

during the final 14 days of evacuation. Considerable quantities of equipment, including some 200 M.T. vehicles, were lost, all of it urgently needed in the N.E.I.

Final Air Operations from Singapore.

380. Except for a small number of Hudson sorties for convoy protection, and a sweep by Buffaloes over the Batu Pahat area on 28th January to cover the evacuation of troops cut off by the Japanese advance, air operations from Singapore itself from the last days of January to the fall of the Fortress were nearly all carried out by fighters for the defence of the Island. Bomber operations from Sumatra for the support of the defence of Singapore are narrated in Section III.

381. An attack was carried out on the night of 2nd February by the Swordfish flight, released by the Army for the purpose, against the aerodrome at Kluang, where the Japanese had by now established a strong fighter force. Subsequently this Flight had to be destroyed, as its aircraft were in no condition to be flown to Sumatra.

382. The P.R. Buffalo Flight, which had functioned almost daily with outstanding success under the command of Squadron Leader Lewis since the beginning of the campaign, finally lost its aircraft by enemy air attacks on the 7th February. This Flight had carried out over 100 sorties, the majority of which had proceeded as far north as Singora. Aircraft were intercepted by Japanese fighters and hit on numerous occasions, although none was shot down. Throughout, no armour or guns had been carried; pilots had relied entirely upon evasion in order to fulfil their missions. The greatest credit is due to them for the valuable work they did.

Final Fighter Operations from Singapore.

383. On the 31st January the fighter strength of Singapore was 8 Hurricanes of No. 232(F) Squadron and 6 Buffaloes taken over by No. 453(F) Squadron. The small Buffalo force gradually wasted away and 453(F) Squadron was evacuated to Java about 4th February. The Hurricanes were maintained from Sumatra at an average daily strength of 10 aircraft. This average was maintained firstly by the arrival on 29th January of No. 258(F) Squadron with 15 Hurricanes. This squadron was one of several which had been convoyed from the Middle East (where they had just arrived as reinforcements from England) to the Far East in H.M.S. Indomitable. They had been "flown off" south of Java and had proceeded by air via Batavia and Sumatra, No. 258 thence flying on to Seletar. They had had a long and varied passage from England, involving a sea voyage to Sierra Leone, followed by a long flight across the whole breadth of Central Africa to Port Sudan, where they had embarked in H.M.S. Indomitable. They came into action on 1st February after a delay caused by the necessity for removing all guns to clear them of anti-corrosion grease with which they had had to be protected for the journey. This squadron was relieved by 232(F) Squadron on 3rd February, also ex H.M.S. Indomitable. The latter remained in Singapore until the withdrawal of the last of our aircraft.

384. These fighters were far too few in number to affect materially the scale of enemy

attack. But they put up a stout fight, and throughout the first ten days of February they were almost constantly airborne throughout the hours of daylight, attempting to ward off the constant Japanese attacks.

385. Most of their sorties were for the defence of the Island. Fighter cover was provided on 30th January for the final withdrawal of the Army across the Johore causeway; and a few sorties were also flown against aircraft attacking our troop positions on the Island. On 9th February, the day following the Japanese landing on the Island, Hurricanes took off at the request of the Army and engaged enemy dive bombers, shooting down at least one.

386. A number of patrols were made for convoy protection. One convoy reached Singapore on 5th February. It had been shepherded through the Banka Straits, and during its onward passage towards Singapore, by reconnaissance and protective patrols from Sumatra. Fighters from Singapore covered its final approach. The "Empress of Asia" was attacked and set on fire, but that was the only loss incurred by reinforcing convoys. They escaped unscathed partly because of the protection they were given, but partly also because, it must be admitted, the Japanese made no very determined attacks against them. In contrast, many ships leaving Singapore during February were heavily attacked and there were many losses amongst them.

387. The devotion to duty of the fighter pilots and of the ground crews who serviced their aircraft and maintained landing strips during these last few days was exemplary. Warning of attack was short, and on occasion the Japanese bombers had dropped their bombs and were withdrawing before our fighters could reach them. But with experience of the enemy's tactics results steadily improved; and on the final day of operations, (9th February), 6 enemy aircraft were shot down and a further 14 seriously damaged for the loss of 2 Hurricanes and 1 pilot. It was significant that by 5th February the surviving pilots were mostly experienced men who had had previous battle experience before coming to the Far East.

388. On the 4th and 5th February, Seletar, Sembawang and Tengah came under steady observed shell fire, and all operations had then to be carried out from Kallang. The Japanese bombers concentrated their attack on this station, and the landing area was soon so riddled with craters that only by constant and arduous labour was a landing strip 750 yards long maintained in operation. Even so, by 6th February our pilots experienced very great difficulty in avoiding craters when taking-off and landing.

389. On the 10th February, by which time the Japanese were established in strength on the Island, all aircraft were withdrawn to Sumatra. G.O.C. Malaya concurred in this decision, which was also endorsed by C.-in-C. South-West Pacific who visited Singapore the same day. A few Buffaloes were left, owing to their condition, and had to be destroyed.

Results of Fighter Operations in Malaya.

390. Total results of the fighting in the air over Singapore are difficult to assess with any accuracy, as definite confirmation of successes was in most cases impossible. Group Captain Rice, who commanded the Fighter Force during