

designate to the newly appointed C.-in-C. Far East. He remained in Singapore to assist the A.O.C., being attached to A.H.Q. on 12th January for the purpose.

*To resume the narrative of events*

*Arrival at Singapore of Reinforcement Convoys*

272. With effect from the 26th December, arrangements for the reception of reinforcement convoys at Singapore became of overriding importance, not the least factor being the urgent necessity to maintain the secrecy of their arrival. This was successfully accomplished, it is believed.

273. In view of the importance of these convoys to the defence of Malaya, G.H.Q. issued an instruction on the 27th December that "air protection for convoys bringing reinforcements will now take precedence before the other tasks".

274. Reinforcements were, if anything, more important to the Army even than to the R.A.F. All the fighting since the beginning of the campaign had fallen on the IIIrd Corps, particularly the 11th (Indian) Division, and the troops badly needed a rest; and as the reinforcements contained a complete fresh Division (18th) as well as anti-aircraft regiments, it was vital from the Army point of view that the Air Force in Malaya should do everything in their power to ensure that the convoys got through.

275. Air protection for these convoys was provided by means of widespread reconnaissance sweeps into the S. China Sea, close anti-submarine patrols from the Banka Straits onwards and fighter escort for the final approach to Singapore. An extremely vulnerable part of the route was that which lay through the Banka Straits off E. Sumatra. For the protection of the convoys in this area, the Dutch Fighter Squadron based at Kallang was moved to Palembang on the 29th December, and again on the 9th January. Apart from the fighters, operations for shepherding these convoys, for periods of three days for each convoy, employed at least 2 Catalinas, 6 Hudsons and 4 Glenn Martins daily. In addition, during these 3-day periods, all other available aircraft in the Command were kept at short notice in case the convoys were attacked by enemy naval or air forces. In this situation the absence of effective Naval strength in Malayan waters was aggravated by the insufficiency of air forces to reinforce the Navy, and at the same time to meet the needs of the battle on the land. In these circumstances there was no alternative but to withdraw appreciable numbers of our aircraft, and to make them stand by for the protection of convoys when they might otherwise have been participating in the battle on land.

276. The task was successfully accomplished. The first convoy arrived in Singapore on 3rd January and a second on 13th January. The latter included the first brigade of the 18th Division to arrive. It also contained 51 crated Hurricanes accompanied by more than 20 Hurricane pilots.

It is difficult here adequately to convey the sense of tension which prevailed as these convoys approached Singapore, and the sense of exultation at their safe arrival. The feeling spread that at least the Japanese were going

to be held on the ground if not driven back, whilst many confidently expected that the Hurricanes would sweep the Japanese from the sky.

*Withdrawal of the Army to Johore*

277. But by the time that the first reinforcements arrived the position of the Army had seriously worsened. On the West coast a withdrawal from the strong Kampar position had been forced upon IIIrd Corps by an out-flanking landing at Telok Anson on the West coast.

278. The forcing of a line on the Slim river and further landings in the Kuala Selanger region led to the evacuation of Kuala Lumpur and Port Swettenham on the 10th January; and by the middle of January the bulk of our forces were back to the northern frontier of Johore, little more than 100 miles from Singapore.

279. On the East coast, the Brigade that had originally held the Kota Bahru area had fallen back, without serious losses, to Central Malaya. The Brigade Group defending Kuantan, which had been attacked from the north on 30th December, had also to be withdrawn to prevent its communications being cut as the result of the West Coast withdrawal.

280. Thereafter, the Japanese on the East coast began to move steadily down towards Mersing. There had been no attacks in this area up to the middle of January, but a major Japanese landing was expected daily.

281. Thus the progress of the Japanese Army was quicker than had been anticipated, chiefly as the result of its possession of an armoured component, its superiority in jungle warfare, its superiority in the air, and its ability to pass parties in boats down the West coast round the left flank of our Army. Infiltrating Japanese frequently got behind our forward troops and formed road blocks on their lines of communication which proved difficult, and sometimes impossible, to clear. Our own demolitions were swiftly repaired or circumvented by the enemy; and in general the speed and aggression of his follow-up came as a surprise.

*Co-operation with the Army on the West coast*

282. The heavy commitments of the air forces for reconnaissance, convoy protection and the air defence of Singapore, reduced the number of aircraft available for the direct support of the Army during this period. But, within the limitations thus imposed, air action was carried out on both West and East coasts, increasing in quantity as the battle area came within range of aircraft based on aerodromes in Singapore.

283. In response to requests from H.Q.M.C. and IIIrd Corps, action was taken against Japanese landing parties on the West coast. Daily offensive reconnaissances were carried out by 4 to 6 Glenn Martins or Blenheims, unescorted at first, but later, after 4 aircraft had been shot down in one day, with fighter protection. Five Shark aircraft were moved up to Batu Pahat on 2nd January: they also took part in this type of operation.

284. Barges off Port Swettenham were attacked by Blenheims on the 2nd, 3rd and 4th January: several near misses were observed but no definite sinkings.