

particular role was to guard against landings in the Mersing area on the east coast of Malaya.

(iv) The garrison of Singapore Fortress.

All these formations were either already committed actively or potentially. Adequate reinforcement for the main battle area therefore depended upon the safe arrival of reinforcements from outside Malaya. But before dealing with this aspect it is first necessary to dispose of some other matters.

*Preparations for basing squadrons in the N.E.I.*

256. The evacuation of the northern aerodromes had been foreseen, and as this would eventually result in congestion of aerodromes on Singapore Island, A.H.Q. issued orders as early as the 14th December for stocks of bombs together with refuelling and re-arming parties to be sent to aerodromes in Sumatra. Shortly afterwards, two staff officers from A.H.Q. and an officer of the A.M.W.D. were ordered to Sumatra to accelerate work in connection with:—

(a) providing facilities for the transit of reinforcing aircraft;

(b) the operation of bombers from Sumatra, including the selection of a Bomber Group H.Q.

257. For these movements it was possible to call upon an Air Transport service from Singapore-Sumatra-Java which had been instituted by the Dutch Army Air Service. The number and capacity of the transport aircraft were limited, but they enabled the movements to Sumatra to be carried out rapidly. They illustrated the value of transport aircraft. It was considered inadvisable to operate these aircraft in Northern Malaya where little fighter protection could have been provided for them.

258. A warning order was also issued on the 22nd December for moving No. 153 M.U. from Kuala Lumpur to Java. By that date the Japanese had advanced as far south as Taiping, and Kuala Lumpur was threatened. Thus it was felt that the work of the unit could be more satisfactorily carried out in Java.

*Japanese Attack on Borneo.*

259. It is now necessary to revert to operations off the East coast of Malaya leading up to the Japanese attack on Borneo.

On the 13th December G.H.Q. received information from a reliable source that a large convoy of well over a hundred ships was heading S.S.W. from the direction of Saigon. Its destination was not known for some days. It constituted a serious threat to Malaya, on the east coast of which existed several good landing beaches with little or no defence, where a successful landing would have seriously jeopardised our army formations still closely engaged with the enemy on the western side of the peninsula.

260. Accordingly, reconnaissance activity from Malaya was materially increased, and during the period 13th to 24th December most of the available bombers stood by to attack the enemy convoy in the event of its approach.

261. An average of 2 Catalina, 6 Hudson and 6 Glenn Martin sorties was sent out daily from Malaya to locate the expedition, whilst Dutch Glenn Martins from Sinkawang in Dutch Borneo were similarly employed. On the 14th, 6 cruisers were reported south of Saigon, and on the afternoon of the 16th a landing was reported at Miri, in British Borneo. The ships in the area were attacked by the Dutch in bad weather on the 17th, 18th and 19th. Hits were claimed on a cruiser and transports, and several near misses against transports.

262. The reconnaissance activity continued, spreading south-east to the Rhio Archipelago, and on the 23rd December an expedition heading towards Kuching was detected. Both Kuching and Sinkawang aerodromes had been attacked by Japanese aircraft on the preceding days, and the former had been "blown". The Dutch aircraft at Sinkawang were withdrawn to Palembang in Sumatra on the 24th, though before they were transferred they were able to carry out a few attacks against the enemy convoy.

263. This same convoy was attacked on the 24th by 3 Hudsons and also by 5 Blenheim IVs of No. 34 (B) Squadron. Several near misses were claimed but no positive sinkings. A Dutch submarine claimed to have sunk 3 transports and 1 tanker in the area.

*Increased Air Reconnaissance activity.*

264. Seaward reconnaissance at this time absorbed almost all the G.R. and bomber aircraft in Malaya. In addition to major Japanese expeditions east of Malaya, Japanese forces were still infiltrating southwards down the East coast towards Kuantan; and on the 15th December a flight of M.V.A.F. was established at Kahang to carry out local coastal reconnaissance for the Australian forces in Johore who were responsible for guarding against landings in the Mersing-Endau area. Reconnaissance up the West-coast also became an increasing commitment during the second half of December. Regular reconnaissances were instituted from 22nd December, as the Japanese were already showing signs of infiltrating in small boats by day and night down the West coast behind our Army's left flank. The discovery and attack of these infiltrations was difficult because the boats moved in waters flanked by luxuriant tropical undergrowth. By day the Japanese protected their movements with fighter patrols.

265. The possibility that the Japanese might spread across from Malaya to Sumatra had also to be faced, thus a squadron of Dutch Glenn Martins at Pakenbaroe in Sumatra were employed on reconnaissance to detect any such movement with effect from 15th December.

*Minor Reorganisations.*

266. Meanwhile, certain reorganisation of squadrons had taken place. One flight of Wirraways (6) was formed at Kluang on the 18th and training in dive-bombing commenced. The aircrews of No. 60 (B) Squadron were sent back to Burma by sea by B.O.A.C. to join their ground personnel at Rangoon: the squadron's aircraft were taken over by No. 62 (B) Squadron.