

405. There was a single line telephone linking each aerodrome with Group H.Q.'s., but instruments and wire were not available for developing an internal telephone system on either aerodrome.

For point to point communication a W/T set was improvised which was able to link up with A.H.Q., and with Sabang and Lho'nga on the air reinforcement route.

406. A civil Dutch Observer system existed at Palembang, consisting of two concentric circles of posts round Palembang, at 50 and 100 kilometers radius. There were a few posts still further out—one on the north end of Banka Island, one at the mouth of the Palembang river and one on Tanjong Pinang Island, just south of Singapore. Posts on the outer circle were unavoidably somewhat widely spaced: most warnings came from the 50 kilometre circle only. Communication between posts and the centre was by W/T or telephone. No radar was available to supplement the observer system, whose volunteer operators were most enthusiastic but unfortunately had had little experience in aircraft recognition. Warnings were consequently erratic.

407. With the most willing and energetic co-operation of the head of the Observer Corps, steps were immediately taken to improve the system. Additional posts were selected, manufacture of W/T sets began and additional personnel were trained. But events moved too fast for these measures to take effect. The original system only was available during the actual events which followed.

408. The Dutch army in the N.E.I. had no A.A. artillery, having been unable to obtain guns from the belligerents in Europe or from the U.S.A. Thus the aerodromes in Sumatra had no A.A. defences. The Dutch had already had aircraft destroyed on the ground at Medan and Pakenbaroe by Japanese low flying fighters.

409. By the end of January, however, Abdacom was able to allot A.A. defences to P.I. and P.II., 6 heavy and 6 Bofors guns to each aerodrome, and 4 of each type to the oil refinery at Palembang. Ships carrying ammunition for these guns were unfortunately sunk and there was little ultimately available. There were two Dutch armoured cars and 150 native Dutch troops allotted to the defence of each aerodrome. With the arrival of R.A.F. ground personnel, aerodrome defence parties were organised to reinforce them.

410. There was one Dutch native regiment for the defence of the whole Palembang area, but there were no defences on the river leading to the town. On the 23rd January representations were made both to the Dutch naval and military authorities, and to Abdacom, on the inadequacy of the defences in the Palembang area, but no reinforcements were available. It is thought that plans were in hand to strengthen the defences, as General Sir John Laverack, Commanding 1st Australian Corps, visited Palembang about 25th January and indicated that an Australian division might be expected in the near future. Presumably, owing to the general situation in the Far East, the move was cancelled.

411. In short, the aerodrome defences were very weak and few troops were available for the defence of the area against invasion.

Arrival of R.A.F. Units from Singapore.

412. However, Japanese progress in Malaya was quicker than had been anticipated. The transfer from Singapore had to be accelerated and expanded beyond what had first been contemplated. In the event, all aircraft had to be based on P.I. and P.II, although the personnel of one bomber squadron moved to Lahat on 10th February, Group Captain Noble being appointed Station Commander. But events moved too quickly for that aerodrome to come into use.

413. This Report has already narrated the plans made by A.H.Q. in Singapore for transferring and re-organising in Sumatra and Java, and how these plans were largely frustrated by the speed of the Japanese advance in Malaya and by the dislocation caused at the docks in Singapore by air attack. These plans were further frustrated by Japanese action against shipping at sea en route to the N.E.I. Many ships were sunk and others re-routed at sea to other ports. The cumulative effect was disastrous. Practically all equipment destined for Sumatra went astray. In particular no M.T. arrived except some light motor cars about the 8th February and a few bomb trailers. There were only three refuellers available. Most important of all on the domestic side, few rations arrived and no tentage and field equipment. On aerodromes which were practically without accommodation, the last was a serious loss during the prevailing monsoon weather.

Aircraft spares were also scarce, particularly those for Blenheims, with which type the two reinforcing squadrons, Nos. 84 and 211(B) Squadrons, were also equipped.

Three month's anticipated requirements in petrol, oil and lubricants had arrived at each aerodrome. A limited number of bombs also came across and these were distributed to P.I. and P.II.

414. Local buses were requisitioned and gradually came into service. An organisation for the local purchase of supplies was set up and contracts already placed for the manufacture of domestic equipment were expedited and expanded.

415. By the end of the first week of February personnel were reasonably fed and accommodated. But later when large numbers arrived, many unexpectedly, from Singapore, accommodation had to be found at short notice. Thus 1,500 were provided for in P.II, where provision was ready for only 250, whilst 2,500 were housed in schools and cinemas in Palembang town.

Throughout, however, operational and maintenance facilities remained primitive in the extreme. The aerodromes in Sumatra were virtually landing grounds "in the blue".

All the problems which faced the staff and units were tackled with energy and spirit, and the praiseworthy results which were achieved in the face of every handicap are a great credit to both.

The Dutch gave magnificent assistance in all these local preparations, headed by the Resident Palembang, who personally inspired and directed the civil authorities in their efforts.

416. From the 22nd January onwards, personnel and aircraft started streaming in. The former were in some disorder owing to loss of