

*Formation of War Council, Malaya.*

228. On the 10th December Mr. Duff Cooper, whose ministerial duties had taken him to Singapore, formed a War Council, the composition of which was as follows:—

Mr. Duff Cooper, Chairman;

H.E. the Governor of the Straits Settlements,

C.-in-C., Far East;

C.-in-C., Eastern Fleet;

G.O.C., Malaya;

A.O.C., Far East;

and later, Sir George Sansom as being responsible for propaganda and Press control, and the late Mr. Bowden as representative of the Australian Government.

This War Council met daily for deliberation, mainly in connection with the conduct of the war in Malaya.

*Events on the 11th December, 1941.*

229. On 11th December the squadrons in N. Malaya were not in a position to take offensive action. Coastal reconnaissance, however, to the north of Kuantan by sections of Hudsons, continued. Catalinas extended the search into the S. China Sea, whilst P.R. Buffaloes continued to register Japanese activities off the South Siamese coast. Enemy submarine reports necessitated the despatch of sections of Vildebeestes without result.

230. No. 21 (F) Squadron, R.A.A.F. at Ipoh had no aircraft available for tactical reconnaissance for IIIrd Corps, and so A.H.Q. issued orders that the squadron was to be brought up to strength (16 I.E.) immediately with a proportion of new pilots.

231. Eighty Japanese aircraft attacked Penang Town; no aircraft were available for its protection.

232. On the ground, in addition to advances in the N.E. and N.W., the Japanese had infiltrated down the east coast as far as Trengganu. In the north-west, where the main Japanese forces were advancing, there was considerable pressure on the 11th (Indian) Division, but no major action had been fought. Attacks from the air on our forward troops increased in weight on the 11th, though the enemy air effort was still being expended chiefly on our aerodromes.

233. To assist in the defence of Borneo the Dutch placed at Sinkawang under A.H.Q. operational control one squadron of (9) Glenn Martins and one flight of (4) Buffaloes.

*Consideration of Bomber Policy.*

234. On the evening of the 11th December it was decided to attack Singora aerodrome once more, the arrival over the objective to be just before first light on the 12th. Eight aircraft of No. 34 (B) Squadron at Tengan were detailed. The attack was unsuccessful: few aircraft got through the bad weather and others were lost as a result of it.

235. This raid was carried out as part of the current policy for bombing Japanese aerodromes in order to reduce the scale of their air activity against our ground forces. The Air Staff at A.H.Q., however, favoured the view that the correct employment of air forces was in the attack of the shipping and troop concentrations in the Singora area, where the main landing had taken place, and through

which reinforcements were still entering. They felt that the time had not yet come to concentrate on co-operation with the Army to delay the Japanese advance on the ground. Furthermore, the resources available for the bombing of aerodromes were not sufficient to produce any real effect on the Japanese effort. This was the view of the A.O.C., but he considered that he could not alter the policy which was selected to meet the wishes of the G.O.C., Malaya, who was anxious that action should be designed to reduce the scale of air attack on our troops. The G.O.C. was approached again at about this time, but reiterated that "bomber policy must give immediate relief to his troops" which, in his view, could only be achieved by bombing aerodromes. (See next paragraph.)

*236. Note by Lieut.-General A. E. Percival.*

"I have no recollection of this approach. In any case I am quite certain that there was no strong difference of opinion on the subject between the late Air Vice Marshal Pulford and myself. I would point out that there had been practically no air attacks on the ground troops up to that time, so it was very unlikely that I should press for immediate relief of the troops. At the same time I have always held, and still do, that the first essential in any campaign is to obtain some measure of control in the air. By 11th December the Japanese fighters, most of which were based on Singora aerodrome, had established control of the air over Northern Malaya. As long as they held that control the chances of our aircraft doing damage to Japanese shipping and troop concentrations in the Singora area was remote. Before that could be done it was necessary to regain some measure of air control. The only chance of doing this was to destroy a number of enemy fighters on their congested and weakly defended aerodrome. Therefore, if I did press for an attack on the aerodrome, it would have been for that reason and not to provide immediate relief for the ground troops."

237. The G.O.C.'s point of view was confirmed by G.H.Q. who, on 12th December, issued a War Instruction, the relevant paragraph of which read:—

"For the present, assistance to the 11th Ind. Division is to take precedence over other R.A.F. offensive tasks."

On the 12th December the C.-in-C. visited A.H.Q. and re-emphasised the importance of providing support to the Army in the north-west.

*Provision of Support for the Army.*

238. On the 11th/12th December the land position in the north-west worsened. The 11th (Indian) Division was attacked in and forced to evacuate the Jitra position, and Krohcol came under heavier attacks. The withdrawal of the latter force would have had grave consequences as it would have exposed the communications of the 11th Indian Division and thus necessitated a general withdrawal out of Kedah province.

239. The only aircraft still available in the area for direct support of the Army were two or three Buffaloes of No. 21 (F) Squadron, R.A.A.F., at Ipoh; the rest of the squadron was being re-equipped at Singapore. The