

504. On the 19th February all available (5) Blenheims attacked shipping at Palembang. On this day a bombing attack was launched by the Japanese against Semplak and 6 Hudsons were destroyed. Semplak had no A.A. defences and dispersal facilities were poor.

505. On the 20th February 4 Hudsons and 3 Blenheims again bombed shipping at Palembang in the face of severe fighter opposition from aircraft based on P.I. The following day 2 Hudsons and 5 Blenheims continued these attacks. On this occasion it was possible to observe results, hits were obtained and one 10,000-ton ship was set on fire.

506. On the 22nd February, Semplak, which had no A.A. defences, sustained low flying attacks by some 20 fighters. Six Hudsons were burnt out and three others damaged beyond repair. As a result of this raid Abdair approved the move of the remains of No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron R.A.A.F. to Kalidjati where a light battery (8 Bofors) had by 20th February been located as part of the aerodrome defence. Six aircraft were transferred the next day, a rear party being left at Semplak to repair the unserviceable aircraft on the aerodrome and to strip the rest of serviceable parts. Whilst they were there, another attack was sustained on 24th February, and more aircraft, unserviceable, were destroyed.

507. On the 23rd February, 3 Blenheims bombed 4 submarines off the coast and claimed that one had been sunk.

508. On the 24th February, Kalidjati was bombed by the enemy, and again twice on the 26th. The Bofors guns successfully prevented a low flying attack from developing on the latter date.

509. Four Blenheims attacked P.I. on the 25th February. By this time there were only 2 Hudsons operationally serviceable, with 9 others repairable: the Blenheim position, however, was slowly improving.

SUPREME ALLIED H.Q. S.W. PACIFIC LEAVES JAVA.

510. The enemy's unexpectedly rapid advance had frustrated the hopes, originally entertained, of building up a large Allied strength in the S.W. Pacific under the direction of Abdacom in Java, which was by now under imminent threat of invasion. Being without appropriate forces to handle, Abdacom could serve no useful purpose by remaining in the island: on the contrary such action could only result in the loss of a valuable Allied staff, the capture of which would have given great prestige to the enemy. On 22nd February its withdrawal was ordered.

511. It was decided that the British forces remaining in the island should in future operate under the Dutch Naval and Army Commanders-in-Chief in the N.E.I. In conformity with this decision H.Q. Westgroup moved on 23rd February from Soekaboemi and took over the H.Q. in Bandoeng vacated by Abdair. It took over operational control of its squadrons from Abdair on 24th February and was renamed Britair. It was placed under the orders of Maj.-Gen. van Oyen, the Dutch A.O.C., whose staff was already installed in Abdair's operations room. Command passed to the

Dutch Authorities on 25th February, and personnel of Abdacom left Java on 25th and 26th February.

512. Before he left Java Sir Archibald Wavell issued his instructions to the A.O.C. Britair (Air Vice Marshal Maltby). They were to the effect that:—

(a) He was to command all R.A.F. units left in Java.

(b) He would exercise Command under the orders of General van Oyen, the Dutch A.O.C. in Java, who, in turn, was under Command of the Dutch C.-in-C., General ter Poorten.

(c) The British Army troops left in Java were under command of Major-General H. D. W. Sitwell who would receive his orders from General ter Poorten.

(d) To co-operate with the Dutch and to go on fighting as long as they continued effective resistance.

(e) Thereafter to do the utmost to evacuate remaining personnel.

(f) To ensure that no undamaged equipment fell into enemy hands.

(g) As senior British Officer in Java to act as signals link between all British forces in the island and their service departments in London, Delhi, Washington and Melbourne.

(h) That no help from outside could be expected for a long time.

513. Gen. van Oyen issued instructions that the operations room, vacated by Abdair, was to be maintained for the combined use of his H.Q. and of Britair, and that it was to be organised for covering all operations in the S.W. Pacific. This necessitated a last minute augmentation of Britair's staff.

514. As the Japanese invasion fleet began its approach to Java, from bases in and around Borneo, on 25th February, energetic action was essential for collecting and organising the necessary personnel and material, and for establishing the contacts with the various Dutch, American and British authorities with whom Britair was now to deal.

515. During the following days encouraging messages were received from the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Air, and from the Chief of the Air Staff, emphasising the importance of every day which could be gained by resistance in Java. These were promulgated.

FORCES AVAILABLE AND DUTCH PLAN FOR DEFENCE OF JAVA.

516. Before proceeding further with the narrative of events it is advisable to give a brief description of the outstanding topographical and climatic features of Java, of the Dutch naval, army and air resources, and of the Dutch plan of defence.

Topography and Weather.

517. Java is approximately 650 miles long with an average width of 80 miles. Its northern coast, the one most exposed to Japanese attack, affords innumerable landing beaches throughout its length. The western end is dominated by aerodromes in South Sumatra. Highly developed road and rail communications cover the Island, the main arterial lines of which run east to west: these are exposed at many points throughout their