

Effect in the N.E.I. of Japanese Capture of Singapore and Sumatra.

485. On 8th February the Japanese secured a foothold on Singapore Island and within a couple of days its imminent capitulation became evident.

486. On 14th February they attacked and overran South Sumatra, admittedly at heavy cost. The British forces, mainly air units, had to withdraw to Java.

487. Between 12th and 18th February large numbers of personnel, evacuated from Singapore and Sumatra, arrived in considerable confusion in Western Java: amongst them were approximately 10,000 R.A.F. of all ranks. They augmented considerable numbers of refugees who had preceded them in a steadily growing stream from the same places and from other N.E.I. Islands.

488. At this time, mid-February, Abdacom was still established in Bandoeng, reinforcements were arriving and more were expected. Nevertheless it was evident now that Java would be attacked in the near future. A civilian exodus from Java on a grand scale replaced the small stream which had been leaving for some time through Sourabaya and Batavia.

Congestion in Batavia.

489. At Batavia the exodus became confused with incoming reinforcements and evacuees from Singapore and Sumatra. For several days the harbour of Batavia, and the roadstead outside, were congested with shipping. This unloaded as best it could. The result was that quays, warehouses and the roads leading from them rapidly became blocked with an inextricable confusion of merchandise, equipment, M.T., abandoned cars and goods of every description. The town of Batavia became congested with personnel—outgoing refugees, incoming reinforcements, incoming evacuees and Dutch troops mobilised for defence of the locality.

490. Into this confused area the R.A.F. evacuated from Singapore and Sumatra, arrived, for the most part between 12th and 18th February.

491. Those from Singapore had embarked there under heavy air attack on shipping of all kinds as it came to hand, and amongst a number of civilian refugees. Units had become much mixed, many personnel were separated from units and many had become separated from their equipment. It had proved impracticable to embark much equipment owing to conditions at Singapore docks, and some of what had been embarked had been lost at sea through enemy action.

492. Units from Sumatra had also suffered loss of their equipment by reason of the hasty withdrawal from aerodromes near Palembang, and still more so by circumstances at the port in South Sumatra, Oesthaven, at which they had embarked: such small amount of equipment as they had possessed in Sumatra, and which they had succeeded in removing to Oesthaven, could not be embarked and brought with them (para. 476).

493. An appreciable number of bombers and fighters had, however, reached aerodromes in the Batavia district, though a high proportion of them were unfit for operations.

494. Such was the situation in Batavia on 16th February. It was from personnel and equipment so placed that a maximum air fighting strength with ancillary services had to be evolved, and surpluses evacuated from Java. Twelve days were destined to be available for this work before the Japanese landed in Java.

R A.F. RE-ORGANISATION IN JAVA.

Situation on 16th February.

495. On the 16th February, the date of the evacuation of Sumatra, the position in Java was as follows:—

(a) *H.Q. Westgroup* (A.O.C.—A.V.M. P.C. Maltby)—A.O.C. and a nucleus staff had arrived at Soekaboemi on 14th February and were organising a H.Q. there; this was still known as Westgroup. Soekaboemi was chosen because it is centrally located in Western Java, where all Westgroup units were being located. Westgroup assumed administrative responsibility for its units on 16th February. As it was not yet ready to take operational control, this was retained by Abdair, which had assumed it on 7th February whilst units were still operating in Sumatra (para. 448).

(b) *No. 205 (F.B.) Squadron*—(Wing Commander Cuncell in Command) had arrived in Batavia on 1st February and was operating as part of the Allied Reconnaissance Group (Recgroup), using anchorages at Batavia and Oesthaven.

(c) *Nos 36 and 100 (T.B.) Squadrons*—(Squadron Leader Wilkins in Command). Aircraft had arrived on 29/30th January from Singapore for re-organisation. After being based on various aerodromes they were rejoined by their ground personnel on 15th February at Tjikampek.

(d) *No. 153 M.U.*—(G/Capt. Ridgway in command) had arrived in Java on the 9th January and moved to Djocjarta, where it was ready to start work on 15th January.

(e) *No. 152 M.U.*—(Squadron Leader S. G. Aylwin in command) had arrived in Batavia on 14th February and moved on the 17th to Poerbolingo to form a transit store.

(f) *R.A.F. Base, Batavia* (Group Captain Ridgway in command until 18th February 1942 when Air Commodore Silly relieved him). This base had been established in Batavia on the 24th January to organise the reception, sorting and despatch of personnel arriving by sea from Singapore and Sumatra and of air reinforcements from the Middle East and the United Kingdom. It also organised the reception and erecting of a number of boxed Hurricanes. By 18th February this base was administering 5 transit camps in Batavia and one at Buitenzorg. Personnel of all other units not mentioned in (a) to (e) above passed through this base for re-organisation and disposal, a total of over 12,000 being handled.

(g) *Certain A.M.E. Units* were installing radar facilities in the Batavia and Sourabaya areas.

(h) Thirty-nine crated Hurricanes had been erected in Batavia during the first ten days of February. Seventeen had proceeded to No. 266 (F) Wing in Sumatra, where a number of them were lost. Twelve were handed over by Abdair to the Dutch