

ends of the islands, near Sourabaya in the east and in the Sunda Straits on the west: this was the most difficult form of attack to parry, and it was to be expected that the enemy would adopt it. A landing in central Java was not thought to be likely. The Dutch defence plan was laid accordingly.

Dutch Plan.

523. This was:—

(a) To watch, by means of air reconnaissance, as far northwards as possible on both sides of Borneo, and the whole of the Java Sea—this being undertaken by the Reconnaissance Group. Submarines supplemented this watch.

(b) An invasion was to be opposed as far out to sea as possible by air action: all bomber and reconnaissance aircraft were to be used for the purpose when occasion arose.

(c) A Combined Allied Naval Striking Force of 5 cruisers and 9 destroyers was based at Sourabaya and would engage the main threat when it appeared.

(d) Finally, should the enemy land, he was to be resisted on the beaches at certain points only. Suitable landing beaches were so numerous that only a few of the most obvious could be defended. Elsewhere the plan was to keep troops in local reserve and to counter-attack landings with them, the Army falling back if necessary on to previously prepared positions covered by demolitions.

(e) As a successful invasion was all too probable it was decided that there should be two centres for a final stand, a decision which was enforced by a shortage of troops and by the great length of the island. The two chosen centres were Malang Plateau in the east and Bandoeng volcanic plateau in the west.

APPROACH OF ENEMY CONVOYS.

524. On the 25th February air reconnaissance on the east side of Borneo reported that shipping, which had been collecting for some time past in ports in the Macassar Straits, was forming up at Balikpapan, evidently in preparation for putting to sea. The invasion of Java was imminent.

525. On 26th February a convoy of more than 50 ships and transports, accompanied by a strong naval escort, was located in the southern end of the Macassar Straits steaming south.

526. On the 27th February it was again located, now in the Java Sea, on a course and speed which would bring it to the north coast, westward of Sourabaya, at midnight 27th/28th February.

527. The Allied Fleet put to sea and fought an engagement with the escort of heavy cruisers and destroyers during the night 27th/28th February. The latter was very superior in numbers, weight and metal. The Allied ships were either sunk or disabled. This gallant action afforded the land defences another 24 hours' grace, because the transports turned away northwards at the beginning of the sea action and steamed towards Borneo during the night.

528. On 28th February the transports were again located steaming south at a speed which would bring them to landing beaches westward

of Sourabaya about midnight 28th February/1st March.

529. Meanwhile the situation on the west side of Borneo had not developed so clearly. Invasion forces had been suspected in the Natuna or Anambas Islands and possibly at Muntok on Banka Island. Reconnaissances had failed up to 26th February to clarify the situation.

530. On the 27th February, a small convoy with escort was located about 50 miles south of the southern tip of Banka Island steaming slowly on a north-easterly course. This might or might not be part of an invading convoy "marking time" before turning south towards Western Java.

531. On the 28th February about noon, the situation became clearer. A convoy was sighted at that hour approximately 100 miles north-east of Batavia steaming on an easterly course at high speed. It consisted of 11 transports; one cruiser and three destroyers were disposed some 30 miles to the south and on a parallel course. Another and larger convoy was located to the north-west: strength, course and speed were not clear. Both were at a distance which would make landings possible at two points in western Java about midnight.

532. The moon was one day past full, wind off shore, ideal conditions for landing. All was evidently set for simultaneous landings—one at the eastern end of Java probably just west of Sourabaya, and two at the western end of Java in the vicinity of Batavia.

BOMBER OPERATIONS 27TH FEBRUARY TO 1ST MARCH.

533. To revert to the night of 27th/28th February. It then appeared that the major threat would develop against Eastern Java. It was therefore decided to move No. 36 (T.B.) Squadron (9 Vildebeestes and 1 Albacore) at once to Madioen (near Sourabaya) to co-operate with American B.17's in resisting it. No. 36 (T.B.) Squadron arrived at Madioen on the afternoon of 28th February, and during the night 28th February/1st March carried out two sorties per aircraft, the first against transports, the second against landing barges. The first attack entailed a long search because reconnaissance information with which they had been briefed proved inaccurate. A convoy of 28 ships was eventually found 5 miles off the Coast, north of Rembang, some 100 miles west of Sourabaya. Most pilots claimed hits on transports, and execution amongst the barges. Subsequent reports received from American H.Q. in the area stated that attacks had been most successful and that No. 36 (T.B.) Squadron had sunk 8 ships—the Americans themselves claimed 7 others: but it has not been possible to verify this seemingly very high rate of success. On completion of the second attack, No. 36 (T.B.) Squadron returned direct to Tjikampek, less three aircraft which had been shot down including that of the C.O., Squadron Leader J. T. Wilkins, an outstanding leader who was unfortunately killed. Each aircrew of this squadron, operating from a strange aerodrome, thus carried out two night attacks in 24 hours, involving over 15 hours flying in open cockpits—an excellent achievement.

534. In the meantime, during 28th February, the threat to western Java had crystallised