

all visibility from aircrews flying through them, whose skill and endurance they test to the utmost: navigation through them is fraught with great risk. Unfortunately at this season several such thunderstorms were certain to be encountered during the course of every long flight.

#### *State of Aerodromes.*

399. Up to this date, 18th January, the policy of A.H.Q. had been to develop aerodromes in Northern Sumatra as refuelling grounds for reinforcements arriving by air from India, and as advanced landing grounds for operational use on the flank of Malaya. In consequence of this policy constructional work on them had been given priority over that at aerodromes in the south, and it was the aerodromes in the south of Sumatra which would now be wanted for our squadrons to use as their main bases. By the middle of January small refuelling and re-arming parties of varying strengths, up to 50, had been established at the following places:—

- (a) Sabang (also for Flying Boats),
- (b) Lho'nga.
- (c) Medan Civil Aerodrome (a large military aerodrome was also being constructed in this area);
- (d) Pakanbaroe,
- (e) Padang;
- (f) Palembang—at the civil aerodrome known as P.I;
- (g) a secret military aerodrome 20 miles south of Palembang known as P.II.

In addition there was a strip at Lahat, and a field under construction by the Dutch at Oesthaven. Wing Commander Duncan, Squadron Leader Briggs and Squadron Leader Wightwick (A.M.W.D.) were already located at Palembang for liaison with the Dutch in connection with the development of these aerodromes.

#### DEVELOPMENT OF R.A.F. ORGANISATION IN SUMATRA.

400. A H.Q. therefore decided, on the 16th January, that the time was becoming imminent when bomber units would have to be transferred to Sumatra. For this reason H.Q. 225 (B) Group was formed at Singapore on this date, and was sent to Palembang in Sumatra on the 18th January, 1942. Initial appointments made by A.H.Q. were:—

Group Commander	Group Captain A. G Bishop.
S.A.S.O. ...	Wing Commander K Powell.
S.A.O.	Squadron Leader Briggs.
A.M.W.D	Squadron Leader Wightwick

#### *Instructions to No. 225 (B) Group.*

401. On formation of the Group Headquarters, the A.O.C instructed the Group Commander:—

- (a) to establish a Bomber Group H.Q.;
- (b) to accelerate, to the maximum, arrangements for operating bomber units from Sumatra; such arrangements not only to provide for all bombers then in Singapore but also for the following reinforcements:—

- (i) Nos. 84 and 211 (B) Squadrons (Blenheim IV) then en route from Middle East;

- (ii) Hudson III's en route from U.K. which were to re-equip in succession No. 62 (B) Squadron, and Nos. 1 and 8 (GR) Squadrons, R.A.A.F.

402 The A.O.C also decided that, dependent on the situation, when bomber units were located in Sumatra, either Group H.Q. would be responsible for the selection of targets (within the policy laid down by A.H.Q.) and for the briefing of squadrons, or alternatively squadrons would proceed to bases in Singapore and be briefed there under A.H.Q. arrangements. To provide for this latter arrangement, refuelling and re-arming parties for bomber units would be maintained at aerodromes on Singapore Island. At this time it was fairly confidently anticipated that the situation on the ground in Malaya would be stabilised and that a bridge-head would be held of sufficient area for the deployment of reinforcements preparatory to a counter-offensive being undertaken (para. 322). That it would be necessary later to transfer fighter squadrons from Singapore was not at this time "on the cards".

#### *Development by No. 225 (B) Group H.Q.*

403. Group Captain Bishop, on arrival at Palembang on the 18th January, decided to:—

- (a) Establish Group Headquarters at Palembang.
- (b) Expand and accelerate the provision of accommodation at P.I and P.II aerodromes, and improve aircraft dispersal at each.
- (c) Develop Lahat for use by bombers.
- (d) Reconnoitre the area to the south of Palembang for the selection and development of further landing strips.

At the same time he put in hand reconnaissance for siting an Ammunition Park, an Air Stores Park and an R.S.U., which were to be provided for the maintenance of the Force

A.H.Q. were informed and approved of these decisions.

404. P.I. was, at that time, a large 'L' shaped aerodrome with two hard runways. It possessed dispersal arrangements which were at once considerably developed by Dutch Engineers. There was no accommodation for personnel nearer than the town, 8 miles away.

P.II was a huge natural field about 10 miles in perimeter with good natural cover for aircraft. It was not visible from the road, and its construction had been successfully kept secret from the Japanese. Similar clearings in the neighbourhood made it difficult for air crews to locate it from the air, even by those who had been briefed as to its location. Great care was taken to preserve its secrecy and, although at one time more than 100 aircraft were based on it, Japanese reconnaissance, which frequently flew over it by day and night, never located it. Communications between Palembang and P.II were handicapped because there was no bridge over the Palembang river, on the north of which lay Palembang town and P.I, the river had to be crossed by a small ferry which had a limit of 4 to 6 vehicles. The Dutch put in hand the construction of huts for accommodation of personnel at P.II aerodrome.