flown off the Indomitable on 25 January. Fifteen had been issued immediately on arrival to squadrons in Malaya, and when they reached Palembang they were serviced by personnel of Buffalo squadrons, evacuated from Singapore, who had no Hurricane tools or spares. When No.226(F) Wing began to arrive with some equipment, there was a certain improvement but still a serious deficiency of tool kits and starting batteries, and no charging facilities were available. All this meant a low standard of serviceability. There were no fully formed operational fighter units and pilots for the Hurricanes were drawn from personnel of Nos.232, 242, 258 and 605(F) Squadrons.

#### Early Japanese air operations in Sumatra

In the meantime Japanese air forces were fully occupied in Malaya but from the beginning of February they began to carry out photographic reconnaissances over Palembang and Banka Island. On 6, 7 and 8 February there were attacks by bombers on P.1 which did a good deal of damage, and a number of Hurricanes were destroyed, chiefly on the ground. There was very little warning of the attack on the sixth, and, as a result, the Hurricanes were caught at a tactical disadvantage, and four were lost, against one Navy 'O' fighter shot down. Warning on the seventh was even shorter, and results were more serious. Three Hurricanes on the ground were destroyed, eleven were damaged, and three were shot down. In this raid also, four unserviceable Blenheims, and one Hudson which had arrived during the attack, were destroyed on the ground. Japanese losses were negligible, only one Navy 'O' fighter being claimed. On 8 and 13 February attacks were continued, but more warning was received and the Japanese bombers did not reach P.1. On 13 February three Navy 'O' fighters and two Army 97 bombers were shot down for the loss of one Hurricane.

During these operations reinforcing aircraft were arriving for No.226(F) Group. On 12 February Wing Commander Maguire with eight Hurricanes arrived by air from Batavia where the ground crews of Nos.232, 258 and 605 (F) Squadrons, together with 39 Hurricanes and 15 pilots had been disembarked on 4 February. On the next day, 13 February, a further nine Hurricanes arrived from Batavia while the Japanese attack was taking place. Six of these were lost, some perhaps in the fighting, but more likely, from forced landing through shortage of petrol, as they could not land on P.1 during the action.

#### Japanese main attack develops

It had been known for some days that Japanese shipping was moving down from Borneo, and on the morning of 14 February a convoy with strong naval escort was reported north of the entrance to Banka Straits. Under orders from Abdair all available Blenheims of No.225(B) Group, with the few serviceable Hurricanes as escort, set off early to make a bombing attack. While they were in the air the Observer Corps reported, at about 08.00 hours, the approach of a large force of enemy aircraft making for Palembang. Attempts were made to recall the Hurricanes but without success. P.1 was heavily bombed and aircraft on the ground were shot up by fighters, and then at

about 09.00 hours from 20 or 30 Japanese transport aircraft later described as Hudsons, marked with R.A.F. roundels, about 300 paratroops were dropped 800 yards S.E. and N.W. of the airfield in two groups of about 150 each. At the same time a third group, about the same strength was dropped near the oil refinery at Pladjoe, a few miles away.

#### Ground Defences at Palembang

Before giving in detail an account of the operations immediately following the Japanese paratroop landing, it might be convenient to examine briefly the ground defence system as it existed at Palembang. In Malaya, aerodrome defence was primarily the responsibility of the Army whose duty it was to provide protection against air and ground attack. Many airfields in N. Malaya, however, had been selected and sited, more because of their suitability for landing aircraft, than for their capability of defence, and it was not until there was consultation between the Army and R.A.F. regarding the selection of airfields that the situation became more or less satisfactory from the point of view of ground defence.

At home the general question of ground defence of aerodromes had become a subject of high level discussion between the three services early in 1940, but it was not till May 1941 that a general instruction was agreed and issued to the Navy, Army and Royal Air Force. This document was entitled 'Instructions for the defence of aerodromes'. It was dated 1 May 1941, and was a publication agreed by, and issued under the authority of, the Admiralty, War Office, Air Ministry, and Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces. There was no indication that this publication was applicable to overseas command, but there is little doubt that copies found their way to the Far East and an effort was made in Malaya to form an R.A.F. ground defence force, which however developed slowly owing to a general shortage of personnel and weapons. Events in Crete in May and June 1941 had emphasised the danger of airborne landings, and with more personnel becoming available in Malaya, both as the result of the shortening of the R.A.F. line, and of the arrival of reinforcements in Singapore, a training school was set up at Seletar and ground defence flights were formed, but the process was very slow.

On 6 February 1942, one flight of these Seletar-trained men consisting of 1 officer and 36 other ranks arrived at Palembang, and almost immediately the officer was informed that paratroop landings were expected. On 10 February three defence flights of 3 officers and 86 men arrived, and it was during the allocation of these to their defence positions on P.1 that the paratroop landings took place.

Other ground defences at Palembang at this time were:-

- (a) 1 Heavy A.A. Battery with eight 3.7 guns.
- (b) 1 Light Battery with 6 Bofors.
- (c) 1 Netherlands Infantry unit of 150 men with 2 Bofors guns and 2 light armoured cars.

All the above were on the airfield at P.1 and in addition there were two Netherlands Infantry units - native troops with Dutch officers and N.C.Os - with a headquarters in Palembang town. The personnel of the heavy and light A.A. batteries were British, being the only British army troops in Palembang.

### Ground Defence Equipment

The Netherlands infantry were well equipped on the whole, each man being armed with an automatic weapon of the Mauser type. They had hand grenades, and some light and medium machine guns, most of which were in fixed positions, but in addition a portable light machine gun was available for each 15 men, i.e. 10 L.M.G.s per unit. The British A.A. batteries, both heavy and light, had practically no small arms or ammunition, and some of their gun positions were in the open without any cover. The R.A.F. defence flights were not well equipped. They had rifles and a few Lewis guns, although the flights which arrived on 10 February brought with them 250 rifles and 6 Lewis guns, many were unserviceable. Fifty Browning guns, removed from Hurricanes, were being adapted as ground guns, but mountings were not ready for them when the paratroop landings took place. The R.A.F. had a total of 13,000 rounds of .303 ammunition.

On the morning of 14 February the defence position at Palembang may be summarised as follows. In the airfield area, i.e. round the perimeter of P.1 there were:-

- (a) 110 officers and men of the Netherlands army.
- (b) 150 officers and men of British A.A. batteries.
- (c) 3 officers and 72 men of R.A.F. defence unit.

Forces in Palembang town were:-

- (a) 1 officer and 72 other ranks of the R.A.F. defence unit who were to have been transferred to P.1 that day.
- (b) 2 weak companies of Netherlands infantry.

At Fladjoe, the oil storage area, there were five or six Dutch Bofors guns and some infantry.

### The Paratroop Landings

With regard to the actual landing which, as has been stated, took place to the N.W. and S.E. of the airfield, the officer in charge of the R.A.F. defence flights, in a report<sup>(1)</sup> made afterwards, thinks that the Japanese must have had a good knowledge of the country round P.1. The party to the N.W. were scattered over a ridge from which they could fire on one of the runways, and that on the S.E. was in a position to cut the road from P.1 to Palembang town, and in fact they set up a road block early in the action. Having done this, they moved back to attack the A.A. batteries, using small arms and hand grenades. In the meantime the A.A. gunners were using their guns against paratroops on the ground, firing over open sights, but they were soon ordered to retire and destroyed most of their guns. They suffered heavy casualties. At this stage of the action Wing Commander Maguire had taken over control of aerodrome defence. Aircraft from the Banka Straits raid were due to return to P.1 and an attempt had been made to direct them to P.2. Some of No.232(F) Squadron Hurricanes landed, were refuelled under fire, and took off for P.2 and soon after, when no more aircraft were expected, all surplus air and ground crew were evacuated.

By this time many of the paratroops had been killed by the defence forces, but at noon the Japanese still held a road block to the S.E. and there were a few on the perimeter near the control tower. The situation however, was under control, but

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(1) A.H.B. ILJ.54/6/11.

reports coming from the area of the oil refineries at Pladjoe were not good, and there were also rumours that Palembang was cut off from the south. All approaches to the town had been covered by personnel of No.226 Group, whose control room and office records were destroyed. The headquarters joined up in the same building with No.225(B) Group, whose records were then destroyed but the operations room and communications to P.2 were kept intact.

#### Headquarters move to P.2

When it was found that the road to the south was open later in the afternoon, Nos.225 and 226 Groups moved to P.2, casualties and all surplus personnel being evacuated, after aircraft and equipment had been destroyed, for no apparent reason except that food, water and ammunition were running short, and it was thought that there might be a night attack on the airfield. Except that runways which had been prepared for demolition were not blown, the withdrawal was successfully carried out and most of the defenders were evacuated. Almost as it got dark the A.O.C. No.225(B) Group returned to Palembang from P.2 with most of his staff. The evacuation had undoubtedly been premature, and the Dutch commander stated that the situation was under control and that he hoped to be able to round up the remaining paratroops. At night, however, oil and rubber stocks in the town were set on fire. Early in the morning of 15 February, at a meeting with the Dutch authorities, both Group Commanders were informed that the ferries to the south and the railhead facilities were to be destroyed and the town evacuated by troops. As a result, the A.O.C. ordered all R.A.F. personnel to leave, and they were moved by road and rail to Oosthaven. Both group commanders then returned to P.2, and it was agreed that operational control of remaining aircraft, both fighters and bombers, should be exercised by the A.O.C. No.225(B) Group.

#### R.A.F. attack on Japanese convoy

At this stage an account should be given of the joint attack carried out by No.225(B) Group and No.226(F) Group on the Japanese convoy which had been previously reported moving south from the Anambas Islands. The presence of this convoy was giving rise to considerable anxiety in Palembang, and on the evening of 13 February it was decided, after discussion with the Dutch authorities, and contrary to the orders of Britair, to carry out a reconnaissance to find out the strength and course of the convoy. A single Hudson of No.1 (G.R.) Squadron was sent off and reported a large force of Japanese ships north of Banka Island, moving towards the Straits. An immediate attack was ordered by all available Blenheims, but owing to darkness and storms, results were not observed. At first light next morning, 14 February, five Hudsons of No.1 Squadron carrying bombs were ordered to make a reconnaissance and attack if possible. A convoy of 25 to 30 large vessels with naval escort was discovered at the entrance to Banka Straits. It was covered by a force of Japanese fighters which, it was thought, had come from a carrier though no carrier was seen. The Hudsons were not able to make an attack, but immediate orders were then issued by No.225(B) Group for all operationally serviceable Blenheims and Hudsons from P.1, with a Hurricane escort, to attack the convoy. In spite of strong fighter defence and in face of heavy A.A. fire from the naval escort this attack was pressed home with great determination and much damage was caused. It was claimed that six transports

were sunk or set on fire. Though our own losses were heavy, six or eight aircraft having been shot down, or destroyed on landing at P.1, and others damaged, this action on balance was successful. For the time being the convoy was scattered and the landing which would have taken place at the mouth of the Moesi river that day, almost simultaneously with the paratroop descent on P.1, had to be postponed till the next, 15 February. It was during this attack that the paratroop landings at P.1 and Pladjoe took place, and as has already been told, returning aircraft were diverted to P.2. Some which had landed at P.1 were refuelled and immediately took off again for P.2, though most were hardly air-worthy.

#### R.A.F. aircraft strength in Sumatra

It is hardly possible to give an exact estimate of R.A.F. aircraft strength in Sumatra at this time. Some assistance had been received from Dutch and American units in Java, but mainly owing to bad weather, these had not been able to take part in attacks on Japanese shipping off Banka Island. On the evening of 14 February however, when all aircraft had been pooled under No.225(B) Group there were at P.2 the following:-

(a)	Hurricanes	22
(b)	Blenheims I and IV	35
(c)	Hudsons	3

Many of these aircraft, particularly the Blenheims, were operationally unserviceable. Most airworthy Hudsons, loaded up with No.1 Squadron personnel had already been flown to Java for repair after the attack on the Japanese convoy. All these aircraft were placed under the operational control of the Station Commander at P.2, Group Captain McCauley, who was ordered by the A.O.C. No.225(B) Group, to continue at first light with attacks on the Japanese convoy. Ground crews, in fact every one, worked all night getting aircraft serviceable and composite flying units were made up. Blenheims were manned mostly by aircrew of Nos.84 and 211 Squadrons who had recently arrived from the Middle East.

#### Final operations from Palembang

Early morning reconnaissance on 15 February had reported transport and naval vessels steaming through Banka Straits, and others, including large barges, moving into the several mouths of the Moesi or Palembang river, most of these latter being in the main stream which was navigable for vessels of light draught up to the town. The first attack, made by six Blenheims escorted by Hurricanes, took off at 06.30 hours. In spite of strong fighter opposition they pressed home their attack. It was to be a strenuous day. As they landed on their return from their first sortie, aircrews were reporting to the Station Commander and later to the A.O.C. No.225(B) Group, who had arrived from Palembang, and from then onwards till late in the afternoon there was a constant stream of Blenheims and Hurricanes between P.2 and the river. Refuelling and rearming as quickly as possible aircrews turned round and set off again. Japanese fighter opposition had ceased soon after the first attack, and transports and landing barges were shot up by the Hurricanes and low flying Blenheims after their bombs had gone. At first there was heavy, but inaccurate A.A. fire which, however, ceased altogether about mid-day. Attacks were continued till late in the afternoon when it was seen that all movement of shipping in the river had stopped. Transports had moved away and barges and landing craft had drawn in to the river banks under trees and bushes. Troops who had landed were shot up and though Group Captain McCauley had been ordered to

evacuate P.2 that night, some Blenheims of Nos. 84 and 211 Squadrons kept up the attack till dark, when it was too late for them to take off for Java. Hurricanes and Hudson had gone, and most of No. 211 Squadron Blenheims, but the remainder, all requiring repair, and heavily overloaded with maintenance personnel, made their way singly to Java early on 16 February. All other R.A.F. personnel from P.2 and some who were still in Palembang area left for Oosthaven by road and rail during the afternoon, equipment and unflyable aircraft having been destroyed.

#### Evacuation of Sumatra

The loss of Palembang and its airfields meant that Sumatra would soon be overrun by the Japanese, and Abdacom decided on a complete evacuation of all forces to Java where it was still thought that an effective stand might be made. Under orders from Abdair, all R.A.F. units began to move from Oosthaven on the morning of 16 February, when already all Dutch military property and stores were being destroyed. At Oosthaven the officer in charge of embarkation insisted that shipping was available for personnel only, and that heavy equipment, including M.T. and some A.A. guns and ammunition which had been sawed from Palembang, were to be left behind. This equipment also unfortunately included almost all the stores of No. 226(F) Wing, which had arrived at Oosthaven with No. 41 A.S.P. Much of the fighter wing's R.S.U. equipment was also abandoned, though some was recovered later, this loss being felt particularly in operations in Java. Once again this evacuation at Oosthaven was premature. It might have been realised that the severe handling which the Japanese landings at Palembang had received must have made it impossible for them to advance so quickly down through Sumatra. In spite of a second paratroop descent on P.1 on 16 February, the Japanese would have taken some time to recover from their defeat in Palembang river, and it is almost certain that had there been even moderate ground forces available the invaders could have been driven into the sea. This had been a major success for the R.A.F. which it had not been possible, in the circumstances, to exploit.

At it was the destruction at Oosthaven went on without interference from the enemy. Two days later Group Captain Nicholetts who, with the ground personnel of No. 84 Squadron had been the last to leave, collected a party of fifty volunteers from No. 605(F) Squadron in Batavia and returned to Oosthaven in H.M.S. Ballarat, which was commanded by an officer of the Royal Australian Navy who knew the harbour. Much valuable equipment was salvaged, including some Bofors guns and ammunition. After a day's work the salvage party left, not only having recovered a great variety of R.A.F. equipment, but also, by the destruction of harbour facilities, having denied these to the Japanese. Part of the railway terminus and much loaded rolling stock were also destroyed.

The evacuation of Oosthaven meant that with the exception of the C. and M. parties at various landing grounds in N. Sumatra, all R.A.F. personnel were now in Java. The C. and M. parties were instructed by wireless to make their way to the west coast and embark in such ships as they could find. Having destroyed petrol and other stores they embarked, mostly at Padang and Sabang, and eventually reached India.

1. The first step in the process of the investigation is the identification of the problem. This is done by the investigator who is assigned to the case. The investigator will then gather information about the problem and the people involved. This information will be used to determine the cause of the problem and the best way to solve it.

450440 11/12/01

The following information was obtained from a review of the records of the Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, and the Bureau of Reclamation, regarding the proposed project.

[illegible][illegible]



OPERATIONS IN JAVA

Sumatra having been completely evacuated by the R.A.F. and Dutch forces, the campaign now moved to Java, and it was estimated that the Japanese would lose no time before attempting amphibious landings on the north coast of the island. It will be recalled<sup>(1)</sup> that ABDACOM had been formed to take over control of all Allied forces in the S.W. Pacific. General Wavell had arrived in Java on 15 January, and set up his headquarters near Bandoeng, a large town on the railway about 100 miles S.E. of Batavia. Allied air forces were controlled by Abdair, under Air Marshal Sir Richard Pierse, who also acted as deputy to General Wavell and as chief of a combined air staff in ABDACOM.<sup>(2)</sup> Abdair retained control of all R.A.F. units up to the time of the formation of West group under A.V.M. P.C. Maltby at Soekaboemi, which took over administrative responsibility on 16 February. There had been hopes, in which the Dutch joined, that the formation of ABDACOM, with its headquarters in Java, and the very considerable reinforcements which were on the way, might have made it possible to build up a strong Allied force in the S.W. Pacific and that an effective resistance to the Japanese might have been established. But this was not to be.

ABDACOM disbanded

The rapid advance of the Japanese in great strength, the fall of Singapore with the loss of all its troops and the capture of Sumatra, with the certainty of the invasion of Java, made it clear that no effective large-scale operations could be carried out. By the middle of February, ABDACOM had no appropriate forces to control, its capture in Java would have given great prestige to the enemy, and on 22 February its withdrawal was approved, this taking place by sea and air to India a few days later, on 25 and 26 February.

Dutch control Allied forces in Java

By agreement, control of the Allied forces in Java now devolved upon the Dutch High Command, under the overall direction of the Governor General of the Netherlands East Indies who, at the time, was Jonkheer Dr. A. W. L. J. Jarda Van Starckenborg-Stachouwer. The naval C-in-C. was Admiral Helfrich, and in command of the Royal N.E.I. Army was Lieutenant General ter Poorten. The Dutch had no separate air force, the navy and army each having control of its own air service.

As a result of the disbandment of ABDACOM, Abdair also came to an end. To control the R.A.F. in Java, West-group under A.V.M. Maltby moved from Soekaboemie to Bandoeng and was renamed Britair. It moved into the headquarters vacated by Abdair, and took over operational, as well as administrative, control of all R.A.F. units in Java. Allied air forces then came under command of the Dutch A.O.C., Major General van Oyon who, with his staff, was located in the same headquarters. There was a combined operations room.

Before General Wavell left for India he had handed to A.V.M. Maltby, the senior British officer in Java, a directive the main points of which were as follows:-<sup>(3)</sup>

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- (1) See under Malaya.
  - (2) A.H.B. II J50/5 Encl. 28A.
  - (3) See Supplement to L.G. No. 38216, dated 20 February 1948. Report on air operations in Malaya and N.E.I. from 8.12.41 to 12.3.42 by A. V. M. Sir Paul Maltby.

- (a) To command the Royal Air Force in Java.
- (b) To exercise command under the orders of General van Oyen, who himself was under the orders of the Dutch C-in-C, General ter Poorten.
- (c) That British army troops left in Java were under command of Major General H.D.W. Sitwell who also was under the orders of the Dutch C-in-C.
- (d) To co-operate with the Dutch, and to go on fighting as long as they continued effective resistance, and thereafter to do the utmost to evacuate the remaining personnel.
- (e) To ensure that no undamaged equipment fell into enemy hands.
- (f) As senior British officer in Java to act as a signals link between all British forces in the island and their service departments in London, Delhi, Washington and Melbourne.
- (g) That no outside help could be expected for a long time.

#### Reorganisation of R.A.F. in Java

There was great need for reorganisation of the air forces in Java. The exodus of the R.A.F. from Singapore had already caused great confusion at the ports in the N.E.I. particularly in Oosthaven and Batavia. From the middle of January too, till the fall of Singapore, reinforcements were arriving in Java. On the airfields there were considerable numbers of aircraft, mostly operationally unserviceable. There were also large numbers of R.A.F. personnel largely separated from their parent units, but squadrons, as completely formed units, did not exist.

It is almost impossible to say how many R.A.F. aircraft were available in the N.E.I. at this time. Appendix XII of this narrative gives the R.A.F. order of battle based on the last signal sent to the Air Ministry on 10 February 1942, which shows that the operational strength, i.e. fully serviceable aircraft, at p.m. on this date, was 57 aircraft of all types. Not included in this total however were the torpedo bombers of No.36 (T.B.) Squadron or the flying boats of No.205 (F.B.) Squadron, of which latter there were at least three, and possibly two more. Not included also were 39 orated Hurricanes which were awaiting erection in Batavia. Almost all of these Hurricanes had been flown in the first ten days in February. Seventeen had been sent to Palembang for No.266(F) Wing, a number of which were lost. Twelve had been handed over to the Dutch army air force leaving ten only as replacements for the R.A.F. in Java. There were undoubtedly a good many more operationally unserviceable aircraft on various airfields round Batavia, some of which were being rapidly repaired.

Great reorganisation of these forces was needed, and from 16 February, first Abdair then Westgroup set about this work. Under direction from Air Vice-Marshal Maltby new establishments were drawn up and an R.A.F. base, first under Group Captain M. C. Ridgway C.O. of No. 153 M.U. and later under Air Commodore B. J. Silly, was formed at Batavia with the task of organising the reception, sorting, posting and evacuation of R.A.F. personnel arriving by sea and air. By 18 February this base had established five transit camps in Batavia and one in Buitenzorg. In all, approximately 12,000 R.A.F. personnel were handled in this way.

In spite of the large number of personnel available it was not at first found possible to reorganise the air forces on a unit or squadron basis, and immediately after the evacuation of Sumatra, airfields in Java were allocated as follows:-

- (a) All Hudsons to Semplak.
- (b) All Blenheims to Kalidjati.
- (c) All fighters to Tjililitan.

These airfields were merely landing grounds with few buildings, small arrangement for dispersal, and little organisation for ground defence. There were no A.A. defences, but some Bofors guns were found later, and the British personnel of the heavy A.A. battery, who had escaped from Palembang, were armed as infantry and employed on ground defence duties.

On 18 February Air Vice-Marshal Maltby decided on a further reorganisation. No.225(B) Group and No.226(F) Group, which had disintegrated on the evacuation of Sumatra, were reformed under the same A.Os.C. for the purpose of re-establishing R.A.F. squadrons in Java. This was a more satisfactory plan and the new organisation was as follows:-

- (a) Semplak: Station Commander Gp.Capt. Brown: No.1 Squadron R.A.A.F. with 14 Hudson II and 12 Hudson III under Wg. Cdr. R. H. Davies. Only about 12 Hudsons were operationally serviceable.
- (b) Kalidjati: Station Commander Gp.Capt. Whistondale, till Gp.Capt. Nicholetts should be available. No.84(B) Squadron: Wg. Cdr. Jeudwine, with 26 Blenheims of which about 6 were serviceable.
- (c) Tjikampek: No.36 (T.B.) Squadron under Sqn. Ldr. Wilkins with 9 Vildebeestes and 1 Albacore. (there were no torpedo facilities available in Java).
- (d) Tjililitan: No.232(F) Squadron under Sqn. Ldr. Brooker: No.605(F) Squadron under Sqn. Ldr. Wright.

In these two squadrons there was a total strength of 35 Hurricanes of which about 18 were operationally serviceable. The former had been fighting since its arrival in the Far East, in Singapore, Malaya, and Sumatra but the latter was not armed till it went into action on 23 February. It had been employed erecting and testing Hurricanes for No.266(F) Wing. The two fighter squadrons named above were retained because it was hoped to arm one of them with P.40s which were due to arrive from Darwin on the U.S.A. warrier Langley on which there were 32 erected aircraft. There were also en route to Java, in the U.S.A. Seawitch, 27 orated Buffaloes. Unfortunately Langley was torpedoed and lost with all its aircraft, and Seawitch arrived too late for its aircraft to be erected, some of them being destroyed in their cases on shore to deny them to the Japanese.

The two groups which were not fully staffed, being little more than in skeleton form were allocated duties as follows:- No. 225(B) Group, reformed at Bandoeng, under Air Commodore H.J.F. Hunter was given the task of setting up bomber airfields. With the co-operation of the Dutch, problems of accommodation, transport and supply were solved, and the squadrons were placed on an operational basis by means of a maintenance organisation which was available at the time. After this had been completed Air Commodore Hunter became A.O.A. Abdair, and the remaining personnel were absorbed into Westgroup on its arrival in Bandoeng on 23 February. No. 226(F) Group, in a similar way,

administered No. 232(F) Squadron and No. 605(F) Squadron at Tjililitan and also controlled a fighter operations room in Batavia as well as the local warning system. The well developed chain of Dutch communications in Java enabled this work to be carried out very efficiently and the operations and filter rooms were connected to the Dutch observer corps, to the fighter airfield, to the A.A. defences of Batavia, and to Abdair's operations room in Bandoeng. Two R.D.F. and two G.L. sets were erected round Batavia and connected up to the operations rooms. The maintenance organisation which has been mentioned above consisted of the following units:-

- (a) No. 153 M.U. which was located, with almost all its original personnel, at Djocjacarta and was fully organised for work.
- (b) No. 81 R.S.U.
- (c) No. 41 A.S.P. - Both these units had arrived with the echelon of No. 266(F) Wing, but had lost most of their tools and equipment at Oosthaven.
- (d) There was also an improvised A.S.P. with personnel collected locally, whose duty was to salvage and sort R.A.F. equipment. Remaining personnel of all categories who were surplus to the reorganised air force were ordered to prepare for evacuation by sea as soon as possible.

#### Air operations 18 - 26 February

During the period of reorganisation which has been described above, air operations were kept to a minimum in order to improve aircraft serviceability, particularly bomber, which was very low. On 18 February a single Hudson made a reconnaissance of the Oosthaven - Palembang road which failed to discover any Japanese activity. On 19 February all available Blenheims - only five - raided shipping in the Palembang river and docks and attacks were continued on 20 and 21 February when there was great fighter opposition from aircraft based on P.1. Results of these attacks, where observed, were reported as good. At the same time the enemy was becoming increasingly active from P.1. His first attack on the R.A.F. in Java was on 19 February when Semplak was bombed and six Hudsons were destroyed on the ground. Dispersal on this airfield was poor and there was no A.A. defence. On 22 February a strong force of Japanese fighters made a low level attack on Semplak and again there was considerable damage. On 23 February a Japanese submarine was claimed as sunk by three Blenheims to the north of Batavia. Finally on 24 February a third attack made Semplak untenable, with the result that the remnants of No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron were moved to Kalidjati, where by this time, a battery of Bofors guns was in position. On 24 and 26 February Kalidjati was bombed, and on the latter date a strong fighter attack was driven off by the Bofors guns, of which ten or twelve were in action this day.

#### Combined forces available in Java

When ABDACOM disbanded and the Dutch High Command assumed control of Allied forces in Java, messages of encouragement were sent to the A.O.C. Air Vice-Marshal Maltby, from the Prime Minister, from the Secretary of State for Air, and from the Chief of the Air Staff. It was evident that the invasion and capture of Java were only a question of time, but these messages emphasised the value and importance of every day which could be gained by putting up the best possible resistance. For this, the forces available were not great but, well handled, and with a determination to fight, they were not negligible.

Naval Forces

There was a combined Allied fleet based on Batavia and Sourabaya under command of the Dutch Admiral Doorman. This fleet consisted of the following vessels:-

Heavy Cruisers:	U.S.S. <u>Houston</u> - H.M.S. <u>Exeter</u> .
Light Cruisers.	H.M.A.S. <u>Java</u> and <u>De Ruyter</u> H.M.A.S. <u>Perth</u> .
Destroyers	Five American, three British, three Dutch.

In addition there were some auxiliary vessels and also some American and Dutch submarines the former of which, however, were not under control of the Dutch Commander and operated independently.

Land Forces

At this time the Dutch had in Java about 25,000 regular troops made up of four regiments of native infantry, commanded and led by Dutch officers, and also artillery, garrison, and supply units. Equipment in this force was poor and obsolescent, and not comparable with that of the Japanese. There was a Home Guard of about 40,000, static in role, poorly armed and trained, though they had some locally made armoured cars which were used for aerodrome defence.

British land forces were almost negligible. Under the direction of Major General H. D. W. Sitwell and executive command of Brigadier A. S. Blackburn, of the Australian Imperial Forces, there were a squadron of light tanks, two battalions of Australian infantry, and some small administrative and supply units. There was an American field battery and attached to the army, under Wing Commander Alexander, were 600 R.A.F. airmen who were armed and trained for ground defence. Finally there were two British batteries of Bofors guns, located at Kalidjati and Tjililitan, where also were the remnants of the British heavy A.A. battery from Palembang, now without guns, and armed as infantry for aerodrome defence. There was a combined hospital commanded by an R.A.M.C. officer, the personnel of which were mostly Australian, with Dutch nurses. These British forces were known as 'Blackforce' and co-operated closely with the Dutch for the defence of western and central Java.

Air Forces

In addition to the Royal Air Force in Java, the reorganisation of which has already been described, the Dutch had five bomber, three fighter and two observation squadrons, very much depleted from their original strength, both in personnel and aircraft, and low in serviceability. About this time they had received some P.40s from America, via Australia, and as already stated, twelve Hurricanes from the Royal Air Force. There were some American heavy bombers, about twelve to fifteen B.17s, and a few P.40s. The U.S.A.A.F. had been operating to the east as far as Darwin, but from time to time took part in attacks on Japanese convoys in the South Pacific. Their fighters were often in action in defence of Batavia. Finally there was a combined British, American and Dutch G.R. group operating from bases in Java, to which the R.A.F. contribution was No. 205 (G.R.) Squadron, at this time

reduced to from three to five Catalinas. All these air forces were under command of the Dutch General van Oyen. The R.A.F. component was known as 'Britair' and was commanded by Air Vice-Marshall Maltby.

#### Japanese attack Java

From early in February it had been realised that the Japanese intended amphibious operations against the N.E.I. and the form of this attack had already taken shape. Three large convoys, with great strength in naval escorts, had been located. That to the westward had assembled in the Anambas, and, as already described, reached its objective in Sumatra, where in spite of severe handling by the R.A.F. its troops effected a landing and were given time to recover and consolidate. The other two convoys, moving down both sides of Borneo, through the South China sea and the Straits of Macassar, were expected to attempt simultaneous landings at both ends of Java, in the Sunda Straits in the west, and to the east of Sourabaya.

Plans to meet the attack impending on Java were made by the Dutch commander on a basis calculated for each successive phase of the expected operations:-

- (a) It was intended to reconnoitre the east and west coast of Borneo as far north as possible, and to keep continuous watch on convoys after they had been located. This was to be carried out by aircraft of the G.R. group, including the Catalinas of No. 205 Squadron. There were also some Dutch submarines operating off the west coast of Borneo as far north as Balikpapan from which wireless reports were expected.
- (b) When located, convoys were to be attacked at once, as far out from Java as possible, with all available aircraft.
- (c) The combined fleet under Admiral Doorman was to be in readiness.
- (d) As the north coast of Java was suitable almost throughout its whole length for beach landings, suitable static defences to meet every contingency could not be provided, but landings were to be opposed at the more obvious points and sufficient troops and mobile forces were to be kept in reserve to be moved to danger points as necessary.
- (e) Finally, as it was realised that the Japanese invasion would be successful in the end, it was arranged to withdraw all forces from the beaches to two inland resistance areas where a last stand could be made. These areas were at Malang plateau in the east, and near Bandoeng in the west.

#### Battle of the Java Sea

On 25 February an air reconnaissance was sent out from Java to verify a report received from a submarine that shipping from the Macassar Straits area was being marshalled off Balikpapan. It discovered a convoy of over 50 transports, with strong naval escort, forming up as if for a move. The convoy was shadowed on 26 and 27 February, when it was reported to be steaming on a course which would bring it off the Java coast, west of Sourabaya, at midnight 27/28 February. Admiral Doorman, who had been at sea with the Allied fleet since 24 February, was entering Sourabaya harbour to refuel at 15.00 hours on 27 February, when he received orders from Admiral Helfrich to turn round and attack the enemy, now east of Bawean Island, about 100 miles due north of Sourabaya. At 15.25 hours De Ruyter, the flagship, leading Exeter, Houston,

Perth, and Java, with a screen of British, Dutch and American destroyers, was steaming on a course of 315° at 20 knots, and less than an hour later, Exeter and Houston were under long range fire, which they returned, from the Japanese heavy cruisers Haguro and Nachi.

In the action which followed, which lasted till 23.50 hours, and during which Admiral Doorman had made several determined attempts to get at the enemy convoy, De Ruyter and Java were sunk, Exeter was disabled, and most of the other ships were damaged. The Allied fleet, no longer seaworthy, made for Tanjong Priok, near Sourabaya and signalled the result to Admiral Helfrich. Admiral Doorman had gone down with his flagship.

There was little air action in this naval battle of the Java sea. Except for early reconnaissance sorties which had reported and shadowed the enemy, there was no Allied air support for the fleet though Admiral Doorman had asked for it. Instead, the Dutch High Command had sent all the torpedo bombers of No. 36 Squadron escorted by eight Buffaloes to make an attack on the Japanese transports, which had turned away from Java at the commencement of the naval action. On the other hand, the Japanese were greatly helped by naval aircraft which appeared in a spotting role. Their battleships were able to fire through a heavy smoke screen laid by the American destroyers, and at night every change of course by Admiral Doorman was disclosed by calcium flares dropped by shadowing aircraft. The result of this action, gallantly fought by the Allies under the leadership of Admiral Doorman, meant that the Japanese landings, though delayed a little, were now inevitable, and they took place almost as expected, one at the eastern end of Java, just west of Sourabaya and two at points in the west, between Batavia and the Sunda Straits.

#### Air Attack on Japanese landings

Air attacks on the Japanese convoys had met with some success. No. 36 (T.B.) Squadron, reduced to nine Vildebeestes and one Albacore, were moved to Madloen, near Sourabaya, and during the night of 28 February/1 March carried out two sorties per aircraft against transports and landing barges. A convoy of 28 ships was attacked five miles off the coast north of Rembang. In this attack a number of American B.17s and P.40s took part, and all pilots reported damage done to transports and barges. Reports received from American headquarters said that the R.A.F. had sunk eight vessels and they claimed seven others. After the attack, No. 36 Squadron, having lost three aircraft shot down, including that of their C.O., Squadron Leader Wilkins, were moved back to Tjikampek.

The landings to the west were also attacked by air. Two convoys had been located, late on 28 February, approaching the coast east and west of Batavia. From Kalidjati on the night 28 February/1 March the convoy to the eastward was attacked by 26 Blenheim and 6 Hudson sorties under very difficult weather conditions, and on the morning of 1 March, of 15 transports which had been attacked, only 7 were seen at anchor off the embarkation point near Eritanwetan. Sinkings were claimed by the Blenheims, but it is more

probable that a number of ships seen later in the day further to the north-west, were part of the original convoy of 15, three of which, however, were probably sunk.

#### Japanese landings take place

Japanese landings had commenced about 01.00 hours on 1 March, but in the meantime it had been decided to rest the Blenheims at Kalidjati. Their crews had been standing by most of the night 27/28 February, and operating almost continuously 28 February/1 March. At 07.00 hours on 1 March the Station Commander, Group Captain Whistondale, was instructed to disperse his aircraft and to prepare for operations later in the day, but at about 10.30 hours a considerable force of Japanese with light tanks, armoured cars, and infantry in lorries, attacked and overran the airfield which was finally captured. In this attack the Japanese suffered heavy losses, but the ground defence forces, British and Dutch, were wiped out. The dispersed Blenheims, eight of which were bombed up ready for action, and others under repair were all destroyed. Four Hudsons of No. 1 Squadron, whose crews were standing by on the runway, were able to take off under fire and flew to Andir, near Bandoeng. As Kalidjati was only a few miles from Tjikampek, where the Vildebeestes of No. 36 Squadron were standing by after their operations on the night of 28 February, and at which there were no organised defences of any kind, this squadron was ordered to join the Hudsons at Andir, and later moved to Tjikamber, in south-west Java, where Group Captain Nicholetts was in command of the station.

#### No. 226(F) Group leaves Java

Fighter operations, on a very limited scale with greatly depleted forces, had continued almost daily from 18 February. It will be recalled that after the evacuation of Sumatra, a nucleus H.Q. of 226(F) Group had been set up to control sector operations rooms and a warning system in and around Batavia. The two remaining fighter squadrons, Nos. 232 and 605 were located at Tjililitan, and up to 27 February, were operating continuously in the air defence of Batavia. They were hopelessly outnumbered, it was impossible to replace their lost aircraft, although in the circumstances their losses were small, and eventually it was decided to reduce the two squadrons to one. No. 232 Squadron volunteered to remain, though there were also many applicants from No. 605 Squadron, some of whom were accepted. On 28 February No. 605 Squadron handed over its remaining aircraft and began to prepare for evacuation. It was thus clear that No. 226(F) Group, having established the necessary organisation for fighter control and being without units to command, was redundant. Air Commodore Vincent was ordered to leave Java with his surplus staff and the group was evacuated by sea a few days later.

#### Final air operations

Owing to the absence of cloud cover in the mornings at this time of the year in Java, bomber aircraft had not been called on to operate over the landing beaches till later in the day. No. 232(F) Squadron was ordered on 1 March, at full strength, to attack beaches at Eritanwetan and in the Sunda Straits where landings had also taken place. Assisted by ten Dutch Kittyhawks and six Buffaloes, under heavy and accurate A.A. fire, it inflicted severe losses on troops in barges and on land. In the west, particularly, marching columns, cavalry, and M.T. on the road to Batavia were shot up. After Kalidjati had been overrun with the loss of its Blenheims, No. 232 Squadron continued its attacks on the beaches at Eritanwetan from which troops were



marching westwards to Batavia, and on the road a fast moving cyclist column was dispersed. Three enemy flying boats were destroyed on the water.

All this entailed loss and damage to the squadron's aircraft. On 2 March it became necessary for them to defend their own aerodrome at Tjililitan from hostile air attacks. Not only this, but road reconnaissance showed that the Japanese were also moving west by road from Kalidjati and, with its limited defences, it seemed likely that Tjililitan would be overrun in the next twenty-four hours. Air Vice-Marshal Maltby ordered the squadron to move back to Andir. The remaining Hurricanes were flown out in the evening, and on 3 March the road party arrived at the new airfield where Group Captain Noble was Station Commander. In the early morning of 3 March General van Oyen, the Dutch A.O.C., recalled the Hurricanes from Andir to Tjililitan for operations and, up to mid-day, No. 232 Squadron was intensively engaged fighting off Japanese air attacks. On its return journey to Andir the squadron made a heavy and successful low level attack on Kalidjati where there were many Japanese fighters on the ground.

On 3 March Batavia was declared an open town by the Dutch, and it became necessary to destroy operations rooms and radar stations in the area, the control staffs being withdrawn to Bandoeng. No. 205 (F.B.) Squadron which was operating from Batavia was moved on 1 March to Tjilatjap, a port on the south coast, with orders to continue its G.R. duties and anti submarine patrols from there as long as possible. When, on 3 March, it could no longer be usefully employed, two Catalinas were flown to Ceylon and one, which had a damaged airscrew, to Australia, where it arrived safely, all the flying boats being loaded to capacity with personnel for evacuation, in addition to the crews.

#### End of air operations in Java

From the state of the air forces in Java on 3 March it was clear that little further Allied resistance was possible. On the morning of 4 March an order of battle for the R.A.F. may be reconstructed as follows:-

- (a) H.Q. 'Britair' at Bandoeng.
- (b) No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron R.A.A.F. - 7 Hudsons (3 serviceable) at Andir.
- (c) No. 232(F) Squadron - 10 Hurricanes (serviceability doubtful) at Andir.
- (d) No. 36 (T.B.) Squadron - 5 Vildebeestes (4 serviceable) at Tjikamber.
- (e) 450 to 500 armed R.A.F. personnel under Wing Commander Alexander, operating as infantry in Buitenzorg area.
- (f) About 1,900 unarmed personnel waiting evacuation at Tjilitjap, and about 600 more at Djoojacarta. Other surplus personnel were standing by at various places under orders to move to ports when shipping became available. The total personnel was just over 5,000.

Final air operations and disposal of remaining squadrons were as follows:-

No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron R.A.A.F. - four Hudsons of this squadron which had escaped from Kalidjati on 1 March, to Andir, do not appear to have operated again, and on 4 March, on which day only three aircraft were serviceable, the squadron was ordered to fly to Australia, taking all records and as many personnel as possible. Single aircraft, on three successive nights from 4 March, took off fully loaded and all reached Australia.

No. 36 (T.B.) Squadron:- On the nights of 2/3 and 3/4 March the squadron, from its airfield at Tjikamber, carried out attacks on Kalidjati where there were many Japanese aircraft and on 4 March it moved to a landing ground at Tasikmalaja, about 100 miles east on the Bandoeng - Djoojacarta main road, from which on the nights 4/5 and 5/6 March it carried out further attacks on Kalidjati. Only two aircraft remained serviceable, and orders were given for these to be prepared for evacuation. They left for Burma on 7 March, but both crashed in Sumatra and the crews were lost.

No. 232(F) Squadron:- From Andir this squadron was carrying out various tasks, partly offensive sweeps over Kalidjati, road reconnaissances for the Dutch army commander, and attacks on Japanese troops when suitable targets were found, to try and slow down the enemy advance on Bandoeng. It had, in addition, the task of defending its own aerodrome at Andir, which, from 4 March, became increasingly subject to air attack without warning. By 7 March only five serviceable Hurricanes were left and in the evening these were ordered to Tasikmalaja from which, on 8 March, a final tactical road reconnaissance was carried out by the only two serviceable Hurricanes. On return from this operation, by order of Britair, all Hurricanes were destroyed. Thus air operations by the R.A.F. in Java ended.

Little mention has been made of the activities of the U.S.A.A.F. and Dutch air forces owing to a lack of definite information and operational records. For some time before the fall of Singapore U.S.A.A.F. forces operating under ABDACOM were commanded by General Brereton. Their strength varied considerably as, although nominally under orders of Abdair they were also liable to be called on by the Officer Commanding U.S. air forces in Australia for operations to the east, and in fact some of their B.17s had been recalled to Darwin about the end of January. About 20 February, General Brereton, after consultation with General Wavell, decided to withdraw all remaining bomber personnel and aircraft to India, but only a few B.17s and a few heavily overloaded transport aircraft were able to get away. American fighters too, had operated over Palembang and Batavia, but with the evacuation to India and Australia on 26 February, there were left in Java, under the command of Colonel Enbank some 13 P.40s, 6 F.2As, 3 A.24s and 2 or 3 B.17s which had been repaired since General Brereton's departure. Of these, all serviceable aircraft took part in the attacks, already described, on Japanese landing forces on 28 February/1 March, after which survivors were flown to Australia. Ground personnel were evacuated by sea, some to Karachi to join General Brereton, and some to Australia. Not many became prisoners of the Japanese.

The Dutch, at the outbreak of war with Japan, had in the N.E.I. between 150 and 200 aircraft of all types. It has already been told how the Dutch Air Force began at once to operate in Malaya and over the seas to the north and east of Java. They incurred losses which it was not possible for them to replace from their own resources. They received from time to

time from America, P.40 fighters, and also help, though on a much smaller scale, from the R.A.F. whose own needs were great. During the height of operations in Java 12 new Hurricanes were handed over to them from R.A.F. supplies, and but for the sinking of the Langley they would have received a number of P.40s. They also had Catalinas, some Hudsons, and for transport purposes a number of Lodestars, in which many Dutch women and children were evacuated to Australia. Some Dutch pilots, flying American aircraft took part in the operations against Japanese convoys and against the beach landings on 28 February/1 March. On 6 March the Lodestars made their last flights to Australia. From the beginning of operations in Malaya to the final days in Java, there had been the closest co-operation between the Dutch air forces and the R.A.F. and the relations between the two Services were always good.

#### Evacuation of the R.A.F.

From the fall of Singapore there had been a steady evacuation of R.A.F. personnel from ports in Sumatra and Java. This evacuation was incidental to the campaign, and took place when shipping was available, and when units, owing to the trend of operations, became surplus to the needs of the R.A.F. Later, as the reorganisation of the forces in Java took place, it became part of the policy to evacuate as many as possible, preference being given to formed units, surplus aircrews, of whom there were many, and all skilled tradesmen who could be spared. In furtherance of this policy Air Commodore Hunter, on 19 February, was ordered to hand over No. 225(B) Group, and to take up duties as A.O.A. Abdair, with the main task of evacuating all surplus R.A.F. personnel. Owing to the closure of Batavia on 23 February, with the loss of some shipping, embarkation after this date took place at Poerwokerta and Tjilatjap on the south coast, both of which were under constant, though not heavy, air attack. There were also light Japanese naval forces, including some submarines, in the Indian Ocean to the south, which caused the loss of some shipping at this time, including the large transport vessel City of Manchester, as it was arriving to be loaded up.

It is difficult to get exact figures of the numbers of personnel evacuated. There had been a constant trickle by air, both to India and to Australia, but of approximately 12,000 R.A.F. personnel in Sumatra and Java, it is estimated that 7,000 left the islands, though not all reached their destinations. The remainder, about 5,000 became prisoners of war. It may be asked why this high percentage of the R.A.F., practically non-combatant personnel and including many highly skilled tradesmen should have been captured. It may have been to meet some criticism by the Dutch, who at this time shewed grave misgiving at the evacuation of men who were potential defenders against the coming invasion, and could not understand why, at this critical time, so many men were being sent away. It was not generally understood by the Dutch civilian population that the R.A.F. was a highly technical service, mostly untrained in the use of arms for ground defence, and that if they were evacuated they would be available for their technical duties in some other field of operations against the common enemy. The need for the evacuation was thoroughly understood by the Dutch High Command, but among the general public, planters and volunteers, there was some ill-feeling at this apparent desertion. This was very obvious to the

R.A.F. staff, and may have led to the retention in the island of numbers who might possibly have been evacuated. There were, however, some 2,500 R.A.F. unarmed personnel waiting near the ports for whom no shipping was available and who were taken prisoner.

Mention must be made of the escape of some aircrews of No. 84(B) Squadron to Australia.<sup>(1)</sup> They had been sent from Bandoeng to Tjilatjap for evacuation, but the last ship had gone and the harbour was in flames. A derelict ship's lifeboat was found, complete with oars and sails. The Commanding Officer decided to try to sail this boat to Australia, the nearest point of which was about 1,000 miles away. It was loaded with food and water for 12 persons for 30 days, though it was estimated that the voyage might be done in 16 days. With only a marine sextant, a school atlas, a small scale Mercator's projection of the world, and no chronometer except his own inaccurate wrist watch, Wing Commander Jeudwine, 4 officers and 7 sergeants, all Australians, set sail at 17.00 hours on 7 March. After incredible adventures they were sighted close to some small islands by the crew of an American Catalina which alighted alongside on 21 April, and were informed that they were off the Australian mainland, about 50 miles from Roebourne which they had hoped to reach. Three sergeants were taken off by the Catalina and at 13.00 hours on 22 April a second Catalina took off the remainder of the crew on the forty-seventh day of the voyage. The Scorpion, as they had named the lifeboat, was cast adrift, and on 23 April the whole party arrived by air in Perth.

#### Surrender or resistance in Java?

From 1 March the situation in Java was critical. There were continuous discussions among the Allied commanders, and on 5 March the Dutch Commander-in-Chief, Lieutenant General ter Poorten, called a conference at Bandoeng at which he gave an outline of the general position on that day. The conference was attended by Air Vice-Marshal Maltby, A.O.C. Britair, and by the G.O.C. British military forces in Java, Major General Sitwell, who were accompanied by their senior staff officers. Senior officers of the Dutch Commander-in-Chief's Staff were also present. General ter Poorten stated that the enemy were close up to the outer perimeter of Bandoeng on the north and were rapidly closing in from the west. Bandoeng was incapable of defence, and as it was crowded with refugees it was to be declared an open town, as Batavia had been. As there was no other suitable place from which organised resistance could be controlled, Dutch headquarters would surrender. Resistance, however, would still be carried out by local commanders as long as organised forces could be maintained, but owing to hostility of Japanese natives no guerrilla warfare was possible. Instructions were issued to the A.O.C. that, when the Japanese entered Bandoeng Air H.Q. and Andir airfield were not to be defended. General Sitwell said that the British would continue to fight on and, supported by the A.O.C., he asked to be allotted a defence area in the mountains to which their forces could retire and continue operations. A region to the south of Bandoeng and north of Santosa was indicated but when a reconnaissance was carried out next morning, 6 March it was found to be unsuitable for defence, and there was obstruction from the local Dutch who did not want British troops in the area. With the help of the Dutch General Schilling an area to the south of Tjikadjang was selected and prepared for defence, and here army units and armed R.A.F. were concentrated.

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(1) See A.H.B. II J 54/6/11 Appendix E.

On the evening of 6 March, R.A.F. personnel left in Java were disposed as follows:-

- |     |  |       |
|-----|--|-------|
| (a) | In Tasikmalaja area, preparing for defence in conjunction with the army: | 900   |
| (b) | Blackforce contingent:   | 450   |
| (c) | Aerodrome staff and units at Andir:                                      | 850   |
| (d) | In Poerwokerto area, unarmed, waiting embarkation:                       | 2,500 |
| (e) | Various small parties in south and central Java:                         | 400   |

Late on 6 March orders were issued to the above forces as follows:-

- (a) The Andir party was to surrender when the Japanese entered Bandoeng, mainly because there was no transport to move them.
- (b) The R.A.F. in Poerwokerto were to place themselves under the orders of the local Dutch commander, to prepare for surrender.
- (c) The Tasikmalaja area was to be defended to the end.

Defence preparations were continued during 7 March, but by next day the situation had changed. Transport had been found for the Andir detachment and, together with the contingent at Tasikmalaja, it was moved into the Tjikadjang defence area, where also 'Blackforce' and the British army units were assembled, the total force there being about 8,000. The Dutch commander at Poerwokerto had moved the 2,500 unarmed R.A.F. personnel to Tasikmalaja as they were an embarrassment to him in the defence of the town. There they were to surrender, as already ordered.

On the morning of 8 March a combined British defence H.Q. was set up within the Tjikadjang area and arrangements for resistance were being supervised by the A.O.C. and G.O.C. A W.T. station was in operation to communicate with London and Delhi. Soon after 09.00 hours however the position was completely changed by receipt of a broadcast from the Dutch C.-in-C., issued in the name of the Allied forces, to the effect that all organised resistance in Java was to cease forthwith. This broadcast, completely unexpected by the British commanders was confirmed at 10.30 hours by telephone, and Air Vice-Marshal Maltby went at once to see the Dutch Resident at Garoet at which a staff officer had just arrived from Bandoeng. Further telephone messages were received from the Dutch staff and a call for the A.O.C. came from the Dutch C.-in-C. who had gone to Kalidjati to discuss terms with the Japanese commander. At about 13.30 hours the A.O.C. returned to Tjikadjang, and after a long discussion with the G.O.C. it was reluctantly decided that resistance should end. Defence preparations in the hills had made good progress, morale of the troops was not impaired, but both commanders felt that, though every day was important, resistance could not have been continued for long. There was no supply service, and no medical service, except some medical equipment with the units. The combined Field Hospital, being overloaded with casualties, had remained behind in Bandoeng. At 14.30 hours therefore, the Dutch order to cease resistance was passed to the troops, who at the same time were ordered to destroy their arms, and given directions to preserve complete reticence when under interrogation by Japanese intelligence officers. Before

destruction of cyphers and code-books, signals had been sent to the Air Ministry, but for various reasons they were not received in London.

On 9 March orders were received through Dutch headquarters that force commanders were to establish contact with the nearest Japanese general, and to concentrate all troops in allotted areas. This, as far as the R.A.F. was concerned, had already been done as follows:-

In Tjikadjang area	2,200
In Tasikmalaja	2,500
In detached posts	400

This gave a total of 5,200 which was the approximate number of R.A.F. prisoners. The A.O.C. next went to Bandoeng, and on 10 March met the Japanese commander, Lieutenant General Maruyama, from whom he received instructions regarding handing over to the Japanese. He also received promises of help with accommodation and supplies, and an assurance that prisoners would be treated in accordance with the Geneva Convention. At 07.30 hours on 12 March, Allied commanders were assembled at Bandoeng to hear formally the terms of capitulation and to sign the Instrument of Surrender. There were present Air Vice-Marshal Maltby, Major General Sitwell, Brigadier Blackburn (Australia) and Colonel Searle (U.S.A.). Interrogation of senior Allied officers then commenced, and later, other ranks were called before Japanese intelligence officers. Many officers and men were threatened. Some senior officers were imprisoned for refusing to answer questions, but, in spite of much brutal treatment, there was a general observance of the order not to give military information to the enemy. Prisoners were moved to Batavia from which they were dispersed to various camps in the Far East. It is a matter of history that they were treated with great brutality, without regard to the terms of the Geneva Convention, which after  $3\frac{1}{2}$  years left an ineffaceable mark on the majority of those who survived.

JAPANESE ACCOUNT OF NETHERLANDS EAST INDIES CAMPAIGN

It will be of interest to end this narrative of the Netherlands East Indies campaign with a short account of the operations as described by Japanese authorities. As far as is known there are no unit records available for examination, but a high level account<sup>(1)</sup> of the operations after the fall of Singapore was prepared for the American 1st Demobilisation Bureau in Tokio, from which the campaign may be examined from the Japanese angle. The material for this story was collected for instructional purposes by two military staff college professors, Colonel Shin Ishikawa and Colonel Katsiyi Dozono, and their work was revised and extended by Colonel Minoru Miyako, who was the officer in charge of operations for the Third Air Group.

The early success of the Japanese in the Pacific, the capture of Manila, and the occupation of the whole of Borneo, had freed large Japanese forces which, from the middle of January, were earmarked for the campaign which would be necessary to capture the Netherlands East Indies. The Japanese staff estimated that Singapore would fall early in February, probably on the seventh, and their first operation in southern Sumatra was timed for 10 February. This had to be postponed for five days. The forces to be used were the First Southern Fleet, the Sixteenth Army, and the Third Air Group. The main concentration area for these forces was in Borneo, but when airfields in Malaya became available owing to the retreat of British forces, the Japanese army moved its air units into Penang and Perak area, airfields at Kahang, Kluang, Kuala Lumpur, and Ipoh being brought into use. Naval aircraft were based chiefly at Ledo and Kuching in Borneo, and arrangements were made for them to be refuelled, during the operations, on Banka Island, off the coast of Sumatra. Numbers of army transport aircraft were assembled at Kahang. None of these forces were used in the Malaya campaign but were reserved for operations in Sumatra and Java. Certain units of the army air force however, from the middle of January, carried out regular attacks on airfields in northern Sumatra as a softening-up process, in preparation for the operations in southern Sumatra. These attacks served their purpose, because as has been seen earlier in this narrative, the R.A.F. were unable to develop northern Sumatra airfields to any extent, but could use them as refuelling and rearming points only. In the earlier attacks in this area the Japanese claimed a total of from ten to twelve aircraft destroyed on the ground. Besides preliminary exploratory attacks in northern Sumatra, the Japanese also began to reconnoitre the Palembang area in the first week of February and their two attacks on P.1 on 6 and 7 February have been described. According to the Japanese narrative, their attack on 6 February was carried out by 33 bombers, 22 fighters, and 1 photo-reconnaissance aircraft. They claim to have shot down 15 aircraft and to have destroyed 11 on the ground. According to R.A.F. reports, 4 Hurricanes were shot down and an unstated number destroyed or damaged on the ground. On 7 February the Japanese estimated that there were still 30 Allied aircraft on P.1, and on that day they made an attack, through cloud cover, with 6 bombers and 31 fighters, in which they claim to have destroyed 20 aircraft on the ground and to have shot down

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(1) See A.H.B.IIJ 59/4; Air Operations Record No. 72.

'about 10', their own losses being 2 shot down. In the R.A.F. account, 3 Hurricanes were destroyed and 11 damaged on the ground, besides 4 unserviceable Blenheims and 1 Hudson which were set on fire. Three Hurricanes were shot down, and 1 Japanese fighter was claimed. This was admitted by the R.A.F. to have been a crippling attack.

To obtain a decision in the Netherlands East Indies, the Japanese planned their campaign in three phases. The first - Operation 'L' - originally fixed for 10 February was against Palembang and southern Sumatra, the second - Operation 'H' - timed for 26 February was the capture of Java, and the third - Operation 'T' - was against northern Sumatra and, if successful, to extend to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

#### Operation 'L' - Palembang

Planning for the attack on Palembang and south eastern Sumatra commenced in the middle of January and training of the airborne forces took place at Sungei Patani. It may be that news of parachute dropping in this area filtered through to R.A.F. intelligence officers, for it will be recalled that the defence officer at Palembang had been warned that paratroop landings were to be expected. On 31 January orders were issued by the Japanese army commander that the 1st Raiding Group was to be placed under the command of the Third Air Group for the operations in Sumatra. These orders indicated a limited objective, and were to be preparatory for the main seaborne landing which was to be carried out by 38th Division on 'L' day. The objective was Palembang airfield, after which the oil refineries were to be captured before they could be destroyed by the Dutch forces. Subject to suitable weather conditions the airborne landing was to take place on 'L' minus 1 day, and the greatest care was taken to ensure that all concerned co-operated to the fullest extent. After the main landing, i.e. after the paratroops had established themselves and advanced elements of the 38th Division had disembarked, the command of all the troops engaged was to devolve on the Japanese commander of the Sixteenth Army. The 1st Raiding Group, less the airborne units, was to return to its original command. Various air units were detailed for support of the 1st Raiding Group, and there was a powerful escort to provide air cover for the amphibious landing by the 38th Division.

Except that operations in Malaya did not end as early as expected, and that 'L' day, originally fixed for 10 February had to be postponed till 15 February, the Japanese occupation of Sumatra took place very much as planned. It was made in overwhelming strength by well balanced forces. Exclusive of the transport aircraft of the 1st Raiding Group, there were employed in the operation approximately 140 naval aircraft and an almost equal number from the army. Forty seaplanes and flying boats were also available, but they do not appear to have been used in the operation.

For the actual paratroop landing the 1st Air Raiding Group had detailed the 2nd Raiding Regiment, of which 260 men were dropped on or near Palembang airfield and 130 near the oil refineries. Among the personnel who were dropped, the Japanese included signallers and technicians, the latter of whom were intended to take over the equipment and machinery in the oil refineries before these could be destroyed. In this they were partly successful, though oil and petrol stocks were set on fire, and an explosion caused by a time bomb destroyed one of the largest plants. In the second raid which took place at about 15.00 hours



on 'L' day, i.e. 15 February, the Japanese dropped 100 paratroopers in the refinery area near Pladjoe. There had been a good deal of night fighting on 14/15 February in the refinery area, but the Japanese account states that by 10.00 hours they had occupied the main buildings and oil derricks. There was a considerable counter attack by the Dutch, and severe fighting took place in Pladjoe till late afternoon in which the Japanese suffered many casualties. Late on 15 February advanced units of the 38th Division began to arrive by river in Palembang, and with the retreat of the Dutch forces, the Japanese consolidated their position on 16 February when they commenced to repair the airfield at P.1. The Japanese narrative makes no mention of the intensive air attacks carried out by the R.A.F. on shipping and barges on 15 February, but states that there were three raids by the R.A.F. on Palembang airfield on that day in which two aircraft were shot down.

#### Operation 'H' - Java

After consolidating their position in Sumatra the Japanese commenced preparations for the occupation of Java. This operation, known as operation 'H' was timed to commence on 26 February - 'H' day - when the landing of the Sixteenth Army was to take place. On 'H' minus 1 day, 3rd Air Group, operating from Sumatra airfields, was to take over the protection of the approaching convoys, and after the landing, it was to bring its air units forward as quickly as possible to occupy airfields as they were vacated by the enemy, in order to provide direct air support to Sixteenth Army in the land battle. At the same time aircraft from the 3rd, 7th and 12th Air Brigades were detached to assist the Twenty-fifth Army in the north Sumatra operations - operation 'T'. Between 19 and 25 February, Japanese aircraft, mainly from the 59th, 64th and 90th Air Regiments, based at Palembang, carried out heavy attacks on Java airfields round Batavia. A total of 203 fighter and 142 bomber sorties was flown in which the Japanese claimed to have shot down 34 and damaged 53 Allied aircraft, their own losses being 3 missing. (1)

Partly owing to the naval battle in the Java Sea, which however the Japanese narrative does not mention, 'H' day had to be postponed till 1 March, when landings took place at three points on the north Java coast, and Kalidjati was captured. Thereafter operations continued as planned, and on 5 March Japanese advanced units had reached the outer defences of Bandoeng. Sourabaya and Tjilatjap were occupied on 7 March, and on this day the Dutch High Command proposed a truce. Hostilities ceased on 8 March.

#### Operation 'T' - Northern Sumatra

Although, in the event, the Japanese found no opposition in northern Sumatra, the most careful preparations had been made for operation 'T' and strong naval, army and air forces were deployed against this area. 'W' day was 28 February, and it was expected that the task could be completed by 17 March, which in fact, was the date on which the northern Sumatra operation ended. After this the air forces were moved to Burma and Thailand, partly for operations and partly for training and re-equipment. Some anti-aircraft artillery units were also moved to Burma. Naval vessels and two flying boat units were moved to the Andamans.

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(1) These figures are, of course, preposterous.

From a study of this Japanese narrative one is impressed by the very careful planning which left nothing to chance, and the high state of co-ordination of the large forces involved. These forces, naval, army and air, were more than ample for the operations in which they were employed and arrangements for the supply of equipment seemed to be good. There was perhaps a certain lack of elasticity in the employment of the various forces, all of which worked rigidly to a time schedule, which in view of the circumstances at the time might well have been modified. This is particularly noticeable in operation 'T' where there was no opposition of any kind. The operations in northern Sumatra were carried out in accordance with the original plan, and covered a period of eighteen days in which much unnecessary movement of forces took place.

PART II  
THE FIRST BURMA CAMPAIGN  
8 DECEMBER 1941 - 20 MAY 1942

BURMA BEFORE THE OUTBREAK OF WAR

By the Government of Burma Act of 1935, Burma, on 1 April 1937, ceased to be a province of the Indian Empire, and became a separate territory under the British Crown. A Secretary of State for Burma was established in the United Kingdom who issued an Instrument of Instruction to the first governor. By the time of the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939 Burma, at least as far as its internal government was concerned, had progressed some way along the road to Dominion status.

Geographically, Burma formed the eastern boundary of India and Assam, and as such, in the event of an attack on India from the east, its defence was of the greatest importance to that country. At the outbreak of war in Europe, countries to the east of Burma, Thailand and Indo-China, had expressed their intention to resist occupation by the Japanese, the only possible enemy, and as long as Singapore was in British hands there could be little danger of attack on Burma by sea. For this reason the defence of Burma which at the time, was the responsibility of the War Office, was neglected and, as there was no pressing danger, and military needs in other parts of the World were much greater, no immediate measures were taken to provide defence forces. Japan, however, entered Indo-China in July 1941 and at the same time began to extend existing airfields in Thailand, so the real danger became obvious.

For operational purposes Burma was included in the Far Eastern Command which had been established in October 1940, with headquarters at Singapore and in spite of representations by the Commander-in-Chief, in India, which, later, the Governor of Burma, Sir Reginald Dorman Smith approved, to have this arrangement changed and the defence of Burma transferred to India, the Chiefs of Staff would not agree on the ground that the matter had been fully considered when the Far East Command was formed.

Chiefs of Staff Far Eastern Appreciation (1)

In June 1940, the question of defence in the Far East including Malaya, Borneo, and Burma was considered by the Chiefs of Staff in London who drew up a paper, Far Eastern Appreciation, which clearly indicated anxiety regarding defence measures which would be necessary in the event of an attack by Japan. As the result of this appreciation, a summary of which had been telegraphed to the Far East, a Singapore Defence Conference (2) was held in October 1940, under the Chairmanship of Vice-Admiral G. Layton, R.N., Commander-in-Chief, China Station. (3)

Singapore Defence Conference

With regard to the threat to Burma and India, the Conference recognised the importance of Burma in the scheme

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(1) A.H.B. ILJ50/2 - C.O.S. (40) 592

(2) A.H.B. ILJ50/13/6

(3) A.H.B. Narrative - The Campaigns in the Far East, Volume I, p.30 et seq.

of Imperial defence, not only because it formed a frontier and natural barrier for India, but because of the country's great resources, oil, minerals, rice, timber etc., because of its sea and air communications with Singapore and finally, because at that time by means of the Burma road, Rangoon was the chief channel for supplies to the Chungking Government, from America. Further, the occupation by Japanese forces of Thailand would make Burma liable to invasion by land, as well as by sea and air, and would bring her within close bomber range of Japanese airfields of which many were known to exist, even as early as 1940. There was also the danger that Japan might advance into Yunnan thereby making possible land and air attack against Burma from that country. The Singapore Defence Conference further thought that Japan, having occupied Thailand, would establish land bases from which she could attack not only Malaya but also Burma and the installations in India, particularly Calcutta. The immediate dangers were considered to be air attacks on the docks and port at Rangoon to disrupt traffic on the Burma road, the destruction of airfields on the Tenasserim coast which were vital to the R.A.F. Singapore reinforcement route, and possible land attack into Burma through the Southern Shan States from Chiangmai, which was the terminus of the railway running North from Bangkok. There was also to be kept in mind the fact that Japan could attack Burma from Yunnan by land and air, though to do this she would have to overcome the Chinese in this province, or come to terms with the Yunnan Government, which latter was a possible contingency.

#### Problems before the Singapore Defence Conference

With all these possibilities in mind and in view of the limited resources, in men and material, available in the near future, the Conference had to decide:-

- (a) How to deal with enemy air attack on Burma and eastern India, including possibly, Ceylon.
- (b) How to hold and delay any land attack on Burma until reinforcements could arrive.
- (c) How to keep open the R.A.F. air reinforcement route to Singapore, as far south as Tavoy and Mergui.
- (d) How to arrange for the reception and accommodation of such land and air reinforcements as would be available in the event of a sudden attack.

#### Land Defence

The Conference further examined the possible defence of Burma, both on the land side and in the coastal areas. In the latter it considered that the most likely points for attack were: Akyab airfield; Rangoon docks and oil installations; and the Tenasserim coast. At Akyab it was thought that the existing garrison of Burma Frontier Force and military police would have to suffice for the time being when only raids might be expected. For Rangoon the minimum defence requirement was one infantry brigade, one field battery, and one field company R.E. in addition to anti-aircraft defences. In the Tenasserim area a different problem presented itself. Until the arrival of air forces it was realised that neither Mergui nor Victoria Point was capable of defence, and both these landing grounds were prepared for demolition in anticipation of war with Japan. It was thought that the local ground defences of the Tenasserim airfields provided by units of the Burma Frontier Force were sufficient against airborne landings. For the defence of the land frontier, from the Salween estuary north to Myitkyina, the minimum requirement was considered to be two infantry brigades, two field batteries, one mountain battery, one anti-tank battery, one light A.A. battery, one light tank company, and two field companies R.E. As a long term

requirement, in the event of a land attack through Yunnan, there would be necessary a further two infantry brigades, one field regiment R.A., one light A.A. battery, two medium batteries, one light tank company, one anti-tank battery, and the necessary R.E. units.

#### Anti-Aircraft Defences

The Conference emphasised the paucity of A.A. defences, both in Burma and in India. From airfields in Thailand, already occupied by Japanese elements, long range heavy bomber attacks could be made on India where A.A. defence was negligible, and Burma had no protection whatever. It was realised that owing to equipment not being available for some time to come, full scale A.A. defence was impossible of attainment, and the Conference fixed the minimum requirement as twelve heavy A.A. guns over the Syrian oil refinery, and eight heavy A.A. guns near the Rangoon docks. To provide these one heavy A.A. regiment was necessary. Light A.A. defence would also have to be provided, and for this the minimum requirement was set at one battery of light A.A. guns which would give a total of sixteen Bofors for the docks area. This was only a token A.A. defence, but it would help to meet the immediate problem, sustain the morale of the civil population and give a measure of protection to the important oil storage tanks and refinery at Syrian. As part of anti-aircraft defence the Conference also considered searchlights and balloons. For the former a minimum of 48 lights was considered essential but as even this, at the time, was unattainable, it was decided that Rangoon would have to establish a black-out system for its protection. Balloons for climatic and other reasons were thought to be impracticable, although later, arrangements were made with the Middle East Command for balloon squadrons to be sent to Burma, but they did not arrive for this campaign.

#### Air Defence

In the section of this narrative dealing with the campaign in Malaya, a full account has been given of the Chiefs of Staff estimate, both of the Japanese air strength likely to be available for attack on Malaya, Burma, and the Netherlands East Indies, and also of the R.A.F. requirement to meet this attack. For this latter the estimate was set at 566 aircraft which however was exclusive of those required 'for the protection of Burma against Japanese attack by land, sea or air.'

The Chiefs of Staff estimate of Japanese air strength available in the Malayan area was from 617 - 713, made up probably of 281 carrier-borne, and up to 432 land based aircraft. With regard to Burma, the Conference, while taking note of these figures, thought that the Japanese air attack on that country would be made by aircraft detached from the Malayan front and that it could be met by switching R.A.F. squadrons from Malaya to Burma. The Conference thought it unlikely that the Japanese would concentrate in Thailand and Indo-China their full air strength for an attack on Burma, and in view of all the possibilities which it was able to consider at the time, a limited scale of air defence for Burma was recommended as follows:-

- 1 G.R. Squadron at Rangoon.
- 1 Bomber Squadron at Iashio.
- 1 Fighter Squadron at Rangoon.
- 1 Bomber Squadron at Tavoy.
- 1 A.C. Squadron with detachments as required.

Of the above, one fighter squadron only was in addition to the 566 aircraft already recommended by the Chiefs of Staff, the total requirement being therefore 582 aircraft.

#### Provision of airfields and landing grounds in Burma

One of the most important recommendations of the Defence Conference was the provision in Burma of eight operational airfields which, as soon as possible, were to be equipped with fuel, explosives, communications and temporary accommodation. Of these airfields, four were to be in the areas for the squadrons mentioned above. Regarding the other four, the probable sites would be along the eastern frontier of Burma in anticipation of Japanese attacks through Thailand and China, but this was to be a matter for further investigation. It will be seen later that No. 221 Group R.A.F. was formed at Rangoon on 21 April 1941 for the specific initial function of providing airfields and landing grounds throughout Burma and the Shan States to which air forces could be sent in an emergency. The airfields recommended to be established were:- Mingaladon (Rangoon), Toungoo, Heho, Namsang, Lashio, Moulmein, Tavoy, Mergui and Victoria Point, <sup>(1)</sup> the last named to be maintained, in its existing state only, as a transit landing ground. In the event, the siting of some of these airfields was unfortunate, though perhaps this could not have been foreseen at the time. The tactical appreciation on the defence of Malaya, including Burma, prepared at the time, had laid great stress on the need for maximum operational mobility based on the eastern frontier of Burma, and the new airfields were sited to meet this requirement and also to counter a land-based attack through Thailand, and perhaps China.

From the point of view of India, the air defence of Burma could be considered as the first line of protection for eastern India. While the Singapore Defence Conference realised this equally with the Commander-in-Chief in India, it will be for consideration that if Burma had been under Indian, rather than under Far Eastern command, it would not have been better to locate a series of airfields at suitable points along the Irrawaddy and Chindwin valleys. Akyab, too, might have been made much more valuable as a defensive airfield, than, in fact, it was.

#### Naval Defence

The Conference found it difficult to assess the scale of naval defence for Burma. While Singapore was intact and in British hands it was thought that Japanese naval attack would be confined to minelaying in the approaches to Rangoon, which could be carried out by surface raiders or submarines. To meet this a considerable flotilla of minesweeping and anti-submarine craft would be required. These were not available in the Far East, and though there were some in India, it was thought they might be required in the Bay of Bengal for the defence of Calcutta. A source of great danger was the large Japanese fishing fleet which operated along the Tenasserim coast and off Arakan. These were motor vessels of 70 to 80 tons, with a speed of 10 knots, which could be readily used for towing barges and large sampans filled with troops, supplies and guns. They ran on Diesel fuel which

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(1) Victoria Point had been an airfield on the Far East reinforcement route, but it was not considered possible to defend this place, as it was very vulnerable to attack from the sea. Its one grass runway was early prepared for demolition and was blown up soon after the outbreak of war.

could easily be stored in hidden bases along the Burma coasts and creeks and in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. To meet a danger of this kind the Conference regarded it as essential that some G.R. aircraft should be available for use in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and along the Arakan and Tenasserim coasts. Incidentally, and at this early date, the Singapore Defence Conference warned the Government of Burma about the issue of licences and the increased supervision needed for these Japanese fishermen, who were to be rounded up in the event of war. The Conference was not able to lay down any long term plan for the naval defence of Burma, except that immediate steps should be taken to hasten the building of anti-submarine and mine-sweeping vessels for which a programme had already been laid down. Further, G.R. aircraft, able to carry out anti-submarine patrols in co-operation with the Navy, should be provided to protect supply convoys through the Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal.

#### General findings of the Conference

Generally, the conclusion at which the Conference arrived was to the effect that the military garrison of Burma was, at the time, based solely on internal security needs, and that the existing forces were sufficient only to hold the northern part of Tenasserim and Rangoon. There was literally no air protection for the vital oil installations in Rangoon area. The great need was the immediate provision of additional forces, particularly air forces, anti-submarine defences, and local naval defence and artillery to support land forces. The provision of A.A. guns was urgent.

#### Position of India in relation to the defence of Burma

It has been seen that up to outbreak of war with Japan, defence of Burma was the responsibility of Far Eastern Command. On 15 December 1941, one week after the opening of hostilities, India took over operational control in Burma. On 15 January Abdacom assumed responsibility, but when this command was dissolved on 21 February 1942, Burma reverted to India, whose Commander-in-Chief was responsible till the formation of South East Asia Command. While these changes did not tend to the highest standard of administration or control, too much must not be made of this point, for from 15 December 1941, with the exception of a few days in February 1942, General Wavell was in control of operations in Burma.

At the Singapore Defence Conference, India's representative, Major General G. N. Molesworth, presented a note on the position of India regarding the Japanese threat to Burma. The three chief points which he made were: that India would require to know what, in the way of troops, material, or supplies, she would be expected to provide for the Far East, including Burma; that India was closely concerned with any arrangements which would affect the security of her eastern frontier, her coasts, ports, and territorial waters; and that India was responsible for seeing that her troops, sent overseas, were properly maintained, and their general welfare safe-guarded. It was felt in India that Burma was particularly vulnerable to air attack and that adequate preparations should be made to meet

this. The targets which could be attacked from Thailand or Yunnan about which India felt concern were:-

- (a) Syriam near Rangoon; this was the site of the Burma Oil Company refineries, the destruction of which would seriously affect India's supplies of petrol and oil of all grades.
- (b) Digboi and Tinsulcia in N.E. Assam; here was a second and smaller supply of oil products, loss of which, in addition to Syriam, would mean that all India's oil and petrol would have to come by sea from America, involving a delivery period of from two to four months, even if tanker tonnage were available.
- (c) The industrial areas of Calcutta and the lower Ganges plain, where a large part of the industrial plant of India was placed and where dislocation of labour would seriously affect India's war effort, already considerable.
- (d) Tatanagar; here was the largest steel and industrial plant considered to be India's most vital target.

The protection of the last three of these areas would be undertaken by India as part of a local defence plan, but it would require the establishment in Burma of bomber and fighter aircraft, and a warning and observer system. Thus the air defences of India were linked with the defence of Burma, and India was closely concerned with the plans to provide and operate them.

Equally, the land defences of Burma provided a problem which closely concerned India. Burma was without adequate forces to meet a land attack from Thailand or Yunnan, and it was clear that any reinforcements would in the first place, have to come from India, and that all their maintenance would have to be provided by India. For these reasons India, at an early stage, would require to know the extent and nature of demands likely to be made on her, particularly as they would be made at very short notice. Finally, General Molesworth said (1) it was felt in India that the operational control, operational planning, and training of forces supplied by India should come under the C.-in-C., India rather than under Far Eastern Command. It was agreed that there should be co-ordination of air action in Burma with air action in Malaya, but, from every other point of view, the advantages of placing Burma under India were greater.

The Indian note which has been discussed above may be summarised as follows:-

- (a) Strategically the defence of Burma and India could not be separated. The bulk of the land and air forces for the defence of India from the east must be located in Burma, and therefore India should be in control of the preparations to be made.
- (b) Burma had only recently, in April 1937, been separated from India for political reasons, and the whole administration of the country, though under the Burma office, was still almost completely India in structure.
- (c) It was almost certain the reinforcements for Burma would have to come from India and be maintained from India.
- (d) Burma's resources were small, and unless great expense was to be incurred, perhaps needlessly, full use would have to be made of India's supply storage, repair, production, and training facilities.

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(1) A.H.B. ILJ50/13/6. Appendix D.



From the point of view of land organisation too, India would have preferred to exercise operational control in Burma, the C.-in-C. working directly under the War Office and not under the Government of India, with suitable arrangements for the adjustment of financial matters between the governments of Burma and India, and the Treasury. Similarly, as the air defence of Burma and India from the east constituted one problem together with the air defence of the coasts and ports of India in the Bay of Bengal, it would have been advantageous to combine both under the A.O.C.-in-C. India. As far as the defence of Malaya was concerned, there would be no difficulty in maintaining close liaison and co-operation between the A.O.C.-in-C. and the C.-in-C. Far East.

As this may be the crucial reason for early defeat in Burma, the point has been dealt with at some length, particularly because General Wavell, in his despatch (1) on the operations in Burma from 15 December 1941 to 20 May 1942, points out that several attempts had been made to get the Chiefs of Staff in London to transfer the defence of Burma to India Command, and that he considered that to place control of operations in Burma under Far Eastern Command instead of under India, 'was an error from the military point of view which only the strongest political reasons could justify.' The inference is clear that if, early in 1940, or even as late as 1941, India had been given responsibility for the defence of Burma, the defeat in that country and even in Malaya might never have taken place.

The conclusions of the Singapore Defence Conference were summarised in a telegram to the United Kingdom and Dominion Governments dated 31 October 1940. Paragraph 8 of this telegram, relating to Burma, reads as follows:- 'Burma. Military garrison of Burma at present inadequate against threat from Thailand, vital refineries and dock areas Rangoon being entirely unprotected from the air, and existing land forces inadequate to hold country in face of attack. Although Burma and vital industrial targets in eastern India now within range of aerodromes in Indo-China already occupied by Japanese, Burma has no air protection whatever, and A.A. protection in India is negligible. Most immediate action required is provision of eight operational aerodromes fully equipped with fuel, explosives, communications and temporary accommodation to house air units. These include Rangoon, Lashio, Mergui, Tavoy and four more to be decided after further investigation. Aircraft required for Burma comprise one fighter, one G.R., two bomber squadrons which are included in 582 aircraft mentioned in paragraph 4.(2) Examination of A.A. problem disclosed that even in terms of deterrent effect number of guns required unlikely to be available for some time, therefore recommend immediate provision of twelve heavy and eight light A.A. guns to give some protection and raise morale of civil population. Immediate naval requirements are for A/S patrols and M/S services, building programme for which should be hastened. Immediate army reinforcements required to meet threat of seaborne, airborne, and land attack from Thailand are two infantry brigades, three field companies, one field regiment, one mountain battery, one anti-tank battery, one mobile light A.A. battery, one company tanks. Of these artillery most urgent requirement

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(1) Wavell Despatch; London Gazette supplement No. 38228 dated 11.3.1948.

(2) i.e. of the report.

to support existing garrison which cannot do more than hold northern Tenasserim and Rangoon and deal with internal security. Following also immediately required for Burma (a) strengthen Army headquarters, (b) form small R.A.F. group headquarters, (c) provide adequate roads to air bases (d) provide machinery to settle financial incidence of cost without delaying urgent preparations.'

#### R.A.F. reaction to proposals of Singapore Defence Conference

The first reaction of the R.A.F. to the recommendations of the S.D.C. was the despatch from India to Burma, of No. 60 (B) Squadron armed with Blenheim IVs. This Squadron, which had been separated into flights for coast defence duties at Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, and Karachi, left India on 13 February 1941, and two days later arrived at Rangoon where it was located on Mingaladon airfield, and employed mainly on training and communications duties. The next step was the formation, two months later, of a small group headquarters at Rangoon. No. 221 (1) Group came into being on 21 April 1941, with the appointment of Group Captain E. R. Manning as Officer Commanding the R.A.F. and Air Adviser to the Government of Burma. The staff consisted, in addition to the Group Commander, of an equipment officer, central accounts officer, and an administrative officer, together with a small number of office personnel.

#### First duties of No. 221 Group

The first function of this group was to make the necessary arrangements, in co-operation with the Government of Burma, for the construction of a number of airfields on the eastern frontier and Shan States to which in an emergency, reinforcing squadrons could be sent. These airfields were to be established with small C. and M. parties, skeleton operations room staff, and supplies of petrol, oil, bombs and ammunition were to be laid down. By direction of R.A.F. Headquarters, Far Eastern Command, airfields were to be sited at Mingaladon (Rangoon), Toungoo, Heho, Namsang, Lashio, Moulmein, Tavoy and Mergui. At some of these places there were already landing strips which had been made as part of the R.A.F. Far East reinforcement route. Victoria Point was not considered a suitable operational airfield but, with some improvements, was to be maintained as a transit landing ground only. The group itself was gradually built up with an appropriate staff, and all services were established. Remarkable progress was made with the construction of airfields, largely due to the energy of the Public Works Department of the Government of Burma. The first C. and M. party, consisting of one officer and ten airmen, moved from Rangoon to Toungoo on 27 July 1941, and during August most of the projected stations were completed, some with satellites, and ready for occupation as fully operational airfields. By that time too, most of the C. and M. personnel had arrived from Singapore ex United Kingdom, and operations room and other staff for the new stations began to reach Burma.

All the above expansion was carried out under the direction of H.Q. No. 221 Group, the whole being under constant supervision of the A.O.C., R.A.F. Far East, whose staff officers of all branches made regular visits of inspection to Burma. In the middle of September 1941, Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, C.-in-C. Far East Command, made an extensive tour in Burma in which he had meetings with the Governor, the G.O.C. and the Officer Commanding

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(1) O.R.B. No. 221 Group, R.A.F.

No. 221 Group. On 25 October new group headquarters were opened in Rangoon. In the new building accommodation was provided for the G.O.C. Burma, and the Naval Officer-in-Charge, so that all three services were under one roof. A combined operations room was planned, but not completed till later, but staff officers from Far Eastern Command were making arrangements for the development of fighter operations rooms and an air defence system. At that time also plans were made for the operational employment of the Burma Volunteer Air Force (B.V.A.F.) and of the American Volunteer Group (A.V.G.), the former primarily on communications duties, and the latter as part of the lighter defence of Rangoon. At the end of October 1941 the total strength of the R.A.F. in Burma, i.e. of No. 221 Group, was as follows:- Officers (including Nos. 60 and 67 Squadrons) 68; other ranks 966. The strength of the A.V.G. was approximately - Officers 60; other ranks 90, but these latter numbers varied from time to time.

#### Air Reinforcement

In the meantime reinforcing squadrons were being sent to Burma. As already stated No. 60 (B) Squadron had arrived at Rangoon on 15 February being located at Mingaladon, five of its Blenheims being detached to Toungoo. About the same time No. 67 (F) Squadron was being formed in Malaya and prepared for defence of Rangoon. One flight and some personnel of this squadron arrived in Burma soon after the formation of No. 221 Group, and for ease of control and economy of administration this flight, equipped with Brewster Buffaloes, was absorbed into No. 60 (B) Squadron of which it became 'B' Flight though maintaining its identity for operational purposes as No. 67 (F) Squadron. On 13 October, No. 67 Squadron was complete as a unit, and was located at Mingaladon. In October arrangements were made, under orders from A.H.Q. Far East, to send a detached flight of No. 60 Squadron to Mergui. Ground personnel with equipment, bombs etc. were sent by sea and six Blenheims were held at one hour's readiness from dawn to 15.00 hours daily at Mingaladon. The movements of these aircraft to Mergui did not, in fact, take place because, early in November twelve Blenheims complete with aircrews and some maintenance personnel were ordered to Kuantan in Malaya for armament training.<sup>(1)</sup> These aircraft were kept in Malaya on outbreak of war, and on 9 December 1941, were in action against the Japanese, operating from Tengah, their own airfield at Kuantan having been evacuated that day. The remainder of No. 60 Squadron, with four Blenheims which had been kept in Burma, was usefully employed in the erection of crated P.40s and Buffaloes, as they arrived for the A.V.G. and No. 67 Squadrons.

Reference has been made to the Burma Volunteer Air Force - B.V.A.F. and to the American Volunteer Group - A.V.G., of the formation of which a short account may now be given.

#### Burma Volunteer Air Force

With assistance from the Government of Burma the B.V.A.F. was formed in the latter half of 1940 under the

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(1) O.R.B. No. 221 Group.

title Burma Volunteer Air Unit. Its headquarters were at Mingaladon, the civil airport of Rangoon, and the unit was placed under the command of Mr. W. A. Wright, A.F.C., a member of the Indian Civil Service, on loan to Burma. In October 1940, an officer of the R.A.F., Squadron Leader M. P. C. Corkery, arrived from England to take up the duties of Chief Instructor. He brought with him six Tiger Moths in crates, which were soon erected, and in November the first course of twelve pupils arrived to undergo 'ab initio' flying instruction, the system of training being based on the syllabus of an E.F.T.S. of the Royal Air Force. The first course was sent to No. 1 S.F.T.S. at Ambala in India to complete service training, after which pupils were to be absorbed into R.A.F. squadrons or returned to Burma, if required for locally raised squadrons. After the first course, no more training was completed in India, but a number of pupils were sent to New Zealand where S.F.T. schools had been set up. By November 1941, there was in the B.V.A.F. a good number of pilots who had completed 300 hours on Tiger Moths, many of whom had been authorised to carry passengers. Then they began to take part in exercises in co-operation with the army and civil defence services, besides being employed on communications and transport duties. They also carried out 'black-out' reconnaissances and practice exercises with the local observer corps, some of which involved night flying.

In the first week of November 1941, the G.O.C. Burma, with the consent of the Government, decided to send a detachment of the B.V.A.F. to Victoria point, about 600 miles from Rangoon in the most southern tip of Burma, to carry out coastal and island patrols in co-operation with the Burman navy. Preparations were made to send a party of 1 Officer in charge, 3 pupil pilots, 1 R.A.F. N.C.O. and 10 other ranks and followers which arrived at Victoria Point on 2 December. The aircraft were two Tiger Moths and one American Falcon (P22) the latter of which, with some other aircraft had been bought from an American firm in Loiving in China, and from the Chinese government in Kuming. Patrols were immediately commenced, but the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour and the landings in Malaya altered conditions very considerably. On 7 December a Japanese aircraft made a reconnaissance of Victoria Point, and a few days later the unarmed aircraft of the B.V.A.F. were withdrawn to Mergui, and then to Rangoon. A second detachment had been sent to Toungoo for communications duties, and one aircraft was on permanent duty at Rangoon race-course for coastal and creek patrols, when called for by the G.O.C.

The B.V.A.F. then came under the orders of the A.O.C. and during the First Burma Campaign was employed mainly as a communications unit for No. 221 Group. It withdrew to India in March 1942, was re-organised at Dum Dum, and became the combined communications unit for Nos. 221 and 224 Groups of the R.A.F.

#### American Volunteer Group

For some years before the entry of America, in 1941, to the war in the Pacific, considerable advice and assistance had been given by that country to the Chinese in their war with Japan. Both by volunteers, and by an official military mission<sup>(1)</sup> under Brigadier General John Magruder, the United States had provided advisers and equipment under a lease-lend arrangement. In 1937, a retired officer of the American Air Corps, Major C. L. Chennault, was acting as Air Adviser to the Chinese, his special subject

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(1) See A.A.F. Historical narrative. Army Air Forces in the war against Japan, 1941-1942.

being formation flying and fighter tactics. He was supported by a considerable number of well paid American pilots, who, in addition to their pay, received substantial awards for each Japanese aircraft destroyed. Chinese fighter aircraft were mostly Russian or American but when, in 1941, both these countries entered the European war a limit was put to that source of supply, Russia's quota in particular, being completely cut off. From bases in China the Japanese began heavy air attacks on the Burma road supply route and it was to meet this new attack that Major Chennault formed the American Volunteer Group. He returned to America from China soon after the entry of Russia into the war, and in a short time enrolled as volunteers 100 experienced pilots, many of whom had been in China with him, and 200 ground staff, for service under Generalissimo Chiang Kai Shek. He also collected, under lease-lend 100 Tomahawks (P40), obsolescent fighter aircraft which had been earmarked for sale to Sweden and which were already in crates awaiting shipment. This party arrived by sea at Rangoon, and by September 1941, some aircraft were erected and training commenced at Toungoo, where the air-field and accommodation were provided by No. 221 Group R.A.F.

After training at Toungoo, the A.V.G., practically three squadrons strong, moved into China to Loiwing, but at the request of General Wavell and with the permission of Chiang Kai Shek, a squadron returned to Burma to assist with the air defence of Rangoon, to keep the port and the Burma road open. When air fighting started this squadron was very largely responsible for complete air superiority over the Japanese, till the retreat of the British army and the destruction of the R.A.F. at Magwe on 21 and 22 March 1942, caused them to return to China, where they operated in support of the Chinese land forces. They had suffered losses, but continued in action with the two Chinese armies retreating in Burma. While serving at Rangoon the squadron was relieved from time to time by one of the other two units from China. They co-operated closely with the R.A.F., frequently flew Hurricanes when any were available and served willingly under the orders of the A.O.C. In July 1942, the A.V.G. became a regular unit of the Tenth Air Force, then in process of formation by General Brereton, who had established his headquarters at Delhi in March 1942.

#### Land forces in Burma

As already stated in this narrative Burma, had in 1937, separated from India and become a province under its own Governor, controlled from the Burma Office in London. Steps were taken, almost at once, to commence the formation of a Burma army, which however was to be for the purpose of internal security only. In 1939 this army had had a very short existence, and was not sufficiently developed or trained to take part in a modern war. For many years the Burmese had shewn themselves to be good and brave fighters in defence of their country, but mostly as irregulars in guerrilla warfare, and regular soldiering and army discipline made little appeal to them. From September 1939, a build-up of Burmese defence forces commenced, and at the time of the Singapore Defence Conference in October 1940, the strength of the army was as follows:-

- 2 British Battalions
- 4 Burma Rifle Battalions
- 1 Mountain Battery

- 1 Field Company
- 4 Burma Rifle Battalions. (being formed)
- 1 Field Battery - 4 Guns only. (being formed)

The above forces excluded certain territorial and auxiliary units which were employed on police and internal security duties. The Singapore Defence Conference requested the Chiefs of Staff to provide immediate reinforcements as follows:-

- 2 Infantry Brigades + 1 Battalion
- 1 Field Regiment
- 1 Mountain Battery
- 1 Anti-tank Battery
- 1 Heavy A.A. Regiment
- 1 Light A.A. Regiment (non-mobile)
- 1 Light A.A. Battery (mobile)
- 1 Light Tank Company
- 2 Field Companies

In addition the necessary signal, transport, and administrative units were asked for. It was realised by the Conference that the above reinforcements, which they considered to be the bare minimum necessary, would not be immediately available, and they particularly requested that, if this should be so, an immediate and urgent allocation of twelve heavy and eight light A.A. guns should be made for the defence of Rangoon port and Syrian oil refineries.

#### Army Order of Battle on outbreak of war with Japan

Some progress was made in the provision and raising of troops and at the outbreak of war with Japan, a Burma Order of Battle might be summarised as follows:-

- (a) One Burma Division consisting of:-
  - (i) Maymyo Brigade
  - (ii) Tenasserim Brigade
  - (iii) 13th Indian Infantry Brigade
- (b) Rangoon Brigade
- (c) 16th Indian Infantry Brigade
- (d) Burma Frontier Force - B.F.F. - 7 Battalions
- (e) Garrison Companies - 5 Battalions
- (f) Burma Rifles - 5 Battalions
- (g) Burma Auxiliary Force - 4 Battalions + 1 A.A. Regiment (forming)
- (h) Burma Rifles - 2 Battalions (forming)
- 6 Anti-tank troops (forming)
- 1 Field Battery (forming)
- (i) Field Company - Forming
- (j) Armed Police - Battalions

In the Maymyo Brigade, and in the Rangoon Brigade, there was a British regiment, the 2nd Battalion King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry and the 1st Battalion Gloucester Regiment respectively, and these two brigades, with 16th Indian Brigade, were the only trained troops available. Ancillary to these forces were:-

- 3 Indian Mountain Batteries
- 1 Burma (B.A.F.) Field Battery
- 5 Mobile detachments of the B.F.F.

The Rangoon Brigade had some coastal defence guns.

By units, on 7 December 1941, the strength of the Burma Army was as follows:-

British - 2 Battalions  
Indian - 6 Battalions  
Burma Rifles 8 Battalions (regular)  
" " 4 Battalions (territorial)  
Garrison Companies - 5 Battalions  
Burma Aux: Forces - 4 Battalions  
Burma Frontier Force - 6 Battalions + 1 reserve.

Artillery

Indian Mountain Batteries - 3  
B.A.F. Field Battery - 1  
A.A. Guns - 8 Heavy, 4 Light.

In addition to the above A.A. guns, 8 Heavy and 8 Light guns had just arrived and were not sited or manned, and there were 8 Heavy and 8 Light guns advised on the next convoy.

Army Headquarters Staffs

Besides the Royal Air Force Group, which the Singapore Defence Conference considered immediately necessary for Burma, a further essential requirement was to strengthen the existing Army Headquarters. At this time the G.O.C. in Burma was Major General D. K. McLeod, whose staff was the minimum required to carry out the day to day administration and training of the small forces then in Burma. Staff officers for operational duties and planning, and for all ancillary services - signals, supplies, transport, ordnance, intelligence and welfare were urgently needed, and though an Army Headquarters was gradually built up, it was some months after the outbreak of war before there was anything like an adequate staff, competent to deal with all the needs of an expanding army, in action with a determined enemy. General McLeod was completely overworked, and when an extensive re-organisation<sup>(1)</sup> of the whole Burma defence system was commenced in December 1941, he was replaced in command by Lieutenant General T.J. Hutton, who was then C.G.S. in India under General Wavell, the C.-in-C. General Hutton took over on 27 December 1941, and at once acknowledged the efforts which had been made by General McLeod, with inadequate staff and inadequate resources, to prepare the country for war. There was, however, much more to be done, and so far as the arrangements to receive reinforcements were concerned the Army was in a much less favourable position than the Royal Air Force. General Hutton found that the headquarters staff was entirely insufficient, and that a few over-worked officers were struggling with problems beyond their powers. This lack of organisation, due to a shortage of trained staff officers, had imposed an unbearable burden on a G.O.C. whose operational troops were already engaged with a determined enemy, and, in the end, vitally affected the trend of the campaign. General Hutton, soon after taking over his command, was instructed from the War Office that his administrative planning was to be for a force of four divisions.

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(1) Wavell Despatch - L.G. Supplement No. 38228 - 5.3.48

which would involve the formation of a Corps Headquarters, with a Base Area, Line of Communications, with all ancillary services to scale, but this did not materialise before the fall of Rangoon.

#### Changes in Command in Burma

In view of this proposed large increase of the army in Burma, the War Cabinet in London had decided that Lieutenant General the Honourable Harold Alexander should be appointed as Commander-in-Chief, and on 22 February General Hutton was informed of this change through ABDACOM<sup>(1)</sup> and that he was to remain in Burma as C.G.S., to General Alexander who took over on 5 March. General Hutton remained in Burma till the end of April. On 4 March, in Calcutta, at an interview with the C.-in-C., India<sup>(2)</sup> General Alexander had received his directive verbally as follows: 'The retention of Rangoon was a matter of vital importance to our position in the Far East and every effort must be made to hold it. If, however, that was impossible, the force must not be allowed to be cut off and destroyed, but must be withdrawn from the Rangoon area for the defence of Upper Burma. This must be held as long as possible in order to safeguard the oil fields at Yenangyaung, keep contact with the Chinese, and protect the construction of the road from Assam to Burma'. Rangoon was evacuated on 8 March, and the retreat to India commenced.

#### Civil Defence in Burma

The findings of the Singapore Defence Conference which had been placed at the disposal of the Government of Burma were not without effect in that country.<sup>(3)</sup> A Burma Defence Council was formed under the chairmanship of the Governor, Sir Reginald Dorman Smith, and after earlier meetings it was decided in June 1941 to hold a defence exercise to test as far as possible all the arrangements that would be required, both civil and military, in the event of war with Japan. The exercise was divided into two phases and took place between 5 and 10 July. In the first phase it was assumed that war was imminent, and in the second that hostilities had commenced. As an indication of the defence measures which were taken in Burma a summary of the purposes of the exercise may be given as follows:-

- (a) To allow the civil government and all government departments and forces and civil bodies involved in the transition from peace to war to study, and as far as practicable to practise, their functions.
- (b) To exercise the higher commanders and staffs of all the services in a war situation, and to carry this as low down the scale of command as possible.
- (c) To test liaison between all commanders, and also between the services, the civil government, and the civil forces.
- (d) To test, as far as practicable, all communications necessary in time of war.
- (e) To study the means by which the higher commanders obtain their 'intelligence' in war.

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(1) Disbanded in Java 25.2.1942.

(2) General Wavell who had resumed his appointment on dissolution of ABDACOM.

(3) See A.H.B. ILJ31/14/20. Report on Burma Defence Exercise.



- (f) To test the battle organisation, including the working of plotting rooms at army headquarters, and to study the means of communication with commanders in Burma and elsewhere, and with the civil government.
- (g) To exercise the air raid warning system.
- (h) To provide practice for all organisations involved in dealing with air raids, especially fire-fighting, bomb disposal etc.
- (i) To test the black out arrangements throughout Burma, especially in the port of Rangoon.
- (j) To practise the initial deployment of all services.

Although the exercise was to some extent unrealistic, partly owing to the large assumptions made, and because of the absence of aircraft, R.A.F. participation being on a 'paper' basis only, many valuable lessons were learnt and immediate steps were taken to carry out the recommendations of umpires who were the senior officers of the respective services and departments taking part. One particularly useful result of the exercise was the establishment, on a wide perimeter round Rangoon, of a series of listening posts with appropriate communications, and the formation of an observer system which from the outbreak of war until the fall of the city, did much to ensure freedom from air attack and enabled the R.A.F. and A.V.G. to meet enemy raids before they reached the port and oil refineries. One policy decision made, was unfortunate in its result. It was decided that if Rangoon should be attacked from the air the evacuation of the civil population was the best means of avoiding casualties. After the two heavy bomb raids of 23 and 25 December which, though they did comparatively little military damage, caused serious loss of life and destruction of property, there was an uncontrolled mass evacuation from Rangoon which seriously affected all municipal services and completely disorganised road, rail, and river traffic to the north. The refugees were a serious liability to the military forces in the long journey back to India, and many thousands died on the way.

Plans were made to repeat the defence exercise in December, but this was not done before war broke out. However, as far as civil defence was concerned, Burma was not caught entirely unprepared.



OUTBREAK OF WAR IN BURMA

On 1 December 1941 all forces in Burma were brought to No.2 degree of readiness, and on 6 December No.1 degree was assumed. A Japanese reconnaissance aircraft had appeared over Victoria Point on 7 December and the unarmed B.V.A.F. detachment there was at once withdrawn to Mergui. Victoria Point was evacuated by the defence troops and the R.A.F. C. and M. party on 10 December, the airfield having first been made unserviceable. In the next few days there were numerous Japanese aircraft over the Tenasserim coast at Victoria Point, Mergui, Tavoy, and Moulmein and Mingaladon were also reconnoitered. The first enemy bombing operation was on 11 December when, at 16.15 hours, Tavoy was attacked by 28 Japanese light bombers. On 12 December a squadron of the A.V.G. moved from Toungoo to Mingaladon for the defence of Rangoon. On 10 and 11 December three Tomahawks of this squadron had carried out photographic patrols over the Chiengmai area and Bangkok. The first air raid warning sounded in Rangoon on 13 December, when a single Japanese aircraft made a low reconnaissance over the city. Later the same day the sirens again sounded and this time 27 light bombers were seen making for the harbour. R.A.F. and A.V.G. fighters had received warning, and, though no contact was made, the bombers sheered off without making an attack on the city, their bombs being dropped on Mergui, without doing much damage, on their return journey.

No.221 Group (Burgroup) comes under Indian control

As already stated, India assumed responsibility for the defence of Burma on 15 December 1941, and No.221 Group (Burgroup) was transferred to Air Headquarters, India, on that date. Two days later a party of senior staff officers led by Air Commodore Vachell S.A.S.O., arrived in Rangoon for discussions on matters arising from the change of control.

Early air operations

From the end of the first week in December routine coastal patrols of the area Moulmein, Tavoy, Mergui and Rangoon were carried out in 3-day circuits, by Buffaloes of No.67(F) Squadron, which also, assisted by the A.V.G., provided escorts over convoys which were beginning to arrive. Photographic reconnaissances were regularly carried out over air-strips in Thailand where enemy aircraft in some small numbers were noted as arriving. On 21 December six Buffaloes of No.67 Squadron carried out a low level attack at Prachuab Kirikhand on the Thailand state railway, and destroyed six enemy aircraft on the ground. On the same day a Blenheim, in transit to Singapore, was detained to carry out a photographic reconnaissance of Lampang - Chiengmai area, and came under A.A. fire, this being the first occasion in the campaign on which Japanese A.A. guns were reported in action. On 23 December a heavy bomb raid by about sixty Japanese bombers, with fighter escort, was made on Mingaladon airfield and Rangoon city. Much damage was caused, Mingaladon operations room, two petrol dumps, and one hangar being partially destroyed, and all communication to Mingaladon being broken. The A.V.G. and No.67 Squadron shot down nine bombers and one fighter, with a number of probables, but two Tomahawks with their pilots were lost and two Buffaloes<sup>(1)</sup> were destroyed on the ground.

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(1) O.R.B. No.67(F) Squadron.

R.A.F. casualties in the bombing at Mingaladon were seven killed and fifteen wounded. More serious were the losses sustained by the civilian population in Rangoon, where most of the people stood in the streets watching the air fighting above them. Over 2,000 were killed, and this raid and the heavier one which followed on 25 December, had most serious results. The second raid was carried out by over 100 aircraft, including fighter escort. Runways and administrative buildings were damaged, but military losses were not heavy, and there were no R.A.F. casualties on the ground. Again the A.V.G. and No. 67 Squadron had received warning and got in good attacks, 17 enemy aircraft being claimed as certain, with many probables. Four Buffaloes were lost in the air, and two on the ground, the four pilots being killed. Again civilian casualties were heavy.

#### First reinforcements arrive

In the meantime, reinforcements were beginning to arrive in Rangoon by sea, and frequently, Blenheims, flying in pairs from the Middle East via India, were touching down at Mingaladon en route to Malaya. On 12 December, in London, Air Vice-Marshal D. F. Stevenson was notified by the Air Ministry that he was to take over command of the air forces in Burma which it was proposed to reinforce with four fighter squadrons, six bomber squadrons and one G.R. squadron. Air Vice-Marshal Stevenson arrived in Rangoon on 1 January 1942. He had travelled from London via Delhi, where he had discussions with General Wavell, the C.-in-C. and with Air Marshal Playfair, the A.O.C.-in-C., both of whom emphasised the importance of keeping open the port of Rangoon and the Burma road. On 27 December two reinforcing Blenheims arrived from the Middle East, and next day a flight of four Wapitis arrived from Karachi to form the nucleus of a coast defence squadron which it was intended to base at Moulmein.

Air Vice-Marshal Stevenson was an experienced operational commander who had been A.O.C. No. 2 Group in Bomber Command. On his arrival in Rangoon on 1 January 1942, his first duty was to see for himself what the needs were in Burma, and in the first week of his command he visited all R.A.F. units and airfields, and had consultations with the Governor and the heads of all services. As a result of what he saw, and of the information which he gained, he made an appreciation of the situation which is well set out in his report<sup>(1)</sup> of the air operations in Burma in which he was involved in this campaign. This, while it contained nothing that was not already well known regarding the defences of Burma, presented the matter from a fresh angle, and in the light of the most recent operational experience in Europe. An important part of this appreciation was the assessment of air reinforcement required in Burma. On 2 January, as has been seen, ABDACOM was formed under General Wavell for the control of operations in the S.W. Pacific area, including Burma, and No. 221 Group (Burgroup) became Norgroup, under the operational control of General Wavell, though remaining under the A.O.C. in India for administration. Air Vice-Marshal Stevenson's request for reinforcements was sent to ABDACOM and to the Air Ministry on 18 January, and at once the question arose whether these reinforcements were to come out of the Air Ministry allocation to ABDACOM. On 2 February in a

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(1) London Gazette Supplement No. 38229 dated 5.3.48.

telegram from the D.C.A.S. (Webber W446 of 2 Feb.), the Air Ministry's proposals for the reinforcement of Burma were set out. These approved an immediate reinforcement of two additional Hurricane squadrons, making a total of six in all, including No. 67 (F) Squadron, for which unit the I.E. aircraft were to come out of the allotment already made. These Hurricanes were never available, and on the fall of Singapore on 15 February the two additional squadrons,<sup>(1)</sup> already en route to Burma, were diverted to Ceylon. The fighter force ultimately available in this campaign, exclusive of the A.V.G., was never up to the I.E. strength of two Hurricane squadrons, and a number of the aircraft were Mark I, already obsolete. With regard to bomber aircraft, the D.C.A.S. telegram referred to above, stated that there would be an immediate reinforcement of three squadrons out of the seven already approved for Burma. Even this however assumed the provision from the resources of ABDACOM of sufficient Blenheims to re-equip No. 60 Squadron, but there were never enough Blenheims to do that and the campaign was fought with little more than the equivalent of one bomber squadron instead of seven which had been agreed to be necessary. Both fighter and bomber aircraft en route to Burma were diverted to Malaya and in the end, in this campaign, from 21 January to 23 March (Magwe), the daily average availability of aircraft was 23 fighters and 6 bombers.

The reinforcement programme had included two army co-operation squadrons and one general reconnaissance squadron. Of these, No. 28 (A.C.) Squadron arrived from India on 26 January, and No. 1 (A.C.) Indian Squadron arrived about the same time. Both squadrons were equipped with Lysanders. No. 28 Squadron went straight to Lashio, but when it was realised that there was to be no Japanese attack in the north, it was recalled to the Rangoon area, and with No. 1 Indian Squadron was employed mainly in bombing operations against Japanese airfields in Thailand and on enemy columns moving into Tenasserim. Both squadrons were ordered back to India in the first week of March, but in February they had carried out between them 63 bombing sorties, and dropped a total of 15.75 tons of bombs. Each Lysander carried 2 x 250 lb. bombs and on these attacks no aircraft was lost. These two squadrons were also used for tactical reconnaissance duties but as there was neither air to air, nor air to ground, communication this work was not satisfactory and was later carried out by Blenheims.

With regard to G.R. aircraft, as already stated, No. 4 Indian Flight, equipped with Wapiti and Audax aircraft arrived on 28 December and, operating from Moulmein, was employed on coast defence duties. This flight was replaced later by No. 3 Indian Flight equipped with four Blenheim I aircraft. After the fall of Singapore, No. 139 Squadron armed with Hudsons, and on transit to Java, was retained in Burma to be employed on G.R. duties. There were no ground staff for this squadron, and their maintenance was carried out by personnel of Nos. 3 and 4 Indian Flights. Photographic reconnaissance was carried out by such aircraft as could be spared for the task and had the necessary range to get over Japanese

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(1) No. 30 (F) Squadron and No. 261 (F) Squadron.

airfields in Thailand. The Buffaloes of No. 67 (F) Squadron and P 40s of the A.V.G. were sometimes employed on P.R. duties and two P.R. Hurricanes en route to Java were retained in Burma but could meet photographic requirements only to a limited extent.

Among other reinforcements which were arriving at this time were H.Q. No. 267 Fighter Wing, No. 60 R.S.U., No. 39 A.S.P., and No. 7 S. and T. Column. The A.S.P. and R.S.U. had no tools or equipment. Personnel for Group Headquarters had been arriving gradually, and several of the new stations were completed with staff, including Zayatkwint, Toungoo, and Magwe, the last of which was a small civil airfield, and was never completed as a fully operational station.

#### Warning System in Burma

One of the earliest defence provisions by the Government of Burma had been an Observer Corps which, up to the attacks on Magwe in March, had performed very efficiently. For the defence of Rangoon there was a wide ring of listening posts all linked up on post office telephones to a central exchange which was directly connected to the combined operations room. As the Japanese advanced through Tenasserim, and closed in on Rangoon, these listening posts were gradually driven in and were later disposed along the Sittang valley. The Singapore Defence Conference had envisaged an ambitious programme of seven R.D.F. stations for Burma but only two of these materialised. No. 517 W.A. with a C.O.L. set, had arrived at the end of September and was located at Moulmein, which however, was not a suitable site, being probably dangerously far forward, with an ineffective arc of observation. It was withdrawn to Rangoon and was kept operating with great difficulty owing to a shortage of spare parts. No. 258 W.U. arrived just before the fall of Rangoon but was not disembarked. It was sent to Akyab, where it operated for a short time before being withdrawn to Calcutta. Thus it will be seen that an insufficient warning system added to the already great difficulties of a small air force operating against an enemy very superior in numbers. If this small force was to survive, early warning of enemy air attack was a most essential requirement.

#### Assessment of enemy strength in the air

One of the first things the new A.O.C. required to know was the enemy air strength opposed to him. From the limited photographic reconnaissances which had been carried out, and from intelligence reports from various sources, there were, early in January on airfields within range of Rangoon, about 150 fighter and bomber aircraft disposed as follows(1)

Prachaub Kirikhand	- 10
Me Sohd and Tak	- 40
Bangkok	- 70
Lampang and Chiengmai	- 30

(1) Stevenson Report. London Gazette Supplement  
No. 3822 9d/11.3.48

In February there was some reinforcement, and Japanese air strength was estimated as at least 200, and some new airfields were reported, namely Pitsanuloke (20 aircraft) and Nagorm Sawan (20 aircraft). There is no definite confirmation of these figures and it may be that they are an over-estimate. It must be remembered that though Singapore fell on 15 February, Japanese air losses in Malaya had been high, and at that time extensive preparations were being made for an all-out air offensive against Sumatra and Java. This culminated in the surrender of the Netherlands East Indies on 8 March, but in the short period Japanese air losses were again high, and reinforcements for (1) Burma must have been hard to find. At this time, too, the Japanese were aware that American air forces in the Pacific and Philippines were being established on an increasing scale and that an air superiority battle had to be fought in that area in the near future. Some squadrons which had been in action in Malaya and the N.E.I. were withdrawn to airfields in Thailand and Indo-China, for re-equipment and training in preparation for the approaching battle in the Pacific, and it is possible that some air units reported as being in Thailand were not used or available in the Burma campaign. But even the minimum Japanese air strength, fighter and bomber, within range of Rangoon was greatly in excess of that of the Allied air forces. The daily average effort available to the R.A.F. and A.V.G. in Burma on dates in January, February, and March was:-

31 January	-	35 to 40 aircraft
14 February	-	53 to 60 aircraft
21 March	-	42 to 45 aircraft

on which last date, and included in the total, 14 aircraft were at Akyab. Against this there was a probable Japanese strength of 350 bomber and fighter aircraft, with, at the middle of March, a daily effort available of from 240 to 250 aircraft. There are no available records giving Japanese daily strength returns or operational diaries but from Air Operations Record No. 67(2) prepared in Tokio, after the Japanese defeat, by a staff officer of the Fifth Air Division an approximate estimate can be made of enemy air forces operating in Burma in 1942. The report, which was prepared from memory, cannot be accepted in all respects as accurate, but it gives a picture of the situation from the Japanese angle which is worth examination.

#### Japanese air forces operating in Burma.

From the commencement of war Japanese air operations in Burma were controlled by their 3rd Air Group, later known as 5th Air Group. In January 1942 the Japanese 5th Air Division arrived from Formosa, after the fall of Manila, and this division, up to the end of the First Burma Campaign, was deployed against Burma. Divisional Headquarters was located at Bangkok, and the disposition of units about the middle of January 1942, was as follows:-

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- (1) See A.H.B. IIJ.54/49. Japanese Air Operations Record No. 67.  
(2) See A.H.B. IIJ. 54/49.

Headquarters 5th Air Division	- Bangkok
4th Air Brigade	- Bangkok
8th Air Regiment	- Bangkok
14th Air Regiment	- Bangkok
50th Air Regiment	- Nakorn Sawan
10th Air Brigade	- Lampang
77th Air Regiment	- Lampang
31st Air Regiment	- Pitsanulok
61st Air Regiment	- Nakorn Sawan

This would give a total of 180 + aircraft.

In the middle of March, just as preparations were being completed for a knock-out attack on the Allied air force in Burma, and after the fall of Rangoon, an order of battle and location of units seems to have been as follows:-

Headquarters 5th Air Division	- Insein
4th Air Brigade	- Toungoo
5th Air Regiment	- Toungoo (South)
8th Air Regiment	- Toungoo (South)
7th Air Brigade	- Bangkok
64th Air Regiment	- Mingaladon
12th Air Regiment	- Domman.
98th Air Regiment	- Nakorn Sawan
10th Air Brigade	- Lampang
77th Air Regiment	- Lampang
31st Air Regiment	- Pitsanuloke
12th Air Brigade	- Hlegu
1st Air Regiment	- Hlegu
11th Air Regiment	- Hlegu
15th Independent Air Unit	- Mingaladon
27th Air Regiment	- Toungoo (South)

This gives a total of 300 + aircraft and the list shows a little variation, both in location and numbers, from the estimate given by Air Vice-Marshal Stevenson, which was based on P.R.U. results and intelligence reports. On the whole, however, the A.C.C. had a very good idea of what he was up against. For example, his estimate of Japanese air strength in January was 150 bomber and fighter aircraft, which compares with an approximate figure of 180 given in the Japanese account. On 21 March (Magwe) the assessment of Japanese air strength by No. 221 Group Headquarters was 400, while the Japanese order of battle was 300 +, all of which, with the exception of one air regiment at Lampang, were in the Rangoon and Toungoo areas. In the middle of January, a Japanese estimate of Allied air strength, including an element of the A.V.G. was under 120 aircraft. Equally then, the Japanese had good knowledge of the air opposition they were likely to meet and that they had a numerical superiority of never less than three to one. What they did not know till later was the fine fighting quality of this small force, the A.V.G. and No. 67 Squadron R.A.F. particularly the former, who in the words of the Officer Commanding No. 28 (A.C.) Squadron 'had the Japanese completely taped.'<sup>(1)</sup>

#### Air Intelligence

Before the outbreak of war with Japan too little was known in the R.A.F. about the capabilities of Japanese aircrews, and the performance of their aircraft. In Burma, as in Malaya at this time their fighter aircraft were of three types, an Army 97, an

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(1) A.H.B. IIJ 54/3 Enclosure C.



Army 01 and a Naval '0'. The Army 97 was a lightly armed aircraft with a fixed undercarriage, the 01 was a similar aircraft with retractable undercarriage, and considerably higher performance, while the Navy '0' fighter was an aircraft with very much higher performance, besides which the general flying ability and airmanship of the naval fighter pilots was of a high standard. None of these aircraft had armour or self-sealing tanks, and by reason of their light construction they were extremely manoeuvrable, and on this account, R.A.F. pilots on Mark I and even on Mark II Hurricanes were at a disadvantage in a tight 'dog-fight'. To remedy this it became a practice to remove four or six Browning guns from the Hurricanes which, even then, had greater fire power than Japanese fighters. The endurance of Japanese aircraft was generally considerably greater than that of R.A.F. or American fighters opposed to them, and all types were convertible to long range fighters with two jettisonable tanks. This made them capable of carrying out low flying attacks on R.A.F. airfields from bases outside the range of Hurricanes or P.40s a form of air fighting in which the Japanese were particularly successful. New and inexperienced Hurricane pilots were warned not to 'dog-fight' Japanese fighters, but to gain height, make a dive attack, zoom and half roll into position for a new attack. On the whole, however, at medium heights and over 20,000 feet, R.A.F. and American fighters were not at a disadvantage. Some A.V.G. pilots who had flown Hurricanes reported that they preferred them to their own P.40s, though the latter were very manoeuvrable, with a performance much the same. The P.40 was more lightly armed than the Hurricane but its .5 inch guns were more destructive.

With regard to bomber aircraft, the Japanese Army 97, a medium bomber, though of greater range and lift, was inferior in fighting qualities to the Blenheim, and was very vulnerable to fighter attack. The power operated turret of the Blenheim enabled it to put up a good defence against fighters and when used, as it sometimes was in this campaign, in a medium or low support role it was a most successful aircraft. The Japanese themselves (1) considered that the Blenheim was at least the equal of their own Army 97 bomber in performance, and that the Hurricane and P.40 were superior in speed to their Army fighters. For this reason they preferred to avoid air fighting, as over Rangoon for instance, but their immense superiority in numbers was the factor which eventually decided the issue in this campaign. The Japanese Air Force, in spite of this numerical superiority, did not throughout this campaign shew itself particularly efficient or formidable, either in a bomber or fighter capacity. It can be clearly seen that the small Allied air force, handled as it was, was more than a match for the enemy, as long as it had reasonably good airfields from which to work, and had an adequate warning system. Without these, in the end, it was finally overwhelmed by force of numbers.

#### Air Operations in 1942

Early air operations from 8 December 1941 to the end of the year were not extensive and have already been described. There were no bomber aircraft available to the R.A.F. whose work consisted in regular routine reconnaissance of enemy

(1) See A.H.B. IIJ 54/59.

airfields in Thailand, in attacks carried out from Tavoy, Mergui, and Moulmein, on airfields where hostile forces were located, and in the vital fighter defence of the port of Rangoon. Road and rail communications on the Bangkok - Chiangmai route were attacked with success, and useful sea reconnaissance and convoy escort duties were carried out by the G.R. unit. The Japanese Air Force was not particularly enterprising during January, but their raids on Rangoon in December, in which they had suffered considerable loss, gave a clue to their plan. This was to attempt the achievement of air superiority, over Rangoon, and so to reduce the growing Allied air forces, that unrestricted bombing of this vulnerable target could take place. In this the Japanese were unsuccessful and their losses were such as no air force could sustain. It seemed therefore, that with the small but regular reinforcements that were beginning to arrive, it might have been possible to build up an air force more nearly equal in numbers to that of the enemy, which itself was being gradually strengthened.

#### Land operations in January

Besides reinforcements for the R.A.F. army reinforcements were also beginning to reach Rangoon. In the first week of January, the Headquarters Staff of 17th Indian Division arrived and was established in Moulmein, around which area the Indian Infantry Brigade was deployed at suitable points for the defence of Kawkaeik, and to watch the passes, particularly the Three Pagodas Pass, from Thailand into Burma. Troops from this brigade were also deployed along the road leading from Ye to Tavoy. In both Tavoy and Mergui there were strong detachments for the defence of these airfields. There had been many reports of the advance of Japanese forces into Tenasserim, and on 11 January it was estimated that 5,000 enemy troops were between Raheng and Myawaddy. Victoria Point had earlier been occupied by the Japanese who were receiving reinforcements by sea, and it was clear that Mergui and Tavoy would be attacked in some force. These attacks took place, and by 19 January both places were in enemy hands, their garrisons having been withdrawn by sea to Rangoon. This was particularly unfortunate for the R.A.F. because by the loss of the airfields, it became impossible to carry out air operations over the enemy's lines of communication, through which supplies and troops were being moved into Malaya. Northern Tenasserim was next attacked and under severe pressure the army moved back to Moulmein. Here the airfield was captured on 30 January and the army began to withdraw, most of the troops being evacuated by sea across the Salween estuary to Martaban.

On 1 February the army was west of the Salween river, and the Divisional Commander's general plan was to hold Martaban and the line of the Salween as far north as Pa-an, 17th Division being in echelon as far back as Kyaikto, on the Bilin river, where it was reinforced by the newly arrived 48th Indian Infantry Brigade. Martaban was lost on 11 February, and on 15 February enemy pressure had so increased that the 17th Indian Division began to retire behind the Bilin river, and preparations were put in hand for a further withdrawal across the Sittang. To protect this line and the approaches to Pegu from the N.W., troops were moved into the area of the Rangoon - Mandalay railway, round Nyaunglebin. There were thin forces between this place and Toungoo which was held by 1st Burma Division. Reinforcements for the army were still arriving regularly in Rangoon, and an important addition was 7th (1) Armoured Brigade which disembarked on 21 February and moved straight

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(1) A first class fighting unit from the Middle East.

into the line where it was of the greatest value in delaying the enemy advance west of the Sittang river, and as a reinforcement on the Pegu railway area.

#### Air participation in the land battle

In the fighting described above, the R.A.F. had provided air support to the limit of its capacity. Enemy losses on the Bilin river were heavy, partly as the result of continuous attacks by Lysanders and Blenheims which, from 18 to 21 February inclusive, carried out 73 sorties - 63 Blenheim, 10 Lysander. On 21 February the army reported that an enemy convoy of about 500 loaded vehicles was completely destroyed on the road north of Kyaikto as the result of an attack by ten Blenheims, this being one of the few occasions when the Japanese were caught in the open. In spite of heavy losses enemy pressure increased, and it became necessary for the army to withdraw from the Bilin line, and to prepare a position on the Sittang across which all transport was to be moved. Retirement behind the Sittang meant that the Rangoon - Mandalay railway and road would be cut and that the line of evacuation from Rangoon to the north, and of supplies for China along the Burma road, would no longer be available.

#### Army reports being bombed by R.A.F.

About this time there were reports from the army that our own troops were being bombed and machine gunned by R.A.F. aircraft. It is probably true that, on 20 February, the 1/9 R. Jat Regiment was caught by a pre-arranged bombing attack intended for the enemy. This regiment was partially surrounded and at the time of the bombing attack was in a position from which it should have withdrawn some time previously. Identification of ground forces in the thick jungle was almost impossible and it is surprising that incidents of this kind did not occur more frequently. A more serious case was reported by troops on the following day. It was stated that heavy casualties were caused at Mokpalin by some Blenheims and that the aircraft were identified by R.A.F. roundels on the underside of their wings. A careful and formal enquiry was made into this incident and it was established that eight Blenheims had bombed Kawbein near Bilin in the morning, but by midday they were back at their base and could not have carried out the attack on our own troops which took place between 12.00 and 15.00 hours. There seems to have been some confusion about this incident because, in the R.A.F. operational bombing (1) record for that day, there were two attacks recorded, one by four Blenheims on an enemy position at Kawbein, and the other, already mentioned, by the ten Blenheims on Japanese transport on the Bilin road north of Kyaikto. Curiously enough, almost at the same time, in Sumatra on 15 February, Japanese para-troops who attacked Palembang were reported by various experienced R.A.F. officers to have been dropped from aircraft - some said Hudsons - bearing the R.A.F. roundel on the underside of their wings. This was not a custom of the R.A.F. in Burma and it is possible that the Japanese may have adopted the plan, as a ruse, in Burma where they were operating a bomber, the Army 97, not unlike the Blenheim in its silhouette plan. If true, these incidents would undoubtedly have had a bad

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(1) See Appendix XIV.

effect on the morale of our own troops and on the good relations between the Army and the R.A.F., besides for every reason being most regrettable. In the circumstances of this campaign however there was always the possibility. The policy of the bomb-line had not been adopted, there was no direct communication between ground troops and the air and, in a moving battle, in jungle country, it was extremely difficult from the air to distinguish friendly from enemy forces.

#### Army withdrawal continues

There was a steady and confused withdrawal of the army to the Sittang river under severe and continuous pressure from the enemy, who, in addition to their strong frontal attack were reported to be moving forces northward in the direction of Toungoo. Fighting was most severe and, for three days, of a hand to hand nature, in thick jungle country which favoured the attackers. The Japanese had brought elements of a new division into action and it was clear that the 17th Indian Division would have to withdraw across the Sittang, over which there was only one bridge which carried the main road and railway to Rangoon. Attempts to form a strong bridgehead failed, and, in order to stop the Japanese advance the bridge was blown on 23 February when only part of the 17th Division, with very little transport and equipment had been able to get across. Two complete brigades and two battalions of another were left on the wrong side of the river and the Sittang disaster was complete. Many troops swam the river which was 500 yards wide, many were drowned and arms and equipment were lost. Troops on the left bank became disorganised and began to move up river, looking for a crossing place. Rafts were improvised and some units were able to cross a few miles higher up-stream but their transport and equipment were lost. This defeat meant that, for the time being, the 17th Division was non-existent as a fighting force. Its remnants were assembled in the area Waw - Pegu and re-organisation was commenced.

#### Air Operations in January and February

In the two months fighting which have been summarised above the R.A.F. was fully occupied and some of its operations have been mentioned. Its tasks were:-

- (a) Air defence of Rangoon, in which its fighters were supported by the A.V.G.
- (b) Reconnaissance of the battle area, Tenasserim coast and enemy lines of communication, mainly by low flying fighters and such G.R. (1) aircraft as were available.
- (c) Support of land forces by bombers with light fighter escort.
- (d) Bomber attacks on enemy bases and ports.

On 7 January No. 113 Squadron arrived at Mingaladon by air from the Middle East, and that night its aircraft, without the necessary inspection after the long flight, were sent to attack enemy shipping and docks at Bangkok. Ten Blenheims which took part in this attack dropped five tons of bombs leaving the dock area in flames. The squadron then moved to Lashio for inspections and maintenance, which owing to a shortage of tools

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(1) Hudsons of No. 139 Squadron and Blenheims of No. 3 Indian Flight.

and spare parts took some time. It returned to Rangoon on 19 January, after which the daily bomber effort averaged six. In the period between 18 and 31 January during which the Japanese had advanced through Mergui and Tavoy to Moulmein, the total bombing effort of the R.A.F., including ten sorties by No. 113 Squadron, was fifty-one effective sorties distributed as follows:-

<u>Targets</u>	<u>Effective Sorties</u>	<u>Tonnage dropped</u>
Airfields	18	8 tons (Bri.)
Harbours	22	9.8 tons (Bri.)
Ground Support	11	5.8 tons (Bri.)

Airfields attacked were Me Sohd, Rahung, Mesarieng in Thailand where, on each occasion, aircraft on the ground were destroyed or damaged. These bomber attacks were all escorted by fighters which meant a drain on the air defence of Rangoon. Direct ground support at this stage of the campaign was extremely difficult owing to the nature of the country, and damage to the enemy was probably small, but the attacks were completely justified as they helped in sustaining morale on the ground.

In February it became possible to increase the bomber effort. No. 28 (AC) Squadron and No. 1 Indian Squadron, both armed with Lysanders, had arrived from India in Rangoon on 26 January, and on 4 February 11 Lysanders carried out a bomb attack on Mchongson airfield, dropping 22 x 250 lb. bombs, a weight of 2.75 tons. Between 4 and 20 February the Lysanders carried out 63 effective day sorties, out of 63 ordered, chiefly on enemy communications, dropping a total weight of 15.75 tons of bombs. During this month the daily Blenheim effort was seven on average, but on 19, 20, 21, and 28 February the effort was 13, 10, 10, and 12 respectively. In all, in February, 204 Blenheim sorties were ordered, of which 202 were effective. The total tonnage dropped by Blenheims and Lysanders was 117.25. This effort was distributed as follows:-

<u>Targets</u>	<u>Effective Sorties</u>	<u>Tonnage dropped</u>
Airfields	45	15.0 tons (Br.)
Army Support	146	63.4 " "
Harbours	23	8.0 " "
Communications	26	8.1 " "
Shipping	25	10.0 " "

All of these attacks were provided with fighter escort of a very limited nature, which again it was difficult to find owing to the increasing danger over Rangoon. Sorties in support of the army were mostly carried out at low level, enemy troops and transport being shot up, both by bombers and fighters, as well as bombed. At the end of February, No. 28 Squadron and No. 1 Indian Squadron returned to India where it was hoped to re-equip them with Mohawks. Some Lysanders were retained for G.R. duties in the Andamans. Fitted with extra tanks they operated eastwards between Port Blair and the Tenasserim coast, and as far north as the Prepara channels.

#### Fighter operations in January and February

Apart from the escort and support sorties mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, fighter operations till the end of February were almost entirely for the defence of Rangoon,

and as cover for convoys entering and leaving the harbour. The two enemy air attacks on Rangoon in December have already been described, and it was clear that there was to be an air superiority battle over the city in which the small Allied fighter force would be hard pressed. On 30 December the A.V.G. Squadron at Mingaladon was replaced by a fresh squadron with 13 P.40s and on the same day No. 67 (F) Squadron had available 13 Buffaloes. Others which had been damaged on the ground, were under repair, and in the first week of January fighter strength was about thirty effective aircraft. Hurricanes were beginning to arrive and by 23 January when the Japanese made their next attack in force, fighter strength was considerably greater, over forty aircraft being available. For a week, from 23 to 29 January, there was continuous day fighting over Rangoon in which more than fifty enemy bombers and fighters were claimed as destroyed. Besides a state of readiness throughout the day, it was necessary to have fighters standing by against night bombing attacks which were expected, and the small fighter force was almost exhausted. Night bombing, but not in great strength, continued over Rangoon for a month, after which on 24 and 25 February, the Japanese air force made what was to be its final effort to obtain air superiority in Burma. This resulted in complete defeat for the enemy who, out of a force of approximately 170 bombers and fighters, lost 37 claimed as definitely shot down, with 7 others probably destroyed. A loss of 25 per cent was greater than the Japanese could sustain, and there were no reports of enemy aircraft within the warning zone till after the fall of Rangoon on 8 March. The practical result of this victory was that the evacuation of Rangoon by sea and land was carried out without interference from the air. During this stage of the campaign Japanese air effort was confined to close support of their troops in the area Pegu - Toungoo, where air raids were made on Maymyo, Toungoo, and to the west of Rangoon on the railway terminus at Basseim. In this period, although the Japanese air force was still heavily committed in Java, there seems to have been some reinforcement of its Burma Front.

#### Land Operations in March

After the retreat across the Sittang river there were confused operations in the area round Pegu and as far north as Toungoo. The remnants of the 17th Indian Division had been concentrated in the area Waw - Pegu, but the division was almost entirely without equipment, and its total strength was 3,335 dispirited and exhausted troops. 7th Armoured Brigade was still intact with all its vehicles and it was a most efficient fighting unit which the Japanese were unwilling to face by day, and they began a system of infiltration by night through the jungles of Pegu Yomas, with the apparent intention of cutting the Prome road. In these operations they were greatly helped by Burman traitor forces led by Japanese officers. The situation was so serious that preparations were completed for the evacuation of Rangoon and all arrangements were made for the demolition of Syriam oil plant and the harbour installations (1) General Hutton, the G.O.C. visited the 17th Indian Division to discuss the situation, had given orders for further withdrawal and was on the point of ordering the evacuation of Rangoon, when he heard that the new G.O.C., General Alexander, had arrived. This was 5 March, and General Hutton suspended all action on the orders he had issued until the new G.O.C. could see the situation for himself. General Alexander found the position was extremely serious, but in view of his directive from the C.-in-C. India

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(1) London Gazette Supplement No. 38228 dated 11.3.48.

to hold Rangoon, he did not confirm the orders for demolitions at Syrian and Rangoon. He found that the 17th Indian Division was holding the area Pegu - Hlegu with the 48th Infantry Brigade and the 7th Armoured Brigade in Pegu and the 16th Infantry Brigade in Hlegu. These units, except the armoured brigade, were weak and disorganised. The 63rd Infantry Brigade, which had just disembarked, was at Hlawga, sixteen miles north of Rangoon, but its transport was still on board ship. General Alexander at once ordered a movement of troops to close a dangerous gap of 40 miles, to the north of the 17th Indian Division and south of the 1st Burma Division at Toungoo. In these operations there were local successes, but the Japanese entered Pegu on 5 March, and the road between Rangoon and Pegu was cut on 6 March. There had also been a landing of Burman traitor forces south of Rangoon, who were advancing on Syrian, and the demolition orders were issued on 6 March, at midnight.

General Alexander decided to evacuate Rangoon and regroup and re-organise his forces in the Irrawaddy Valley. All troops in Rangoon not required to cover the demolitions, with Army Headquarters, moved out on the Prome road on 7 March, and about 21 miles north of Rangoon ran into a road block which caused serious and increasing congestion for some time. General Alexander states in his despatch that Japanese air attack at this stage would have had disastrous consequences. That this did not take place was due to the complete air ascendancy which had been established by the R.A.F. and A.V.G. in the preceding weeks. Not only this, but the evacuation by sea was carried out without the loss of a ship. There were some high-flying enemy bombers in the air, but they did little damage and were kept off by the A.A. artillery with the army. The move into the new concentration area just south of Prome was completed by 11 March.

#### Loss of Rangoon

The loss of Rangoon was extremely serious as it was the only point of entry into Burma of reinforcements, personnel, and supplies. The army was left without a line of communications, facing its former base. Fortunately, base and line of communications installations and reserves of fuel and stores had already been moved north. For the R.A.F. the loss of Rangoon with its effective warning system and the airfields which had been established round the city was disastrous. Reinforcement and replacement of aircraft were now almost impossible, and the fighting strength of the air forces was, in future, to be of a decreasing value. There was a general and gradual withdrawal of the army into the Prome area and, on 14 March, General Alexander established his headquarters at Maymyo to which also the Civil Government had moved. On 19 March a Corps Commander, General W. J. Slim with a skeleton staff arrived. The new corps, I Burcorps, was established in the area Allamyo-Prome at the end of March.

#### The R.A.F. after the fall of Rangoon

At this stage it will be convenient to return to the operations of the R.A.F. It has been seen how, owing to the establishment of air superiority over the Japanese, the general withdrawal of the army from the Sittang river along the Irrawaddy Valley, and the evacuation of Rangoon by land and sea had been carried out with the minimum of

air interference. Early in February however the A.O.C. had seen, along with the G.O.C., that Rangoon would likely fall within a few weeks. His problem then was to find a suitable location for his air forces, keeping in mind that besides having to fight the Burma battle they were the only air protection for India. His line of retreat for the air forces would largely depend on that taken by the army. There was a line of airfields running almost due north from Rangoon to Loiwing in China. These airfields were fully operational, with ample accommodation and satellite landing grounds, but there was no organised warning system and it would have been easy there for Japanese fighters to destroy the R.A.F. on the ground.

An alternative plan, and the one recommended by the A.O.C. was to move the R.A.F. base to India and maintain two mixed wings in Burma which could be administered from India. Advanced bases for this force would be at Magwe and Akyab, at both of which it would be possible to provide a warning system. This decision was made by the A.O.C. on 18 February but though the plan was referred to ABDACOM, then in process of disbanding, it was never confirmed by them. At the same time however, on 19 February an instruction had been received from the A.O.C.-in-C., India that if it should be necessary to withdraw the air forces from Burma, a plan would be prepared by R.A.F. headquarters in India.

On 20 February air transport was requested from India to move the R.A.F. group from Rangoon to Akyab by a shuttle service. From Akyab the evacuation would be continued by sea. In this way about 3,000 R.A.F. personnel were moved to India in the next three weeks. At the same time preparations were made to continue operations over Rangoon, and in defence of the army in its retreat along the Prome road. An operational headquarters was established at Magwe, a small civil airport on the Irrawaddy, about 260 miles N.N.W. of Rangoon and 95 miles north of Prome. Magwe had not been included in the original R.A.F. plan for establishing operational airfields in Burma and it was not suitable immediately to receive a mixed wing. Buildings were insufficient, the main runway required extension, and there were no dispersal points or ground defence posts. This work was put in hand but on account of the general evacuation northwards there was little native labour available. Maymyo where General Alexander had his headquarters, near the Civil Government, was about 170 miles north-east of Magwe.

On 23 February an R.A.F. rear headquarters was opened at Magwe, forward headquarters being still in Rangoon. To enable Hurricanes with a fighting range of about 140 miles to provide cover for the long army columns retreating northward it was necessary to have along the route a series of landing strips where aircraft could be rearmed and refuelled. Strips were cut in paddy fields at intervals along the road but it was impossible entirely to eradicate the small irrigation banks and channels with the result that Hurricane tail units were often damaged in the corrugations. Aircraft which became unserviceable in this way were fitted with temporary bamboo tail skids and flown out for repair, which meant considerable delay before they were again serviceable. The chief and best of these airstrips was at Zigon, 60 miles south of Prome, to which, on 7 March, the mixed wing, which had been formed at Rangoon as "X" Wing, was moved to make arrangements for close support for the army.

While the new base at Magwe was being established, and personnel and equipment moved in, a wing headquarters known as 'X' Wing had been formed in Rangoon. It was provided with an experienced staff under Group Captain Noel Singer, with



satisfactory communications and ample transport. Its role was to control fighter and bomber offensive action in support of the army and to maintain air superiority over Rangoon till the evacuation was complete, after which it was to move back with the army using the temporary strips which had already been made. On 2 March the R.D.F. station at Rangoon was moved to Magwe to set up a warning system at the new base. 'X' Wing had operated from Mingaladon, which was well known to the Japanese, but to prevent losses on the ground in the event of a sudden attack without warning, fighter aircraft were moved to a satellite air-strip at Highland Queen some miles away, Mingaladon being camouflaged as a dummy aerodrome. Bombers were moved to Magwe and operated from there using Highland Queen as an advanced landing ground.

On 7 March 'X' Wing was moved to Zigon, having left demolition parties to destroy Mingaladon, Zayatkwint and Group Headquarters in Rangoon. These demolition parties withdrew safely with the army. From 7 to 11 March 'X' Wing provided from 12 to 18 sorties a day, operating from Zigon over the line to Rangoon, but there was no interference by the enemy air force and the army was able to move safely into its new position on the Letpadan. During this time aircrews were reporting that the retiring column of vehicles and tanks was about 40 miles long, a most vulnerable target, but it was never attacked from the air. Although Japanese reconnaissance aircraft were frequently seen over the troops, the only attack made in this area was a raid by ten bombers on Tharrawaddy where damage was done to the town and many civilian casualties were caused. On 11 March 'X' Wing moved from Promé to Magwe where it was disbanded on the formation of Burwing under Group Captain Seton Broughall.

#### Formation of Burwing and Akwing

On the disbandment of 'X' Wing whose task was completed, Group Captain Singer was ordered to Akyab, where he arrived by air on 12 March, to take over command of Akwing then in process of formation under the direct supervision of the A.O.C. whose own headquarters were there. Akwing, a mixed wing, was composed of No. 67(F) Squadron, a G.R. Flight with Hudson aircraft, and a small detachment of the B.V.A.F. for communication duties. To this Wing it was proposed to add No. 113 (B) Squadron and No. 139 (G.R.) Squadron when Blenheims and Hudsons became available for them. Also at Akyab at this time was No. 136 (F) Squadron, without aircraft who were waiting for transport to India, for which they sailed on 23 March. The fighter aircraft in Akwing were nine obsolete Hurricane Is and one Hurricane II.

Burwing, formed at the same time at Magwe, also a mixed wing, was to be under the direct operational control of General Alexander. It consisted of No. 45 (B) Squadron, an army co-operation flight, No. 17 (F) Squadron, the A.V.G. with six P.40s, and the R.D.F. Station, operated by No. 517 W.U.

The plan to maintain these two mixed wings, which had been proposed in February, was approved by Sir Richard Peirse who had flown from India to Akyab on 9 March to meet A.V.M. Stevenson. Operational planning was discussed, and in addition a new directive was issued to the A.O.C. This was to organise the air defence of Calcutta, including the

port and large industrial areas of Asansol and Tatanagar, to arrange air protection for oil installations at Digboi in Assam, and to continue, from India, bombing operations in support of the army in Burma. G.R. patrols being carried out from Akyab over the eastern part of the Bay of Bengal, including the Andamans, were to be continued and extended by G.R. reconnaissance from Calcutta of sea communications as far as Ceylon.

#### No. 221 Group reformed in Calcutta

Having completed the realignment of his Command in Burma, Air Vice-Marshal Stevenson on 17 March went from Akyab to Calcutta, where on 12 March his new headquarters had been set up. No. 221 Group, originally formed in Burma on 21 April 1941, had been re-named Burgroup, and later, on formation of ABDACOM had become Norgroup. With the disintegration of ABDACOM in February 1942, the remnants of Britair moved from Java to India, and on 12 March 1942, No. 221 Group (1) was reformed in Calcutta, under command of Air Vice-Marshal Stevenson, for the control of all air forces in N.E. India and of the two wings in Burma. Later, this headquarters in Calcutta became Bengal Command to which another group, No. 224, was added.

#### Air Reverses at Magwe and Akyab

In the meantime, air operations had continued in Burma, on a limited scale, from Magwe in support of the army, and from Akyab on G.R. reconnaissance in the Bay of Bengal and Gulf of Martaban. There was little enemy activity in the air, but reconnaissance from Magwe over the Rangoon area had reported increases in the numbers of Japanese aircraft at Mingaladon and neighbouring airstrips. The Intelligence estimate of enemy air strength at this time was that 400 aircraft were available in Burma. This may have been on the high side but there were at

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- (1) No. 221 Group O.R.B. Appendix B  
R.A.F. Units in No. 221 Group on formation 12.3.42.
- I Akwing, formed 12.3.42 at Akyab  
No. 136 (F) Squadron, No. 67 (F) Squadron, No. 139 (G.R.) Squadron. (No. 139 Squadron became No. 62 (G.R.) Squadron soon after 12.3.42).
- II Burwing, formed 8.3.42 at Magwe  
No. 45 (B) Squadron - No. 17 (F) Squadron - No. 517 W.U.
- III H.Q. No. 2 (F) Wing at Dum-Dum  
H.Q. No. 161 (F) Wing " Ballygunge  
H.Q. No. 267 (B) Wing " Calcutta  
No. 5 (F) Squadron " Dum-Dum  
No. 201 (A.C.) Squadron " Peshawar  
No. 28 (A.C.) Squadron " Lahore  
No. 60 (B) Squadron " Lahoro  
No. 103 (G.R.) Squadron " Dum-Dum  
No. 113 (B) Squadron " Asansol  
No. 135 (F) Squadron " Dum-Dum  
No. 146 (F) Squadron " Dinjan  
No. 215 (B) Squadron " Asansol

■ No. 103 Squadron was formed from No. 3 Indian Flight and later became No. 353 Squadron.

least 300 and probably 350. On 20 March reports showed that there were about 50 enemy aircraft on Mingaladon and numbers on surrounding satellites. On the morning of 21 March, Burwing, at its own request, received permission<sup>(1)</sup> from army headquarters to make a raid on Mingaladon. Nine Blenheims of No. 45 Squadron, with an escort of ten Hurricanes from No. 17 Squadron, almost the whole available strength of the Wing, took off to make this attack. The Blenheims were intercepted by Navy '0' fighters about 40 miles north of Rangoon but pressed on, and in the running fight which followed, one Navy '0' Fighter and one Army T. 97 were shot down, two more being claimed as probable and two damaged. All bombs, 4.5 tons were dropped on runways and dispersal areas on which many aircraft were seen. All the Blenheims then returned but seven were more or less severely damaged and required repair. One Blenheim pilot was wounded. The Hurricane escort had engaged enemy fighters during the approach and had shot down five T.97s, and claimed four more as probably destroyed. They then made a low level attack on Hmawbi (2) and Mingaladon in which a total of sixteen enemy bombers and fighters was claimed as destroyed or damaged on the ground. These burning aircraft on the ground probably included some which had been set on fire by the Blenheims. One Hurricane crashed on the return journey, but the pilot escaped, and one P.R. Hurricane taking photographs in the area Zayatkwint - Mingaladon - Rangoon - Hmawbi was shot down on its return journey near Yenangyaung but the pilot, with his camera, was recovered uninjured. Most of the other Hurricanes had been shot up and required repair.

#### Japanese attack Magwe

It was intended to repeat the attack on Mingaladon in the afternoon, the first raid having taken place at 08.30 hours, but while preparations were being made and all aircraft, including five new Blenheims which had arrived from India that day, were being got ready, a strong enemy force of 59 bombers and about 24 fighters appeared at 13.30 hours over Magwe. They attacked in three waves, the last attack being carried out at 14.30 hours. Six Blenheims and one Hurricane were destroyed on the ground. In the air four Hurricanes and six P.40s which had been able to take off shot down five enemy fighters. In addition there were two Hurricanes in the air which had taken off at the first warning to intercept a single unidentified aircraft which had been previously reported. Both these Hurricanes were shot down but the pilots escaped. The A.V.G. had no losses in the air, but one P.40 was damaged on the ground and three personnel were wounded. Damage to buildings and runways was not serious, but an oil dump containing 1,000 gallons was set on fire and destroyed, and all telephone communication, including the main trunk line to the south, was put out of action. It was established later that the first wave of the enemy attack was from Rangoon area, and the other two which came in from the W. and N.W. were from Chiangmai in Thailand.

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(1) Burwing was directly under the G.O.C. for operations.

(2) Highland Queen, a satellite of Mingaladon.

After this attack work was started on the repair of damaged aircraft which could be made flyable. Crews worked all night and good progress was made, but at 08.04 hours and 08.11 hours next morning, 22 March, plots of approaching aircraft were passed to sector operations from the R.D.F. station, which during the night had been moved to a new position. Communication with the operations room was by a W/T link, but after the second warning this broke down and no further plots were received before an enemy attack developed at 08.45 hours. Just before this an enemy aircraft was heard over the airfield and two Hurricanes took off to intercept. They had not made contact when a wave of 27 bombers with fighter escort appeared without further warning, which meant that no more Hurricanes or P.40s were able to take off. Fifteen minutes later a second wave of the same strength arrived and commenced an attack without opposition. The raids did much damage and three Blenheims and three P.40s were destroyed on the ground. The Hurricanes already in the air damaged two Japanese fighters which were then shot down by light A.A. guns, but one of the Hurricanes crashed on landing and was a 'write off'. Damage to the whole airfield was extensive, and the warning system was rendered useless as W/T and R/T and telephones had been put out of order.

In the two days the scale of these attacks was estimated at 113 bombers and at least 44 fighters and approximately 167 tons of bombs were dropped. During the attacks the A.A. aerodrome defence seems to have been very small. There were in action four heavy 3.7 A.A. guns, four Bofors and ten .5 inch machine guns manned by the Burma Rifles, but not all these opened fire. On 22 March the Bofors completed the destruction of two enemy fighters already damaged by Hurricanes. The heavy A.A. guns do not seem to have offered any protection. After the raids the aircraft situation at Magwe was that out of 20 Blenheims, 9 had been destroyed, five were damaged, and six, though operationally unserviceable, could be flown. There were three serviceable Hurricanes which were all the fighter defence remaining after the departure of the A.V.G. Some other Hurricanes, probably five could be made airworthy, but not operationally serviceable without major repairs. These aircraft, six Blenheims and eight Hurricanes, were flown to Akyab. Before this the A.V.G. had flown out to Lashio their three remaining P.40s, and their road convoy moved off later in the day. After the aircraft had left a further enemy attack developed. At 13.30 hours on 22 March 27 bombers with an escort of 10 fighters followed at 14.30 hours by a second wave of similar strength, completed the destruction at Magwe almost at their leisure. It was possible to send up two Hurricanes which had been repaired, to meet the first of these attacks and they were landing when the second wave appeared. Runways were further damaged and some aircraft under repair, were finally destroyed.

#### Evacuation of Magwe by the R.A.F.

After this it was decided to withdraw the R.A.F. from Magwe to Lashio to reform if possible, and evacuation in accordance with a previously prepared plan was ordered at first light on 23 March. A slow convoy, with heavy transport carrying sector operations and No. 517 W.U. had moved to Yenangyaung on the evening of 22 March, and a faster convoy containing Burwing advance party, moved off at 18.00 hours the same day. The main convoy started at 06.00 hours on 23 March as detailed in a previously issued movement order. Salvage parties, with the necessary transport, were left behind by the two squadrons and arrangements were made for a detachment with heavy lifting gear to come from Lashio. Salvage operations, including efforts to repair the runways were carried

out till 3 April, during which time 16 Mercury engines, 4 Merlins, all serviceable airscrews, self-sealing tanks, Hurricane main planes and also the equipment of the P.R. Hurricane which had been lost on 21 March, were removed. No R.A.F. guns were left behind except ten .5 inch machine guns which had been issued on loan to the Burma Rifles for ground defence. A refuelling party also remained to supply aircraft which might arrive from India.

During this critical period the A.O.C., A.V.M. Stevenson, had been engaged in the preparations for reforming his group in Calcutta, and in drawing up plans for the air defence of N.E. India. He was at Akyab from 12 to 17 March, during which time Akwing was formed, and on the latter date he flew to Calcutta to continue his discussions with the A.O.C.-in-C. and to meet the Commander-in-Chief. On the morning of 22 March he returned to Burma. When he landed at Akyab he was informed of the Japanese attacks on Magwe the previous day, and soon afterwards a signal was received from Burwing notifying the closure of Magwe airfield owing to a heavy renewal of the enemy raids. This signal stated that there were few aircraft left and asked permission to move Burwing to Lashio and Loiwing to reform. The A.O.C. was able to get first hand information from Blenheim aircrews who had just arrived from Magwe and he agreed, by signal, to the evacuation. At the same time he instructed Group Captain Seton Broughall to meet him that night at Mandalay or Maymyo. Conferences were held with General Alexander, who, it will be recalled, had operational control of Burwing, on 22 and 23 February. The decision to remove Burwing to Lashio was confirmed, but it was arranged that attempts should be made to hold Magwe airfield and repair the damage so that Burwing could return there for operations. On the A.O.C.'s order, part of the moving convoy was turned round, the R.D.F. station was sent back, and the repair and salvage sections were strengthened. It was hoped to make Magwe operational, but it was never possible to do this, though R.A.F. transport aircraft from India were able to land there for about three weeks. On 28 March, Nos. 45 and 17 Squadrons, without any aircraft, completed their move to Lashio and the same day No. 139 Squadron left Akyab for Dum Dum near Calcutta.

#### Repercussions of Magwe defeat

A report of the Japanese attacks on Magwe and on the resultant evacuation by the R.A.F. was prepared for the A.O.C.-in-C., India.<sup>(1)</sup> There had undoubtedly been severe criticism of the hasty evacuation, both by the army, which was still fighting in the Prome area 90 miles to the south, and by the civil authorities in Mandalay. The fact that the retreating convoys were turned round and ordered back to Magwe may have given rise to some of this criticism. It is unfortunately true that in the early Far East Campaign, in Malaya and in the Netherlands East Indies, unnecessary (at the time) evacuations and retreats had taken place in circumstances indicating utter panic and disorganisation, and a complete break-down of all administrative control and discipline. This was not the case at Magwe. There can be little doubt that Burwing Commanders' decision to move his flyable aircraft from Magwe to Akyab was correct. On 22 March three operationally unserviceable P.40s of the

(1) See A.H.B.IIJ 54/53.

A.V.G. all that were left, were flown out to Lashio; eight Blenheims and eight Hurricanes were flown to Akyab the same day, and three Hurricanes which had been partly repaired left on 23 March for Akyab. It is not so easy however to see why the rest of the R.A.F. were moved out so suddenly. There was much salvage and repair work to be carried out and ample transport to move stores and equipment to Mandalay and there was no immediate danger from Japanese land forces. Transport aircraft from India continued to use the airfield, and it may have been from their passengers that stories of panic and disorganisation at Magwe gained circulation. The impression formed from the almost desolate airfield with its wrecked and burnt out aircraft, its destroyed and damaged buildings, undoubtedly gave rise to unfavourable and exaggerated reports.

The actual evacuation by road was carried out in accordance with a plan which had been prepared some weeks earlier, and which was completely understood by the squadrons and all Burwing ancillary units. Convoys moved off punctually and in good order, at their stated times, and except for minor mechanical troubles would have reached their destinations as arranged. Discipline on the road was good, and the precaution had been taken of sending forward two Bofors guns to each of two difficult river crossings where convoys might have been vulnerable to air attack.

#### Magwe Report

The Magwe report, prepared by Group Captain H. Seton Broughall was forwarded on 16 April 1942 to the A.O.C. No. 221 Group from whom it was sent accompanied by a long demi-official letter (1) to the A.O.C.-in-C., India on 24 April. In this letter A.V.M. Stevenson gave a full account of the Magwe incident, from the opening attack by Burwing on the Japanese air concentrations in the Mingaladon area to his meetings at Mandalay and Maymyo with General Alexander and Group Captain Broughall on 22 and 23 April. At these meetings the decision to move Burwing to Lashio, which had been previously made, was confirmed with the full agreement of General Alexander, who it will be recalled had operational control of the mixed wing, but the arrangement to send back at once to Magwe a great part of the moving convoy, including the R.D.F. unit, the A.A. and aerodrome defence sections, and parties for refuelling, repair, and salvage is an indication that the original evacuation was considered premature. A.V.M. Stevenson says that on 24 March he went to Loiwing to make arrangements to operate Burwing in China, but that he was unable to carry out this plan mainly because two Hurricane Squadrons (Nos. 30 and 261), earmarked for Burma, had been diverted to Ceylon. He had known however, in the first week of March, that these two squadrons would not be available for Burma, and that, with the reinforcements in sight and with the pressure in India due to reorganisation and the formation of Bengal Command, it would have taken many months to carry out this plan.

Group Captain Broughall's report covers the enemy air attacks on Magwe on 21 and 22 March and the withdrawal of Burwing to Lashio. It is accompanied by a large number of appendices containing statements and reports from the heads of all administrative and technical sections in the Wing and also from the Officers

(1) A.H.B.IIJ 54/53: Encl. ref. H.Q., B.C. 5.2.1.Air.

Commanding Nos. 17 (F) and 45 (B) Squadrons. There are also reports from the Officer-in-Charge of the Burma Observer Corps and from the Royal Engineer Officer-in-Charge of the constructional and extension work on Magwe airfield.

For the purpose of this narrative it is not necessary to examine all these reports in detail, but it is clearly evident that Magwe was not a suitable base from which to operate an air force, under the circumstances at the time. It is not quite clear, however, why the preparation of dispersal areas, and of satellite air strips had not reached a more advanced stage. It had been known, early in January, that Magwe would be required as an operational airfield from which air support could be provided for the army retiring up the Chinthein valley, and in the first week of January work had commenced on the extension of the north-south main runway. On 19 January when the superintending engineer met the P.W.D. executive engineer to discuss the extension to the airfield, it was decided that dispersal areas were urgently required and this work was put in hand at once. A progress report made on 10 February was good, shewing that work on the dispersal and relief runway was well under way. There was however, an increasing difficulty in obtaining labour, and this was the chief factor which, in the end, prevented Magwe from becoming operationally suitable at a (1) critical time under heavy attack. There had clearly been delay in carrying out the necessary works.

#### The Magwe Warning System

The report of the Officer-in-Charge of the Burma Observer Corps (2) was prepared to meet a general criticism that the air attacks on Magwe on 21 and 22 March took place without warning. Here, as far as the Observer Corps is concerned, it is clear that warnings were given, but not all the separate raids were reported. At this time the warning system consisted of two observer post belts and the R.A.F. 517 W.U. with an R.D.F. set. The two observer belts extended from Mandalay to Toungoo and Prome, and reported plots to fighter operations room at Magwe by direct land line. In the system there was also a chain of posts on the railway line from Pyinmana to Kyaukpadaung, from which plots were reported direct to Magwe through an R.A.F. W/T link at Taunggyi. The R.D.F. set fed plots by land line telephone or by a W/T link direct to the operations rooms.

On 21 March the first enemy air raid was plotted at 13.05 hours and at 13.27 hours it was confirmed that the objective was Magwe. The air raid warning was sounded at 13.33 hours and the first bombs were timed at 13.55 hours. There were however two further attacks on this day at 14.10 and 14.30 hours which were not reported separately by the observer corps, perhaps owing to telephone failures, or due to the fact that aircraft approached from a direction not covered, either by the R.D.F. set or by the listening posts. On 22 March there was a good deal of confusion about the warnings. Early W/T reports received on this day at 08.20 hours were unintelligible owing to interference

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(1) See A.H.B. IIJ 54/53 Encl. 3.  
(2) Ibid. Encl. 2.

and jamming, the latter being due to an A.V.G. transmitter located near the operations room. Land line reports were not received till 08.48 hours when the air raid warning was sounded two minutes before the first bombs fell. There was a raid at 09.00 hours by a second wave of bombers and fighters which was not reported. In the afternoon at 14.30 and 14.40 hours there were two separate attacks. An air raid warning was given at 14.14 hours and the first bombs fell at 14.39 hours, so that only one of these was reported, but by this time the communication system was completely disrupted, and it is likely that listening post plots were not received at the operations room. The observer corps had operated efficiently at Rangoon, and at Magwe it could not be blamed for the failure of the warning system.

With regard to the R.D.F. set at Magwe a signal (1) had been sent to No. 221 Group on 18 March which indicated a very low state of serviceability. Extracts from this signal read as follows: '517 radio virtually unserviceable 17/3 due technical breakdowns. Full complement spares not issued on formation ----- Subsequent demands never met ----- Extemporisation and local purchase have so far met case in absence of official action but materials not now available. Present situation ----- Receiver unserviceable, generally unreliable and continually failing due to non-tropical design ----- Transmitter generally satisfactory' This signal included a request for spares which of course did not arrive in time. Extracts from the F.540 - Operations record book - of No. 517 W.U. give a clear picture of the position. 'Date 21.3.42: sited in Magwe in a position designed for sweep 45 to 190 degrees; odd friendly plots received during morning: 13.23 hours, hours suspected tracks 61 miles E. and E.S.E. 13.28 hours, plotting commenced on inward tracks from 55 miles: telephone failed at 13.44 due breakdown in line; this was repaired in one minute and plotting continued. This raid was plotted out 61 miles. As the second wave (some twenty minutes later) approached from N.W., Wing Commander Devitt subsequently requested all round sweep. Unit therefore moved at 18.00 hours to new site four miles from Magwe and one mile from Magwe satellite. W/T to Ops. tested by 517 C.O. at 22.00 hours and found satisfactory - 22.3.42: 08.18 hours, compound tracks picked up 58 miles east, commenced plotting to Ops. by W/T at 08.21 hours - 58 miles. Investigation immediately after raid produced the following: (A) From Magwe Ops. W/T Operator - 517 heard to be plotting from 08.20 approx., but nothing could be made of it as Taungdwingyi R.A.F. W/T was sending at the same time, and the A.V.G. transmitter (which was outside the Ops. room) "blotted everything out." (B) From 517 W/T Operator. Plots came in for transmission at 08.20 approx. The W/T receiver failed at this time, but the transmission of plots continued and the duty mechanic was sent for. By the time the raid was half way in the W/T receiver was working, and Magwe operations gave "RK" (This means I am receiving you - continue) - transmission of plots therefore continued. This raid was plotted out 56 miles. 14.08 hours, compound tracks picked up 61 miles, 078 degrees. 14.10 hours inward tracks plotted by W/T. This raid was subsequently plotted out 53 miles ----- 17.30 hours unit left for Yenangyaung.' The above extract shews that No. 517 W.U. was incorrectly sited in the first place, and that its equipment was in a bad state. As already stated, the convoy was turned back, and after a general check over of equipment was resited at Magwe where it remained till 7 April. It then moved to Lashio.

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(1) A.H.B.IIJ 54/53 Encl.4 - 517 W.U.



Removal of explosives from Magwe (1)

When the evacuation convoys left Magwe on 23 March, the only explosives removed were small arm ammunition and detonators. Considerable quantities of bombs were left behind, mostly in concealed dispersal sites, but some were lying about in the open giving an impression of hasty and disorganised retreat. To salvage these bombs and other armament equipment a convoy consisting of 23 three ton lorries with a breakdown vehicle left Lashio on 2 April and began to remove the bombs which were delivered to 'X' M.U. at Se-en. In this way 577 x 250 lb., 11 x 500 lb. and 156 x 25 lb. incendiary bombs were salvaged, the work being completed by 8 April. There were daily enemy reconnaissance aircraft over the airfield but the removal of explosives was carried out without interference from the Japanese air force. This armament convoy, and others conveying R.A.F. equipment from Magwe to Lashio, about 290 miles away, passed through Mandalay and Maymyo and may have caused comment in army and civil government circles.

The various other appendices to the Magwe report indicate the difficulties of the evacuation, but there is nothing to justify stories of disorganisation and panic. On the contrary, the movement was carried out under complete control, the movement order was in writing and completely understood by all concerned, and the general behaviour of the R.A.F. and the convoy discipline were excellent. It must be, however, for consideration, whether the evacuation should have been carried out at the time. Aircraft from India were arriving almost daily with army passengers and stores. Two Dakotas landed on 27 March and two more on the following day and this traffic continued well into April. Except for a Japanese bomb raid on 31 March which did little damage, there was no enemy interference. Had the R.A.F. stayed longer much more might have been done, both for the restoration of the airfield and salvage of equipment than was in fact accomplished before the final move of the R.D.F. set on 7 April, and charges of disorganised and premature evacuation would never have arisen.

Japanese attack Akyab

The next effort of the enemy air force was to neutralise Akyab, which, during the attacks on Magwe had been under continuous observation by Japanese reconnaissance aircraft. Akwing was attacked on 23 March by 26 bombers with an escort of 50 fighters, and again on 24 March, when there were two heavy raids. Warning had been received and Hurricanes, which made interceptions on these two days, shot down four aircraft and probably destroyed two more, but six of our own fighters were lost. The final attack came on 27 March, when a force of 12 low flying fighters made a raid on Akyab satellite. There was some warning of this attack, but the Hurricanes were caught on the ground, seven being destroyed in addition to one Valentia. One Hurricane was lost in the air. Arrangements had previously been made to withdraw Akwing to Chittagong, and this move was carried out at once, a refuelling party being left to enable G.R. aircraft to operate over the Andamans where concentrations of enemy shipping, both naval and transports, had been seen. On 27 March two

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(1) See A.H.B.IIJ 54/53 - Magwe Report. App.W.

1st Class cruisers and two 2nd Class cruisers, five destroyers and five transports of about 4,000 tons were reported off Port Blair. This indicated the early arrival of a Japanese convoy in Rangoon. Frequent enemy reconnaissances by flying boats were being reported in the Bay of Bengal, and on 29 March, an Allied merchant vessel was attacked in a position 152 miles from Vizagapatam. On 29 March, the transports previously reported at Port Blair could not be found but two cruisers and three destroyers were seen slowly moving from their moorings.

#### Bomber Operations in March

From 1 March till the fall of Rangoon bombing operations were carried out from Mingaladon and Zayatkwun and afterwards from Magwe. Attacks were mostly on airfields in Thailand, in the Bilin river area in support of troops, and on enemy river and sea communications. A total of 84 Blenheim sorties was flown in this period and 42 tons of bombs were dropped. Small fighter escorts accompanied all these attacks, but there was little enemy opposition from the air. The effort from 1 to 21 March, exclusive of the attack by nine Blenheims on Mingaladon on 21 March, was distributed as follows:-

<u>Targets</u>	<u>Effective Sorties</u>	<u>Tonnage dropped</u>
Airfields	22	11.0 (Bri.)
Communications (river & rail)	5	2.5 "
Ground support	57	28.5 "

#### Enemy air activity after Magwe

With the destruction of the R.A.F. at Magwe and Akyab, enemy operations against our troops were on a limited scale. The Japanese did not exploit their air victory by making heavy attacks on the ground forces, but turned their attention more to civil centres of population with the plan of disorganising public services, including river and rail communications, telephone systems, and public works departments. They attacked Prome, Mandalay, Maymyo, and the airfields at Heho, Namsang, Lashio, and Loiwing, although, except at the last, there were no Allied aircraft operating. They seem to have noticed repair work going on at Magwe and on 31 March made two attacks there, each with eight bombers and sixteen fighters, but no great damage was done. The dislocation of public services, particularly of river transport on the Irrawaddy, seriously held up movement of troops and supplies. There were indications also at this time that the enemy was turning his attention to the Bay of Bengal, and, during the last ten days in March, and early in April, there were frequent reports of Japanese reconnaissance aircraft in Indian waters. Attacks began to be made on shipping in the Hoogly delta, and from 4 April, it became necessary to have standing fighter patrols in this area. These were carried out by Mohawks based at Cuttack which became an operational station on 8 April.

#### Reorganisation in India

From 22 March R.A.F. operations from bases in Burma ceased, except that G.R. aircraft continued to fly from Akyab. On 1 April 1942, Air Vice-Marshal Stevenson took over command of No. 224 Group in Calcutta, No. 221 Group being handed over to Air Commodore H. J. F. Hunter. Up to 20 April these two groups occupied a joint headquarters, and on this date Bengal Command was formed, with its headquarters at Government House, Barrackpore. The function of the new command was to co-ordinate the work of Nos. 221 and 224 Groups, and to provide a link with the Government of Bengal, the Eastern Army Commander at Calcutta, Corps Commanders,

the Senior Naval Officer, and Air Headquarters, India. On 5 May A.V.M. Stevenson, arrived from his Group to take over Bengal Command for which, for the time being all administrative function was to be carried out by the staff of No. 221 Group.

#### Operations in Burma in April

In April the air operations carried out on the Burma Front from bases in India, in support of the retreating army, were on a small, but gradually increasing scale, indicative of the re-organisation of the air forces which was taking place in India. At this time the army was moving slowly northward and westward. The newly formed Burcorps, under General Slim, was concentrating in the Irrawaddy valley, in the area Allamyo - Prome, and 1st Burma Division was withdrawn from Toungoo front to assemble in the area Dayindabo - Kyaukpadaung - Allamyo - Thayetmyo, having been relieved by the 200th Chinese Division. The 17th Indian Division was in the area Wettigan - Prome - Shwedaung - Sinda and 7th Armoured Brigade was placed in Corps reserve in the Tamagauk area. A detachment of Royal Marines, which was operating with the army, was employed on the Irrawaddy on river patrol duties. With the move of the 200th Chinese Division to Toungoo area, the Fifth and Sixth Chinese Armies were in echelon back to Lashio.

As already stated, Japanese air forces began to make heavy bomb raids, free from any interference, on centres of communications, in Central and Upper Burma. Attacks were made on Prome, Meiktila, Mandalay, Thazi, Pyirmana, Maymyo, Lashio, and Taungl. Much structural damage was done in these towns and the effect on the civil population was great. After each raid public services were brought to a standstill, as entire populations moved into the jungle. Railway employees, and the workers of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company who operated river steamers left their jobs, police forces disintegrated, power supplies broke down, and the Post and Telegraph Service, which had hitherto operated with much efficiency, was greatly reduced.

All this added to the difficulties of the troops retreating up the Chindwin and Irrawaddy valleys. There was severe fighting under continuous enemy pressure, and in the middle of April it became necessary to destroy the oil wells at Yenangyaung, and to make plans for further delaying action in Upper Burma in the event of the loss of Mandalay, which seemed likely. The chief reasons for this were to gain time for the completion of a road from Assam to Burma, and to give every assistance to the Chinese armies in the north-east, in order to keep China in the war as long as possible. The Japanese increased the pressure of their land forces, both on the Irrawaddy front and in the Shan States where Chinese forces were being driven slowly back, under continuous, if not heavy, air attack. On this front Lashio was occupied by the Japanese on 30 April, with the resultant threat to the flank of General Alexander's forces on the Mandalay - Irrawaddy line, where it was almost certain that the enemy would occupy Bhamo. On 1 May, therefore, plans for withdrawal from Mandalay were completed and at the same time General Stilwell decided that the Chinese Fifth Army should move into India, through Katha. Under severe pressure the campaign soon developed into a race for the Indian frontier, and the crossing of the Chindwin river at Kalewa. Owing to the speed of the Japanese advance up this river, General Alexander applied to A.H.Q.

India for air attacks on enemy river craft on the Chindwin. Only small air forces were as yet available but on 3 May six Blenheims made an attack on the Chindwin, on 4 May the same aircraft bombed rivercraft on the Irrawaddy, and on 5 May three Blenheims bombed barges at Monya on the Chindwin. At this time there was little enemy air activity, and except for raids on a boom across the river south of Kalewa on 5 May, and air attack on Shwegyn on 7 May, no enemy air operations on this front took place.

#### R.A.F. Operations in April

The R.A.F. was not able to be of great assistance to the Army during the operations outlined above. Burwing, though it had no aircraft, remained in Lashio and Loiwing to operate such units as it might be possible to land there. On 6 April eight Hurricanes had been flown to Burwing, but they did not last long, and occasionally a flight of Blenheims flew to Loiwing to operate for a few days at a time on the Chinese front before returning to India, but when Lashio was occupied by the Japanese on 30 April, Burwing withdrew to China, to provide R.A.F. refuelling parties at Chinese air bases. The personnel of No. 17 (F) Squadron had been withdrawn from Loiwing to India by 14 April. R.A.F. relations with the Chinese had always been good and it was a matter of great regret that so little air support could be given to their troops.

The bomber effort from India during April consisted of a total of 48 sorties, in which 24 tons of bombs were dropped. On 9 April four Blenheims made an attack on enemy vessels 175 miles N.N.E. of Trincomalee. The above effort was distributed as follows:-

<u>Targets</u>	<u>Effective Sorties</u>	<u>Tonnage dropped</u>
Airfields	3	1.5 (Bri.)
Shipping	8	4.0 "
Ground Support	37	18.5 "

All the above were Blenheim sorties, except that on 14 and 18 April, two Hudsons made attacks on enemy flying boats at their moorings in Port Blair harbour. On 11 April a G.R. Hudson from Akyab had reported nine Japanese flying boats at Port Blair, and the first attack, carried out on 14 April, did considerable damage. Two twin-engined flying boats were left burning, one four-engined boat was sunk, and all the others were shot up from a low height. On 18 April this attack on Port Blair was repeated. Two Hudsons at 06.30 hours found twelve four-engined T.97 flying boats at their moorings and destroyed two. Three more were severely damaged, and most of the others were shot up in attacks carried out at mast height. One Hudson was damaged and the other, which was last seen in action with a Navy 'O' fighter, failed to return. These two operations did much to reduce enemy air activity, both sea reconnaissance and attacks on shipping, in the Bay of Bengal. From the beginning of April enemy convoys had been arriving in Rangoon in some numbers, and there was considerable reinforcement both in personnel and equipment.

By this time heavy bombers of the U.S.A.A.F. had begun to operate from India by night. These were the aircraft which had flown from the Netherlands East Indies with General Brereton and there had also been some reinforcement for the Tenth Air Force being established in India. On 2/3 April, six B.17s attacked Port Blair, dropping six tons of bombs on shipping. On 16/17 April three B.17s, with a heavier load, attacked Rangoon harbour dropping over six tons of bombs. The U.S.A.A.F. effort during this month was as follows:-

<u>Targets</u>	<u>Effective Sorties</u>	<u>Tonnage dropped</u>
Port Blair shipping	6(B.17)	6.0
Rangoon Shipping	5(B.17)	10.3

Japanese attack Ceylon

In the first week of April, Japanese naval forces, including at least two carriers, moved into the Indian Ocean and made an attack on Ceylon with the object of destroying shipping in Colombo and Trincomalee harbours. The Allied fleet had moved out of the Indian Ocean and this attack did not involve a fleet action, but there was a very heavy air raid on Colombo in which the R.A.F. were heavily engaged, both in fighting off the main attacks by carrier-borne aircraft, and in searching for and bombing the Japanese fleet. The two Hurricane squadrons which took part in this action on 5 April were Nos. 30 (F) and 261 (F) Squadrons. Originally intended as a reinforcement for Burma, these two squadrons while en route from the Middle East to Rangoon were diverted to Ceylon and were flown off the Indomitable early in March. They were at full strength and in the action shot down about sixty Japanese bombers and fighters, but they lost heavily themselves. A Blenheim squadron also suffered severe losses in attacking the Japanese fleet. As it had been possible to move most of the shipping from Colombo harbour before this attack began, damage was not serious. Except that this Japanese raid on Ceylon may have been staged as a diversion for convoys entering Rangoon, it was not an incident of the Burma campaign, in the sense that R.A.F. aircraft operating in defence of Ceylon were not under the command of the A.O.C. No. 221 Group.

The Army reaches Imphal

During May, enemy pressure on the army in the Irrawaddy and Chindwin valleys was maintained. Bomber attacks, already referred to, which had been carried out from India on 3, 4, and 5 May had delayed the Japanese advance by river transport. There was a gradual withdrawal to Kalewa on the Chindwin, where the river had to be crossed by a ferry. Before this crossing, all guns, heavy vehicles, and tanks had been destroyed as they could go no further. One brigade was moved by river steamers on which a good deal of equipment was also loaded, to Sittaung. The retreat now speeded up, less owing to enemy pressure, though this was considerable, than owing to the near approach of the monsoon rains which, in this area, began in the third week in May. The final stage of the retreat continued without incident. On 11 May General Alexander met the Commander of III Corps which was holding the Assam frontier line, and discussed plans for establishing Burma Army in the Imphal area. As soon as the retiring army passed through the defence line held by III Corps, it was to come under command of Lieutenant General N. M. S. Irwin. General Alexander's rear guard entered this area at 18.00 hours on 20 May 1942 and his task was completed. The First Burma Campaign was over.

R.A.F. Final Operations in the Campaign

Except that there were remnants of Burming in China, and a small C. and M. party in Akyab, air operations in the Burma campaign were carried out, from April onwards from bases in India. Akyab was under continuous attack during

April, by Japanese bombers and became untenable. It was evacuated on 4 May under cover of two G.R. Hudsons and a fighter escort from Chittagong, which remained over the small convoy till it was clear of the danger area. Blenheims of No. 113(B) Squadron had carried out attacks on 3, 4, and 5 May in support of the army, on Japanese rivercraft in the Chindwin and Irrawaddy, in which good results were obtained. Numbers of heavily loaded barges under tow were seen, and six direct hits were claimed, barges being left on fire. There was no enemy air opposition to these attacks, except by a single Army 97 fighter which did no damage.

Owing to reinforcements which had arrived in India it became possible to operate, at night, the Wellingtons of No. 215 Squadron which was based at Asansol. On 5/6 May two sorties were flown over Magwe. The Wellingtons were accompanied by a Blenheim and a total of two tons of bombs was dropped. On the same night a third Wellington attacked a target 20 miles S.E. of Magwe. Besides these support operations, G.R. Reconnaissance was continued daily in the Bay of Bengal and down the Arakan coast. P.R. sorties were carried out over Lashio and Rangoon by single B.25 aircraft. On 8 and 9 May there were two heavy enemy attacks on Chittagong, the second of these being by 40 bombers and the airfield was severely damaged. Besides bombing sorties, Wellingtons from Dinjan carried out regular supply dropping patrols over the Chinese forces and refugees marching westward, led by General Stilwell, to India. On 14 May, Bengal Command received a signal from A.H.Q., Delhi that the Japanese Air Division at Rangoon had planned a mass attack on Calcutta on 14 or 15 May. Immediate preparations to meet this were made, No. 62 Squadron, No. 215 Squadron and No. 113 Squadron being brought to half an hour's readiness, the first named being moved from Dum Dum to Asansol and Pandaveswar. The expected attack did not develop and normal operations were resumed.

About this time the monsoon was beginning to break and bad weather caused the cancellation of R.A.F. attacks on Akyab area. For example, of seven Wellingtons which were sent to bomb Akyab on 15 May only three were able to reach their target, where hangars and the main runway were damaged. No. 60(B) Squadron had become operational again and from 14 to 18 May, from two to three of its aircraft were operating daily over Kalewa in the Chindwin river area, the squadron itself being moved from Lahore to Asansol. Wellingtons were engaged in ferrying to Dinjan and supply dropping at Kangpat. A G.R. Hudson of No. 62 Squadron dropped leaflets for the Chinese Army N. of Mandalay, though no troops were seen in the area.

Altogether, up to the end of May there was a very heartening increase in the activities of the R.A.F. Although no great numbers of aircraft were involved, there were daily attacks over wide areas from the Chindwin to Akyab, and from Mandalay to Rangoon. In spite of bad weather conditions most tasks were successfully completed. From 1 to 31 May excluding ferrying and supply dropping operations which were increasing in numbers and importance, a total of 120 R.A.F. sorties was sent out, of which 115 reached their objectives. In the same period the heavy bombers of the U.S.A.A.F. carried out 45 day and night attacks, principally on shipping in Rangoon docks and on Japanese aircraft at Mingaladon. The distribution of this R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. effort during May is as follows:-

<u>Targets</u>	<u>Effective sorties</u>	<u>Tonnage dropped</u>
Airfields	27 Blenheim 8 Hudson 8 Wellington	24.55 (Bri.)
Harbours, shipping and rivercraft.	49 Blenheim 6 Hudson	24.10 "
Camps, troops and army targets	13 Blenheim 2 Hudson 2 Wellington	8.04 "

U.S.A.A.F.

Airfields	27 B.17	45.53 "
Docks and shipping	18 B.17	27.67 "

Attacks in support of the army were chiefly on Japanese communications in the Chindwin river where very considerable damage was inflicted on steamers and barges, and at times all movement was stopped. This support was particularly valuable in the few days before the Burma Army had moved into its static position, when there was great danger that it might be outflanked. Enemy aircraft at this time were not often seen in the air, although considerable numbers were reported at Akyab. Here on 22 May a Blenheim of No. 60 Squadron was attacked by from four to seven Navy '0' fighters, and in a running fight, which lasted for 25 minutes it shot down one fighter which fell in the sea. It was announced later by the Japanese that the pilot of this aircraft was one of their ace fighters, Lieutenant Colonel Kato, who was posthumously promoted Major General. The crew of the Blenheim was W/O. Huggard pilot, Sgt. Howitt and F/Sgt. McLockie, all of No. 60(B) Squadron.

With the retreat of General Alexander's army within the line held by III Corps on the Assam - Burma frontier, the First Burma Campaign ended. The R.A.F. however, continued operating from bases in India and Assam, over the front into Burma and as far as Thailand. Supply dropping, offensive reconnaissance in the Imphal - Kalewa area, G.R. reconnaissance in the Bay of Bengal, attacks on enemy airfields at Akyab, Magwe, and Mingaladon continued on an increasing scale. On 24 May, 4 Wellingtons of No. 215 Squadron, operating from Pandaveswar, dropped 6,000 pounds of supplies in the area Kangpat - Homalin. On 25 May rivercraft and barges in the Chindwin between Kalewa and Sittaung were bombed by seven Blenheims of No. 113 Squadron. In spite of deteriorating weather R.A.F. activity increased rather than diminished, indicating a successful rebuild of forces. Airfield construction in Assam was extended. On the last day of May there were seven G.R. sorties by No. 62 Squadron from Dum Dum over the Bay of Bengal. No. 3 P.R.U. provided one B.25 for reconnaissance Magwe - Lashio, and three B.25s for the Rangoon area. Photographs were taken of Moulmein and Rangoon. At Mingaladon it was not possible, owing to cloud, to get photographs. Enemy fighters came up to attack, and there was a barrage from six heavy A.A. guns sited on the edge of the airfield. R.A.F. fighter effort over Burma during May was slight. Defensive patrols were carried out in the Calcutta area, but except for some escort patrols in Burma, and occasional sweeps, carried out by Mohawks from Dinjan, fighter action was extremely limited.

### Air transport operations in First Burma Campaign

The work of supply dropping and the evacuation of troops and refugees have been mentioned in the course of this narrative. This was carried out mainly by No. 31 Squadron from India. Towards the end of the campaign in May 1942, Wellingtons of No. 215 Squadron commenced supply dropping, but from the first week of January No. 31 Squadron provided a daily effort of from three to six aircraft for air transport purposes. At the outbreak of war with Germany No. 31 Squadron was equipped with Valentias and in February 1941 it had ferried the personnel of No. 60(B) Squadron from India to Rangoon, and No. 27 Squadron was later transferred to Singapore by the same means. When war with Japan began in December 1941 No. 31 Squadron had detachments in Iraq and the Middle East, and only two serviceable D.C.2s in India. These were flown to Rangoon and they plied between Rangoon and Calcutta, carrying urgent stores and evacuating casualties. In one of the earliest Japanese raids on Mingaladon a D.C.3 was destroyed on the ground. The detachment from the Middle East returned to India early in February 1942 and the squadron, less its headquarters, moved to Akyab and was employed mainly in the evacuation of R.A.F. units from the Rangoon area, the personnel moved to Akyab in this way, being transferred to Calcutta by sea. When Akyab became untenable, No. 31 Squadron moved back to India, to Dum Dum, where it began to carry equipment and stores to Shwebo, Mandalay, and Myitkina and bring back refugees and casualties.

The Dakotas D.C.2s and 3s which were used by No. 31 Squadron were acquired as a gift to further the war effort, from a number of American business men and heads of large firms who bought up a number of civil aircraft and had them flown to the Middle East and India. Some difficulty was encountered in transit through Egypt. The aircraft which had civil markings, and were flown by civilian pilots, required permits to fly over, or land in Egypt, and the Egyptian government was not at first prepared to grant facilities. A few of the aircraft crashed in Iraq but the majority reached Karachi where they were converted to military use and issued to No. 31 Squadron for use in Burma.

In February and March these aircraft which had been flying from six to ten hours daily were getting worn out. There had been little time for inspections and maintenance and at the end of March there were available only eight aircraft of dubious serviceability. About the middle of April the squadron received some D.C.3 aircraft, and owing to the critical situation in Burma, a detachment with 3 D.C.3s and 2 D.C.2s moved from Dum Dum to Dinjan to operate from there to Myitkina in Central Burma. The remainder of the squadron went to Lahore to await re-equipment.

On 24 April 123 personnel of the R.I.A.S.C. were flown from Dinjan to Myitkina and 161 casualties were brought back. On 25 April results were even better. In 23 hours 45 minutes flying, 182 personnel with rations and equipment, were flown to Myitkina and 15,000 pounds of currency and 45 C.M.A. personnel were off-loaded at Dinjan. It is claimed by the squadron that these results would have been better, if there had been suitable refueling facilities at Myitkina. On 4 May 369 persons were off-loaded at Dinjan, and on 5 May 520 personnel of whom 367 were casualties were brought out from Myitkina. On 6 May under cover of cloud, a number of Japanese dive bombers caught four or five Dakotas on the ground while loading at Myitkina and considerable casualties were caused. Two women passengers were killed, two doctors severely wounded and three aircraft were destroyed. Two more D.C.3s landed on the runway when it had been cleared and all the remaining personnel were evacuated. On 9 May, a reconnaissance



of Myitkyina, carried out by fighters of No. 5 Squadron, reported that Japanese aircraft had occupied the airfield.

From this time onward as there were no more available landing points in Burma, the squadron turned to supply dropping over refugee columns moving into India. There were no special containers and few parachutes, and most of the food supplies were dropped direct with the result that there was some loss. Rice, particularly, which was a staple food for the Chinese and Burmese refugees was difficult to drop without damage, as the sacks invariably burst on impact with the ground. This was largely overcome by using two sacks, the outer of which did not normally break open.

On 10 May 10,000 lb. of food were dropped over Maingkwan and Shingbwiyang and on the following day 13,385 lb. were dropped in the same area. On 13 May 26,000 lb. were dropped, but for the next few days bad weather made operations impossible. On 13 May when the weather was good the two serviceable D.C.3.s at Dinjan carried out seven sorties. From 14 to 31 May, in spite of inclement monsoon weather, a total of 236,175 lb. of supplies was dropped by No. 31 Squadron detachment at Dinjan, chiefly over areas where refugees had been reported. By this time, considerable and increasing assistance was being given by aircraft of the U.S.A.A.F., whose effort, both in evacuation and in supply dropping, was in addition to that recorded above. From the beginning of March to 20 May a total of 8,616 persons including 2,600 wounded was flown out of Burma to India and 109,652 lb. of supplies were dropped to isolated garrisons. While landing grounds were available in Burma, equipment and supplies had been unloaded and distributed by personnel of the Army Service Corps, both British and Indian. The experience gained in this form of air supply during the First Burma Campaign was of inestimable value in the later operations in which, from the relief of the beleaguered garrisons in Imphal and Arakan to the re-occupation of Rangoon, air transport was almost the sole means of provisioning the large Allied forces engaged. Till the recapture of Rangoon, the only line of communications for Burma was the air.

#### Comparison of Allied and Japanese air losses

When A.V.M. Stevenson arrived in Rangoon he found that the A.V.G. system of claiming enemy aircraft destroyed differed in some ways from that which was standard in the R.A.F. After consultation with Colonel Chennault, with whom full agreement was reached, the A.V.G. system was brought into line with that of the R.A.F., so that, in this campaign from 1 January onwards the computation of enemy losses, particularly of aircraft shot down in air combat, was reasonably accurate. A.V.G. claims from 8 to 31 December were rechecked and agreed. This is important, as the bulk of the air fighting over Rangoon was carried out by the A.V.G. whose pilots were well trained and experienced and whose P.40s were superior to Japanese fighter aircraft at the time. According to available records, a total of 233 enemy aircraft, fighters and bombers, was claimed as destroyed in the air. Of these the A.V.G. claimed 179 and the R.A.F. 54. On the ground as the result of fighter attack, 58 enemy aircraft were claimed as destroyed, 38 by the A.V.G. and 20 by the R.A.F. Claims for aircraft probably destroyed on the ground were 76, 43 by the A.V.G. and 33 by the R.A.F. Exclusive of

losses in December, which for the A.V.G. were three P.40s and for the R.A.F. six Buffaloes shot down, in the rest of the campaign 38 Allied fighters were destroyed in the air of which 16 were P.40s and 22 Buffaloes or Hurricanes. Of 6 Hurricanes lost at Loiwing in April three or four were shot down in air combat. Bomber losses in the air were eight Blenheims and four Hudsons, all of which were probably shot down by enemy fighters. On the ground losses due to enemy air action, chiefly in attacks by low flying fighters were 51 aircraft made up of 17 fighters, 23 Blenheims, 4 Hudsons, and 7 Valentias or D.C.2s or 3s. Enemy losses mentioned above do not include aircraft destroyed in R.A.F. bomber attacks, of which there must have been a considerable number, nor aircraft shot down by A.A. fire of which there were a few.

Japanese accounts, both of their own losses and of Allied aircraft destroyed, which latter are greatly exaggerated, are of little value as a comparable record. From figures<sup>(1)</sup> which are available, in December 1941 out of 662 aircraft in the Burma French Indo-China area, the Japanese state that their losses were 134 of all types or 20 per cent. Carried out throughout the remainder of the First Burma Campaign, a similar percentage would indicate very high losses which no air force could sustain for long. However from the Japanese figures there would be every reason to accept the R.A.F. and A.V.G. claims given above.

The loss of so many R.A.F. aircraft on the ground was, in the main, due to lack of warning, but also to the fact that the Japanese were very efficient in their low flying attacks. In the early stages of the campaign, when the radar set at Rangoon was functioning well, and the locally raised Observer Corps were able to get their reports through from the listening posts, warning was ample, but later, when the posts were driven in from Rangoon perimeter and the worn-out radar set could not be properly sited, as at Magwe, sufficient warning was never available. In the enemy losses mentioned above no claim has been made for the flying boats destroyed at their moorings at Port Blair, as they were difficult to assess. It is probable, however, that at least ten were destroyed.

#### Japanese version of air operations in First Burma Campaign

There is very little reliable source material for the Japanese account of early air operations in Burma. Day to day operational records, war correspondents stories to the press, unit reports from lower to higher formations, and original statistical records are not available. There is, however, an account<sup>(1)</sup> prepared in Tokio for the American 1st Demobilisation Bureau, by a Japanese staff officer, Mas Tanaka who had served throughout the campaign with 5th Air Division, previously 5th Air Group, of the Japanese Air Forces, which controlled operations in Malaya and Burma. Fifth Air Group became 5th Air Division in March 1942.

According to this account, the strength of the R.A.F. and A.V.G. in Burma early in January 1942 was estimated by the Japanese staff to be less than 120 aircraft. This was an over-estimate, as has been seen, while the Japanese, according to their own account, had, at bases in Thailand, available for operations in Burma, approximately 180 fighters and bombers. In the middle of March the Japanese had over 300 aircraft at bases round Rangoon, and on the Thailand border. The Japanese narrator considered that Allied air operations were largely neutralised owing to early

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(1) A.H.B. IJ 54/49; Air Operational Record No. 67.

bombing attacks on Rangoon, and he states that the British and American air forces concentrated mainly on the air defence of the port and oil installations, and of their own airfields, although their aircraft occasionally appeared over the border line between Thailand and Burma. In January 1942 the R.A.F. seemed to the Japanese to operate in support of British ground forces, and some daring attacks are stated to have been made on Japanese troops advancing to the Salween and Bilin rivers. At this stage the Japanese realised that R.A.F. aircraft were dispersed at secret airfields round Rangoon.

When the British retreat from Rangoon began, the Japanese considered that there was no close co-ordination between the R.A.F. and American air forces, although this co-operation became very evident in the later stages of the Burma campaign from 1943 onwards. During the retreat of the British army, after the fall of Rangoon, the Japanese seem to have been in considerable doubt both as to the airfields which the R.A.F. were using and as to the strength of the Allied air forces operating against them. The Japanese narrative states that the British and American air forces had adopted, at this time, a defensive policy, but it is evident that the Japanese were deceived by the R.A.F. dispersal plans, and that they did not know the numerical weakness of the air forces operating against them.

After the fall of Singapore, and with the occupation of Sumatra and Java in sight the Japanese began to prepare plans for a final and 'annihilation' assault on the R.A.F. in Burma. This plan had been on paper for some time, but at the end of February and in the beginning of March, they commenced moving bomber squadrons to airfields on the Thailand frontier, and when Rangoon fell, Mingaladon, Zayatkwint and surrounding airfields were occupied by their fighters. The bomber units were to be brought forward to Rangoon bases for operations, after which they were to return direct to their own airfields. This forward concentration of enemy air units had been observed by the R.A.F. and a decision to attack them was made on 20 March, with the results already recorded.

From the Japanese narrative, it seems largely by accident that the R.A.F. base at Magwe was first discovered. Their staff believed that there was an enemy air base somewhere in the area between the Chindwin and Irrawaddy rivers, and a very close photographic reconnaissance was made during the first fortnight in March by a special unit attached to their 33rd Infantry Division for this purpose. Reconstruction work at Magwe was noticed on a photograph, after which continuous watch was kept on the airfield. Plans to attack with the full strength of the Air Division were carefully made, and the R.A.F. operation over Mingaladon on the morning of 21 March anticipated this by a few hours only. This accounts for the apparently immediate and successful Japanese reprisal attack on Magwe.

To act as a diversion from their plans to attack on the Irrawaddy, the Japanese employed their 7th Air Brigade, based on Bangkok, to operate over the Chinese frontier in the Yunnan area, while the 4th Air Brigade, from a Burma base, appeared active over Akyab and the Arakan coast. Their attack at Magwe, through apparently an immediate reprisal, was in fact the implementation of a scheduled and carefully made plan. The Japanese account of the Magwe operation states that though it was considered that the

attack on 21 March had completely fulfilled its purpose, a second attack was made on 22 March to make certain of victory. The Japanese claimed that 120 R.A.F. and A.V.G. aircraft<sup>(1)</sup> were destroyed, and the escape of a small remnant to Akyab and Lashio was admitted.

After Magwe, there was some re-organisation of Japanese air forces. Some units moved to Manchuria, notably 15th Independent Air Unit which had completed an air survey of the Chinese frontier in preparation for operations to intercept the retreating Chungking armies. In connection with these operations the Japanese had planned airborne landings in the area between Lashio and Shwebo, but owing to bad weather they were not carried out on the date arranged and were finally cancelled. This Japanese narrative, incidentally, mentions that the Officer Commanding their 64th Air Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Takeo Kato, was killed in air combat in Akyab area.

On the approach of the rainy season in April the Japanese reduced the scale of their operations in Burma, and began to withdraw their air forces into Thailand and Malaya for re-organisation and training to meet the expected Allied counter attack after the monsoon. Preparations were made for attacks on Calcutta, and plans were drawn up for operations against shipping in the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean. Aircrews were trained with the object of improving night flying and air navigation. Intensive practice in aerial combat was carried out and ground services were overhauled and brought up to a higher state of efficiency. The attack on Calcutta was not carried out as a major operation at the time arranged, partly because of transportation troubles in the rainy season, and partly because of technical defects in the exhaust flame dampers of their heavy bombers. Also the Japanese Fifteenth Army was facing British forces preparing to counter attack and was calling for air support on an increasing scale.

In May a redistribution of Japanese forces to meet new conditions was made, the location of units being as follows:-

Headquarters, 5th Air Division	- Rangoon
Advanced H.Q.	- Meiktila
4th Air Brigade H.Q.	- Meiktila
5th Air Regiment	- Meiktila
8th Air Regiment	- Heho
14th Air Regiment	- Sungei Patani
7th Air Brigade H.Q.	- Toungoo
64th Air Regiment	- Toungoo (North)
12th Air Regiment	- Alor Star
98th Air Regiment	- Sungei Patani
12th Air Brigade H.Q.	- Maymyo
1st Air Regiment	- Maymyo
11th Air Regiment	- Maymyo
81st Air Regiment	- Heho

The 4th and 7th Air Brigades were to operate over Imphal, Chittagong, and Fenny areas, and the role of 12th Air Brigade was to attack the Yunnan area in China, and to intercept R.A.F. raids in North Burma. When, in the early stages of the next campaign, Allied heavy bombers began small systematic raids on

(1) The actual figures were:-

Aircraft destroyed on ground:	Blenheims, 14;	P.40, 5.
" " in air :	Hurricanes, 3.	
" flown out - Akyab :	Blenheims, 6;	Hurricanes, 11.
" " - Lashio :	P.40, 3.	

Japanese airfields in Burma, Japanese squadrons were withdrawn to Thailand and Malaya. At this stage of the campaign there was some re-equipment of Japanese air forces, squadrons being withdrawn to Singapore for the purpose. New supplies of the Model 1 fighter, Model 100 reconnaissance aircraft, and Model 97 heavy bomber were arriving in some quantity. The Japanese narrative goes on to describe, in some detail, operations up to the end of 1945 which are outside the scope of the First Burma Campaign.

#### Summary

The First Burma Campaign commenced with the outbreak of war with Japan on 8 December 1941, and ended with the entry of the Burma Army to Assam and India on 20 May 1942. From the R.A.F. point of view the campaign emphasised the difficulties of a small air force operating in support of a defeated army, from insecure bases, with insufficient or no warning, and without a possibility of adequate reinforcement. At the outset of hostilities it was estimated that to meet the Japanese air forces reported to be available against Burma, a minimum R.A.F. strength of sixteen squadrons would be necessary. This was to have been made up as follows:- Bombers - 7 Squadrons; Fighters - 6 Squadrons; Army Co-operation - 2 Squadrons and G.R. - 1 Squadron. As it was, the campaign was fought with the equivalent of 2 fighter squadrons, 1 bomber squadron, 2 army co-operation squadrons, (for a short time only), and probably never more than two flights of a G.R. squadron. In addition, there were 1 A.V.G. Squadron, the communication aircraft of the B.V.A.F. and some transport aircraft from India. This small force, from 8 December 1941 till the fall of Rangoon, exactly three months later, held off a Japanese air force, never less than three times superior in numbers, and at times much more. By the maintenance of air superiority during this most critical time, the army was able to withdraw from the Sittang river to Prome with a minimum of interference from the air, the port of Rangoon was evacuated by land, sea, and air, without loss, and large quantities of valuable stores and equipment had been back loaded to Prome and Mandalay, and also along the Burma road to China. For three months the role of enemy air forces was determined by the R.A.F. and A.V.G. The Japanese were unable to attack Rangoon and close the port. They were confined to operations in support of their own troops, and, from the Sittang to Prome, those operations were carried out with a lack of enterprise which was entirely due to the severe handling which the enemy had received in the air over and round Rangoon. After the closure of Rangoon port, which meant the end of aircraft supplies for the R.A.F. the Japanese were able to prepare, more or less at their leisure, for the final destruction of Allied air forces at Magwe on 21 and 22 March and at Akyab a few days later. Having eliminated air opposition the Japanese effort was turned, not as might have been expected against the vulnerable retreating army, but against large centres of population at Mandalay, Maymyo, and Prome to disorganise public services, against airfields at Heho Namsang, Lashio and Loiwing, and against Chinese forces operating on the left of General Alexander's army. The end of the campaign arrived with no R.A.F. in Burma, but there were signs that the reorganisation in India would be effective as far as the R.A.F. was concerned and that the U.S.A.A.F. would take a prominent part in future operations. Japanese air forces were inactive through the monsoon, but were preparing for the counter attack which they knew would take place at the

end of the rainy season. Japanese forces in this campaign were never really formidable in the air and their eventual success was due more to the numerical weakness of the Allies, than to their own fighting strength.

JAPANESE AIR FORCES IN MALAYA

A.P.3146

'Organisation  
of the  
Japanese Army  
and Navy Air  
Forces'Chapter I,  
paras. 1, 15,  
17, 18.1. General

In Japan the Air Force was not a separate Service but simply two supporting forces for the Army and Navy working on strictly independent lines. Primarily it was the function of the Army Air Force (J.A.A.F.) to give support to the ground forces whilst the Naval Air Force (J.N.A.F.) supported the surface fleets and was responsible for coast defence, sea and anti-submarine patrols and convoy protection.

Prior to the outbreak of war in 1941 it was assumed that the J.N.A.F. was superior in equipment and efficiency to the Army Air Force. Poor opposition to the Russians at Nomonhan between May and September 1939 may have accounted for this supposition. Furthermore, such opinion may have been strengthened by the China Incident when the J.A.A.F. was not fully equipped with long-range medium bombers and in consequence the strategic bombing of Chinese cities had to be carried out by medium bombers of the J.N.A.F. This inferiority was only temporary and by the time hostilities started these shortcomings had been made good.

Foreign influence in the building of the Air Forces was used to good effect and Japan adapted to her own needs all what she considered most useful of European and American achievements. In the early stages she was greatly influenced by British, American, French and Italian methods, but after the signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact in 1937 German influence quickly became apparent. Their technicians made great contributions towards the organisation and equipment of the Japanese Air Forces.

In 1941 the two Air Forces were prepared for a swift and conclusive war, at the same time relying upon an early German victory and the collapse of the British Empire.

Ibid

Chapter 2  
paras: 2,  
8.2. Japanese Army Air Force

At the outbreak of war with Great Britain, U.S.A. and the Netherlands the highest formation in the J.A.A.F. was an Air Division (Hikōshidan). The 3rd Air Division co-operated with the 25th Army in Malaya (and later with the 16th Army in the N.E.I.). Flying Units were known as 'Flying Regiments' (Hikōsentai) and were established between twenty-seven and forty-nine aircraft. These Units were organized into Air Brigades (of three or four Regiments) but not necessarily all of the same kind. For example, two or three fighter regiments might form one Fighter Brigade but bomber regiments would include in the Brigade fighters for their protection. Fighter Regiments were normally divided into three Squadrons (Chūtai) each of sixteen aircraft and sixteen pilots; repair and maintenance was the responsibility of approximately three hundred and twenty technicians. Control of the whole Regiment was exercised by a Headquarters Platoon consisting of the C.O., Adjutant and specialist officers, together with some forty-five N.C.O's and men.

Ibid

Chapter 3  
paras: 1, 4,  
3, 10, 12.

Bomber Regiments were similarly organized except that the three Squadrons were established at nine or twelve aircraft. Light Bomber units totalled four hundred and sixty personnel. Establishment of aircraft for the Medium Bombers was the same but personnel numbered six hundred. Reconnaissance Flying Regiments consisted only of two Squadrons with eighteen aircraft. Such Units were

generally attached to Brigade or Divisional Headquarters.

Ibid  
Chapter 6  
para. 1,2,4,8.

For administrative purposes a Division was sub-divided into Sectors. Headquarters was responsible for the construction, upkeep and defence of the airfields, for supplies reaching them, and for maintenance of aircraft. The size of a Sector varied with the theatre; subordinate to it were Airfield Battalions and Airfield Companies.

Ibid  
Chapter 5  
paras.1,2,4,5,  
6,9,10,11,12,13.  
15,17,18.

Airfield Battalions provided the ground personnel for operational airfields and maintenance crews for servicing fighter, bomber or reconnaissance aircraft. H.Q. Staff of a Battalion formed the command of the airfield on which it was based. Maintenance was the principal section; a company would include three servicing platoons each of which was capable of maintaining one Squadron of nine aircraft. Establishment of a Battalion usually totalled five hundred to six hundred officers and men. It was more or less permanently located on an airfield whilst the Flying Regiments made only temporary use of the station according to operational requirements. A high degree of mobility was thus ensured. 'Airfield Companies' were not part of Airfield Battalions; although smaller in size, they performed similar duties. A Battalion was primarily responsible for the serviceability of the airfield and its Works Section developed airfields in territory over-run by the land forces. Daily inspections of aircraft were normally carried out by the ground staff of the flying unit but they were augmented by at least half the personnel of an Airfield Battalion. These would give considerable assistance, and on occasions would wholly undertake the servicing of aircraft pending arrival of the ground personnel of the flying unit who usually travelled by road. Inspections and minor work were undertaken on the airfield, but major aircraft repairs were sent to a Field Aircraft Repair Depot.

Considerable supplies of fuel, bombs and ammunition were held by the Battalions. Airfield defence was the responsibility of the Garrison Company (of the Battalion) which comprised about two hundred and thirty men. Anti-aircraft sections were armed with automatic cannon and machine guns.

Ibid  
Chapter 22  
Paras: 1,2,3,  
4. Map 12.

### 3. Japanese Naval Air Force (J.N.A.F.)

There was a close partnership between the Japanese Navy and the J.N.A.F. which was so organized as to secure for the Navy the maximum advantage to be had from air power in naval co-operation. Conversely the Navy organization permitted the J.N.A.F. to form an integral part of its structure.

A flying Unit (including complementary ground personnel), in the J.N.A.F. was known as an Air Group (Kokutai). Ground forces were not simply maintenance personnel for the flying unit but were adequate in strength to administer an airfield or to provide similar services on a Carrier. An Air Group would vary in size depending on its equipment. A large Group of medium bombers had an establishment of over two thousand personnel with eighty-four aircraft.

Air Groups were organized into Air Flotillas and Air Fleets. Each Group in the Flotilla was equipped with aircraft of one type so that when they co-operated one Group provided reconnaissance, another dive bombers, another fighters and so on. Two or more Flotillas under a Headquarters formed an Air Fleet. The first Air Fleet to be raised was numbered the 11th. This was the expeditionary naval air force and moved outwards from Japan with the Navy in the invasions of French



Indo-China, Malaya, N.E.I. and the Solomons. At the time it consisted of Air Flotillas 21, 22, 23, 24. The 22nd Air Flotilla was based on Saigon; it included the Genzan and Mihoro Air Groups with the Kanoya Group attached from the 21st Air Flotilla. All groups were equipped with bomber aircraft.

#### 4. Air Tactics

IIJ89  
Encl. 17a  
paras: 1,3,4,  
6,7,8,9,10,11,  
12,13.

Japanese level bombing tactics exemplified certain of their natural traits - courage, indifference to losses and adherence to preconceived plans. Bombers usually flew in vics of nine; occasionally in line abreast. Formation flying was very tight and well performed; when an aircraft was shot down another would immediately take its place. A.A. fire and fighters, even when causing considerable casualties rarely broke-up a Japanese formation. High losses to gain an objective were willingly accepted. Long, straight approaches were made in perfect formation and bombs dropped at altitudes ranging from 7000 to 26,000 feet. Releases were made on a visual signal from the formation leader. Sometimes one bomb from each aircraft was dropped on a run. Great pains were taken to achieve accuracy and often a second run was made before the load was released. Long-range attacks were usually preceded by ample air reconnaissance. Evasive action was confined to the maintenance of an altitude beyond effective range of the gun defences; by occasional changes in altitude; and by weaving in formation. When attacked by fighters the bomber formations would usually turn in to the attack, the forward aircraft 'stepping-down' to uncover the guns of the main formation.. Even so, formation was well maintained until the bombs had gone. Fighter escort varied according to the opposition expected; frequently the fighters flew above and behind the bombers. On other occasions fighters moved in small formations backwards and forwards over the target area. Operations against important targets were repeated with great regularity along the same route and at the same time each day.

Ibid  
Encl. 17a  
paras: 17, 18,  
19.

Low level precision attacks were made in a powered glide commencing at 10,000 feet and levelling off at 2500 feet with each aircraft following the other down. After the release guns were used against ground installations. Dive bombing was less frequently practised: dives were shallow and in the region of 55° with a height of release at 1000 to 1500 feet.

Ibid Encl. 17a  
paras: 30,33,  
35.

Fighter tactics varied but the normal formation was three flights each of three aircraft in vic or echelon. Pilots usually worked with high cover and individual pilots would rarely engage formations because they required numerical superiority before delivering an attack. Equipped with very light, highly manoeuvrable aircraft well suited to aerobatics, the Japanese were always at an advantage in dog fighting. One of the first lessons learned by our pilots was that they should not attempt to dog-fight a Japanese fighter. This manoeuvrability was obtained partly by the saving of weight involved in the lack of armour and self-sealing tanks. This, of course made them highly vulnerable to Allied fighters.

#### 5. Attacks on Airfields

Apart from air superiority, the next most important contributory factor in the Malayan campaign was the destruction of grounded aircraft and carefully calculated attacks on airfields and their vicinities. The airfields in Malaya proved compact targets for the Japanese. Where tree cover was assumed by the enemy to be used in concealing aircraft they attacked airfield buildings and defences and then came in

low, systematically circling the woods and subjecting them to a concentration of fire to a depth of more than 50 yards from the edges. Another trick was to send over big patrols to deploy our aircraft off the ground and away from the airfield. When this had been accomplished, other formations came over to bomb the landing area and the buildings. The Japanese seem invariably to have used anti-personnel bombs and bombs of small and medium sizes. This scheme was employed with the intention of putting the airfield and its buildings temporarily out of action and to deny it to such aircraft as were already airborne or had escaped ground attack, rather than to smash it up altogether. A nice balance was struck and the maximum number of casualties were caused amongst personnel and aircraft, together with the minimum damage required to render the airfield unserviceable. By this restrained bombing, the Japanese were enabled, once the airfield was captured - and their ground forces were usually close up to the zone of air operations - rapidly to render it operational for their own aircraft. They also proved themselves very quick at making usable airfields which had been demolished.

IIK/18/8  
'Battle  
Summary No. 14'

#### 6. Japanese Attacks Against Shipping

##### (a) Action of 10th December 1941. (Prince of Wales and Repulse).

The high level bombing which preceded the torpedo attack was carried out by formations of eight to nine aircraft from 10,000 to 12,000 feet. Perfect line abreast formation was kept and attacks were delivered along the fore-and-aft line. The G.P. bombs, (one 500 kg., two 500 kg., or two 250 kg. per aircraft) were nose and tail fused with delays 0.1 to 0.25 seconds, dropped simultaneously on a signal from the leading aircraft. Long-range high angle fire which from the ships appeared to leave them untouched was, on the contrary, very accurate and damaged many of the bombers.

The attack on H.M. ships was planned as a 100 per cent torpedo effort, but there was not enough of these weapons, consequently a proportion of the force carried bombs. Torpedoes which were the Type 91 weighed approximately 1700 lbs., with a war-head, contact fused, of 303 lbs. Their speed was 42 knots with a depth setting, varied in the different Groups, of 10 to 16 feet. Formations were sighted at about 8000 feet and whilst still beyond the ships' range height was lost and the aircraft strung out into loose line astern. The approach was from 70° off the bow of the target with the actual attack directed against the ship's beam. Dropping range varied between 1000 and 2000 yards from an altitude of 300 to 400 feet. Individual aim was taken after which the torpedoes ran straight with a visible track. The drop was followed up by a machine gun attack in which the aircraft took little avoiding action thereby drawing the defensive fire away from the aircraft about to attack. Japanese assessed the A.A. fire as extremely vicious and intense, even up to the last moments of the warships, although, they state, few hits were scored.

##### (b) Analysis by U.S. Navy Department (August 1943)

Bombing is used against naval vessels often in conjunction with torpedo or dive bombing attack, which it precedes, in order to form a distraction to pave the way for the more effective assaults. The aircraft (Bettys) operate in formation of nine or twenty seven from a height

IIJ50/17/6  
Encls. M.I.10  
d/a 5 Mar. 46.

IIJ/89, Encls.  
18a, 17a.

of 12,000 feet in line abreast or vic. A long, straight run in is made with the drop (usually of one bomb each) controlled by the leader who signals by means of his lights or by rocking the wings. Great pains are taken to achieve accuracy. General Purpose bombs are used weighing 138, 200 and 500 lbs., with instantaneous or 0.25 minute fuzes.

The Japanese Naval Air Service considers the torpedo attack as one exemplifying the traditional qualities of skill, courage, daring and indifference to losses. The carrier-borne aircraft is the 'Kate'; the 'Betty' is used for land based operations. The torpedo (of which there are five types) is sturdy in construction and can be dropped from considerable height; its large explosive charge can do great damage. Type 91 has a war-head of 303 lbs., is 16 feet 11 inches long and can be dropped at a height of 164 feet. They run at shallow depths with straight tracks: contact pistols only are used.

Attacks are pressed home with great determination and co-ordinated with high level and dive bombing attacks; they follow the former or proceed simultaneously with the latter. There are two forms of attack: in one the aircraft glides in at an angle of 45° from an altitude of 6000 feet, torpedoes being dropped 1000 - 2000 yards from the target. Alternatively the formation approaches from 7000 feet in vic, then, after descending in line astern the aircraft form into loose vic of three coming in from the horizon at high speed and low altitude to deliver simultaneous attacks from different directions and with individual aim from an average range of 1000 to 2000 yards. Often the approach is made parallel to the ships course, generally from astern to avoid A.A. fire, with a final turn in to make a beam attack. Drops are between 50 and 250 feet above the water. The glide and low approach attacks may sometimes be used together to confuse the defence, but in both cases, after dropping the torpedo, aircraft frequently carry on over the ship to strafe personnel and to draw A.A. fire from the loaded aircraft behind them.

#### 7. Order of Battle - J.A.A.F.

The IIIrd Air Division took part in the Malayan Campaign. Its Commander was Lieutenant General Sugawara.

The Division comprised:-

(a) 3rd Air Brigade:	59th Regiment (fighters)	
	Type 1 .....	21
	Type 97 .....	3
	27th Regiment (light bombers)	
	Type 99 .....	28
	75th Regiment (bombers)	
	Type 99 .....	25
	90th Regiment (light bombers)	
	Type 99 .....	23

## (b) 7th Air Brigade:

64th Regiment (fighters)  
 Type 1.....35  
 Type 97.....6  
 12th Regiment (heavy bombers)  
 Type 97B.....27  
 60th Air Regiment (heavy bombers)  
 Type 97B.....?  
 98th Regiment (heavy bombers)  
 Type 99B.....42

## (c) 12th Air Brigade:

1st Regiment (fighters)  
 Type 97.....42  
 11th Regiment (fighters)  
 Type 97.....39

## (d) 15th Independent Regiment:

50th Squadron (recce)  
 Type 100.....2  
 Type 97.....3  
 51st Squadron (recce)  
 Type 100.....2  
 Type 97.....3

## (e) 81st Regiment (recce)

Type 100.....6  
 Type 97.....20

The Division was supported by five Sector Headquarters, fifteen Airfield Battalions and seven Airfield Companies. Other Units included: Signals, Intelligence, Transport, Airfield Construction, Repair, Anti-Aircraft and Meteorological.

8. Performance and Characteristics of some Japanese Aircraft(a) Single Engine Fighters

Ibid  
 Appendix  
 Part II

Aircraft	Code	Max. Speed		Service	Max. Range		
Type	Name	M.P.H.	Feet	Ceiling	Miles	M.P.H.	Remarks
Army 97 (Nakajima)	Nate	250 @ 1,300		33,000	880 @ 135 (with extra tank)		-
Army 1, Mark II (Nakajima)	Oscar	325 @ 18,500		38,500	1520 @ 150 (with drop tanks)		Two bombs might replace drop tanks.
Navy 96 (Mitsubishi)	Claude	240 @ 9,000		33,000	1120 @ 130 (with drop tanks).		-
Navy Zero Mark II (Mitsubishi and Nakajima)	Zeke	335 @ 18,500		39,000	1590 @ 160 (with drop tanks).		Two 60 kilo bombs may probably be carried.
Navy 2 (Mitsubishi and Nakajima)	Rufe	280 @ 16,000		37,000	1280 @ 150		

(b) Single Engine Light Bombers

Aircraft	Code	Max. Speed	Service	Max. Range	
Type	Name	M.P.H. Feet	Ceiling	Miles M.P.H.	Remarks
Army 98 (Kawasaki)	Mary	225 @ 12,000	28,000	685 @ 130	Normal bomb load 660 lbs. max.
Army 97 Karigane II (Mitsubishi)	Ann	245 @ 8,000	28,000	600 @ 110	Ditto
Army 98 (Mitsubishi)	Ida	200 @ 13,000	25,000	785 @ 125	Ditto
Army 99 (Mitsubishi)	Sonia	250 @ 12,000	27,000	1030 @ 130	Ditto

(c) Reconnaissance - Single Engine

Army 97 Mark I (Mitsubishi)	Babs 1	210 @ 13,000	25,000	700 @ 135	
Navy 95 (Nakajima) Floatplane	Dave	155 @ 12,000	23,000	650 @ 110	4 x 60 kilo bombs may be carried.
Navy 98	Babs 3	255 @ 13,000	34,000	590 @ 140	Bomb load of 330 lb. max.

(d) Reconnaissance - Twin engine

Army 100 (Mitsubishi)	Dinah	370 @ 23,000	36,500	1450 @ 190	
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(e) Twin Engine Bombers

Army 97, Mark III (Mitsubishi)	Sally 3	285 @ 15,000	30,000	1320 @ 165	
Army 99 (Kawasaki)	Lily	300 @ 17,000	29,000	1255 @ 170	Bomb load 800 lbs.
Army 100 (Nakajima)	Helen	295 @ 17,000	33,500	2180 @ 170	--
Navy 96 (Nakajima)	Nell	240 @ 13,000	37,500	2420 @ 125	Bomb load 1350 lb.
Navy 1	Betty	295 @ 15,000	33,500	2140 @ 155	Bomb load 1584 lbs. or Torpedo 1900 lbs.

Note: Type numbers correspond to the last one or two digits of the year of issue according to the Japanese calendar, by which the year 1940 was the Japanese year 2,600. Thus the aircraft brought into use in 1939 were designated 'Type 99' and those issued in 1940 were 'Type 0'.

9. Japanese Air Forces' strengths and losses -  
Malayan Campaign

Ibid

(a) J.A.A.F. - 3rd Air Division

Document  
No. 17  
'Report  
for  
December  
on  
Southern  
Operations  
(Air)'

Aircraft	Strength	Losses in December, 41 only
Type 97 recce.	33	4
Type 100 recce.	20	5
Type 98 recce.	15	3
Type 99 recce.	20	9
Type 97 fighter	132	16
Type 1 fighter	64	34
Type 97 light bomber	42	1
Type 99 bomber	37	20
Type 99 T.E. Light Bomber	82	12
Type 97 ?	35	10
Type 97 ?	129	16
Type 97 Transports	55	4
Totals	664	134

Japanese  
Interrogations  
(from Tokyo)  
Vol. I

(b) J.N.A.F. - 22nd and 24th Air Flotillas

Document  
No. 8  
'Availability  
and Loss  
Reports'

Aircraft	Strength	Losses		
		Dec. 41 (Malaya)	Jan. 42 (Malaya)	Feb. 42 (Java)
Fighters	60	44	35	31
Dive and Torpedo Bombers	0	19	14	15
Medium Bombers	100	25	11	40
Flying Boats	10	1	0	0
Transports	10	0	0	0
Seaplanes	0	2	15	13
Totals	180	91	72	99

Document  
No. 4  
'Production  
Wastage  
and Strength of  
J.N.A.F.'

LOCATION MAP OF R.A.F. AND R.A.A.F. UNITS DURING  
8TH DECEMBER, 1941

Map of South Siam and Malaya showing the location of R.A.F. and R.A.A.F. Units during 8th December, 1941.

This map is complementary to Appendix I, Vol. I - 'R.A.F. Station Situation in Malaya'. In the latter Appendix the Units are shown on the Stations as at 0001 hr. 8th December, whereas the attached Map shows their positions after certain moves had taken place in the morning of 8th December.

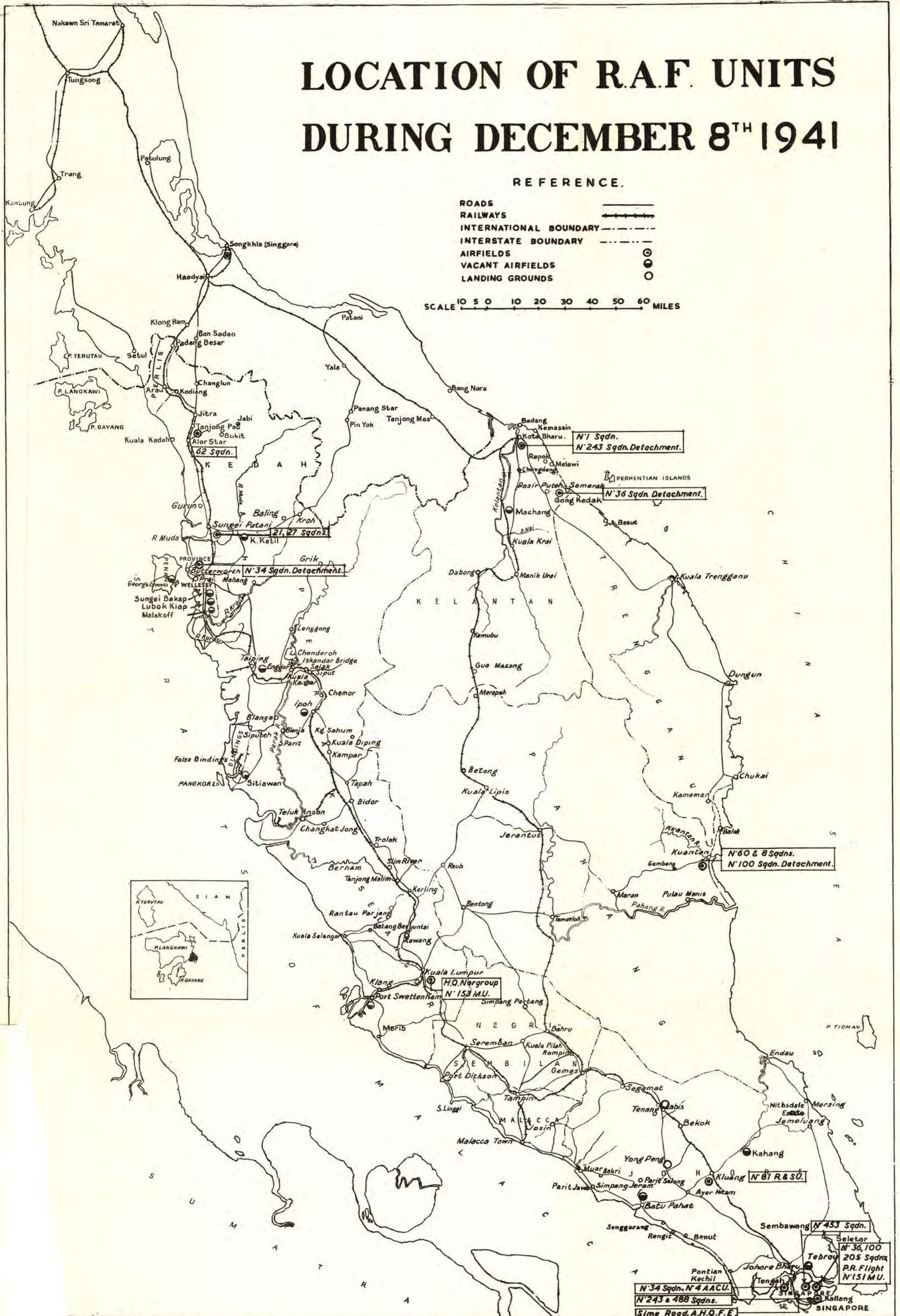


# LOCATION OF R.A.F. UNITS DURING DECEMBER 8<sup>TH</sup> 1941

## REFERENCE.

- ROADS
- RAILWAYS
- INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY
- INTERSTATE BOUNDARY
- AIRFIELDS
- VACANT AIRFIELDS
- LANDING GROUNDS

SCALE 10 5 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 MILES





SUMMARY OF ARMY STRENGTH IN MALAYA, 7TH DECEMBER, 1941

References:- A.H.B. File II J50/39/9, Encs. d/d 2nd August, 1941 and  
6th August, 1941.  
Brooke-Popham Despatch, Appendix "G"  
Percival Despatch Appendix "B"

Actual Strength (R.Es, M.T. Signals and Auxiliary Units not included)	Requirements by General Percival in August 1941. (Volunteers, Airfield Defence Units and A/A Units for defence localities not included)	Deficiencies at December 1941
<u>INFANTRY BATTALIONS -</u>		
British (inc. one M.G. Btn).....6 Indian.....18 Australian.....6 Malay.....1		
Total <u>31</u>	Infantry Battalions.....48 Indian Recce Units.....4	Infantry Battalions.....17
Volunteer Battalions.....10 Johore Military Forces.....1 Indian State Forces.....5		
<u>ARTILLERY</u>		
Field Regiments.....7 (Five of 24 guns; two of 16 guns) Mountain Regiments.....1 (of 24 guns) Anti-tank Regiments.....2 (One of 48 guns; One of 36 guns) Anti-tank Batteries.....2 (One of 8 Breda guns; One of 62 pounders)	Field Artillery Regiments.....9  Anti-tank Regiments.....3  Tank Regiments.....2 Light A.A. Regiments.....4 Mountain Artillery Regiments.....2	Tank Regiments.....2 Light A.A. Regiments.....4
<u>STRENGTH, REGULARS</u>		
British.....19,391 Australian.....15,279 Indian.....37,191 Asiatic.....4,482 TOTAL <u>76,343</u>		
<u>STRENGTH, VOLUNTEERS</u>		
British.....2,430 Indian.....727 Asiatic.....7,395 TOTAL <u>10,552</u>		
GRAND TOTAL <u>86,895</u>		

2  
Anti-Aircraft Strength at 7th December, 1941

Location	Approved Scale	Holdings	En Route	Allocated but not shipped
<u>MALAYA</u>				
Heavy	176	70	12	20
Light	100 (plus 144) (Field Force)	78	28	52
3 inch Naval	Nil	24	Nil	-
<u>BURMA</u>				
Heavy	24	8	8	-
Light	68	16	8	-
<u>HONG KONG</u>				
Heavy	32	14	4	-
Light	30	2	8	-
3 inch Naval	Nil	2	-	-

(a) A proportion was to be allocated to Burma.

(b) Of these, four heavy and eight light had only just reached Rangoon and had not been installed.

ESTABLISHMENT AND STRENGTH OF R.A.F. OPERATIONAL UNITS  
IN FAR EAST AT 6TH DECEMBER, 1941

References:- Details compiled from A.H.Q. Far East signal Q497 dated 9th December, 1941 to Air Ministry - A.H.B. File II J50/11 "Weekly Return of Operational Aircraft".

(i) MALAYA

Type of Aircraft	Unit	I.E. per Unit	Aircraft within Units		Aircraft within Maintenance Units		Remarks
			Service-able	Unservice-able	Service-able	Unservice-able	
Swordfish	4 A.A.C.U.	6	6	2	2	1	(a) Including one Mark II.
Shark II	"	6	5	1	-	3	
Vildebeeste III	36 Sqdn.	12	15	3	-	-	(b) To R.N.Z.A.F. 1st December 1941.
" "	100 Sqdn.	12	16(a)	2	-	-	
Beaufort	"	-	-	6	-	-	
Hudson II	1 Sqdn.	12	8	6	2	2	
" "	8 Sqdn.	12	8	5	-	-	(c) Including 2 in 4 A.A.C.U.
Catalina	205 Sqdn.	6	5(g)	2	-	-	
Singapore	"	-	-	-	1(b)	1	(d) Including 1 Mark I.
Blenheim I	27 Sqdn.	12	8	4	-	5	
" "	62 Sqdn.	14	12(o)	1	-	-	(e) Awaiting Shipment.
Blenheim IV	34 Sqdn.	16	21	2(d)	-	1	
Buffalo	243 Sqdn.	16	11(i)	12	12	-	(g) 2 aircraft detached to Ceylon.
"	453 Sqdn.	16	19	5		27	
"	488 Sqdn.	16	14	3		-	
"	21 Sqdn.	16	23	-	6	-	(i) 2 a/o detached Kota Bahru.
Wirraway	"	-	-	-		5(e)	
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>45</b>	

(ii) CEYLON

Vildebeeste III Seal	(f) 273 Sqdn.	4	2	1	-	-	(f) 1 Flight only.
	Stn. Flt. China Bay	2	3	1			
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>			

(iii) BURMA

Blenheim I Buffalo	(h) 60 Sqdn.	12	9	4	-	-	(h) Unit (9 aircraft) detached to Malaya (Kuantan).
	67 Sqdn.	16	8	24	-	-	
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>28</b>			

(iv) HONG KONG

Type of Aircraft	Unit	I.E. per Unit	Aircraft within Units		Aircraft within Maintenance Units		Remarks
			Service-able	Unservice-able	Service-able	Unservice-able	
Vildebeeste II	St. Flt.	4	3	-	-	-	
Walrus	"	1	2	-	-	-	
TOTALS	1	5	5	-	-	-	
GRAND TOTALS	18	211	198	84	23	45	

NOTES:- 1. In addition to the above the Far East held six Blenheim I and six Wirraways at unspecified locations. These aircraft may well have been held by the O.T.U. at Kluang.

Form 540  
R.A.F. Kluang

See paragraph "Strength of the Air Forces in Malaya". By adding these twelve aircraft to the foregoing totals the final squadron strength would be 294 aircraft.

2. On 9th December 1941, three Dutch Bomber Squadrons (twenty-two Glen Martins) and one Fighter Squadron (nine Buffaloes) arrived at Sembawang and Kallang respectively.

## SUMMARY OF LOSSES IN AIRCRAFT (IN NORTH MALAYA) ON 8TH DECEMBER, 1941

Squadrons	No. 1 (G.R.)	No. 8 (G.R.)	No. 60 (B)	No. 34 (B)	No. 62 (B)	No. 27 (N.F.)	No. 21 (F)	Detachments					Totals
								No. 243 (F)	No. 36 (T.B.)	No. 36 (T.B.)	No. 100 (T.B.)	No. 100 (T.B.)	
Aircraft Type	Hudson II	Hudson II	Blenheim I	Blenheim IV	Blenheim I	Blenheim I	Buffalo	Buffalo	Vildebeeste III	Vildebeeste III	Vildebeeste III	Beaufort	-
Station (Permanent)	Kota Bahru	-	Kuantan	-	Alor Star	Sungei Patani	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Station (Battle)	-	Kuantan	-	Butter- worth	-	-	Sungei Patani	Kota Bahru	Gong Kodah	Kuantan	Kuantan	Kota Bahru	-
Strength on Unit ("S" + "U/S") at 6th December, 1941 <sup>a</sup>	(a) 13	-	9	-	11	12	-	-	-	-	-	-	45
Strength of formation deployed to Battle Station on or before 8th December, 1941	-	13	-	9	-	-	(b) 23	2	7	2	8	1	65
Losses during anti- ) invasion operations ) Destroyed/lost	2	2	1	2	0	0	not engaged	1	0	not engaged		1	9 <sup>(c)</sup>
Losses due to enemy ) Destroyed raids on airfields ) Damaged	6 1	0 0	0 0	1 4	4 5	5 4	15 5	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 1	- -	31 20
Aircraft fit for operations at end of first day of Campaign	4	11	8	2	2	3	3	1	7	2	7	0	50

## NOTES

(a) Exclusive of one a/c at Sembawang on 180 hour inspection.

(b) Although the strengths of the Units have been corroborated from other sources no confirmation has been found concerning the figure of "23". Even so it is clearly established that only three aircraft of No. 21 Squadron were operationally fit at the end of the day.

(c) Undoubtedly some aircraft were damaged in addition to the nine destroyed during the invasion at Kota Bahru, but reports are vague, and in any case, to include them in this Summary would be misleading because, through the efforts of the ground crews, many of those same aircraft were repaired and serviceable again by the end of the day.

(d) On 1st December, 1941, No. 4 A.A.C.U. (Tengah) had a detachment of four Sharks and one Blenheim at Kuantan. The state of this Unit at 8th December, 1941 is not recorded on the above Summary because the Unit was non-operational; in any case the losses are by no means clear, except it is known that in the early morning 9th December, three Sharks left Kuantan for Tengah thereby raising the strength of Sharks on that Station to five.

STRENGTH OF R.A.F. AND N.E.I. OPERATIONAL UNITS IN FAR EAST  
AT 15TH DECEMBER, 1941

Authority: Signal from A.H.Q. Far East, Q 653 d/d 19th December, 1941;  
 file II J50/11 - 'Weekly Return of Operational Aircraft'

1. MALAYA

UNIT	TYPE	AIRCRAFT IN UNITS		AIRCRAFT IN MAIN. UNITS		REMARKS
		Service-able	Unservice-able	Service-able	Unservice-able	
No. 4 A.A.C.U.	Swordfish	7	-		2(d)	(a) Transferred
"	Shark II	5	-			from Fleet
No. 36 Sqdn.	Vildebeeste III	11	2		5(e)	Air Arm
"	Albacore	-	-			
No. 100 Sqdn.	Vildebeeste III	16(h)	2			(c) Includes 13 N.E.I.
"	Beaufort	-	5			Buffaloes
No. 1 Sqdn.	Hudson II	5	2			(d) Includes 1 a/o
No. 8 Sqdn.	Hudson II	8	-			transferred
No. 205 Sqdn.	Catalina	4	3(f)			from Fleet
"	Walrus	-	-	2(a)		Air Arm
No. 27 Sqdn.	Blenheim I	0	0			
No. 62 Sqdn.	Blenheim I	1	-	1	3	
No. 34 Sqdn.	Blenheim IV	9	1			
No. 243 Sqdn.	Buffalo	13	2			(e) Transferred from
No. 453 Sqdn.	Buffalo	10	3			Fleet Air
No. 488 Sqdn.	Buffalo	13	-	3	19	Arm and earmarked for
No. 21 Sqdn.	Buffalo	-	1			No. 36 Sqdn.
Kallang	Buffalo	15(c)	-			(f) On loan from N.E.I.
Kluang	Wirraway	3	5		5(g)	and being modified for No. 205
"	Blenheim I	-	1			Sqdn.
Tengah	Blenheim I	1	-			(g) Being re-erected
Sembawang	Glen Martin	15	-			(h) Includes 1 Vildebeeste II
TOTALS		136	27	6	34	

2. CEYLON

No. 273 Sqdn.	Vildebeeste III	3	1			
Stn. Flight	Seal	4	-			
TOTALS		7	1	-	-	

3. BURMA

No. 60 Sqdn.	Blenheim I	9(b)	2			(b) Detached to
No. 67 Sqdn.	Buffalo	20	6			Malaya.
TOTALS		29	8	-	-	

4. NOTES

- (i) No Return sent in from Hong Kong.  
 (ii) No Blenheim I's are now on strength of No. 27 Sqdn.

STRENGTH OF R.A.F. AND N.E.I. OPERATIONAL UNITS IN FAR EAST  
AT 27TH DECEMBER, 1941

Authority: Signal from A.H.Q. Far East, Q4 d/d 28th December, 1941;  
file II J50/11 - 'Weekly Return of Operational Aircraft'.

1. MALAYA

UNIT	TYPE	AIRCRAFT IN UNITS		AIRCRAFT IN MAINT. UNITS		REMARKS
		Service-able	Unservice-able	Service-able	Unservice-able	
No. 4 A.A.C.U.	Swordfish	8	2	4(a)	-	(a) Includes 1 a/c from Fleet Air Arm.
"	Shark II	6	-	-	3	
"	Blenheim I	1	1	1	-	
No. 36 Sqdn.	Vildebeeste III	13	-			(b) Includes 9 N.E.I. Buffaloes at Kallang.
"	Albacore	5	-			
No. 100 Sqdn.	Vildebeeste II	1	-			(c) N.E.I. Buffaloes.
"	Vildebeeste III	16	-			
No. 1 Sqdn.	Hudson II	5	7(g)	-	1	(d) (e) These were the aircraft transferred from No. 60 Sqdn.
No. 8 Sqdn.	Hudson II	8	5(h)			
No. 205 Sqdn.	Catalina	4	4			(f) Includes 5 refors flown from M.E.
"	Walrus	2	-			
No. 27 Sqdn.	Blenheim I	3	1	-	} 5	(g) (h) Includes 6 refors flown from Darwin.
No. 62 Sqdn.	Blenheim I	14(d)	2(e)	-		
No. 34 Sqdn.	Blenheim IV	7	8(f)	-	1	
No. 243 Sqdn.	Buffalo	15	7	4	} 15	
No. 453 Sqdn.	Buffalo	3	10			
No. 488 Sqdn.	Buffalo	14	5			
No. 21 Sqdn.	Buffalo	-	10			
P.R.U.	Buffalo	1	1		} 2	
Kluang	Blenheim I	5	-			
Kluang	Wirraway	4	1	3		
Kallang	Buffalo	10(b)	4(c)			
Tengah	Buffalo		1			
TOTALS		145	67	12	27	

2. CEYLON

No. 273 Sqdn.	Vildebeeste III	3	1			
Stn. Flight	Seal	4	-			
TOTALS		7	1			

3. NOTES

- (i) Burma had reverted to C-in-C. India on 15th December, 1941.
- (ii) Hong Kong had surrendered on 25th December, 1941.
- (iii) A.H.Q. have not reported the state of the two N.E.I. Squadrons at Sembawang, which totalled fifteen Glen Martins.

STRENGTH OF R.A.F. OPERATIONAL UNITS IN FAR EAST AT  
3RD JANUARY, 1942

Authority: Signal from A.H.Q. Far East, Q 159 d/d 7th January, 1942;  
 file II J50/11 - 'Weekly Return of Operational Aircraft'.

1. MALAYA

UNIT	TYPE	AIRCRAFT IN UNITS		AIRCRAFT IN MAINT. UNITS		REMARKS
		Service-able	Unservice-able	Service-able	Unservice-able	
No. 4 A.A.C.U.	Swordfish	4	2	3	1	(a) Includes further 2 refors from M. East.
"	Shark II	6	-	-	3	
No. 36 Sqdn.	Vildebeeste III	13	-			
"	Albacore	4	1			
No. 100 Sqdn.	Vildebeeste II	1	-			(b) Includes 3 refors from Gibraltar.
"	Vildebeeste III	16	-			
No. 1 Sqdn.	Hudson II	9	3	-	1	
No. 8 Sqdn.	Hudson II	13	1			
No. 205 Sqdn.	Catalina	8(b)	2			
"	Walrus	2	-			
No. 27 Sqdn.	Blenheim I	4	-	1	4	
No. 62 Sqdn.	Blenheim I	7	7			
No. 34 Sqdn.	Blenheim IV	10	6(a)			
No. 243 Sqdn.	Buffalo	15	4	5	10	
No. 453 Sqdn.	Buffalo	10	4			
No. 488 Sqdn.	Buffalo	13	-			
No. 21 Sqdn.	Buffalo	7	5			
Tengah	Buffalo	1	-	1	-	
Kluang	Wirraway	5	4			
TOTALS		148	39	10	19	

2. CEYLON

No. 273 Sqdn. Stn. Flight	Vildebeeste III	3	1			
	Seal	4	-			
TOTALS		7	1			

3. NOTES

- (i) A.H.Q. have omitted to report the state of the two N.E.I. Squadrons at Sembawang, which total is known to be sixteen Glen Martins.



**STRENGTH OF R.A.F. OPERATIONAL UNITS IN THE  
FAR EAST AT 10TH JANUARY, 1942**

**Authority:** Signals from A.H.Q. Far East, Q 234 d/d 13th January, 1942 and Q 530 d/d 22nd January; file II J50/11 - 'Weekly Return of Operational Aircraft'.

**1. MALAYA**

UNIT	TYPE	AIRCRAFT IN UNITS		AIRCRAFT IN MAINT. UNITS		REMARKS
		Service-able	Unservice-able	Service-able	Unservice-able	
No. 4 A.A.C.U.	Swordfish	4	2	4(a)	-	(a) Includes 1 a/c from Fleet Air Arm.
"	Shark II	5	1	-	3	
No. 36 Sqdn.	Vildebeeste III	8	4	-	-	
"	Albacore	5	-	-	-	
No. 100 Sqdn.	Vildebeeste II	1	-	-	-	
"	Vildebeeste III	16	-	-	-	
No. 1 Sqdn.	Hudson II	6	6	-	1	
No. 8 Sqdn.	Hudson II	Note (ii)	-	-	-	
No. 205 Sqdn.	Catalina	7	4	-	-	
"	Walrus	1	1	-	-	
No. 27 Sqdn.	Blenheim I	4	-	1	5	
No. 62 Sqdn.	Blenheim I	6	7	-	-	
No. 34 Sqdn.	Blenheim IV	12	2	-	2	
No. 243 Sqdn.	Buffalo	14	8	-	-	
No. 453 Sqdn.	Buffalo	7	7	-	10	
No. 488 Sqdn.	Buffalo	14	5	-		
No. 21 Sqdn.	Buffalo	9	5	-		
Kallang	Buffalo	1	-	-		
Tengah	Buffalo	1	-	-		
P.R.U.	Buffalo	1	1	-	4	
Kluang	Wirraway	Note (iii)	-	-		
TOTALS		122	53	5	25	

**2. CEYLON**

No. 273 Sqdn.	Vildebeeste III	1	3			
Stn. Flight	Seal	4	-			
<b>TOTALS</b>		5	3			

**3. NOTES**

- (i) A.H.Q. have not reported the states of the N.E.I. Squadrons.
- (ii) (iii) No states were returned to A.H.Q. in respect to No. 8 Squadron Hudsons and the Wirraways at Kluang.

R.A.F. ORDER OF BATTLE AT 18TH JANUARY, 1942

Authority: Signal A.O.950 d/d 18th January from A.H.Q. Far East to Abdacom,  
(Enc. 42a, File IIJ55/15/32)

Unit	Type	Available	Location	Function
No. 4 A.A.C.U.	Shark II	3	Tengah	Bomber
No. 36 Squadron	Albacore	4	Seletar	Bomber
	Vildebeeste II	10	-	-
No. 100 Squadron	Vildebeeste III	12	-	-
	-	3	-	Torpedo Bomber
No. 1 Squadron	Hudson	6	Sembawang	G.R. land based
No. 8 Squadron	-	5	-	-
No. 205 Squadron	Catalina	3	Seletar	Flying boat
No. 27 Squadron	Blenheim I	3	Kallang	Fighter
No. 62 Squadron	-	1	Tengah	Bomber
No. 34 Squadron	Blenheim IV	4	-	-
No. 243 Squadron	Buffalo	9	Kallang	Fighter
No. 453 Squadron	-	0	Sembawang	Fighter
No. 21 Squadron	Buffalo	5	-	-
No. 488 Squadron	-	9	Kallang	-
W. Flight	Wirraway	4	Kahang	Bomber
P.R. Unit	Buffalo	1	Seltar	P.R.
Total	-	82	-	-

Note From this date onwards the system of reporting aircraft states to Abdacom was termed 'Order of Battle' - as distinct from the earlier reports - and instead of including aircraft in Maintenance limits and unserviceable aircraft on squadrons confined itself to a simple statement of serviceable aircraft on Units.

R.A.F. ORDER OF BATTLE AT 25TH JANUARY, 1942

Authority: Cable A.O.76 d/d 25th January, 1942 from A.H.Q. Far East to Abdacom (Enc. 49a. File IIJ55/15/32).

Unit	Type	Available	Location	Function
No. 4 A.A.C.U.	Shark II	1	Tengah	Bomber
No. 36 Squadron	Albacore	4	Seletar	-
	Vildebeeste III	10	-	Torpedo Bomber
No. 100 Squadron	Vildebeeste III	12	-	-
No. 1 Squadron	Hudson	11	Sembawang	G.R. land based
No. 8 Squadron	Hudson	5	-	-
No. 205 Squadron	Catalina	3	Seletar	Flying boat
No. 27 Squadron	Blenheim I	1	Kallang	Fighter
No. 243 Squadron	Buffalo	9	-	-
No. 453 Squadron	-	3(a)	Sembawang	-
No. 21 Squadron	-	4	-	-
No. 468 Squadron		0	Kallang	-
No. 232 Squadron	Hurricane	7	Seletar	-
No. 232 Squadron	-	5	Kallang	-
W. Flight	Wirraway	1	Tengah	Bomber
P.R. Flight	Buffalo	1	Seletar	P.R.
Total		83		

Notes (a) Signal corrupt but on 26th January there were three Buffaloes.

(b) (i) The state of No. 34 Squadron is not reported. This Unit was at Palembang on 25th January with a strength of six Blenheim IV's. The above total (83), therefore, includes these six aircraft.

(ii) No. 62 Squadron had no aircraft at this date.

R.A.F. ORDER OF BATTLE AT 3RD FEBRUARY, 1942

Authority: Cable 960 d/d 3rd February from A.H.Q. Far East to Abdaom (Enc. File IIJ55/15/32).  
File IIJ50/3; Loose papers.

Unit	Type	Available	Location	Function
No. 4 A.A.C.U.	Swordfish	4	Singapore	Bombers
No. 453 Squadron	Buffalo	4	-	Fighter
P.R. Flight	-	1	-	G.R.
	Hurricane	0	-	
No. 225 Group Sumatra	Hudson	30	Palembang	G.R.
-	Blenheim IV	16	-	Bomber
-	Blenheim I	2	-	Fighter
-	Blenheim I	7	-	Bomber
-	Vildebeeste III	15	-	Bomber
-	Albacore	2	-	Bomber
-	Buffalo	7	-	Fighter
-	Hurricane	16	-	Fighter
Total		104		

Note No state of flying-boats was reported. These were in Java at the time with a total of five Catalinas.

R.A.F. ORDER OF BATTLE 9/10TH FEBRUARY, 1942

Authority: Cable, Ops. 254 d/d 9th February, A.H.Q. Far East to Abdacom  
(Enc. 61a, File IIJ55/15/32).  
Cable, Ops. 272 d/d 10th February, A.H.Q. Far East to Abdacom  
(Enc. 62a, File IIJ55/15/32).

Unit	Type	Available	Location	Function
No. 232 Squadron	Hurricane	10	Kallang	Fighter
No. 4 A.A.C.U.	Swordfish	4	Tengah	Bomber
No. 225 Group, Sumatra	Hudson	13	Palembang	G.R.
	Blenheim IV	18	-	Bomber
	Blenheim I	5	-	-
	Hurricane	7	-	Fighter
Total		57		

Note (a) Neither of the above signals are complete in-so-much that Enc. 61a reports only upon the aircraft strength in Singapore and Enc. 62a gives the state in Sumatra only. Because these signals are the last two on record they have been combined to give a comprehensive Order of Battle over the two days, 9/10th February, 1942.

(b) No states were reported in respect to Torpedo Bombers and Flying Boats, in Java.

SUMMARY OF AIRCRAFT STATES IN UNITS IN MALAYA AND SUMATRA

APPENDIX XIII

(Serviceable R.A.F., R.A.A.F., and N.E.I. aircraft under A.H.Q. control)

Date	Bombers	Fighters	Torpedo-Bombers	G.R. (land based)	Flying Boats	Miscellaneous	Totals	Remarks	Appendix refers
	Blenheim I, IV Glen Martin	Buffalo Hurricane II	Vildebeeste II, III Albacore Beaufort	Hudson II, III	Catalina	Shark, Swordfish, Walrus, Wirraway, P.R. Buffalo	Serviceable aircraft only.		
6 Dec.	50	67	31	16	5	11	180	Nil	IV
15 Dec.	34	51	27	13	4	16	145	Nil	V
27 Dec.	39	42	35	13	4	27	160	Nil	VI
3 Jan.	37	45	34	22	8	18	164	Nil	VII
10 Jan.	22	44	30	6	7	13	122	No states were reported of: N.E.I. Squadrons No. 8 Squadron 'W' Flight.	VIII
18 Jan.	8	23	29	11	3	8	82	Nil	IX
25 Jan.	7	28	26	16	3	3	83	Nil	X
3 Feb.	25	27	17	30	-	5	104	No state re- ported for No. 205 Squadron now in Java.	XI
9/10 Feb.	23	17	-	13	-	4	57	No states re- ported for Nos. 205, 36 and 100 Squadrons now in Java.	XII

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APPENDIX XIV

BURMA

BOMBING OPERATIONS

December, 1941 to December, 1942

December, 1941 .. .. No bombing operations

1942

Month	R.A.F.		U.S.A.A.F.		TOTAL:	
	Eff.Sorties	Short Tons	Eff.Sorties	Short Tons	Eff.Sorties	Short Tons
January	51	26.50	-----Nil-----		51	26.50
February	265	117.25	-----Nil-----		265	117.25
March	84	42.00	-----Nil-----		84	42.00
April	48	24.00	11	16.30	59	40.30
May	115	63.50	45	82.00	160	145.50
June	71	34.60	13	17.20	84	51.80
July	92	35.25	19	23.60	111	58.85
August	79	25.25	26	30.10	105	55.35
September	70	28.00	24	22.20	94	50.20
October	130	65.00	42	52.40	172	117.40
November	168	131.50	80	86.50	248	218.00
December	229	146.75	128	153.95	357	300.70
TOTALS	1,402	739.60	388	484.25	1,790	1,223.85

2. DISTRIBUTION OF EFFORT BY CATEGORY OF TARGET

TARGET	EFF. SORTIES		SHORT TONS		TOTAL:	
	R.A.F.	U.S.A.A.F.	R.A.F.	U.S.A.A.F.	EFF.SORTIES	SHORT TONS
Ports, Harbours and Riverways (incl. Shipping)	273	89	127.60	154.65	362	282.25
Railways & Rly. Installations	111	69	48.00	94.10	180	142.10
Airfields and Landing Grounds	385	84	268.75	127.40	469	396.15
Troop Concent. & other Military Targets	633	146	295.25	108.10	779	403.35
TOTALS:	1,402	388	739.60	484.25	1,790	1,223.85

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JANUARY - 1942

RAF

Date	Location/Target	SORTIES			Type	BOMBS		Total Tons (Short)
		Des.	Att.	Type		Day	Night	
N7/8	Bangkok Docks	10	10	Blen.	-	-	5.0	5.0
D.21	<del>Mesohod</del> <i>ME Sohd</i> Airfield	6	6	"	-	3.0	-	3.0
D.21	Mesa <del>rieng</del> <i>rieng</i> Airfield	6	6	"	24 x 250	3.0	-	3.0
22	Raheng Airfield	6	6	"	-	3.0	-	3.0
23	" "	6	AB	"	-	-	-	-
	<del>Mesohod</del> <i>ME Sohd</i> Tr. Conc.	6	6	"	-	3.0	-	3.0
N24/25	Bangkok Docks	9	8	"	2 x 500 28 x 250	-	4.0	4.0
N26/27	Kaw <del>Kareik</del> <i>Kareik</i> /Myawaddy Road - Tr. Conc.	5	5	"	28 x 250	-	3.5	3.5
N27/28	Bangkok Docks	4	4	"	16 x 250	-	2.0	2.0
		58	51			12.0	14.5	26.5

DISTRIBUTION BY EFFORT

Target Categories	A/C Des.	EFF.	Short (2000 lbs) Tons	British Tons
Airfields	24	18	9.0	8.0
Harbours	23	22	11.0	9.8
Ground Support	11	11	6.5	5.8
	58	51	26.5	23.6

All Blenheims

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FEBRUARY - 1942

RAF

DATE	LOCATION/TARGET	SORTIES			Type	BOMBS		Total Tons (Short)
		Des.	Att.	Type		Day	Night	
1.	Kado Village	6	5	Blen.	20 x 250	2.5	-	2.5
2.	Martaban A.A. Battery	5	5	"	20 x 250	2.5	-	2.5
3.	Smalo Is. off Martaban	3	2	"	8 x 250	1.0	-	1.0
	Katralli Village	3	3	"	-	1.5	-	1.5
4.	Pagan Village	2	2	"	8 x 250	1.0	-	1.0
	Mongson Airfield	11	11	Lysds.	22 x 250	2.75	-	2.75
5.	Pagan G/A.	3	3	Blen.	16 x 250	2.0	-	2.0
	" "	5	5	"	20 x 250	2.5	-	2.5
6.	Moulmein Rly & Waterway	6	6	Lysds.	12 x 250	1.5	-	1.5
8.	Pagan G/A	3	3	Blen.	-	1.5	-	1.5
9.	" "	3	3	"	-	1.5	-	1.5
	" "	3	3	"	-	1.5	-	1.5
10.	Minzi Troop Conc.	2	2	"	-	1.0	-	1.0
	Chingmai Airfield	6	6	Lysds.	-	1.5	-	1.5
11.	Pagan	2	2	Blen.	-	1.0	-	1.0
	Moulmein Docks	2	2	"	-	1.0	-	1.0
	Chingmai Airfield	6	6	Lysds.	-	1.5	-	1.5
12.	Pagan G/A	2	2	Blen.	-	1.0	-	1.0
	Moulmein Docks	3	3	"	-	1.5	-	1.5
14.	Pagan G/A	6	6	"	-	3.0	-	3.0
	Martaban Docks	6	6	"	-	3.0	-	3.0
15.	Duyinzek Ferry	9	9	Lysds.	-	2.25	-	2.25
	Thaton Rly. Station	5	5	Blen.	-	2.5	-	2.5
16.	Moulmein Rly & Docks	6	6	Blen.)	-	3.0)	-	3.0
	"	10	10	Lysds.)	-	2.5)	-	2.5
	" Steamer	8	8	Blen.	-	4.0	-	4.0
	" Troop Conc. ) Airfield	3	3	"	-	1.5	-	1.5
17.	Martaban Shipping	5	5	Lysds.	-	1.25	-	1.25
	Chingmai Airfield	7	7	Blen.	28 x 250	3.5	-	3.5
18.	River Bilin Area	6	6	"	-	3.0	-	3.0
	(Army Sppt)							
	Pantagon E/Pos.	8	8	"	-	4.0	-	4.0
	Dawiyat E/Pos.	4	4	Lysds.	8 x 250	1.0	-	1.0
19.	Pontagon E/Pos.	13	13	Blen.	-	6.5	-	6.5
	" "	4	4	"	-	2.0	-	2.0
20.	Taungdale/Pagon E/Pos.	8	8	"	-	4.0	-	4.0
	River Bilin area (A/S)	6	6	Lysds.	-	1.5	-	1.5
	Moulmein River Steamer	10	10	Blen.	-	5.0	-	5.0
21.	Kawbein E/Pos.	4	4	"	-	2.0	-	2.0
	Bilin 500 M.T. (N. of Kyaikto) Troops	10	10	"	-	5.0	-	5.0
22.	" " "	6	6	"	24 x 250	3.0	-	3.0
23.	Mokpalin E/Pos.	5	5	"	-	2.5	-	2.5
24.	Kyaikto M.T.	3	3	"	-	1.5	-	1.5
25.	Moulmein Shipping	6	6	"	-	3.0	-	3.0
	Salween River Shipping	6	6	"	-	3.0	-	3.0
26.	Moulmein Airfield	6	6	"	-	3.0	-	3.0
27.	Ye Airfield	6	6	"	-	3.0	-	3.0
	Kywebwe E/Pos.	3	3	"	-	1.5	-	1.5
28.	Shwegyin E/Pos.	12	12	"	-	6.0	-	6.0
		267	265			117.25		117.25
	Blenheim	204	202			101.50		
	Lysander	63	63			15.75		117.25

/DISTRIBUTION

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FEBRUARY - 1942 (Contd.)

DISTRIBUTION OF EFFORT

<u>Target Categories</u>	<u>A/C Des.</u>	<u>Eff.</u>	<u>Short Tons(2000 lb.)</u>	<u>British Tons</u>
Airfields	45	45	16.75	15.0
Army Support	147	146	71.0	63.4
Harbours	24	23	9.0	8.0
Communications	26	26	9.25	8.1
Shipping	25	25	11.25	10.0
	267	265	117.25	104.25

SECRET

G.274013/IF/6/50/35

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4.

MARCH - 1942

RAF

DATE	LOCATION/TARGET	SORTIES			BOMBS			Total Tons(Short)
		Des.	Att.	Type	Type	Day	Night	
1.	Abya E/Pos. <i>Rivercraft</i>	4	4	Blen.	-	2.0	-	2.0
2.	Sittang River/R. Craft	9	9	"	-	4.5	-	4.5
	Waw E/Pos.	6	6	"	-	3.0	-	3.0
3.	Bilin River Area MT.	6	6	"	-	3.0	-	3.0
4.	Pyinbon E/Pos.	3	3	"	-	1.5	-	1.5
<i>Pyagyi</i> 5.	Pyagi E/Pos.	2	2	"	-	1.0	-	1.0
	Pedaye R. craft	2	2	"	-	1.0	-	1.0
	Waw Village	4	4	"	-	2.0	-	2.0
6.	Thayetchaung E/Pos.	2	2	"	-	1.0	-	1.0
	Pegu Town	3	3	"	-	1.5	-	1.5
9.	Moulmein Airfield	5	5	"	-	2.5	-	2.5
11.	Pyunta Rly. Bdge.	5	5	"	-	2.5	-	2.5
12.	Hmawbi M.T.	1	1	"	-	0.5	-	0.5
	Gulf of Martaban R/Craft.	1	1	"	-	0.5	-	0.5
13.	Rangoon R/Craft	1	1	"	-	0.5	-	0.5
	Mingaladon MT/Troop	1	1	"	-	0.5	-	0.5
14.	Mingaladon MT/Troop	1	1	"	-	0.5	-	0.5
16.	Yandoon R/craft.	6	6	"	-	3.0	-	3.0
	Letpadan/Hmawbi Mt.	1	1	"	-	0.5	-	0.5
17.	Hmawbi Village	4	4	"	-	2.0	-	2.0
21.	Mingaladon Airfield	8	8	"	-	4.0	-	4.0
22.	" "	9	9	"	-	4.5	-	4.5
		84	84			42.0		42.0

DISTRIBUTION OF EFFORT

Target Categories	A/C		Short (2000 lb.) Tons	British Tons
	Des.	Eff.		
Airfields	22	22	11.0	9.8
Railway/Communications	5	5	2.5	2.2
Ground Support	57	57	28.5	25.5
	84	84	42.0	37.5

All Blenheims

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5.

APRIL - 1942

RAF								
DATE	LOCATION/TARGET	SORTIES			Type	BOMBS		Total Tons(Short)
		Des.	Att.	Type		Day	Night	
9.	Shipping 175 m. NNE Trincomalee	9	4	Blen.	-	2.0	-	2.0
12.	Nyaungbintha E/Pos.	5	5	"	-	2.5	-	2.5
13.	Sinbaungwe E/Pos.	5	5	"	-	2.5	-	2.5
14.	Port Blair Flying Boats	2	2	Hudson	-	1.0	-	1.0
17.	Singaungwe E/Pos.	2	2	Blen.	-	1.0	-	1.0
17.	Sainggya (N. of Magwe) Troops and Transport	5	5	"	-	2.5	-	2.5
17.	Allanmyo E/Pos.	5	5	"	-	2.5	-	2.5
18.	Port Blair Flying Boats	2	2	Hudson	-	1.0	-	1.0
18.	Magwe A/F	2	2	Blen.	-	1.0	-	1.0
19.	Allanmyo E/Pos.	5	5	"	-	2.5	-	2.5
20.	Bassein A/F.	1	1	"	-	0.5	-	0.5
24.	Loilem/Hopong E/Pos.	4	4	"	-	2.0	-	2.0
24.	Loilem/Sandoway/Taungup E/Pos.	4	4	"	-	2.0	-	2.0
25.	Konghaipong M/T.	2	2	"	-	1.0	-	1.0
	TOTAL	53	48			24.0		24.0

DISTRIBUTION OF EFFORT

Target Categories	A/C		Short (2000 lb.) Tons	British Tons
	Des.	Eff.		
Airfields	3	3 Blen.	1.5	1.33
Shipping	9	4 "	2.0	3.57
	4	4 Hudson	2.0	
Ground Support	37	37 Blen.	18.5	16.52
	53	48	24.0	21.42
	48 Blen.		44 Blen.	
	4 Hudson		4 Hudson	

USAAF

N2/3.	Port Blair Shipping	6	6	B.17	-	-	6.0	6.0
N16/17.	Rangoon Shipping	3	3	B.17	42x 300	-	6.3	6.3
29.	Rangoon Shipping & Hbr.	1	1	B.17	-	2.0	-	2.0
N30/	Rangoon Hbr & Shipping	1	1	B.17	-	-	2.0	2.0
	TOTAL	11	11		-	2.0	14.3	16.3

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6.

### MAY - 1942

RAF								
DATE	LOCATION/TARGET	SORTIES			Type	BOMBS		TOTAL Tons (Short)
		Des.	Att.	Type		Day	Night	
1.	Magwe A/F	4	3	Blen.	-	1.5	-	1.5
1.	Yenangyang Oilfields	3	3	"	-	1.5	-	1.5
3.	Chindwin Rivercraft	6	6	"	-	2.5	-	2.5
4.	Irrawaddy Rivercraft	6	6	"	-	3.0	-	3.0
5.	Monywa Rivercraft	3	3	"	-	1.5	-	1.5
N5/6	Akyab Town	2	2	Well.	-	-	1.5	1.5
N5/6	Akyab (S.E.)	1	1	Blen.	-	-	0.5	0.5
9.	Magwe A/F	5	5	"	-	2.5	-	2.5
10.	Magwe A/F	1	1	"	-	0.5	-	0.5
11.	Akyab A/F	3	3	Hudson	-	1.0	-	1.0
11.	Akyab A/F	2	2	Well.	6 x 500	1.5	-	1.5
13.	Akyab A/F	4	4	Hudson	-	2.0	-	2.0
13.	Shwegyin S. Rivercraft	6	6	Blen.	-	3.0	-	3.0
13.	Akyab A/F	3	3	Well.	-	4.5	-	4.5
14.	Maukkadaw Rivercraft	3	3	Blen.	-	1.5	-	1.5
14.	Magwe A/F	2	2	"	-	1.0	-	1.0
15.	Akyab A/F	7	3	Well.	-	4.5	-	4.5
16.	Akyab A/F	2	2	Blen.	-	1.0	-	1.0
16.	Magwe A/F	1	1	"	-	0.5	-	0.5
17.	Kalewa Warehouses	5	5	"	-	2.5	-	2.5
18.	Sittaung Area Barges	3	3	"	-	1.5	-	1.5
18.	Akyab Harbour	1	1	Hudson	-	0.5	-	0.5
19.	Akyab A/F	1	1	"	-	0.5	-	0.5
19.	Akyab A/F	3	3	Blen.	-	1.5	-	1.5
20.	Mayu River. Rivercraft	4	4	"	-	2.0	-	2.0
20.	Chindwin Rivercraft	2	2	"	-	1.0	-	1.0
21.	Akyab A/F	3	3	"	-	1.5	-	1.5
22.	Akyab A/F	1	1	"	-	0.5	-	0.5
22.	Mayu Rivercraft	2	2	"	-	1.0	-	1.0
23.	Kyaupya Barracks	2	2	Hudson	-	1.0	-	1.0
23.	Akyab A/F	4	4	Blen.	-	2.0	-	2.0
23.	Chindwin/Kalewa R/craft	2	2	"	-	1.0	-	1.0
24.	Sittaung Rivercraft	1	1	"	-	0.5	-	0.5
25.	Mayu River (N.Akyab) Rivercraft	3	3	Hudson	-	1.5	-	1.5
25.	Sittaung Rivercraft	4	4	Blen.	-	2.0	-	2.0
25.	Kalewa Barges	3	3	"	-	1.5	-	1.5
27.	Akyab A/F	2	2	"	-	1.0	-	1.0
27.	Mayu Rivercraft	2	2	Hudson	-	1.0	-	1.0
27.	Kalewa Rivercraft	1	1	Blen.	-	0.5	-	0.5
28.	Chindwin Rivercraft	1	1	"	-	0.5	-	0.5
29.	Kalemyo Bridge	1	1	"	-	0.5	-	0.5
30.	Chindwin Rivercraft	2	2	"	-	1.0	-	1.0
31.	Kalewa Town	3	3	"	-	1.5	-	1.5
	TOTAL	120	115			61.5	2.0	63.5

### /DISTRIBUTION OF EFFORT

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MAY - 1942 (Cont'd.)

DISTRIBUTION OF EFFORT

Target Categories	A/C Des.	Eff.	Type	Short (2000 lb.) Tons	British Tons
Airfields	28 8 12	27 8 8	Blen. ) Hudson ) Well. )	27.5	24.55
Harbours, Shipping & Rivercraft	49 6	49 6	Blen. ) Hudson )	27.0	24.10
Camps, Military Targets	13 2 2	13 2 2	Blen. ) Hudson ) Well. )	9.0	8.04
	120	115		63.5	56.69

90 Blen.  
16 Hudson  
14 Well.

USAAF

DATE	LOCATION/TARGET	SORTIES			BOMBS			Total Tons(Short)
		Des.	Att.	Type	Type	Day	Night	
1.	Rangoon Docks	1	1	B.17	-	1.5	-	1.5
N2/3.	Rangoon Docks & Shipping	1	1	"	-	-	1.5	1.5
N3/4.	Rangoon Docks & Shipping	2	2	"	-	-	3.0	3.0
N4/5.	Mingaladon A/F	2	2	"	-	-	3.0	3.0
N5/6.	Mingaladon A/F	3	3	"	-	-	6.0	6.0
8.	Rangoon Docks	5	5	"	-	10.0	-	10.0
8.	Mingaladon A/F	1	1	"	-	2.0	-	2.0
12.	Myitkyina A/F	4	4	"	-	8.0	-	8.0
14.	Myitkyina A/F	4	4	"	-	8.0	-	8.0
16.	Myitkyina A/F	4	4	"	-	8.0	-	8.0
N25/26.	Rangoon Docks & Barges	4	4	"	-	-	5.0	5.0
N35/26.	Mingaladon A/F	2	2	"	-	-	2.0	2.0
N29/30.	Myitkyina A/F	4	4	"	-	-	8.0	8.0
30.	Myitkyina A/F	3	3	"	-	6.0	-	6.0
N31/	Rangoon Shipping & Docks	5	5	"	-	-	10.0	10.0
	TOTAL	45	45			43.5	38.5	82.0

DISTRIBUTION OF EFFORT

Target Categories	A/C Des.	Eff.	Type	Short (2000 lb.) Tons	British Tons
Airfields	27	27	B.17	51.0	45.53
Docks & Shipping	18	18	B.17	31.0	27.67
	45	45		82.0	73.20

45 - B.17

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