

troops, as I considered it would be necessary to stimulate them rather than the British. Through information that has reached me subsequent to the outbreak of war I believe it had the effect it was meant to. The order is given in Appendix M.

#### *Approach of the First Enemy Expedition.*

98. About 1400 hours on the 6th December I received information that an air reconnaissance had sighted two Japanese convoys escorted by warships about 80 miles East-South-East of Pulo Obi, an island off the Southern point of Indo-China, steaming West. One convoy consisted of 22 10,000-ton merchant vessels escorted by one battleship, probably the *Kongoo*, five cruisers and seven destroyers; the other of 21 merchant ships escorted by two cruisers and ten destroyers. Further West, one Japanese cruiser and three 10,000-ton merchant ships had been sighted steering North-West. I consulted with Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton and Admiral Palliser, Sir Tom Phillips' Chief of Staff, and we concluded that the probability was that the convoy would not continue its course due West, which would have brought it on to the Kra Isthmus, but that it would follow the first four vessels and round Cambodia Point. It was pointed out that there was a good anchorage on the West Coast of Indo-China at Koh Tron, which they might be making for as the next step towards Siam.

Bearing in mind the policy of avoiding war with Japan if possible—a policy which had been reaffirmed by the Chiefs of Staff as recently as the 29th November—and the situation in the United States with the Kurusu talks still going on in Washington, I decided that I would not be justified in ordering "Matador" on this information, but orders were issued to bring all forces to the first, i.e., the highest, degree of readiness. I also impressed upon the Air Officer Commanding the urgent necessity for maintaining contact with the convoy, a point which he had already realised.

The location of these forces by Hudsons of No. 1 Royal Australian Air Force Squadron, based on Kota Bharu, was a particularly good piece of work in view of their being at the limit of their patrolling range, over 300 miles from the Malayan Coast. This same factor of distance, however, made it impossible for them to remain in contact until relieved, but a Catalina Flying-boat was despatched to shadow the convoy during the night. The Air Officer Commanding also ordered a reconnaissance by Hudsons starting early on the 7th December, fanning out from Kota Bharu on to the last known bearings of the convoy. No signal was received from the Catalina, and, from information received later, it is almost certain it was shot down. A second Catalina failed to make contact with the convoy. On the morning of the 7th December, visibility East and North-East from Kota Bharu was good. The reconnaissance found no ships in the area between Kota Bharu and the Southern end of Indo-China, thus confirming the supposition that the convoy had rounded Cambodia Point, and had followed the four leading ships North-North-West into the Gulf of Siam. In this Gulf the visibility was very bad and no positive information was received from this area until the evening, when a report was received that a Hudson had seen, through low clouds, three

small Japanese ships which were then passing Singora and heading south. This information reached me about 2100 hours. I met General Percival and we proceeded together to the Naval Base; I decided not to order "Matador"; the main reason being that at least 24 hours start was required before the anticipated time of a Japanese landing and this was most unlikely to be available, should the 3 ships seen turn out to be part of a Japanese expedition. Further, the conditions for reconnaissance were bad, on the information then available there could be no certainty that the Japanese were about to open hostilities, and on more than one occasion the British Minister to Thailand had stressed the serious consequences that would ensue should we be the first to break Thai neutrality. (See also paragraph 51 above.)

It is pertinent to record that, until the Japanese had committed some definite act of hostility against the United States, the Dutch or ourselves, permission had not been given to attack a Japanese expedition at sea.

#### XI.—THE START OF HOSTILITIES.

##### *The Opening Day.*

99. Clear evidence that the Japanese had, in fact, taken the plunge into hostilities was soon forthcoming when, at 0130 hours on Monday, the 8th December, the Japanese started to land from about ten ships at Kota Bharu. I received this news at about 0200 hours in my office at the Naval Base, Singapore, and the necessary steps were at once taken to put everything on a war footing, including the internment of Japanese. Later on, reports were received that the Japanese were landing large forces at Singora and Patani in the Southern part of the Kra Isthmus.

At 0300 hours on the 8th December Singapore was attacked by Japanese bombers, which, in all probability, came from Southern Indo-China. In one case, at any rate, they came over in a formation of nine at a height of between 12,000 and 14,000 feet, without dropping any bombs, apparently with the object of drawing the searchlights and A.A. guns away from a few other aircraft which, flying at 4,000 to 5,000 feet, attacked objectives on Singapore Island, mainly aerodromes, with practically no results. An attack was also made on the Eastern part of Singapore Harbour, possibly in mistake for the aerodrome at Kallang; this attack caused a number of casualties, killing about sixty, mostly Chinese.

The observation system worked satisfactorily, and thirty minutes' warning of the approach of Japanese aircraft was received at my headquarters. For some reason that I never ascertained, the Headquarters of the A.R.P. organisation had not been manned, and it was only a few minutes before bombs were dropping on Singapore that contact was made by Fighter Group Headquarters and the sirens sounded giving the warning for black-out. In my opinion, the absence of black-out had but little effect, since there was a bright full moon, and the coastline and most of Singapore must have shown up very clearly.

Apart from this failure in Civil A.R.P., there was no tactical surprise, since as has been stated above, the troops were all in readiness, and the black-out was carried out at all Naval, Army and Air Force establishments.