

(para. 531) in the form of two Japanese convoys approaching from the north with the evident intention of landing on both sides of Batavia.

535. All available Blenheims and Hudsons were directed against that convoy, which was approaching the beaches eastward of Batavia. During the night 28th February/1st March, 26 Blenheim and 6 Hudson sorties were carried out against it from Kalidjati. The first attack found it 50 miles north of Eritanwetan, a point on the north coast about 80 miles east of Batavia: it was steaming south at high speed. Weather conditions were bad and by this time only one narrow strip was serviceable on the aerodrome. Not all pilots were sufficiently well trained to cope with the conditions: of those that were, some carried out three sorties each. There is no doubt that attacks were successful and were pressed home from a low level with great determination. When attacks began, 15 ships formed the convoy: early on 1st March, only 7 were seen anchored off the disembarkation beach which was at Eritanwetan. At least three, perhaps more of its ships, are believed to have been sunk. The larger figure may be an exaggeration, as other Japanese ships were seen on 1st March lying off some miles N.W. of the main convoy.

536. Disembarkation at Eritanwetan began at about 0100 hours on 1st March and continued during the rest of the night, despite a number of attacks by our aircraft while landing was in progress.

537. During the night, the Dutch A.O.C., General van Oyen, advised Air Vice Marshal Maltby that the bomber force at Kalidjati would be more favourably placed for opposing the enemy landings if it remained there than if it were withdrawn to aerodromes further inland amongst the hills. He did not appear to have much confidence in the weak detachments of Dutch Home Guard which were watching the river crossings on the roads leading from the enemy landing at Eritanwetan to Kalidjati, a distance of more than 50 kilometres. But he placed more reliance upon the Home Guard of about 1,000 strong, supported by about 10 armoured cars, which were located at Soebang, a town on the road leading to the aerodrome. He also stated that a Dutch battalion at Cheribon had been ordered to counter-attack the landing. The British A.O.C., therefore, decided to keep the bomber force at Kalidjati where it was best placed to resist the enemy.

538. It was decided to "stand down" bombers at Kalidjati at the end of the night's operation because—

(a) Crews had been on a stretch for 36 hours, standing by during much of the night of 27th-28th February, and then operating at high pressure throughout late afternoon and the night of 28th February-1st March. They had worked splendidly, had achieved good results, and needed a rest.

(b) There would be plenty for the crews to do at high pressure for several days to come.

(c) Previous experience had shown that Blenheims and Hudsons were particularly vulnerable if employed in the cloudless conditions which prevail during the mornings at this season, because the Japanese normally

provided their landings with strong Navy 'O' fighter cover. It was therefore decided to employ bombers daily during the late afternoons (when cloud cover could be relied upon) and under cover of darkness, and to use all available fighters, which could look after themselves, to continue the opposition during the cloudless mornings.

539. On completion of the night's work, the Station Commander at Kalidjati, Group Captain Whistondale, was instructed at 0700 hours, 1st March, to disperse his aircraft and to prepare them for further operations later in the day.

Shortly after daybreak the Dutch squadrons withdrew from Kalidjati aerodrome, under General van Oyen's orders as it later transpired, although no information that they were going to do so was given to the A.O.C. or his staff. Nor were the latter kept informed that the Dutch counter attack had failed or that the Dutch defences between the beaches and Kalidjati had not been able to put up the resistance it had been understood they would offer. It is probable that this failure was due to the fact that time had been insufficient for the wheels of co-operation of the recently established staffs (see para. 514) to get run in, and that there was a similar unestablished close touch between the aerodrome and the local Dutch Commander in Soebang. It had a disastrous sequel.

540. About 1030 hours the aerodrome was overrun by Japanese light tanks supported by infantry in lorries—part of the force which had landed at Eritanwetan some hours earlier—and the aerodrome was captured. The whole force of Blenheims, by now reduced to 8 serviceable aircraft, being fully dispersed, was captured. 4 Hudsons which were dispersed on the aerodrome managed to take off under fire of light tanks, which were by now on the aerodrome, and to reach Andir near Bandoeng.

541. Subsequent inquiry made it clear that the aerodrome defence party, a combination of Army and R.A.F. personnel, put up a stout fight and covered the withdrawal of the ground personnel of the squadrons, the majority of the Bofors guns adopting an anti-tank role. It is believed that there are no British survivors of the aerodrome defence party. The Japanese appear to have given no quarter. Later the Japanese testified to the gallant and protracted defence the aerodrome defences put up, and this was supported by the number of bodies, both British and Japanese, which were found near the aerodrome and in the woods around it by the British salvage parties employed by the Japanese after the capitulation of Java. The Dutch aerodrome defence contingent, although it had been relieved during the night by the newly arrived British defence party, remained to assist in the defence. It located posts on the roads leading to the aerodrome on the N., E., and W., the two former of which were overrun by the enemy's armoured vehicles, to deal with which it had no anti-tank weapons. The number of Dutch bodies which were later found on both sides of the roads along which the Japanese attack came, testify to the opposition it put up.

542. It has been impracticable as yet to obtain a clear picture of what exactly happened at Kalidjati. Surviving British witnesses of