

kit and a splitting up of units through the confused conditions of embarkation at Singapore. The situation was further aggravated because the arrivals included units destined for Java, which had been re-routed at sea to Palembang. All had to be sorted and re-organised, and units for Java entrained for Oesthaven and shipped thence to Batavia.

417. On the 23rd January Blenheim IV's of Nos. 84 and 211 (B) Squadrons began to arrive from the Middle East. Their ground personnel, who came by sea, landed at Oesthaven about 14th February. The arrival of the latter coincided with the Japanese attack on the Palembang area (which will be related in due course), and they had to be re-embarked for Batavia before they could join their squadrons, which thus never had their own ground staffs with them in Sumatra. Each squadron had 24 aircraft when it left the Middle East. Sixteen of No. 84 Squadron arrived at P.I. 18 of No. 211 Squadron arrived on different days between 23rd January and 14th February (para. 318). Unfortunately the change of route from Singapore to Palembang resulted in the loss of 3 aircraft of No. 84 Squadron as a result of wrong briefing given to them on leaving Burma about the location of landing grounds in Sumatra.

Dispositions arranged for Units.

418. On the 23rd January P.I. aerodrome received its first air attack. Twenty-seven unescorted bombers dropped their loads from 22,000 feet with great accuracy, but caused only slight damage to the surface of the aerodrome. The Dutch Buffalo Squadron on the aerodrome established contact with the formation and damaged at least two Japanese bombers without loss to themselves. It was now evident that our aerodromes in southern Sumatra were about to be bombed in their turn, in all probability with increasing severity. It was therefore decided to dispose our squadrons accordingly. Fortunately it was possible to take advantage of Japanese habits which by this time were well known, complete confidence could be placed in the fact that no daylight attack would take place before 0830 hours or after 1700 hours. Other factors which were taken into consideration were:—

(a) that P.I. was best adapted to the use of fighters, and it was soon realised that part of the Hurricane force, which was known to be arriving in H.M.S. Indomitable, would want to use it: thus it would be advisable to minimise the number of bombers on it.

(b) that P.II was suitable for all types of medium bombers, that its existence was believed to be unknown to the Japanese. Moreover it had good facilities for dispersal, and cover from view in the scrub jungle which surrounded it.

419. Squadrons were, therefore, to be disposed on them as follows:—

P.I. M.V.A.F., Nos. 84 and 211 (B) Squadrons, serviceable aircraft moving to P.I during Japanese raid hours.

P.II. Nos. 1 (GR), 27 (NF), 34 (B) and 62 (B) Squadrons, whose aircraft strength when they arrived from Singapore would be low.

It will be remembered that the ground parties of Nos. 84 and 211 (B) Squadrons had yet to

arrive by sea from the Middle East. Provision for servicing them was therefore made from amongst technical personnel who had been evacuated from Singapore. Those surplus to requirements were sorted out and despatched to Java.

420. Aircraft and personnel began to arrive from Singapore earlier than had been anticipated, so Wing Commander Powell, S.A.S.O. of the Group, was appointed Station Commander of P.II until the arrival of Group Captain McCauley on 29th January. The former then took over command of P.I from Wing Commander Duncan, the latter being placed in charge of the refuelling party at Pakenbaroe.

OPERATIONS CARRIED OUT BY NO. 225 (B) GROUP.

22nd January-14th February.

421. No. 225 (B) Group was responsible for reconnaissance northwards from the Sunda Straits to cover several convoys that went through to Singapore during the last week in January and the first in February. During the passage of a convoy through the Banka Straits on the 27th January, Blenheim IV's maintained a fighter escort over it because no fighters were available in Sumatra; the Dutch Buffalo Squadron had by this time been withdrawn to Java. All other available bomber aircraft stood by during these periods in case convoys were attacked by Japanese naval forces. The whole resources of the Group were directed towards the protection of these convoys during the two-day periods each took to traverse the area for which it was responsible.

422. On the 26th January the Endau landing took place (paras. 332-339) and No. 225 (B) Group was ordered to despatch all available aircraft to the scene. A force of 6 Hudsons from No. 62 (B) Squadron and 5 Blenheim I's of the same squadron but manned by No. 84 (B) Squadron aircrews was scraped up. The Hudsons arrived on the scene during the late afternoon, and landed at Sembawang for the night, returning to Palembang on the 27th January. The Blenheims arrived too late to participate, and so were ordered to land at Tengah and await orders from A.H.Q. This force was used on the night 27th-28th January to bomb Kuantan, returning to Palembang on 28th January.

423. On 26th January 6 Blenheim IV's of 34 (B) Squadron and 6 Hudsons of No. 8 (GR) Squadron R.A.A.F. were withdrawn from operations and were sent to Java under orders of A.H.Q. in connection with the arrival of H.M.S. Indomitable with 48 Hurricanes on board. This carrier was met at a point some distance to the Southward of Java by the bombers or G.R. aircraft, on which the Hurricanes were flown off in Squadron formations and were navigated to Java by the former aircraft. Meanwhile a Catalina provided anti-submarine patrols for the carrier's protection. The Hurricanes were again navigated during their onward journey to P.I, one squadron No. 258 (F) Squadron onward again to Singapore. The bombers and G.R. aircraft returned to P.II on 2nd February and became available again for operations.