

285. As Japanese activity against the West coast increased, so, from 15th January, air attacks were made on an increased scale:—

15th Jan.—by 6 Hudsons, 6 Glenn Martins and 3 Blenheims escorted by 12 Buffaloes attacked barges in the Linggi River: two barges were sunk and three damaged by the Hudsons.

16th Jan.—15 Buffaloes attacked transport and movements on the road Tampin/Gemas whilst 9 Blenheims and 6 Glenn Martins followed by 4 Buffaloes attacked barges in the Muar River where further landings were taking place.

17th Jan.—9 Vildebeestes escorted by 6 Buffaloes continued attacks on barges in the Muar River, whilst fighter cover was provided for a move by road of the A.I.F. in the area.

18th Jan.—Attacks on barges in the Muar River and on troop concentrations in the Gemas area continued—a total force of 6 Blenheims, 5 Hudsons and 14 Buffaloes being employed.

286. In addition, tactical reconnaissance by one or two sections of Buffaloes was carried out for IIIrd Corps, chiefly in the Seremban-Tampin-Gemas area. Special bombing attacks were carried out by Blenheims on 10th January to destroy trains full of Army stores, which, owing to the congestion and dislocation of the railway system, had been stranded at Malacca. The attacks were at least partly successful, as were others made on 12th January against some oil tanks which had been left intact at Port Swettenham.

287. Part of our offensive effort continued to be made against Japanese-held aerodromes in order to meet the wishes of G.O.C. Malaya for reducing enemy air action against our forward troops, which had been carried out concurrently with attacks against our aerodromes both in Malaya and on Singapore Island and against our road and rail communications behind the battle front.

288. Daily flights over Northern Malaya by our P.R. Buffaloes revealed that aerodromes "blown" in the withdrawal were quickly repaired and occupied. Gong Kedah was occupied by the enemy on the 31st December, Ipoh on the 4th January and Kuantan on the 9th January.

289. Consequently our aircraft made attacks on aerodromes in Northern Malaya at frequent intervals during the latter part of December and the first half of January. They entailed long flights by night, often in the face of violent tropical thunderstorms. Altogether, between 20th December and 15th January, some eighty sorties were carried out against this type of target. Sungei Patani was attacked six times, Gong Kedah twice, Ipoh and Alor Star once. Good results were achieved by Blenheims of No. 34 (B) Squadron at Sungei Patani on 27th/28th December: photographic reconnaissance on the following day confirming that at least 7 fighters had been destroyed and 5 fighters and 3 bombers damaged.

290. Good results were also obtained at Gong Kedah on 1st/2nd January by Catalinas. These aircraft had by this time largely been withdrawn from reconnaissance work, which was instead carried out by Hudsons, owing to the vulnerability of the Catalina to fighter

attack. The range and bomb load of the Catalinas proved very useful for night bombing operations. Twice in January they attacked the main enemy base at Singora, a target which by this time was beyond the range of any other aircraft in the Command.

291. In addition, two attempts were made to carry out strong fighter attacks against Kuantan aerodrome; but tropical thunderstorms on each occasion forced our fighters to return.

292. That these operations inflicted losses upon the enemy is certain. It is equally certain that he had more than sufficient reserves to replace his losses without delay.

Air Activity off the East coast.

293. Off the east coast there was considerable reconnaissance and activity. On 27th December, photographic reconnaissance confirmed the arrival of 34 ships at Singora, which were proved subsequently to have brought a reinforcing Division. Further reports of enemy shipping necessitated sweeps by Hudsons to the Natunas on the 3rd and 4th January.

294. Daily East coast reconnaissances to the north from Endau beyond Trengganu occupied at least 6 Glenn Martins or Hudsons, whilst the M.V.A.F. continued close reconnaissance for the A.I.F. in the Endau-Mersing area.

295. On the 8th January, 9 Glenn Martins and 4 Hudsons bombed and scored direct hits on a ship anchored in the South China Sea, believed to be used by the Japanese as a navigational aid for their aircraft. On 9th January, 9 Glenn Martins bombed with success ships unloading at Kuantan.

296. Meanwhile, Kuantan had been occupied by the Japanese on the 9th January. Infiltration down the coast towards Endau and Mersing immediately commenced. By the 13th January A.H.Q. became convinced of the possibility of a landing in this vital area, and a general direction was therefore issued to all squadrons governing their action in such a contingency. A daily reconnaissance by 6 Hudsons was instituted to detect the approach of any convoy from Indo-China; reconnaissance northwards up the east coast, although restricted, was still maintained.

Capture of Borneo.

297. Borneo had been lost by this time. Kuching had been captured on 26th December, and its garrison of one Indian Battalion forced to retreat. It was located by our reconnaissance as it made its way to Sinkawang, where supplies were dropped for it by three aircraft on 31st December. Apart from a further reconnaissance on 9th January to ascertain the state of Kuching aerodrome, no further air action in the Borneo area was possible.

Japanese air operations against Singapore.

298. During the first half of January the Japanese extended their air attacks to Singapore Island, directing them mainly against its aerodromes, with the evident intention of neutralising our squadrons. Tengah, on which the Blenheim force was based, received particular attention. Night raids were a constant occurrence, but these were mainly of a nuisance value and little damage was done by them. No. 27 (NF) Squadron, which had been reorganised at Kallang, and which now had 5