

same day the C.-in-C. received news of a landing at Kuantan (in para. 205). These two events must have decided the C.-in-C. to abandon the Singora operation and to close Kuantan on the 10th December.

217. Had the C.-in-C. notified his change of plan, it is conceivable that A.H.Q. might have moved No. 453 (F) Squadron to Kuantan where it could have stood by at call: R/T inter-communication between the two ships and the squadron aircraft had already been arranged. Some effective support might then have been given. Actually no call for assistance was sent until the Japanese attack had been pressed home, by which time intervention from Singapore was impossible.

218. It also transpired later that the ships had been attacked by a force of high level bombers backed by a large number of torpedo-bombers, that both ships had suffered a number of hits by torpedoes and had thus been sunk. The sinking of these two ships was a serious shock to the morale of everybody in the Far East. Their loss, combined with the American losses at Pearl Harbour, gave the Japanese an undisputed command of the sea in Malayan waters. The reactions of this state of affairs upon the subsequent dispositions of air units, with particular reference to the share they were able to take in the land battle, will become clear later in the narrative.

Arrival of Dutch Reinforcements.

219. During the morning of 9th December the three Dutch Bomber (22 Glenn Martins) and one Fighter (9 Buffaloes) Squadrons arrived at Sembawang and Kallang respectively in accordance with the mutual reinforcement plan. It was found that the Dutch bomber crews were not trained in night flying, and so one squadron (9 aircraft) was sent back to the N.E.I. to train; the intention being, on its return, to send back the other squadrons in succession for the same purpose. As A.H.Q. had already decided not to use British bomber squadrons in their bombing role by day until fighter escort or cover could be provided (see para. 198), it was obviously essential to apply the decision to the Dutch bomber squadrons, particularly as their Glenn Martins were slower and no better protected than the British Blenheims.

Air Forces driven out of Aerodromes in N.W. Malaya.

220. Meanwhile in Northern Malaya it was evident that the main line of advance by the Japanese Army was from Singora across Malaya to the Alor Star area. The advanced troops of the 11th (Indian) Division were still holding a position near the frontier but the vital Ledge position on the Kroh-Patani road had not yet been secured.

221. Bombing of our aerodromes in N.W. Malaya continued during the 10th December and A.H.Q. decided that the area must be evacuated. From Butterworth No. 62 (B) Squadron (reduced to 2 aircraft) was evacuated to Taiping; No. 21 (F) Squadron R.A.A.F. (6 repairable aircraft) to Ipoh, where 8 Bofors guns had by now been installed, leaving No. 27 (NF) Squadron (nil serviceability) still at Butterworth. All the unserviceable aircraft of Nos. 27, 34 (B) and 62 (B) Squadrons which were capable of flying were flown to Singapore for repair.

222. The withdrawal of the ground parties was carried out under difficult circumstances.

Units had been subjected to severe and constant bombing and machine gun attacks on scantily defended aerodromes where they saw no effective means of hitting back, and aircraft were remorselessly destroyed on the ground without replacement. The apparent opportuneness of the enemy's attacks (see para. 183) and pernicious rumours of disaster in the land fighting added their influence. There was no senior officer at Butterworth with sufficient weight to take control, and some of the personnel of No. 21 (F) Squadron R.A.A.F. and No. 27 (NF) Squadron R.A.F., both of which had already been driven out of Sungai Patani, did not behave at all steadily. Other units, however, maintained their order.

223. The difficulties of all units was intensified by the wholesale, but understandable, disappearance of unenlisted native followers—cooks, M.T. drivers, sanitary personnel etc.—and only improvised arrangements were possible for replacing them by European personnel at the dislocation of the latter's normal work.

The defection of labour spread to the railway area.

224. Withdrawals were nevertheless effected successfully and, in the case of units other than those mentioned above, in good order. It was due to the untiring energy of a small party headed by Flight Lieutenant R. D. I. Scott, who himself drove a locomotive, that much R.A.F. equipment was removed south.

225. In an endeavour to improve repair and maintenance facilities in N.W. Malaya, an R. & S U. was formed at this time from No. 151 M.U. at Seletar and was ordered to Taiping; on arrival it detached a Mobile Salvage Section to Butterworth to assist in the work of salving material.

226. Meanwhile, during the commencement of the denial schemes at Alor Star on 10th December, the sight of large fires and the sounds of explosions in their rear had caused some concern amongst our forward troops. Orders were therefore issued to the Commander, Norgroup, that no fires were to be started and no demolitions by explosives carried out. Buildings were to be damaged only, petrol and oil run to waste, and the demolition of aerodromes with the help of explosives was to be left to Corps Royal Engineers to co-ordinate with the operations of our troops.

Scale of Enemy Air Effort.

227. It was computed that on the 8th, 9th and 10th December the Japanese had used a daily average of over 120 aircraft in N. Malaya, mostly against R.A.F. aerodromes. Fighters and some bombers were based on S.E. Siam, the majority of bombers on Indo-China. It was estimated that over 100 aircraft were based in the Singora—Patani area and at least 280 in Indo-China. Types identified were:—

Fighters—Navy "O".

Twin-Engine Bombers—Navy 96 and Army 97.

Dive Bombers—Junkers 87N (Japanese version).