

324. On the 19th January the situation at Muar was reported to be serious. Twelve Buffaloes carried out an offensive sweep of the area, using surplus ammunition on barges during their return. The latter were also attacked twice during the day by 3 Hudsons escorted by Buffaloes. That night, 19th/20th January, 9 Vildebeestes bombed the aerodrome at Kuala Lumpur, where some twenty fighters had been observed by Buffaloes of No. 488(F) Squadron.

325. On the 20th January two Blenheims made an offensive reconnaissance against shipping off the coast. Later, 6 Buffaloes carried out an offensive sweep of the Muar—Gemas area where the Army reported heavy dive bombing against troops of IIIrd Corps. They met a formation of 6 Army 97's, destroyed one and forced the others to jettison their loads. That evening, at last light, 7 Blenheims bombed and machine-gunned Kuala Lumpur with great success, claiming the destruction of over 20 fighters. 6 Hudsons attacked Kuantan at the same time. These attacks were followed up that night by 24 Vildebeestes, 12 bombing each aerodrome.

326. From the 21st to 24th January, many requests for support of the Army in the Muar area were received, but these were days during which the protection of convoys took precedence, and little was available with which to meet them. On the 21st January, 6 Buffaloes carried out sweeps in the morning and afternoon in the Parit Salong—Batu Pahat area; 2 Albacores and 2 Buffaloes attacked small boats near Batu Pahat; and 2 Albacores dropped supplies successfully for troops who had been cut off, and thus assisted them to extricate themselves.

327. On 22nd January the Japanese were infiltrating from Muar to Batu Pahat. This road was attacked by 2 Albacores, 1 Shark and 6 Buffaloes. More supplies were dropped by Albacores of No. 36 Squadron to troops cut off in the Parit Salong area. That night, 22nd/23rd January, 21 Vildebeestes again bombed Kuala Lumpur.

328. On the 23rd January, 5 Buffaloes patrolled over the withdrawal of troops from the Yong Peng area (N.N.E. of Batu Pahat) and engaged 12 Navy 'O' fighters which were harassing them. All available Sharks, Albacores and Wirraways attacked enemy troops on the road leading south from Muar. That night, 23rd/24th, 12 Vildebeestes bombed Kuantan aerodrome.

329. On the 24th January, 6 Vildebeestes attacked troops on the bridge at Labis on the Segamat—Singapore road, whilst 3 others bombed oil tanks left standing at Muar.

330. On the 25th January, 12 Buffaloes carried out sweeps, morning and evening, in the Kluang—Gemas—Batu Pahat area, whilst that night 24 Vildebeestes and 3 Albacores carried out 2 sorties each to cover the sea evacuation of a battalion which had been cut off in the Batu Pahat area. During that day 5 U.S.A. Fortresses from Java bombed Sungei Patani under Abdair direction. At night, 3 Hudsons attacked Kuala Lumpur.

331. By the evening of the 25th January, the airfields at Kahang, Kluang and Batu Pahat became untenable and were demolished, as were also the strips which had been prepared in S.

Johore. Their loss was a severe blow, as it had been hoped they would be available for the reinforcing Hurricanes; they had been specially prepared and equipped for that purpose. Seletar, which had now to be used instead, was not so well equipped with dispersal points.

Air Action against the Landing at Endau.

332. To turn to the East coast. On the 26th January, at 0930 hours, Hudson reconnaissance sighted 2 cruisers, 11 destroyers and two 10,000 ton vessels accompanied by barges, 10 miles off the coast approaching Endau. (para 321). They were being protected by Japanese fighters based on Kuantan.

333. The forces available for opposing them were:—

9 Hudsons of Nos. 1 and 8 (GR) Squadrons, R.A.A.F.

21 Vildebeestes, 3 Albacores of Nos. 36 and 100 (TB) Squadrons.

334. The attack was organised in two waves. The first wave comprised 9 Hudsons and 12 Vildebeestes and was escorted by 15 Buffaloes and 8 Hurricanes; the second, 3 Albacores and 9 Vildebeestes, escorted by 4 Buffaloes and 8 Hurricanes.

335. Unfortunately, as the Vildebeestes and Albacores of Nos. 36 and 100 (TB) Squadrons had been operating throughout the whole of the previous night (para. 330), the first wave of attack could not be launched until the early afternoon. By this time most of the Japanese troops were probably clear of their transports.

336. However, the first wave, consisting of 9 Hudsons and the Vildebeestes of No. 100 (TB) Squadron, was able to press its attack home, being helped by rather cloudy conditions. 5 Vildebeestes were lost. It was claimed that one cruiser and two destroyers were sunk, both transports were hit (one set on fire), and casualties were caused to troops in barges and on the beaches.

337. With the arrival of the second wave, the Vildebeestes of No. 36 (TB) Squadron, the weather in the area suddenly cleared and enemy fighters intercepted the squadron before it could attack. 6 Vildebeestes and 2 Albacores were shot down and other aircraft damaged and aircrews wounded. Later, 5 Hudsons of No. 62 (B) Squadron from Sumatra arrived in the area and attacked barges.

338. The fighter escort problem had not been easy owing to the slow speed of the T.B. aircraft and the distance of the target from their aerodrome. During these two attacks, 12 Japanese Navy "O" fighters were shot down and 4 damaged for the loss of 2 Hurricanes and 1 Buffalo, one Hurricane pilot personally accounting for 4 Japanese fighters.

339. No. 36 & 100 (TB) Squadrons suffered very heavily. More than half their aircraft were shot down, including those of both Commanding Officers. The remainder were badly shot about, and a number of aircrews in them were wounded. Both were withdrawn to Java on 29th/30th January for reorganisation after their very gallant effort.

Sustained Japanese Air Attacks on Singapore

340. During the second half of January the Japanese carried out air attacks on targets on Singapore Island with increasing intensity.