

allotted to the Dutch and British respectively were:—

Dutch: Kuantan - Gr.Natunas - Kuching (British Borneo).

British: Kota Bahru-Southern tip of Indo-China-Gr.Natunas-Kuantan.

An extension of the reconnaissance area into the Gulf of Siam as part of routine reconnaissance was not possible owing to a shortage of aircraft.

The task of executing the British section of the reconnaissance plan was allotted to Nos. 1 and 8 (GR) Squadrons, R.A.A.F., based on Kota Bahru and Kuantan respectively. Their effort was reinforced by Catalinas of No. 205 (FB) Squadron to fill in gaps and to ensure overlapping the Dutch.

The initiation of the full reconnaissance plan cancelled the special reconnaissance which had been carried out hitherto, and involved the movement of No. 8 (GR) Squadron, R.A.A.F. from Sembawang to Kuantan. Owing to lack of transport aircraft and inadequate land communications, the ground personnel and equipment of this squadron proceeded there by sea.

Reconnaissance period 4th-6th December, 1941.

149. On the 4th December, owing to bad weather, aircraft at Kota Bahru (No. 1 (GR) Squadron, R.A.A.F.) were unable to operate, but those at Kuantan (No. 8 (GR) Squadron, R.A.A.F.) carried out their part in the reconnaissance plan, as did the Dutch, with nothing to report. Reports of the sightings of strange submarines in the reconnaissance area had been received, so a special reconnaissance was carried out by No. 60 (B) Squadron from Kuantan; but it was negative. On this day a Catalina took Admiral Sir Tom Phillips, Commander-in-Chief Eastern Fleet, to Manila.

On 5th December, 1941, bad weather still prevented No. 1 (GR) Squadron, R.A.A.F., at Kota Bahru operating, but again the Dutch Reconnaissance Group and No. 8 (GR) Squadron, R.A.A.F., at Kuantan gave negative reports. On this day a special anti-submarine patrol was maintained by three Vildebeestes ahead of H.M.S. "Repulse" which proceeded at slow speed en route from Singapore to Australia.

On the 6th December, 1941, three crews were despatched to Sourabaya to collect three Catalinas loaned by the Dutch. The anti-submarine patrol in co-operation with H.M.S. "Repulse" was also maintained.

First sighting of Japanese Expedition—6th December, 1941.

150. On December 6th Kota Bahru aerodrome was serviceable and the full reconnaissance plan was operated. The N.E. monsoon was blowing; its tropical downpours periodically made unaided navigation and accurate ship recognition matters of considerable difficulty.

A Hudson of No. 1 (R.A.A.F.) Squadron, Captain F/Lieut. J. C. Ramshaw, was the first to sight the enemy. He located two approaching convoys:—

(a) at 12.12 1 Motor vessel, 1 minelayer and 1 mine sweeper in a position 185 miles, and on a bearing of 52°, from Kota Bahru, steering a course of 310°.

(b) at 12.46 1 battleship, 5 cruisers, 7 destroyers and 25 merchant vessels in a position 265 miles, and on a bearing of 86°, from Kota Bahru steering a course of 270°.

Another Hudson of the same squadron shortly afterwards reported another convoy:—

(c) at 13.00 2 cruisers, 10 destroyers and 10 merchant vessels in a position 260 miles, and on a bearing of 76°, from Kota Bahru steering 270°.

151. Information about the latter convoy was subsequently amplified to the effect that it contained 21 merchant vessels which were cruising in two lines astern. This amplification was received by telephone at A.H.Q. at 1517 hours.

152. The position of the first of these convoys was such that it had the appearance of having recently rounded Cape Cambodia and was now headed N.W. into the Gulf of Siam. The position of the other two convoys was about 80 miles S.S.E. of Cape Cambodia, the Southern tip of French Indo-China; both were steering west, one slightly ahead of the other. They might, or might not, be following the first small convoy and in turn head N.W. into the Gulf of Siam.

One of the Hudsons had been chased by an enemy aeroplane and there could be no doubt that the Japanese knew that they had been spotted.

153. In the meantime, reports were received of aircraft, apparently Japanese, taking photographs at various points. G.H.Q. confirmed that no offensive action was to be taken by fighters against them, although A.A. defences were given authority to open fire on unidentified aircraft.

154. As a result of the enemy sighting reports, Kota Bahru was instructed to send Hudsons from No. 1 (GR) Squadron, R.A.A.F., to shadow the convoys. Catalinas of No. 205 (FB) Squadron from Seletar were ordered to take over this shadowing from the Hudsons, and to maintain it during the night 6/7th December until relieved by Hudsons again in the morning of 7th December.

155. On receipt of sighting reports, the Command was put by G.H.Q. at "No. 1 degree of readiness" which meant that it was to be "ready for immediate operations and prepared for enemy attack without prior warning."

Action taken by A.H.Q. on Enemy Sighting.

156. The following action was taken by A.H.Q. as a result of the reconnaissance reports received:—

(a) 7 Vildebeestes of No. 36 (TB) Squadron were despatched from Seletar to Kota Bahru. (9 were ordered but only 7 could proceed). Aircraft were armed with torpedoes on arrival at Kota Bahru.

(b) Norgroup was informed that No. 62 (B) Squadron at Alor Star was removed to A.H.Q. control.

(c) No. 34 (B) Squadron was retained at Tengah at short notice to move to Alor Star.

(d) The one Beaufort* still in the Command was moved to Kota Bahru to stand by there for a special photographic reconnaissance required by G.H.Q. (see para. 162).

* 6 Beauforts had recently been delivered, but 5 were sent back to Australia owing to "teething" troubles with the aircraft. Nos 36 (TB) and 100 (TB) Squadrons were due to be rearmed with this type.