

9th-10th December. These were driven off, and by 0845 on the 10th December all was quiet there. The general situation in regard to Japanese landings was thus that all successful landings took place North of the Malaya-Siam frontier, except that at Kota Bharu, which, as already stated in para. 12 above, had no road communications to Southern Malaya, and depended for reinforcements from the South on the railway alone.

By the 10th December it was evident that the enemy's primary object was the establishment of air superiority in Northern Malaya, whilst at the same time he was testing our defences on a wide front. It was estimated that the Japanese were now employing about 30 Zero-type fighters from Patani and about 70 aircraft, mainly Zero fighters, from Singora. All but about 50 of the Japanese bombers previously based in Southern Indo-China had presumably been moved to Siam.

A complication of the situation which gave some anxiety at this date was that our efforts might be impeded by lack of support, or even actively hostile measures, among native elements. Native labour tended to disappear for days after bombing, and non-British railway employees, including engine-drivers, deserted temporarily on a large scale; the Army was able to replace the drivers to some extent.

104. By the 11th December the 8th Brigade, in Kelantan, retiring along the road which meets the railway at Kuala Krai, was in a position covering Machang. In Kedah a new threat was opening in the form of enemy infiltration from Siam, especially in the Chaglan area. This advance into Kedah, coupled with the heavy air attacks on Penang, indicated that the Japanese main attack would be down the road communications of Western Malaya. Advanced troops of the 11th Indian Division were in position South of a line Chaglan-Kodiang, while Krohcol sought to hold off the enemy in this more central region. Some of the demolitions that had been prepared in Northern Kedah failed to be effective; this was not due to any failure to act in time, but to some technical fault either in the fuses or explosives. All our serviceable aircraft had now been withdrawn from Northern Malaya. It was estimated that by the 11th December the Japanese were employing in Malaya at least two divisions, supported by 250-300 aircraft.

#### *H.M.S. Prince of Wales and Repulse.*

105. H.M.S. *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* arrived at Singapore on Tuesday, the 2nd December, 1941, Admiral Sir Tom Phillips having arrived by air two days before. He and I had no opportunity for full consultation over the situation before war broke out, partly because he was taking over from Sir Geoffrey Layton as Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, and partly because he visited Manila by air to meet Admiral Hart.

H.M.S. *Repulse* left to pay a visit to Port Darwin on the 5th December, and it was agreed she should proceed for the first 48 hours at comparatively slow speed. She was recalled as soon as the air reconnaissance report of the 6th December was received, and arrived back in Singapore on the 7th December. The naval forces at Singapore on the 7th December are given in Appendix C.

106. Admiral Phillips decided to take action with his two capital ships. So far as my Headquarters was concerned he was put into direct touch with the Air Officer Commanding with regard to the air co-operation required, and asked for three things:—

(a) Reconnaissance 100 miles to north of the force from daylight, Tuesday, the 9th December;

(b) Reconnaissance to Singora and beyond ten miles from the coast starting at first light on the 10th December; and

(c) Fighter protection off Singora at daylight on the 10th December.

The Air Officer Commanding gave tentative replies that he could provide (a), hoped to be able to provide (b), but could not provide (c). It was decided that he should go thoroughly into the problems involved and give definite replies to the Chief of Staff, Eastern Fleet, Rear-Admiral Palliser, who was remaining behind. Air Officer Commanding later confirmed his tentative replies and this information was sent on by signal to Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, in the evening of the 8th December. The doubt about (b) was due to the fact that the reconnaissance would have to be provided by Blenheim IV's based on Kuantan aerodrome, and it was uncertain whether this would be out of action or not. Actually, both the reconnaissances were carried out, though one of the Blenheims doing (b) had wireless troubles.

The reason why (c) could not be provided was mainly that the northern aerodromes were either untenable or else had been badly damaged by bombing; this meant that the fighters would have to operate from aerodromes at considerable distance from Singora, and, owing to the short endurance of the Buffalo, they would have been able to remain only a very short time over that area before having to return to refuel. The Dutch fighter squadron had not arrived by the 8th; it was uncertain whether it would be available by the 10th and thus there was a shortage of fighter aircraft. These factors meant that a short patrol might possibly have been provided at intervals at Singora, but that it was impossible to guarantee continuous fighter protection.

107. The *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*, accompanied by four destroyers, left Singapore in the afternoon of Monday, the 8th December. Early on the 10th December a signal was made to Singapore indicating that the ships would return earlier than originally planned. Except for this, no communication was received and their position remained unknown until, shortly after twelve noon on Wednesday, the 10th December, a signal was received from *Repulse* that she was being bombed in a position about 60 miles East-South-East of Kuantan. On receipt of the message a fighter squadron was at once despatched and reached the position of the ships in commendably quick time, but only to see the *Prince of Wales* go down. No enemy aircraft were spotted. Fighter cover, though only a weak one, was provided for the destroyers that picked up the crews from the sunken ships.

108. I had been asked by Rear-Admiral Palliser to give an indication of the strength of the air force that the Japanese might bring against these two ships from Indo-China, and gave an estimate of between 50 and 60 bombers.