

Army Air Force. For diplomatic reasons they could not be withdrawn in spite of the losses which our fighter squadrons had just sustained in Sumatra. Thus only 10 were left as replacements for our squadrons.

Allocation of Aerodromes.

496. On the evacuation of Sumatra, on 16th February, Abdair allocated aerodromes as follows:—

- (a) All Hudsons to Samplak:
- (b) All Blenheims to Kalidjati:
- (c) All fighters to Tjililitan.

These aerodromes had not been highly developed, dispersal being limited, aerodrome ground defence weak, internal signals and night flying arrangements lacking. No. A.A. defences were available.

497. On the 18th February, in view of the reduced strength of squadrons and the fact that no further bomber reinforcements could be expected, A.O.C. Westgroup decided to concentrate all aircraft by types into selected squadrons as follows:—

(a) Semplak:

Station Commander—Group Captain Brown, No. 1 (GR) Squadron, R.A.A.F.—Commander, W/Cdr. R. H. Davies. Strength 14 Hudson II's and 12 Hudson III's (about 12 operationally serviceable).

(b) Kalidjati:

Station Commander—Group Captain Whistondale (pending availability of Group Captain Nicholletts) No. 84 (B) Squadron—Commander, W/Cdr. Jeudwine. Strength 26 Blenheims (about 6 operationally serviceable).

(c) Tjikampek:

No. 36 (TB) Squadron—Commander, S/Ldr. Wilkins. Strength 9 Vildebeestes and 1 Albacore. (No torpedo facilities were available in Java.)

(d) Tjililitan:

No. 232 (F) Squadron—Commander, S/Ldr. Brooker.

No. 605 (F) Squadron—Commander, S/Ldr. Wright.

Total strength of 25 Hurricanes (about 18 operationally serviceable).

The former had been in action since its arrival in the Far East, in Singapore and Sumatra, and had been kept up to strength by absorbing No. 232 (F) Squadron proper which had arrived in H.M.S. Indomitable. It was now very depleted again, and in turn absorbed practically the whole of No. 242 (F) Squadron also from H.M.S. Indomitable—but the original designation of the squadron, No. 232 (F) Squadron, was retained.

No. 605 (F) Squadron had hitherto been mainly employed in erecting Hurricanes for No. 266 (F) Wing. But it was now armed with a small quota of aircraft and came into action on 23rd February.

The decision to retain two fighter squadrons in Java was taken in expectation of the arrival of U.S.S. "Langley," a U.S.A. aircraft carrier, with a consignment of P.40 fighters on board, with which it was hoped to arm one of them, the other retaining Hurricanes. Unfortunately the "Langley" was later sunk when approaching Java and the expectation was never realised.

Re-formation of Bomber and Fighter Groups.

498. On 18th February H.Q. Nos. 225 (B) and 226 (F) Groups were re-formed in skeleton to assist Westgroup in re-establishing their squadrons in Java.

No. 225 (B) Group, under Air Commodore Hunter, re-formed in Bandoeng. Bomber aerodromes were visited and assistance given, in co-operation with the Dutch, to units to solve their acute problems of housing, rationing and transportation. Air Commodore Hunter was absorbed into Abdair on 19th February to act as A.O.A.; the remaining members of Group H.Q. were absorbed into H.Q. Westgroup on its arrival in Bandoeng on the 23rd February.

No. 266 (F) Group, under Air Commodore Vincent, took charge of Nos. 232 (F) and 605 (F) Squadrons, and of a fighter operations room in Batavia and its local warning system. This had made good progress during the preceding few days, thanks largely to the initiative of Wing Commander Bell, previously Station Commander at Kallang, Singapore. Owing to the highly developed nature of communications in Java, efficient operations and filter rooms were quickly connected to the Dutch Observer Corps, the fighter aerodrome, the A.A. defences of Batavia, and Abdair's (later Britair's) operations room in Bandoeng. Two R.D.F. and two G.L. sets were quickly erected in the Batavia district and were also connected with them. The Dutch provided the utmost assistance, including the provision of many volunteer Dutch youths and women to man the filter and operations rooms; their alertness and enthusiasm could hardly have been bettered.

499. To maintain this Force it was decided to retain:—

(a) No. 153 M.U. (already organised for work at Djocjacarta).

(b) No. 81 R.S.U.

(c) No. 41 Air Stores Park for Unit supply.

(d) An improvised Air Stores Park for collection and sorting of equipment.

500. Establishments were drawn up and issued; and instructions were given that all personnel surplus to establishment were to be evacuated via the R.A.F. Base, Batavia, as shipping became available and as far as possible with their original units. Preference was to be given in the following order, after women and children evacuees—formed units, aircrews, technical personnel and selected details.

501. Aircraft serviceability for various reasons was low: the Hudson and Blenheim Squadrons had about six serviceable each, the two fighter squadrons not more than 18 in all. For the next few days minor operations only were carried out (under Abdair orders), and all efforts were directed towards improving the condition of aircraft and to getting ready generally for the serious operations to come.

AIR OPERATIONS 18TH TO 24TH FEBRUARY.

502. While re-organisation described above was progressing under Westgroup direction, the following operations were carried out under the directions of Abdair.

503. On the 18th February, one Hudson reconnoitred the port of Oesthaven and the road to Palembang. No signs of Japanese activity were observed.