

During the evening I called on the Governor and the C.-in-C. Far East, to whom I reported that the First Degree of Readiness had been assumed by all troops under my command.

123. The first Catalina sent out failed to make contact during the night 6-7th December. A second was despatched early on the 7th December and instructed that, if no contact was established, a search was to be made from 10 miles off the west coast of Indo-China as G.H.Q. anticipated that the convoys might be concentrating in the Koh Kong area where there was a suitable anchorage. No reports were received from this Catalina and, from information subsequently received, it would appear that this boat was shot down by the Japanese. Three Hudson aircraft sent out on the same morning similarly failed to make contact, owing to bad weather conditions which forced two of them to abandon the search.

Further Hudson reconnaissances were sent but only single merchant vessels were sighted in the Gulf of Siam at 1345 hours and 1545 hours respectively. These Hudsons were then sent on a diverging search off the Siamese Coast, and at 1750 hours one merchant vessel and one cruiser were sighted steaming 340°. The cruiser opened fire on the reconnaissance aircraft. At 1848 hours under conditions of very bad visibility, four Japanese vessels, perhaps destroyers, were seen off Singora steaming south.

It will thus be seen that for a period of nearly 30 hours after the first sighting the air reconnaissance sent out had failed to make contact with the main invasion forces, owing to bad weather.

If the report of the Catalina flying boat having been shot down by Japanese aircraft on the morning of 7th December, 1941, is correct, then this was the first act of war in the Malaya area between Japan and the British Empire. If not, then the first act was the firing on the Hudson reconnaissance aircraft by a Japanese ship on the evening of the 7th December.

124. An appreciation of the situation showed that the enemy convoy, if it was bound for Singora, could reach there about midnight 7-8th December, whereas if MATADOR was put into operation, it was unlikely that our leading troops, even if they met with no opposition or obstacles on the way, would arrive there before about 0200 hrs. 8th December. An encounter battle with our small force and lack of reserves would have been very risky, especially as the enemy was expected to include tanks in his force. There was also the complication of part of our force having, owing to the lack of M.T., to move forward by rail and subsequently be linked up with its transport in the forward area. For these reasons I informed the C.-in-C. Far East at a Conference held at Sime Road that I considered Operation MATADOR in the existing circumstances to be unsound. Subsequently at a Conference held at the Naval Base at about 2230 hrs. that night, at which both the C.-in-C. Far East and the C.-in-C. Eastern Fleet (who had just returned from Manila) were present, it was decided not to order MATADOR that night. At 2320 hrs., the Commander 3 Indian Corps was informed of this decision and was instructed to be ready to put MATADOR into effect at dawn on the 8th December if ordered to do so.

125. On the Kelantan front the probable landing beaches had been heavily wired with three belts of double apron or triple dannert wire and concrete pill-boxes had been built. In addition, large numbers of anti-personnel and anti-tank mines had been laid; but the two forward Battalions had to watch a front of over 30 miles and the average company front was over 8,000 yds.

At about 2345 hrs. on the 7th December the Beach Defence troops on Badang and Sabak beaches, the point of junction of which at the Kuala Pa'amat was about one and a half miles N.E. of the Kota Bharu aerodrome, reported ships anchoring off the coast. Shortly afterwards our beach defence artillery opened fire and the enemy ships started shelling the beaches. At about 0025 hrs. on the 8th December the leading Japanese troops landed at the junction of the Badang and Sabak beaches and by 0100 hrs. after heavy fighting had succeeded in capturing the adjacent pill-boxes manned by troops of the 3/17 Dogras. The garrisons of the latter inflicted very heavy casualties on the enemy before being themselves wiped out almost to a man. Hudson aircraft between midnight and dawn pressed home numerous attacks in the face of heavy A.A. fire from warships and transports. One of the transports which is believed to have contained tanks and artillery was set on fire, either by air attack or gunfire, or perhaps both, and prevented from discharging its cargo. As soon as the first landing took place the 2/12 Frontier Force Regt. (less one coy. West of the Kelantan River) and 73 Field Battery were ordered up from Chondong with orders to prevent any penetration towards the aerodrome with a view to a subsequent counter-attack.

In the meantime I had informed C.-in-C. Far East and the Governor that hostilities had broken out.

126. At about 0430 hrs. 8th December a Japanese air formation raided Singapore area. It had presumably come from French Indo-China, a distance of about 700 miles. The air raid alarm was sounded but Singapore was not completely blacked out when the aircraft arrived. Bombs were dropped on the Seletar and Tengah aerodromes and in the City area, but damage was slight. This was the first indication the citizens of Singapore had that war had broken out in the Far East.

127. The A.O.C. Far East, in consultation with myself, decided that the task of the Air Striking Force was to co-operate with the Army in repelling the attack on Kelantan. Accordingly the Squadrons based on the Kedah, Kuantan and Tengah aerodromes were ordered to attack the enemy ships lying off Kota Bharu at dawn. Upon arrival at Kota Bharu these aircraft were unable to find the Japanese transports, which had by then withdrawn behind the Perintian Islands some 15 miles off the Kelantan Coast. One squadron went on to Patani, where other Japanese transports were seen and attacked, but owing to fighter opposition it is doubtful if results were obtained. From now on the absence of modern escorting fighters was keenly felt. On return to the aerodromes in Kedah some of our aircraft were attacked by Japanese bombers and fighters while re-fuelling and considerable losses were sustained. The aerodromes at Alor Star, Sungei Patani, Butterworth, Penang, Kota Bharu, Gong Kedah and