

In Java, 17th February-8th March

About 32 enemy aircraft were shot down (8 by No. 605 Squadron and 24 by 232 Squadron) of which about 15 were destroyed during the closing days in Java, 2nd to 8th March. Heavy casualties were also inflicted on enemy troops which landed on Java at Eritanwetan and Merak, particularly the former.

During the combined periods about 60 Hurricanes were lost, chiefly on the ground, by enemy attacks on our inadequately defended aerodromes.

PROGRESS OF EVACUATION.

570. Throughout the period under review, evacuation of surplus R.A.F. personnel proceeded as fast as shipping permitted. Units were concentrated for evacuation as they became surplus to requirements. They were kept together as units as far as possible, and as shipping accommodation allowed. Towards the end, when accommodation became extremely limited, priority was given to aircrews and technical personnel whose value in other theatres of war was greatest.

571. On the 23rd February, owing to enemy action, Batavia was closed as a port and the R.A.F. Base, Batavia, with its ancillary transit camps, was progressively transferred to Poerwokerto, adjacent to Tjilitjap in South Java, the sole port still open. Tjilitjap was also subjected to air bombardment, and ships leaving it to attack by Japanese light naval forces. On the 27th February, S.S. "City of Manchester" was torpedoed off Tjilitjap whilst approaching the port to assist in the evacuation.

572. From the 1st March onwards, little movement from the port took place. It was finally closed on the 5th March leaving on the island about 2,500 R.A.F. personnel whom it had been intended to evacuate, but for whom no shipping was made available.

573. On 5th and 6th March about 8 seats were allotted to the R.A.F. in Dutch Lodestars; the Dutch had been using these aircraft to evacuate personnel to Australia. The Lodestar service ceased on the 6th March, thus closing the last evacuation channel from Java.

574. A handicap experienced throughout the evacuation of surplus R.A.F. personnel was the difficulty which many of the Dutch had in understanding the necessity for sending out of the island, at a time when it was about to be invaded, personnel who appeared to them to be soldiers: they could not realise that our airmen were untrained as such and were of great value in their real role as airmen for prosecution of the war elsewhere. Informed Dutch authorities appreciated the matter, but many failed to grasp its truth. This is said in no critical spirit; the Dutch outlook is easily understood. But it must be stated in part explanation of the loss in Java of a number of surplus airmen.

575. During the period 18th February onwards, nearly 7,000 R.A.F. personnel were evacuated, leaving a total of about 5,000 in Java.

EVENTS LEADING UP TO SURRENDER OF JAVA.

576. *Conference at Dutch Headquarters.* At 1800 hours on the 5th March, the Dutch Commander-in-Chief, Lieut.-Gen. ter Poorten, convened a conference at his H.Q., A.H.K. in Bandoeng. The Air Officer Commanding, Britair, and the General Officer Commanding British Military Forces in Java, Major-General H. D. W. Sitwell, and representatives of their staffs, were summoned to this conference. It was also attended by senior officers of the Dutch C.-in-C's. staff.

577. At this conference the Dutch Commander-in-Chief stated:—

(a) That the situation was grave: the enemy had practically overcome the northern defences of Bandoeng and was also rapidly closing in from the west.

(b) That morale was at a low ebb and that it was possible Bandoeng might fall very soon. When the enemy penetrated the outer defences, the C.-in-C. did not propose to defend that town, which would be declared an open city. It was full of refugees and could not in any case hold out for long.

(c) That no guerilla warfare was possible or would be attempted by the Dutch. There was great hostility amongst the native population towards the whites, and without the help of the natives guerilla warfare could not possibly be successful. All his staff were emphatically agreed that such warfare was out of the question.

(d) That owing to difficulties of communication, Dutch G.H.Q. could operate only from Bandoeng. They could not exercise control from elsewhere and so would not move from Bandoeng.

(e) That resistance was to be carried on elsewhere under the direction of local commanders if possible and in accordance with an order issued by Queen Wilhelmina of Holland that there should be no surrender to the Japanese. He then added an unexpected rider—that he had instructed his troops to disregard any order that he might subsequently issue to them to cease fighting: they were to disobey it and to go on fighting.

578. In subsequent discussion the Commander-in-Chief was informed by General Sitwell that the British would certainly continue to fight on as long as any of the Dutch did so. When Dutch resistance ceased, then he must reserve to himself the right to decide his actions in accordance with the circumstances at the time. The Commander-in-Chief also informed the A.O.C. that A.H.Q. and Andir aerodrome in Bandoeng must not be defended in the event of the Japanese entering the town. The Commander-in-Chief was then asked to allot an area in the hills in which the British Forces could concentrate and continue resistance. After some discussion he allotted an area near Santoso to the southward of Bandoeng. Its choice appeared to be influenced more as a means of escape to the south coast than as a stronghold; emphasis had to be laid on the fact that it was wanted for the latter purpose.

British move into the Hills.

579. In consequence the G.O.C. and the A.O.C. British Forces went to Santosa at first