

area that might have been used, was virtually undefended and was in a very exposed situation near the coast.

191. During the day, various reports of suspicious vessels off the East coast had been received, necessitating reconnaissances which, however, were all negative.

*Summary of situation on the evening of the 8th December, 1941.*

192. That night (8th-9th December) the situation was, therefore:—

(a) The Japanese expedition to capture the Kota Bahru aerodrome area was succeeding; and the use of aerodromes in this area was now denied to the R.A.F. Our troops in the area were thus without close air support.

(b) The Japanese main forces were landing unimpeded in the Singora-Patani area, covered by air operations against our aerodromes in N. Malaya. Their advance towards the north-west frontier of Malaya had already begun, and our forward troops had made contact. The shipping at Singora had not been attacked, partly because the aircraft at Kota Bahru were fully engaged locally by the time it was reported, and partly because heavy Japanese air attacks against our virtually undefended aerodromes in N.W. Malaya had seriously reduced the squadrons available on them.

(c) The Japanese Air Force was already operating in strength from Singora aerodrome. From the narrow view point of the Royal Air Force, it was apparent that the cancellation of Operation "Matador" was to have a far-reaching influence on air operations in Northern Malaya.

*Air Operations in North West Malaya—9th December, 1941.*

193. In the N.W. aerodrome area, enemy air attacks continued, and early on the 9th No. 62 (B) Squadron was forced to withdraw from Alor Star to Butterworth.

194. To counter these attacks, it was decided to destroy the Japanese fighters based on Singora. Two attacks against this aerodrome were planned. The first was to be made by the aircraft of No. 34 (B) Squadron still located at Tengah, reinforced by No. 60 (B) Squadron, which had by now moved there from Kuantan. No. 34 Squadron was ordered to land at Butterworth, re-arm and take part in the second attack. The second attack was to be made by all available aircraft of Nos. 34 and 62 Squadrons, from Butterworth. A.H.Q. issued orders that both attacks were to be escorted by the maximum strength of Buffaloes from No. 21 (F) Squadron, R.A.A.F.

195. The first attack, consisting of 6 Blenheims of No. 34 (B) Squadron, three of which were manned by crews of 60 (B) Squadron, was made in the early afternoon of the 9th. Heavy fighter opposition was encountered, and 3 of our aircraft were shot down. Results of the attack were not observed, but returning crews claimed that, at least, a congested aerodrome had been hit.

196. No fighter escort had been available. No. 21 (F) Squadron, R.A.A.F., had two aircraft serviceable only, which were on tactical reconnaissances for IIIrd Corps. It may be noted here that these aircraft, on the morning

of the 9th reported the presence of Japanese light tanks, which were observed at Ban Sadao moving south.

197. The second attack—a mixed force of Blenheim I's and IV's from Nos. 34 (B) and 62 (B) Squadrons—due off from Butterworth at 1700 hours, was never launched. Just before the time of "take-off," Japanese bombers carried out a high bombing attack followed up by machine-gunning aircraft on the ground. One aircraft only of No. 62 (B) Squadron—Captain, Flight Lieutenant A. S. K. Scarf—took off as the attack was developing; the remaining aircraft on the ground were all rendered unserviceable. Flight Lieutenant Scarf circled the aerodrome until it became apparent that no other aircraft were joining him. He then proceeded to Singora and pressed home his attack. During his approach to the target and subsequent get-away, A.A. fire and heavy fighter opposition were encountered, and Flight Lieutenant Scarf was mortally wounded. This very gallant officer felt unable to make the longer journey back to Butterworth, but managed to retain consciousness until he reached Alor Star, where he crash-landed without injury to his crew. He died in hospital that evening. He was subsequently awarded the Victoria Cross.

198. As a result of this day's operations against Singora, A.H.Q. decided that no more bombing by day should take place over land until such time as fighter escort could be provided.

*Preparations for withdrawal from the N.W.*

199. At 0900 hours on the 9th, Adv. H.Q. Norgroup opened at Bukit Martajim (near Butterworth), but it became evident that the evacuation of the N.W. bases could not long be delayed. Up till this time there had been no A.A. defences at Butterworth. Eight Bofors guns arrived on the afternoon of the 9th but their presence was not, of course, any deterrent to high flying bombers.

200. A.H.Q., therefore, issued instructions that all airfields on the mainland to the southward were to be got ready for immediate operational use. At the same time, orders were issued to do everything possible to improve dispersal arrangements at aerodromes on Singapore Island.

*Evacuation of Kuantan Aerodrome on 9th December.*

201. During the night of the 8-9th there were many reports of further landings on the East coast, fears of which were to persist throughout the brief campaign and cause many hours to be spent on coastal reconnaissance.

202. On the 9th, two pairs of Vildebeestes were sent at 0300 hours to sweep the coast north and south of Kuantan. During the day, 6 Hudsons were employed on similar duties whilst Catalinas extended the search area into the South China Sea. The remainder of the aircraft at Kuantan stood by to attack whatever might be found. Confirmation was obtained of the large concentration of ships of all natures unloading in the Singora-Patani area, but no threat of further seaborne attack was discovered although 3 Vildebeestes were despatched on a false report to attack a ship 60 miles east of Kuantan.