

Blenheim I's serviceable, was used in an endeavour to intercept these attacks, but without success owing to the poor performance of their aircraft.

299. Day raids by the enemy took place with increasing intensity, at first by bombers alone, and later by bombers escorted by fighters. On the 1st January the first serious attack against Tengah took place, as a result of which native labour disappeared. This was to happen at all aerodromes as they became attacked, necessitating the replacement of domestic personnel by Europeans and making it increasingly difficult to repair damage to aerodrome surfaces. At all Stations on the Island dispersed accommodation was provided for personnel normally quartered at them, mobile kitchens were improvised, and, in the case of Seletar, married families were moved to alternative quarters.

300. Tengah was attacked again on the 6th January, 9th January, 12th January, 13th January and 14th January. On the 15th, the naval base was attacked, and on the 16th, aerodromes and the docks. The 17th was a particularly bad day. Attacks on aerodromes were carried out by escorted bombers, and, under their cover, low flying fighters slipped in and attacked Sembawang and Seletar. At Seletar, 2 Catalinas at their moorings were burned out and another 2 damaged. Six Blenheims at Tengah were damaged to a varying degree, whilst at Sembawang 3 Buffaloes on the ground were destroyed and 4 damaged. Attacks were carried out by some 80 bombers, of which 2 were brought down and another 4 damaged. The attack was repeated on the 18th against the naval base and the docks, and again 2 were brought down and possibly 6 damaged for the loss of 8 Buffaloes.

301. The absence of a first-class fighter aircraft prior to the second half of January was a handicap. An attempt was made to improve the performance of the Buffalo by reducing its petrol load and replacing the unsatisfactory .5 guns, which were heavy and possessed faulty interrupter gear, by .303 machine guns, but it remained inferior to the Navy O particularly in "dog-fighting".

302. Moreover, owing to the short warning of enemy raids, our fighters were frequently still climbing to meet the enemy when they were themselves attacked. A warning of at least thirty minutes was required to enable the Buffalo to reach 24,000 feet, which was the height at which the enemy formations often flew. But the successive evacuation of Observer Corps Posts on the mainland as the Japanese advanced, and the inadequate radar cover available, meant that the period of warning was almost always insufficient.

303. The Dutch Fighter Squadron in Singapore was transferred in the middle of January to Palembang (para 357), leaving only 2 squadrons of Buffaloes—Nos. 243(F) and 488(F)—for the defence of Singapore, because Nos. 21(F) R.A.A.F. and 453(F) Squadrons based at Sembawang were used primarily for Army co-operation and for escorting bombers operating by day on the West coast. Apart from other handicaps, therefore, defending fighters were outnumbered in the air by the Japanese fighters in varying degrees between 6-1 and 15-1.

304. The A.A. defences of the Island were of limited effect in countering air attacks. Bofors guns gave protection against all but a few surprise low level attacks. But the great majority of the enemy's bombing was carried out from altitudes of over 20,000 feet, where they were well above the effective range of the 3-in. guns which formed one-third of the heavy A.A. defences. At such heights only the 3.7-in. guns, of which there were only 40 for the defence of the many targets on the Island, could reach them.

Further changes in the Higher Command.

305. At the beginning of January it had been decided by the Allied authorities to unify the command of all their forces in the South West Pacific under a Supreme Allied Commander. General Sir Archibald Wavell was appointed to this post. He arrived in Singapore on 7th January and commenced to form his staff, absorbing into it the Commander-in-Chief, Far East, and his staff. On 11th January he moved to the site selected for his Supreme Allied Headquarters, South West Pacific Command, namely to Bandoeng in Java. There on 15th January he assumed command of operations throughout the S.W. Pacific, and G.H.Q. as such ceased to exist. The code name for General Wavell's H.Q. was Abdacom.

306. It is unnecessary for the purpose of this report to describe the organisation of Abdacom. Suffice it to say that it included a department, the code name of which was Abdair, whose head functioned in the dual capacity of Chief-of-the-Air-Staff at General Wavell's H.Q., and of Commander of all the Allied air forces in the S.W. Pacific. This appointment was temporarily filled by Major General Brereton, U.S. Army Air Corps, pending the arrival of Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Peirse, R.A.F., who was appointed to it and who took up the duty during the last days of January.

307. To facilitate control of air operations within the S.W. Pacific Command, the area was divided by Abdair into six Groups, of which only two need be mentioned in this Narrative:—

(i) *Westgroup*—consisting of R.A.F. Far East Command, including Units in Malaya and those in process of being transferred to the Netherlands East Indies.

(ii) *Recgroup*—consisting of all seaward reconnaissance units in S.W. Pacific Command, British, Dutch and American. Its Headquarters was in Java.

Directive to Air Forces in Malaya.

308. On the 18th January Abdacom stressed the importance of Singora as a target and issued a general directive to govern the operations of the Air Forces in Malaya. This directive stated that "protection of convoys at present takes precedence over action against other Japanese forces. If, however, 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". The directive also stressed the importance of slowing up the Japanese advance on land by attacking Singora, intervening in the land battle, and of reducing the scale of Japanese air attack.