

Cameron (protecting the South of Victoria), which had been heavily bombarded by the Japanese, and the Middlesex Regiment beat off an attack on Leighton Hill. The enemy, however, penetrated through the A.R.P. tunnels and street fighting began at Wanchai. The conduct of the civil population, which had thus far suffered some 4,000 casualties (1,000 killed), was, however, good and had become increasingly so since the first depression after the evacuation of the mainland.

On the same day the forces isolated in the South of the Island made an effort to counter-attack towards Stanley Mound, but to no avail.

On the 24th December the Royal Scots, following heavy enemy attacks, were driven off the top of Mount Cameron, and Leighton Hill was captured after bombardment. The position in the South of the Island was unchanged.

On the 25th December, in the early hours of the morning, street fighting took place as the enemy fought his way towards the centre of the town, but another Japanese demand for surrender was refused. Two hours later, however, the Governor was advised by the Military and Naval commanders that further effective resistance could not be made, and, after carrying out a series of demolitions, our forces were ordered to lay down their arms. The Chinese kept their word and had endeavoured to assist the defence of Hong Kong by advancing on Canton, but their force was not strong enough to produce any serious effect on the Japanese.

XIV.—OPERATIONS IN BURMA AND SARAWAK. *Burma.*

127. A fresh field of operations opened in Burma on the 9th December, when a landing was reported at Prachuabkhirikun, a clear threat to Mergui and the Tenasserim Peninsula.

On the 11th December, Tavoy was bombed. A further enemy landing at Chumporn (Siam) gave access to the southernmost tip of Burma, and an advance on Victoria Point threatened. In the next two or three days the Japanese advance materialised and coincided with raids on Mergui by about fifty aircraft, propaganda leaflets being dropped as well as bombs. An effort was made to cut off the Japanese advance southwards by crossing the Siam frontier to demolish the railway a few miles south of Prachuabkhirikun, but the strength of the opposition and the heavy rains proved too great for the success of this expedition. The situation was still in an undeveloped stage, but with a clear threat to Southern Burma, when on the 15th December Burma reverted to the province of the Commander-in-Chief, India. (See para. 29 above.)

Sarawak.

128. The general problem of the defence of Borneo was indicated in para. 16 above. The oil denial scheme was put into operation at the outbreak of war and completed by the 11th December. The landing ground at Miri was also demolished and the forces at Lutong evacuated by sea to Kuching in H.M.S. *Lipis*.

The Company of 2/15 Punjab Regiment rejoined the rest of its Battalion, which formed the regular garrison of Kuching and the remaining individuals—from the 2nd Loyals and S.S. Police—were brought on to Singapore.

Considerable anxiety and uneasiness was felt by the authorities in Kuching owing to the absence of Naval and Air Forces. It was pointed

out to them, however, that many places in England had stood up to bombing without any direct defence, and that they would be expected to do the same. It was evident, however, that the morale of the population of Kuching was in a bad way. This, in my opinion, was partly due to the fact that the ruler, Rajah Brooke, was absent—actually in Australia. He had a great deal of influence with the natives, and in view of the situation he should have returned to his country immediately on the outbreak of war, if not before. As it was, the Sarawak Rangers proved quite unreliable, and the 2/15 Punjab Regiment were left to carry out the defence by themselves.

The complete control of the South China Sea exercised by the Japanese reduced the problem of the capture of Kuching to a mere calculation of the strength necessary to overcome the resistance that they would probably meet. They appear to have attacked it with the equivalent of one Brigade Group.

129. Japanese naval forces were not long in appearing in strength before Miri. By the 16th December, some ten warships had been sighted in company with a tanker off Miri and Lutong, and these ships became the object of our attacks. On the 17th December, 6 Glenn Martins and 5 Buffaloes of the Netherlands East Indies Air Force delivered an attack from Sinkawang, but scored neither hits nor near misses. The same day, Dutch bombers from Samiuvwkoa located and attacked this force, a Dutch navy Dornier scoring a direct hit on a destroyer. Encounters between Dutch Buffaloes and the Navy Zero fighters revealed the clear superiority of the Japanese aircraft. Reports of a Japanese landing at Lutong and Baram Point were received, and on the 18th December renewed attacks on enemy shipping in this area were made, without success, by a mixed force. Eight Glenn Martins from Sinkawang had to return without delivering their attack owing to the bad weather. The following day 6 Netherlands East Indies Glen Martins claimed a hit on a cruiser and some near misses. The 19th December, however, was also marked by Japanese air attacks, Kuching aerodrome and town being bombed by about 15 heavy bombers and one seaplane. Civilians suffered approximately 100 casualties, while the main material damage was the destruction of the Borneo Company Benzine Stores. The air war was also carried to Dutch Territory by a heavy attack on Pontianak, much of the city being destroyed.

An expedition clearly aimed at Kuching was then sighted on the 23rd December, and 5 Blenheim IVs, attacking this on the 24th December, scored one hit on a transport and some near misses. Air support from Sinkawang was no longer possible in view of the damage to the aerodrome from a Japanese attack, and the Dutch aircraft were withdrawn to Palembang.

The 2/15 Punjab Regiment carried out demolitions on the aerodromes, held up the Japanese for a time, and eventually moved in accordance with orders, along a jungle path, to join up with the Dutch, though this necessitated abandoning practically the whole of their equipment.

It was noteworthy that Malay labour at Kuching disappeared as the course of operations approached the area.

According to later reports, some 800 of the 2/15 Punjab Regiment joined the Dutch and