

the whole of its operations over Malaya, estimated that 183 Japanese aircraft were destroyed, exclusive of others lost by them during our attacks on their aerodromes.

391. It is felt that this claim may be excessive, though not by much. Reports which have been received from all sources appear to establish that the Buffalo Squadrons shot down a total of 30 Japanese aircraft: others were damaged and a proportion of them probably crashed during their return to base.

It is probable that the Hurricane force destroyed, or so seriously damaged that they failed to return to base, a total of 100 Japanese aircraft. For this total, 45 Hurricanes were lost from all causes, including flying accidents and enemy air bombardment. In view of the odds which were faced these figures speak for themselves.

Final transfer of R.A.F. to Sumatra.

392. On 8th February the Japanese launched their attack on Singapore Island and rapidly obtained a firm foothold. It now became essential to transfer A.H.Q. to Sumatra in order to take control of the Command, whose combatant units were already there, for the purpose of carrying on the fight in the N.E.I.

A nucleus staff, including the S.A.S.O. (Air Commodore Staton) proceeded by air to Palembang on 10th February by order of the A.O.C.

Sir Archibald Wavell again visited Singapore the same day, 10th February. He ordered the immediate evacuation to the N.E.I. of all remaining R.A.F. personnel, which was commenced the following day. At the same time he instructed Air Vice Marshal Maltby, hitherto Assistant A.O.C. at A.H.Q., to take charge in the N.E.I. as soon as possible, that officer proceeding there by air the same afternoon accompanied by an addition to the nucleus staff which had preceded him. He was appointed by Abdair A.O.C. Westgroup in the N.E.I. with effect from 11th February.

393. Aerodrome surfaces were ploughed up. Bomb components, large stocks of petrol and much equipment which could not be got away was destroyed or rendered ineffective. But the volume of the whole was so great that neither time nor circumstances permitted its transfer or destruction, particularly a large quantity salvaged from Malaya which was housed in the town of Singapore where its destruction by fire was impossible. Special action was taken to destroy secret equipment e.g. radar apparatus, signals installations etc. It is believed that little of immediate value to the enemy was left to him.

394. On 13th February Air Vice Marshal Pulford, who had declined to leave until all R.A.F. personnel, who could be, had been evacuated, left Singapore. He did so at General Percival's instigation. He accompanied a party under the orders of Admiral Spooner, R.A. Malaya. When they sailed they were unaware that the Japanese fleet had interposed itself between Singapore and their destination, which was probably Batavia in Java. They were detected, attacked from the air and their boat was stranded on an island of the Tuju or Seven Islands Group some 30 miles north of Banka Island. There the whole party, some 40 in number, lived as best they could, the fishermen

inhabitants having deserted it. It was malarial, unhealthy and contained little food. The party had few stores, practically no medicines and no doctor. After remaining at large for more than two months the survivors were compelled to surrender. By then 18 had died, including Air Vice Marshal Pulford and Rear Admiral Spooner. The remainder were in a bad way. Thus it was that these gallant officers lost their lives and that the former was unable to rejoin his Command in the N.E.I.

Fall of Singapore.

395. On the 15th February Singapore Fortress was compelled to surrender.

SECTION III.

SUMMARY OF OPERATIONS BASED ON SUMATRA.

INTRODUCTION.

396. As has already been narrated in Section II of this Report, by the 16th January, 1942, all Air Force units in Malaya had been driven back to Singapore Island. Even with the existing strength, aerodromes on the island were already congested, they would become more congested when reinforcements, now well on their way, arrived. The scale of Japanese air attack against these aerodromes was increasing. It had become imperative to disperse more widely. Extra elbow room was particularly desirable because H.M.S. "Indomitable," with 48 Hurricanes on board, was due to arrive at the end of January. If bomber units could be transferred to Sumatra, not only would they be dispersed more safely, but fighter squadrons could then be distributed to all the aerodromes in Singapore. It was not realised at the time how soon three of those aerodromes—Tengah, Sembawang and Seletar—would become untenable (para. 360).

General Conditions in Sumatra.

397. Sumatra, an island nearly 1,000 miles long, lies west of and runs parallel to the west coast of Malaya, but extends far to the southward. Its main features are a mountain range running down the west coast throughout the whole length of the island, and a relatively low-lying belt of country eastward of it, consisting mainly of jungle and swamp, which is intersected by many rivers with a west to east trend. It is developed in scattered areas only.

Roads are few, and although there are railway systems in the north and south, they are not connected, and communications are consequently poor. From the Allied point of view the chief economic importance of Sumatra was the oil field and refinery near Palembang, of which the normal outlet is to the east via Palembang river to the sea, though there is a single track railway running to the Port of Oesthaven in the extreme south. There was a radio telephone system inter-connecting the principal towns in Sumatra with an external connection to Java. This telephone system was open and insecure.

398. At the time this Section of the Report opens, the monsoon was still in progress over Sumatra. A feature of this monsoon was the prevalence of torrential thunderstorms, both by day and night. These thunderstorms are very violent indeed, and they completely black out