

100. In the morning of the 8th December the weather was clear over the land and close to the coast, but out to sea there were clouds down to 500 feet. No. 1 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force, at Kota Bharu, aided by the Vildebeestes of Nos. 36 and 100 Squadrons, carried out a vigorous offensive against the Japanese vessels and landing craft. Reports showed that these attacks had a considerable measure of success, many landing craft in the Kota Bharu River being sunk, and a ship reported to have contained tanks being sent to the bottom.

No. 62 Squadron from Alor Star also went out to attack the same target, but, owing probably to being ordered too far from the coast, failed to locate the enemy ships near Kota Bharu and proceeded to the neighbourhood of Patani on the Kra Isthmus. Here it was met by a greatly superior force of Japanese Zero fighters, and though Japanese ships were located there and bombs dropped on them, the attack was probably ineffective.

On the Western side in Kedah reconnaissance forces of the 11th Division crossed the Siam frontier in the afternoon of the 8th December and made contact with the enemy, who were already employing 10 A.F.Vs. After inflicting casualties, our forces withdrew in the afternoon, demolishing bridges on their way to the frontier. Further South a force known as Krohcol also crossed the frontier beyond Kroh in order to take up a position on the Siamese side of the border as originally planned. Both these forces met with some opposition from the Siamese.

Meanwhile, in spite of resistance on the beaches and further back, the enemy had made progress at Kota Bharu, until by 1600 hours the aerodrome was so threatened by Japanese troops that our aircraft had to leave and fly to Kuantan.

101. A feature of the opening day of hostilities was the enemy air attack upon our Northern aerodromes. Gong Kedah, Machang, Penang, Butterworth, Alor Star and Sungei Patani aerodromes were all attacked, the total scale of enemy effort for the day being estimated at some 150 aircraft, of which probably 65 per cent. were fighters. Of these attacks, the most damaging were against Alor Star and Sungei Patani, several aircraft on the ground being rendered unserviceable in both cases and most buildings at Sungei Patani destroyed. Both aerodromes were henceforth unable to operate and had to be vacated.

The attack on Alor Star was made by a formation of 27 twin-engine bombers of the Army type 97, and started about twenty minutes after the return of No. 62 Squadron from their attack at Patani and whilst the aircraft were refuelling. The Japanese attacked from a height of about 13,000 feet and used pattern bombing, the bombs being partly high-explosive, mostly about 150 lb., and partly incendiary. The attack was very effective; some ten of our Blenheims were put out of action, four being completely written off. The fuel dump and some buildings were set on fire, and, as the water supply was put out of action, the fires were not extinguished till dusk. Casualties were small, only seven men being killed. Alor Star was defended by four 3-inch 20-cwt. guns, but they failed to bring down any Japanese aircraft, possibly owing to the height at which they were flying.

9th-11th December.

102. Broadly speaking, assaults on our aerodromes, coupled with fresh landings in Siamese territory, continued to be the main feature of the Japanese operations for the first two days of the war. The enemy was greatly helped in them by the prompt use to which he put Siamese aerodromes, our reconnaissances on the 9th and 10th December revealing concentrations of some sixty aircraft at Singora and eighty to a hundred aircraft at Don Muang, Bangkok. On the 9th December eleven Blenheims attacked Singora aerodrome, but they were met by a greatly superior force of enemy fighters and five of our aircraft were brought down; the results of our bombing were not observed. Aircraft of No. 62 Squadron, which had moved back to Butterworth at dawn on the 9th December, were also ordered to attack Singora, starting at 1700 hours the same day. Butterworth was attacked by Japanese aircraft just as ours were about to take off, and, although Buffaloes were up, considerable damage was caused, with the result that only one Blenheim left. The pilot, Flight-Lieutenant Scarf, reached and attacked Singora, but was badly wounded; he flew his aeroplane back, landed at Alor Star and died a few minutes later.

On the 9th December our aircraft were forced to vacate Kuantan owing to enemy bombing, though it was still used for refuelling. Already by this date it was clear that the success of the enemy's attack on our Northern aerodromes would considerably handicap our own air action, and that this in turn would unfavourably prejudice our fortunes in the fighting on land. Interference with Singora landings was made difficult, once our Northern aerodromes had succumbed, by our lack of bombers of adequate range. In a telegram to London from General Headquarters a warning was given that it was unlikely we should find it practicable to maintain the existing air effort for more than two or three weeks.

Dutch air reinforcements arrived in Singapore Island on the 9th; they consisted of three squadrons of Glenn Martin bombers, total 22 aircraft, and one squadron of nine Buffalo fighters. It was found necessary to send eight of the bombers back to the Netherlands East Indies to complete the training of their crews in night flying.

103. The 8th Brigade, defending Kota Bharu, was pressed back on the 9th, demolition being carried out before the aerodrome was evacuated. By the end of the day it was forced back to a line in Kelantan running Peringot-Mulong. The enemy was employing infiltration tactics and working round the flanks of our forces wherever possible. The 8th Brigade had put up a stout resistance round Kota Bharu, and its commander, Brigadier Key, was faced with a difficult problem in deciding when retreat would become necessary. (See *para. 138 below.*) The decision having been made, the Brigade was disengaged skillfully.

Japanese Army reinforcements meanwhile arrived on a considerable scale. A large force, consisting of transports escorted by a battleship, three cruisers and eleven destroyers, was sighted by our aircraft between Kota Bharu and the Penhentai Islands on the 9th December. North of Kuantan the Japanese landed in small numbers at Beserah during the night