

tended to decrease the effectiveness of our anti-aircraft fire. Nevertheless, casualties were inflicted on the air formations, though these were difficult to assess, and some of the formations were broken up.

As regards Passive Air Defence, some modifications in the system were introduced to avoid the waste of valuable time which took place during periods of Air Raid Warnings.

401. On our side, great hopes had been placed in the Hurricane Fighters which reached Singapore on the 13th January. (See Section XXXVI). It was hoped that the superior quality of these machines might enable us to regain at least some measure of air superiority over the Japanese. Such, however, did not prove to be the case. In the first place the machines, which were not of the most modern type, did not prove to be superior to the Japanese Navy Zero Fighters. Secondly, the pilots lacked knowledge of the Malayan climatic and geographical conditions. As with the Army reinforcements, there was no time to accustom them to the local conditions. As a result, several of these Hurricanes were lost daily, some being brought down in battle, some accidentally lost, while a few were destroyed or damaged on the ground.

402. Our Bomber and Reconnaissance machines also continued to be a wasting asset. All available aircraft, including the torpedo-bombers, were used for daily East and West Coast reconnaissances, for reconnaissance of the roads behind the enemy lines and for attacks on enemy aerodromes and troop concentrations. These attacks, however, were so weak that comparatively little damage could be done. By the 26th January our Air Striking Force in Malaya had, as recorded in Section XXXVIII, to all intents and purposes ceased to exist. A few attacks were made late in January on enemy aerodromes by Blenheims from Sumatra and Flying Fortresses from Java, but they were not heavy enough to affect the scale of the Japanese air effort.

403. I wish here to pay tribute to the gallant air crews who throughout the later stages of the Malayan campaign went unflinchingly to almost certain death in obsolete aircraft which should have been replaced many years before, and also to those members of the Malayan Volunteer Air Force who, with no protection of any sort, continued to carry out reconnaissances in Moths and other light aircraft with complete disregard for their own safety.

404. On the 26th January I telegraphed to the Supreme Commander South-West Pacific as under:—

“With our depleted strength it is difficult to withstand the enemy's ground pressure combined with continuous and practically unopposed air activity. We are fighting all the way but may be driven back into the island within a week. We shall then be subjected to a very heavy scale of air attack unless we can maintain sufficient fighters on the island and drive enemy from Southern Malaya aerodromes. I know that you are doing everything possible to reduce enemy air strength which is at present the dominating factor.”

405. On the 30th January, 1942, it was decided to withdraw the whole of our Air Force, except one fighter squadron, to bases in the

Netherlands East Indies. This decision was made by the Supreme Commander South-West Pacific after consultation with the Air Officer Commanding Far East. At my urgent request, one fighter squadron was left at Singapore. Some heavy and light anti-aircraft artillery was also despatched from Singapore to Sumatra.

Certain preliminary steps had already been taken in anticipation of these moves. Unfortunately several ships carrying Air Force equipment were sunk before reaching their destination.

SECTION XLI.—FURTHER REINFORCEMENTS.

406. *Royal Navy*.—It was now known that it was not intended to send any additional naval forces to Malayan waters. It was also known that a small British fleet was assembling at Ceylon for operations in the eastern waters of the Indian Ocean, that a strong American fleet was assembling in the South Pacific with a view to keeping open communications with Australia, and that some British (including Australian) and American ships were concentrating with the Dutch Fleet for the defence of Java, which was already being threatened by a Japanese thrust south of Borneo. Detachments of Royal Marine survivors from H.M.Ss. “Prince of Wales” and “Repulse” had joined up with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.

407. *Army*.—The following reinforcements reached Singapore during the latter half of January.

On or about the 22nd January.—The 44 Indian Infantry Brigade with attached troops and 7,000 Indian reinforcements. The 44 Brigade was a sister brigade to the 45 Brigade which had fought at Muar. It was equally raw and only semi-trained. It was commanded by Brigadier Ballantine. With a view to giving it an opportunity for further training, I decided to retain it on Singapore Island and allotted it accommodation in the south-western area.

The 7,000 Indian reinforcements were extremely raw and untrained and included very few non-commissioned officers or even potential leaders which were so badly needed in our Indian units. After consultation with the Commander 3 Indian Corps I decided that it would be unwise to draft more than a proportion of these to the Indian units. The remainder were retained at the reinforcement camps for further training.

24th January.—An Australian Machine-Gun Battalion and about 2,000 Australian Reinforcements. As the terrain on the mainland was not suitable for machine-guns, the Machine-Gun Battalion was allotted accommodation in the Naval Base area and ordered to prepare machine-gun positions on the north coast of the island.

Many of the 2,000 Australian reinforcements had only had a few weeks' training. They had not been in the Army long enough to learn true discipline.

29th January.—The 18 British Division (Major-General M. Beckwith-Smith) less 53 Infantry Brigade Group and Machine-Gun, Reconnaissance, Anti-Tank and other units. These, with exception of the 53 Brigade Group already arrived, were due in a later convoy. This division had left the United Kingdom the previous October for the Middle East. It had