

424. On the 30th January Air Commodore H. J. F. Hunter, who had been appointed by the Air Ministry as Commander designate of a Bomber Group in the Far East, arrived in Sumatra and took over Command, Group Captain Bishop becoming S.A.S.O. of the Group.

425. Incidentally, Air Commodore Silly, Deputy A.O.C., also arrived in Palembang on

No. 1 Squadron, R.A.A.F. ...	16 Hudson II
No. 8 Squadron, R.A.F. ...	6 Hudson III
No. 34 Squadron ...	6 Blenheim IV
No. 62 Squadron ...	10 Hudson III
No. 62 Squadron ..	5 Blenheim I
No. 27 Squadron ...	3 Blenheim I
No. 84 Squadron ...	10 Blenheim IV
No. 211 Squadron ...	4 Blenheim IV
M.V.A.F. ...	Mixed Flight

the 30th January with orders from the A.O.C. to site a Command H.Q. in Sumatra. In this he was unsuccessful and left on 6th February to organise the R.A.F. Base, Batavia.

426. By the 30th January Singapore was clear of all but fighter aircraft. The strengths of bomber squadrons in Sumatra then were:—

Many overdue for inspection and showing signs of wear and tear.

} Not available until 2nd February.

} Particularly poor condition.

} Most aircraft required inspection and minor repairs, after their long flight from the Middle East.

427. From the 30th January-5th February, as convoy duties permitted, the following attacks were carried out during the nights shown:—

30th January-31st January.

6 Blenheims—Ipoh aerodrome—using Pakenbaroe for refuelling.

31st January-1st February.

6 Hudsons—Alor Star aerodrome—using Medan for refuelling. Hits were scored on the runway and aerodrome buildings.

1st February-2nd February.

5 Blenheims—Penang aerodrome—using Medan for refuelling.

2nd February-3rd February.

7 Blenheims, 3 Hudsons—Singora docks—using Medan for refuelling.

4th February-5th February.

5 Blenheims, 4 Hudsons—Kluang aerodrome—using Singapore for refuelling.

5th February-6th February.

8 Blenheims—proceeded Medan en route Singora: cancelled owing to bad weather.

12th February-13th February.

12 Hudsons—Kluang aerodrome.

The policy was for aircraft to arrive at the advanced landing ground just before dusk, refuel and rest. Then after delivering their attacks aircraft either returned direct to base, or alternatively refuelled again at the appropriate advanced landing ground and returned to base at first light. On account of Japanese fighter patrols, aircraft could not remain on undefended grounds in Northern Sumatra during daylight hours.

428. These long flights in themselves imposed great strain on crews, it was still the wet monsoon season in Sumatra and torrential thunderstorms were prevalent, particularly at night. Not all the crews of reinforcing squadrons were up to the standard of night flying required for such conditions, particularly in the absence of radio aids to navigation: those that were showed outstanding determination and skill, and of them Wing Commander Jeudwine, C.O. of No. 84 (B) Squadron, was pre-eminent. It was only rarely that results of bombing could be observed in any detail owing to the bad conditions of visibility.

429. Up to the 6th February No. 225 (B) Group had maintained daily reconnaissances across the South China Sea to Borneo to detect any Japanese movement southwards.

On the 6th February there were reports of a Japanese force assembling in the Anambas. This was located by Hudson sorties; it was attacked on the night 7th-8th February by 9 Blenheims in most adverse weather conditions, and again on the 11th-12th February by 10 Blenheims.

430. Throughout this period many transit flights to and from Singapore were carried out by Hudson aircraft either escorting Hurricanes or assisting in the evacuation of personnel.

Serviceability in all units was low.

The M.V.A.F. at Palembang were invaluable throughout in maintaining communications between P.I. and P.II. and Lahat, providing a twice daily reconnaissance of the river approaches, and locating crashed aircraft.

ORGANISATION—No. 226 (F) GROUP.

431. It will be remembered that it had not been the intention until quite a recent date to operate any of our fighters on aerodromes in South Sumatra, but that the unexpectedly rapid Japanese advance right up to the confines of Singapore island had made it impracticable for them to use the aerodromes on the island except Kallang. It now became necessary, therefore, to make arrangements for them in Sumatra. On the 1st February, 1942, Air Commodore Vincent arrived in Palembang and formed H.Q. No. 226 (F) Group. For this purpose he brought with him personnel drawn from No. 224 (F) Group, Singapore, and absorbed those of H.Q. 266 (F) Wing which was now arriving in Sumatra from U.K. (para. 373 (b)).

432. In anticipation of the formation of a Fighter organisation, and with the energetic co-operation of the Dutch, a Fighter H.Q. Operations Room had already been established at Palembang on the 25th January by H.Q. 225 (B) Group. This Operations Room was connected to a naval transmitter in the docks some distance away, for communicating with aircraft. At first, orders from the Operations Controller had to be relayed to aircraft: later this arrangement was improved and the Controller was connected direct to the transmitter.