

consequence are few. Much still remains unsatisfactorily explained. It is hoped that time may reveal the full facts.

543. The captured aerodrome was only a few miles from Tjikampek, the aerodrome on which No. 36 (T B.) Squadron was also resting after having operated throughout the night (para. 533). The latter aerodrome had no defences whatever and was in considerable danger of being overrun by the same troops which had already captured Kalidjati. The Squadron was, therefore, immediately withdrawn to Andir, and was later moved to Tjikamber in S.W. Java, Group Captain Nicholetts being placed in command of the Station.

FIGHTER OPERATIONS IN BATAVIA AREA— 1ST FEBRUARY TO 3RD MARCH 1942.

Consolidation of Fighter Strength.

544. Before proceeding further it is necessary to turn to earlier operations of the Fighter Force.

545. It will be remembered that Nos. 232 (F) and 605 (F) Squadrons were operating at Tjililitan under a Sector Control (a skeleton of No. 226 (F) Group) whose operations rooms and warning systems were installed in and around Batavia.

546. From 17th to 27th February this force was continually in action in its role of the air defence of Batavia. Normal odds met in air fighting were in the vicinity of 10-1. Its operations were handicapped, particularly during the earlier part of the period, by insufficient warning of approaching enemy aircraft.

547. A Fighter Group H.Q. became redundant by 27th February, its squadrons and overhead controlling organisation being established by that date. The Group Commander, Air Commodore Vincent, and several members of his staff, were ordered on that date by the A.O.C. to leave Java, which they subsequently did by sea.

548. By noon on 28th February the combined strength of the two fighter squadrons was less than that of one. The U.S. aircraft carrier "Langley" had been sunk by the Japanese when bringing in a full load of P.40 fighters, with some of which it had been hoped to re-arm one of the squadrons. Thus the last prospect of keeping two fighter squadrons at reasonable strength had gone. It was decided to retain No. 232 (F) Squadron which, under Squadron Leader Brooker's leadership, volunteered to remain in Java. Vacancies in it were filled from volunteers in No. 605 (F) Squadron. No. 605 Squadron, except the volunteers who could be employed, was withdrawn for evacuation after it had handed over its remaining aircraft to No. 232 (F) Squadron on the afternoon of 28th February.

Fighter Operations 1st—3rd March.

549. In accordance with the decision (para. 538 (c)) not to employ bombers during the cloudless mornings, but to oppose the landings during these hours by means of fighters, instructions were issued to No. 232 (F) Squadron to employ all its Hurricanes throughout the forenoon of 1st March, in co-operation with 10 Dutch Kittyhawks and 6 Buffaloes, in attacking two Japanese landings which had occurred simultaneously during the night in Western Java.

550. One of these landings was that which had been made at Eritanwetan (para. 536). Twelve Hurricanes took part in opposing it, and in doing so encountered intense A.A. fire. They pressed home their attacks at low height, inflicting severe casualties amongst troops in landing craft, and set on fire at least six landing craft and three motor vehicles. Several later attacks against the same targets also produced good results.

551. The other landing in Western Java had occurred simultaneously with the foregoing one, but on the extreme western beaches on either side of Merak in the Sunda Straits. It was in greater strength. The remaining Hurricanes of No. 232 (F) Squadron made several sorties against it during the morning at the request of the Dutch Army: they successfully engaged enemy columns, including cavalry and M.T., advancing along the roads from the landing beaches towards Batavia.

552. After the British bombers had been overrun at Kalidjati the fighters continued their attacks against the landing at Eritanwetan. Shortly after midday they brought to a standstill a cyclist column proceeding westwards towards Batavia. In addition three Japanese flying boats were destroyed on the water.

553. All No. 232 (F) Squadron aircraft suffered damage in varying degree from A.A. fire during these operations, which were all carried out at low level.

554. On 2nd March Tjililitan aerodrome was under constant attack by the enemy, and the squadron was in action all day defending it and carrying out road reconnaissances in western Java for the Dutch Army. The aerodrome was also becoming somewhat exposed to overland attack by Japanese forces which had disembarked at Eritanwetan; these were, by the afternoon, reported to be approaching Poerwokerto and the river crossings thirty miles or so to the north-east of the aerodrome. Withdrawal along the road which passes through those places was already out of the question. Moreover, these places were held by Dutch troops on similar lines to Soebang and the river crossings protecting Kalidjati aerodrome; a repetition of the Kalidjati debacle, involving the only remaining British fighter squadron, was distinctly possible during the night or following morning. The A.O.C. therefore, when visiting the aerodrome on this day, ordered No. 232 (F) Squadron, now 10 Hurricanes, to move back to Andir near Bandoeng, the move of the ground parties and aerodrome defence troops to be completed along the Buitenzorg road by the following day. Group Captain Noble was appointed Station Commander at Andir.

555. In the early morning of 3rd March the squadron returned to Tjililitan from Andir under orders issued by General van Oyen. It was airborne throughout the morning repelling Japanese air attacks. At noon it was finally withdrawn to Andir, en route to which it made a successful attack on Kalidjati aerodrome destroying several enemy aircraft. A running fight took place with Japanese fighters from Kalidjati to Bandoeng.

Withdrawal from Batavia.

556. As the Dutch announced on 3rd March their intention of declaring Batavia an "open" town, the operations and filter rooms, together