

to Kuala Krai and thence out of the State, and plans for the denial of sea and river craft to the enemy were put into effect. The few remaining Japanese civilians were rounded up for internment. Many of the Japanese civilians had left before the outbreak of war. The Sultan of Kelantan and his household left for his residence near Kuala Krai. The few Asiatic civilians who wished to leave did so under control and there was no refugee problem.

147. During the night 8th-9th December heavy fighting went on at the Kota Bharu aerodrome. At dawn the Japanese put in a heavy attack astride the aerodrome road and the Commander, Kelantan Force, decided to withdraw to a position with a good field of fire South of Kota Bharu. Eventually the line was stabilized at the new position and a large number of troops who had been cut off in the withdrawal rejoined their units. In the afternoon the 4/19 Hyderabad Regt. arrived from the Command Reserve and was ordered to take up a position some 12 miles south of Kota Bharu covering the camp at Chondong. In the meantime, the troops in the north half of the right sector of the beach defences had been ordered back from the beaches to cover the road Kota Bharu—Pasir Puteh. The troops on the main road were withdrawn through the Hyderabad's and night positions were established north of Chongdong.

148. On the 10th December units were re-organized. The strength of each of the battalions which had been heavily engaged was now up to 600 or more. As so often happened later in the campaign our casualties did not prove to be so heavy as at first reported. Several attacks made by the enemy were beaten off.

149. Having in view the threat to his communications should the enemy make fresh landings further south on the coast of Kelantan, the Commander, Kelantan Force, decided on the morning of the 11th December to give up the Gong Kedah and Machang aerodromes, which were no longer required by our Air Force, and to concentrate his force south of Machang to cover his communications. This movement was carried out during the day and a good position occupied. Unfortunately the runways at both the Gong Kedah and Machang aerodromes had to be left intact, for at neither had the demolition arrangements been completed. Orders were given for the demolition of the Guillemard Bridge over the Kelantan River, the longest railway bridge in Malaya.

Information was received that the Japanese had on the 10th December landed another force at Besut in South Kelantan.

150. *The Kuantan Front*—On the 9th December Japanese aircraft attacked the Kuantan aerodrome. They were engaged by small arms fire, there being no anti-aircraft guns available for the defence of this aerodrome. In the afternoon the aerodrome was abandoned as being unserviceable. Subsequently the greater part of the aerodrome was cratered by Army engineers, one runway only being left for emergency use.

Early on the night 9th-10th December reports were received from the northern part of the beach defences that enemy ships were approaching the beaches. Defensive fire was opened and spread southwards and at about 0400 hrs. torpedobombers attacked three ships

off this coast. No landing took place but subsequently some boats with Japanese equipment were found on the beach south of Kuantan. This incident had a great influence on the movements of the "*Prince of Wales*" and "*Repulse*" which will be recorded later.

151. *Naval Operations*.—In accordance with pre-war plans, submarines of the Royal Netherlands Navy operated off the east coast of Malaya and in the approaches to the Gulf of Thailand during this period. They reported sinking 4 Japanese transports off Patani on the 12th December, and a merchant ship and a laden oil tanker off Kota Bharu on the 12th and 13th December.

Towards dark on the 8th December, Admiral Sir Tom Phillips put to sea with the battleship "*Prince of Wales*" and the battlecruiser "*Repulse*" to attack the Japanese ships in the Gulf of Thailand. They were escorted by 4 destroyers. The decision to take the fleet to sea was made by the Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, after discussing the situation with the Commander-in-Chief, Far East.

On the evening of the 9th December the British Fleet was sighted by a Japanese submarine and also by Japanese reconnaissance aircraft. The Japanese air striking forces, which were being held in readiness, probably in South Indo-China, for this purpose, set-off for a night attack on the Fleet but ran into thick weather and were forced to return to their base.

The Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, realising from his having sighted Japanese aircraft that his movements had been seen, and that the element of surprise had been lost, decided to abandon the project and return to Singapore. During the night 9th-10th December, however, he was informed by his shore Headquarters at Singapore that a landing had been reported at Kuantan. Reconnaissance aircraft were flown off and the Fleet closed the shore in order to clear up the situation before returning to Singapore. Shortly after daylight the Fleet was again located by Japanese reconnaissance aircraft and their striking force was again despatched. At about 1115 it attacked the "*Prince of Wales*" and "*Repulse*" when about 60 miles off Kuantan, and by 1320 both these ships had been sunk. Fighter aircraft from Singapore were despatched as soon as the attack on the ships was reported, but only arrived in time to see them go down. 2,185 survivors were picked up by the destroyers and brought to Singapore. The Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, was lost and was succeeded by Vice-Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton.

With the sinking of these two ships the Japanese again obtained undisputed control of the sea communications east of Malaya and the whole of the east coast became exposed to attack.

I wish to pay tribute to the gallant manner in which the C.-in-C. Eastern Fleet endeavoured to assist the land and air forces by attacking the enemy's sea communications.

152. *Air Operations*.—Early on the 9th December our Air Force attacked targets in the Singora area. Owing to lack of fighter support 5 out of 11 of our aircraft were lost. During the morning Alor Star aerodrome was again heavily bombed and was evacuated later in the day, the buildings being set on fire. The sound of the explosions and the sight of the burning