

The party was then withdrawn to Port Swettenham. With a little more persistence even greater results might perhaps have been obtained.

217. It was hoped to repeat and develop this enterprise which undoubtedly offered great possibilities. That it was not found possible to do so was due to the lack of sea transport which resulted in the main from losses suffered as a result of the aerial supremacy which the enemy had established on this coast. The last hope disappeared when on the 1st January five "Eureka" fast coastal vessels which the Army had purchased from America and handed over to the Navy to operate were attacked by aircraft on their way north to Port Swettenham and either sunk or driven ashore. On the 30th December also H.M.S. "Kudat", the base depot ship for this force, was bombed and sunk in the harbour of Port Swettenham.

218. *Air Operations.*—The 23rd December was the first day of intensive air action against our troops in the forward areas. Up till then the enemy's air effort had been concentrated chiefly against our aerodromes. On that day heavy attacks were made against troops in bivouac areas and on the move and against Ipoh railway station. These attacks continued for the rest of the month. Our own troops were almost entirely without air support as all the remaining fighters except for a few which operated from Kuala Lumpur had by now been withdrawn to the Singapore area.

Air attacks against the Singapore area were not renewed until the 29th December when the first of a succession of night attacks took place.

Our own Air Striking Force, which seldom consisted of more than half a dozen machines, carried out night attacks against enemy occupied aerodromes. The Sungei Patani Aerodrome in particular, where over 100 Japanese aircraft had been located, was attacked on several occasions. In addition, aerial reconnaissances were carried out daily off both the east and west coasts as far as the availability of aircraft permitted.

The C.-in-C. Far East laid down as a policy that convoy protection work must in the future take precedence over all other calls on the Air Force.

219. *Strategy.*—In a telephone conversation which I had with the Commander 3 Indian Corps at 1100 hrs. 29th December it was agreed that it would be better to fight the enemy in the positions then occupied rather than carry out any rearward movements in the immediate future, although this in no way altered the general instructions.

On the same day I informed the Commanders 3 Indian Corps and A.I.F. that I had arranged with the Director of Public Works to form Works Groups in selected areas under State engineers who would report to them for orders. The object of this was to prepare a series of obstacles, especially anti-tank obstacles, in great depth on the probable line of the enemy's advance. The idea was that the officers of the Public Works Department should be given outline instructions and be left to carry out the work themselves with civil labour.

On the 28th December the Commander Singapore Fortress was ordered to prepare schemes for the destruction of the Causeway which connected Singapore Island with the mainland.

SECTION XXV.—THE BORNEO AND CHRISTMAS ISLAND OPERATIONS.

220. *Sarawak and Brunei.*—On the 13th December the Miri detachment, having completed its task, left for Kuching in H.M.S. "Lipis".

At 0330 hrs. on the 16th December Japanese troops landed at Seria. Some of them proceeded by road to Belait. Early on the 22nd they reached Danau.

On the 19th and 20th December Japanese aircraft attacked the aerodrome at Kuching and also dropped bombs on and machine-gunned the town. Many of the inhabitants evacuated. On the 23rd December the O.C. Troops reported that there had been a complete break in civil labour.

221. On the evening of the 23rd December two Japanese cruisers and seven transports arrived off the mouth of the River Santubong near Kuching and landings were made during the night. Before arrival the convoy had been attacked by submarines of the Royal Dutch Navy and three transports and one tanker were reported to have been sunk or disabled. The Japanese troops advanced in landing craft up the waterways leading to Kuching and were engaged by our forward troops at Pending and elsewhere. Later in the day, the situation having become confused, the forward troops were withdrawn to the vicinity of the aerodrome. In the meantime, in accordance with the instructions received from Singapore, the denial scheme on the aerodrome had been put into operation.

222. At 1305 hrs. 24th December I received a wireless message from O.C. Troops Sarawak and Brunei to the effect that, as the aerodrome was no longer required by our Air Force, he presumed that he was at liberty to withdraw his force into Dutch West Borneo. I replied to the effect that he should fight the enemy for as long as possible, and that subsequently he should act in the best interest of West Borneo as a whole, withdrawing if necessary into Dutch territory.

223. On the evening of the 24th December the enemy ships off Kuching were attacked by a small force of Blenheim Bombers.

After some sharp fighting in the vicinity of the aerodrome on the 25th December contact was broken off in the evening and withdrawal to Dutch West Borneo via the 50 mile jungle path was effected. All wheeled transport had to be abandoned. The force arrived at Sanggau in Dutch Borneo on the 29th December and came under orders of the local Dutch commander. Arrangements were made by Headquarters Malaya Command to drop supplies and ammunition on the aerodrome at Sinkawang for this force.

224. The Japanese arrived at the Sarawak—Dutch West Borneo frontier on the 7th January, 1942, but were held there by the 2/15 Punjab Regt. until the 18th January. Much bitter fighting took place here in the endeavour to prevent the enemy reaching the large Dutch aerodrome at Sanggau. Eventually the aerodrome, installations and bomb stores were successfully demolished. A rearguard action was then carried out to Nyabang, where contact with the enemy was lost.

225. Subsequently it was decided to move to the South Coast of Borneo in two columns,