

158. On the 9th and 10th December, Dutch air reinforcements arrived in Malaya from the Netherlands East Indies. They consisted of three squadrons of Glenn Martin Bombers totalling 22 aircraft and one squadron of nine Buffalo fighters. Unfortunately the Dutch bomber pilots were not fully trained in night flying or in advanced navigation over the sea, so that it was necessary for them to return, a squadron at a time, to the Netherlands East Indies for further training in these subjects. Nevertheless, the Netherlands East Indies had shown a most co-operative spirit in sending these aircraft, as well as submarines, so promptly to our assistance.

159. On the morning of the 11th December, 1941, rather more than 100 aircraft were available for operations disposed as under:—

Seletar.

Vickers Vildebeeste	Torpedo-	
Bombers		18
Catalina Flying Boats ..		1
Sharks		5
Swordfish		4

Sembawang.

Hudson General Reconnaissance	4
Buffalo Fighters	17
Glenn Martin Bombers (N.E.I.)	13

Tengah.

Blenheim IV Bombers ..	8
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Kallang.

Buffalo Fighters	26
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Taiping.

The surviving aircraft from the Northern aerodromes reinforced by a few from the South.

160. On the 11th December it was decided that the air policy should be as follows:—

(a) Bombing, except in special circumstances, to be confined to night. This was made necessary by the enemy's fighter superiority.

(b) The primary tasks of the fighters would be the defence of the Singapore Base and the protection of convoys bringing land and air reinforcements to Malaya. The reason for this was that we could not hope to regain superiority without powerful reinforcements. The safe arrival of such reinforcements was therefore the first essential in our air strategy.

As a result of this policy it was clear that the Army would suffer from lack of air support and of close co-operation in the fighting on the mainland, though some seaward reconnaissance would still be possible. I accepted this situation.

SECTION XXI.—THE WITHDRAWAL FROM KELANTAN.

161. On the 12th December 1941 the Commander, 3 Indian Corps, visited Command Headquarters to discuss the policy as regards the Kelantan Force.

It will be recalled that the task of the Kelantan Force had been the protection of the three aerodromes in that State for the use of our Air Force and the denial of them to the enemy. In view of the situation some fresh instructions were clearly necessary. The alternatives were either to leave the force in Kelantan or to

withdraw it for employment elsewhere. The factors in favour of the former course were:—

(a) It might still be possible to prevent the enemy making full use of the three aerodromes.

(b) The presence of our force in Kelantan would contain a proportion of the enemy's force in that State.

(c) The moral effect of the withdrawal both on the civil population and on our own troops would not be good.

(d) We should probably lose some material and equipment in the withdrawal.

In favour of a withdrawal were the following factors:—

(a) The aerodromes were no longer required by our Air Force and there seemed to be no probability of them being required within a reasonable period of time.

(b) It seemed probable that the main threat would develop on the west coast, where we had inadequate resources with which to meet it.

(c) The communications of the Kelantan Force, which now consisted of only a single line railway with a number of bridges, were precarious, especially having in view the enemy's great air superiority.

(d) In view of (c) above and of the superiority on land which the enemy was likely to develop, it seemed probable that we should lose the force if it remained in Kelantan.

After full consideration I decided, with a view to conserving our resources and concentrating them for the main battle which would probably develop on the west coast, to withdraw the Kelantan Force as soon as rolling stock could be made available. This decision was submitted to the C.-in-C., Far East, the same afternoon and approved by him. Orders were issued immediately and the evacuation of surplus stores started at once.

162. On the 12th December the enemy became very active and attacked in strength, but the 2/10 Baluch Regt. counter-attacked, coming to close grips with the enemy and inflicting casualties.

On the 13th December the 2/10 Baluch Regt. again inflicted casualties on the enemy who were trying to advance round their flank.

163. During the next few days the withdrawal continued systematically, the enemy being made to fight for each position, with comparatively little loss to the defenders. By the 16th December all surplus stores and equipment had been evacuated and the withdrawal of the troops by rail began. The 4/19 Hyderabad were the first to leave so that they could rejoin their own brigade on the west coast. On the 19th December the railhead at Kuala Krai was evacuated. The rearmost troops withdrew from Kuala Krai on foot as the large railway bridges a little south of that place had by then been destroyed. Practically all the stores and all the vehicles, except about 80 for which no railway flats were available, were successfully evacuated. A rearguard under Lt.-Col. McKellar, known as Macforce, was left behind to watch the railway and prevent the repair of the bridges. It included troops of the Pahang Volunteers and the Malay Regiment, and carried out its duties most efficiently.