

with the Hurricanes, in the defence of Singapore. By the 30th January, the number of Buffaloes had so dwindled that all (6) were concentrated in No. 453 (F) Squadron. Nos. 21 R.A.A.F. and 243 (F) Squadron personnel were evacuated, whilst No. 488 (F) Squadron was retained to service the Hurricanes, together with a few of the pilots of all these squadrons to replace casualties.

*Effect of Japanese Advance on R.A.F. dispositions.*

*Decision to Transfer Units to N.E.I.*

355. The advance of the Japanese into Johore meant that our aircraft had to operate from the four aerodromes on Singapore Island. Thus a dangerous congestion of aircraft on the ground had come about. The dangers of congestion increased as enemy air attacks steadily grew in violence during January. When expected aircraft reinforcements should begin to arrive from the United Kingdom and the Middle East during January there were prospects of still greater congestion. Dispersal beyond the confines of Singapore Island would then become imperative.

356. During December, the first preparations had been made for operating R.A.F. Units in the N.E.I. (paras. 256-258). On 4th January No. 153 M.U. was moved to Java, and on 16th January No. 225 (B) Group Headquarters was formed in Singapore and moved to Sumatra two days later in order to make preliminary arrangements for operating bombers from aerodromes in that island.

357. By mid-January it was clear to A.H.Q. that the transfer of Units must be accelerated even though facilities for their operation and maintenance in Sumatra were not yet ready. In accordance with a prior agreement made with the Dutch Army Air Force, that Dutch Units should be moved first, a progressive withdrawal now took place from Singapore:—

*19th January*—Dutch Buffalo Squadron at Kallang was withdrawn. On arrival in the N.E.I. it reverted to Dutch control. Its main function was to maintain, as requisite, fighter cover required for future convoys through Banka Straits.

*22nd January*—2 Dutch Glenn Martin Squadrons withdrew to Java and reverted to Dutch control.

*23rd-27th January*—Nos. 27 (NF), 34 (B) and 62 (B) Squadrons, except for small aircraft handling parties, were transferred to Sumatra, as were also the main parties of Nos. 1 and 8 (GR) Squadrons, R.A.A.F.

358. Concurrently with the above moves:—

(a) No. 151 M.U. was ordered to prepare to move to Java, less a party approximately 100 strong who were to remain and salvage and pack equipment.

(b) Base Accounts and Record Offices were ordered to Java.

(c) Station H.Q. Sembawang was ordered to Sumatra.

359. Each Unit was instructed to proceed with 30 days' rations, certain barrack stores and 28 days' pack-up of aircraft equipment. All ground personnel proceeded by sea. It will be seen later that, owing to confusion at the Singapore docks caused primarily by bombing, and owing to enemy attacks on shipping

en route, the arrangements made for the transfer of our units to the N.E.I. were badly disorganised. Dutch Lodestars helped in these moves. Their assistance was invaluable.

360. When the decision was taken on 27th January that it would be necessary for the army to withdraw to Singapore Island, it became evident at once that one aerodrome only, Kallang, would shortly be available for use. The other three on the Island, Tengah, Sembawang and Seletar, were sited on its northern coastline and would soon be exposed to observed artillery fire from Johore at ranges as close as 1,500-2,000 yards: it would not be practicable to operate aircraft from them for long. Unfortunately Kallang itself was rapidly becoming of limited use. Its surface, a crust of marl laid on a salt marsh, was pock-marked with bomb craters which were most difficult to fill. Extension was impracticable, huddled as it was between the sea and the built-up area of Singapore Town. Consequently, further transfer of squadrons to the N.E.I. now became inevitable.

361. On the 27th January No. 8 (GR) Squadron, R.A.A.F., was sent to Sumatra, and No. 205 (FB) Squadron on the 28th to Java. The latter on arrival in Java, was placed by Abdair under Dutch control as part of Recgroup. No. 205 Squadron left 1 Catalina at Seletar until the 30th January in connection with the arrival of a further convoy. On the 29th and 30th January the remaining G.R. Squadron (No. 1, R.A.A.F.) was transferred also to Sumatra.

362. Thus by the end of the month the whole of the bomber force had been compelled to withdraw to air bases in Southern Sumatra, where they were now organising with the intention of providing air support from that quarter to the army invested in Singapore.

363. On the 31st January, apart from fighters, there were left in Singapore only 3 Swordfish. They were still under Army control for coast defence spotting purposes, as H.Q. M.C. at this stage still did not rule out the possibility of a landing from the sea on Singapore Island itself.

*Changes in appointments in the Command.*

To digress for a moment from the narrative:—

364. With the arrival of reinforcements a reorganisation of senior appointments became practicable in the second half of January.

365. About 17th January Group Captain G. E. Nicholletts replaced Group Captain A. G. Bishop as Group Captain, Operations, at A.H.Q., the latter having been appointed to command the Bomber Group (No. 225) in Sumatra.

366. About 19th January Air Commodore W.E. Staton arrived and began taking the duties of S.A.S.O. from Air Commodore B. J. Silly. His recent and personal experience of air operations over Europe was to prove of great value to the Command.

367. On the 29th January Air Commodores S. F. Vincent and H. J. F. Hunter arrived from the U.K. They had been sent by the Air Ministry as Commanders designate of Fighter and Bomber Groups respectively. Air Commodore Hunter was sent to Sumatra on 1st February, to command No. 225 Group which had already formed at Palembang.