

The Japanese Assault on Timor

1941 Australian Defence

- In February the War Cabinet, advised by the chiefs of staff and Brooke Popham, decided
 - that the 8th Division, instead of joining the Australian Corps in the Middle East as had been intended, be retained for use in the Australian area and East Asia.
 - to send one A.I.F. battalion to Rabaul.
 - and to hold two other such groups ready to go to Timor and Ambon when war became an immediate threat.
 - to move one A.I.F. infantry brigade group, to the Darwin-Alice Springs area. These, with units already at Darwin, could provide one battalion for Timor and one brigade group for the Darwin area, as well as coast and anti-aircraft units.
 - to distribute one militia battalion between Port Moresby and Thursday Island;
 - and decided to raise two reserve motor transport companies and one motor ambulance unit for service in Malaya, to overcome a shortage of drivers there which Brooke-Popham had mentioned.

Australian reinforcements



8 December 1941

- **11.00 Melbourne (11.00)**
- The War Cabinet meets in Melbourne, to consider the reports coming in;
 - It is agreed that the situation should be accepted as involving a state of war with Japan.
 - The Prime Minister, Mr Curtin, tells the War Cabinet that he had approved the dispatch of A.I.F. troops to Koepang, the previous day. Navy has ordered the armed merchant cruiser Westralia to escort the transport Zealandia. The War Cabinet confirms both actions.

12 December 1941

- Zealandia and Westralia reached Koepang and landed Sparrow Force in the morning.
- The force of 1,400 men was made up of 2/40th Battalion, the 2/2nd Independent Company, and attached artillery, engineer, signals and medical units.
- The task was to defend the Bay of Koepang and the airfield. Positions south of Koepang were to be held by the Dutch, and those to the north by the Australians, who were also responsible for the defence of the Penfui airfield.
- No 2 Squadron RAAF had moved to Penfui with their Lockheed Hudson reconnaissance bombers.



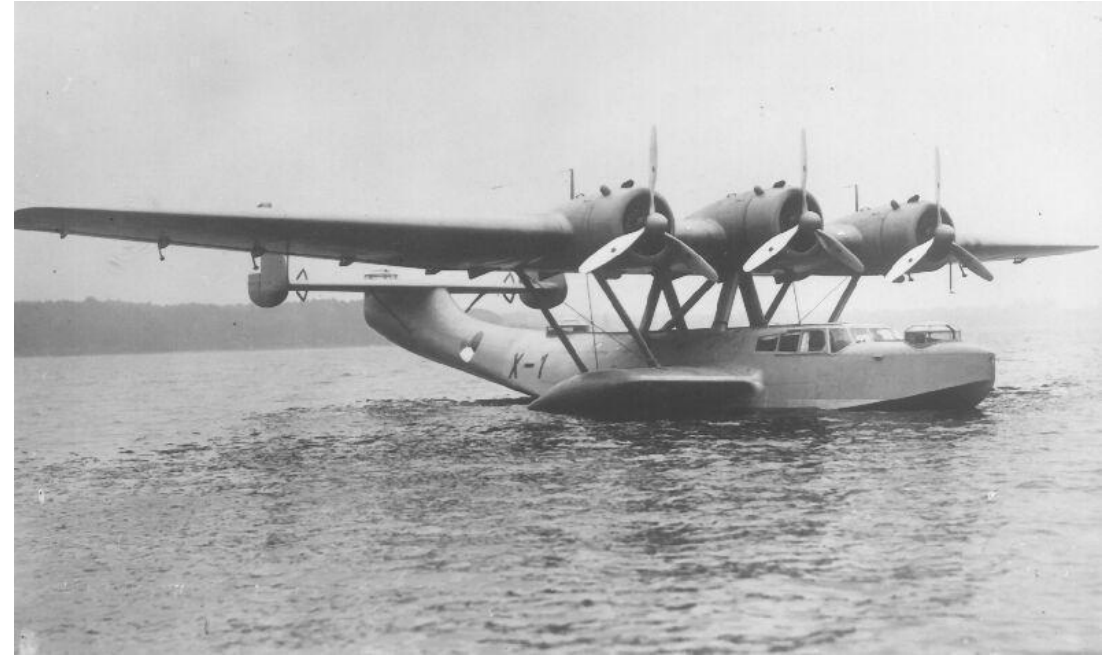
SS Zealandia served as a troopship in both World Wars. Zealandia had transported the 8th Division to Malaya. Her crew were the last Allied personnel to see HMAS Sydney, which was lost with all hands in 1941.

16th December

- **Timor**
- The UK, Dutch and Australian Governments had agreed that in case of aggression against Portuguese Timor by Japan Australian and Netherlands East Indies troops would be sent there. Now that war had broken out an attack on Dili was considered imminent. It was agreed to send troops now.
- 260 Netherlands Indies troops and 155 of the Independent Company embarked at Koepang for Dili at 8 a.m. on 16th December.

17th December

- **Timor**
- Australian and Dutch officers met the Governor of Portuguese Timor on the 17th. The Governor said that his instructions were definitely to ask for help only after Portuguese Timor was attacked.
- He was told that this would be too late; the troops were on their way, and must land.
- After delays while the governor sought instructions, he announced that he definitely must not allow troops to land unless Portuguese Timor was attacked, and that therefore his forces must resist such a landing.
- The delegation expressed the hope that there would be no fighting, pointing out that the Portuguese force was too small to succeed.
- That afternoon the troops landed unopposed, on a sandy beach about two miles west of Dili and at dusk the Australians were digging in around the airfield.



A Dornier 24K of the Dutch Naval Airservice (MLD)
Similar to X32

22nd December

- **Timor**
- By 22nd December the remainder of the Independent Company had reached Dili, and the company had received its only transport vehicles —two one-ton utilities and three motor-cycles.

Australian Outposts in the Dutch East Indies



3rd January

- On 3rd January General Wavell was appointed Supreme Commander of the A.B.D.A. (American, British, Dutch and Australian) Area.
- A.B.D.A. Command in the South-West Pacific was established excluding Australia, but having the northern coast of Australia as its southern boundary.
- The first directive stated strategic policy as:
 - (a) to hold Malaya barrier defined as line Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Java, North Australia ... and to operate sea, land and air forces in as great depth as possible forward of barrier in order to oppose Japanese southward advance;
 - (b) to hold Burma and Australia as essential support positions for the area and Burma as essential to support of China and to defence of India;
 - (c) to re-establish communications ... with Luzon to support Philippines garrison;
 - (d) to maintain essential communications within the area.



15th January

- **Command**
- With the new headquarters at Lembang near Bandung sufficiently advanced for occupation Wavell formally moved in on 15th January and inaugurated ABDA Command.
- In the ABDA Area the Allies' immediate and vital problem was to solve "the time problem between the rate of Japanese advance and the arrival of reinforcements".
- Wavell replied to Sturdee's signal about Ambon, on the 15th:
 - So far as I can judge position at Ambon not critical and in any case I am opposed to handing out important objectives to enemy without making them fight for it. Quite appreciate feelings of lonely garrison but am sure Australians will put up stout fight whatever happens. No doubt it is wise to change commander.
 - If circumstances allow hope fly there for short visit soon.



ABDA COMMAND meeting with General Wavell for the first time. Seated around the table, from left: Admirals Layton, Helfrich, and Hart, General ter Poorten, Colonel Kengen, Royal Netherlands Army (at head of table), and Generals Wavell, Brett, and Brereton.

20th January - Air

- **Timor Sea**
- No. 2 Squadron at this time had aircraft at Darwin, where all major maintenance had to be done, at the Penfui base on Timor, and at the advanced operational base at Namlea on the island of Buru, where one flight was operating under the control of A.C.H. Halong.
- On 20th January a Hudson, heavily laden with stores and men for Namlea, stalled on take-off from Penfui and crashed. The pilot, Flight Lieutenant Cuming, and nine others in the aircraft, including a party of ground staff for the advanced base, were all killed.



Lockheed Hudson

24th January - Washington

- **Command**
- As the result of continued Australian representations it was arranged from 24th January,
 - that part of northern Australia should be placed under Wavell's command in the A.B.D.A. Area, Australian forces being allocated to its defence, and
- Wavell's directive provided that none of the forces of 7th Military District in the area, numbering 14,050, was to be transferred from Australia without the consent of the Australian Government.



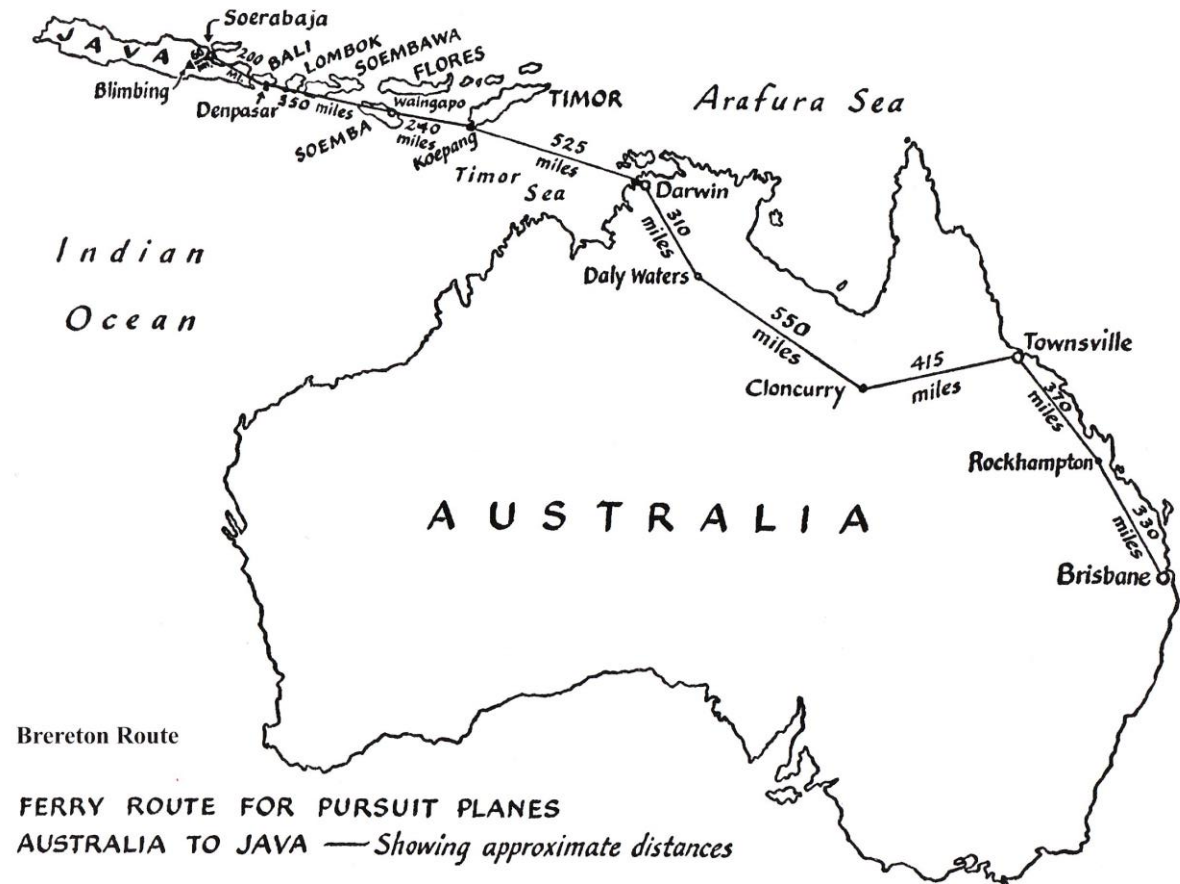
26 January – Dutch Timor

- Koepang was attacked by seven enemy fighters, they made a low-level attack on Penfui aerodrome.
- An American Kittyhawk was wrecked on the ground and the station hangar, operations room and barracks were strafed.

27 January – Lembang

Wavell decided that Timor was threatened. Its airfield was an essential link in the ferry route for short-range fighter aircraft to Java from Australia.

- He reluctantly departed from the principle that he could not afford to reinforce small garrisons and asked the Australian Government for permission to move a battalion from Darwin to Koepang, while
- the Americans agreed to send an artillery regiment from Darwin.
- Wavell also sent a battery of light AA artillery from Java.



30th January

- **Strategy**
- Wavell conveyed the decision (to withdraw to Singapore on 30/31) to Australia in a cable dated 29th January which General Sturdee read to the Advisory War Council next day (30th).
 - He said the Japanese were making three main thrusts, in one of which warships with large convoys were proceeding by the Moluccas probably against Ambon, but Koepang might be threatened.
 - The Australians in Malaya had greatly distinguished themselves, he continued. Percival should have the equivalent of approximately three divisions to hold Singapore Island, about half of whom would be fresh.
 - No more formations of land troops would be available for about three weeks, when the Australian Corps would begin to arrive. It had been intended to use this Corps to relieve Indian troops in Malaya and carry out a counter-offensive, but in view of the changed situation the Corps must be used in the first instance to secure vital areas in Sumatra and Java.
 - All I can do in the immediate future (said Wavell) is to check enemy by such offensive action by sea and air as limited resources allow and to secure most important objectives which I conceive to be Singapore, air bases in central and southern Sumatra, naval base at Surabaya, aerodrome at Koepang.
- The Advisory War Council discussed Wavell's omission of Ambon from the key points to be held. The Chiefs of Staff held that withdrawal from Ambon would be a very difficult operation and in any event it was important to deny it to the Japanese as long as possible.

30th January – Air, Timor

- On 30th January forty two enemy fighters raided Penfui (Koepang),
 - destroying a Hudson that was taxiing to a revetment and wounding the pilot.
 - Off the coast they intercepted and shot down the Qantas Empire flying-boat *Corio* which was on a flight to Surabaya to evacuate women and children refugees.
 - The aircraft was coming in to land at Koepang, and was attacked at 400 feet by enemy fighters, and shot down three miles from shore
 - The flying-boat plunged into the sea with two of its engines on fire.
 - Fifteen of the passengers and crew were killed. The remaining five managed to swim ashore.
 - Two RAN officers Lieutenants McCulloch and Westbrook, were passengers, on the way from Darwin to Batavia to take up appointments at Collins' headquarters. McCulloch was killed Westbrook survived.



Short S.23 Flying Boat (VH-ABF) *Cooee*, similar to *Corio*, Qantas Empire Airways.

30th January – Air, Timor

- Koepang was now eliminated as a stopping point on the regular Qantas flying-boat service to Singapore.
- Scheduled Stops Sydney to Singapore:
 - Brisbane
 - Gladstone
 - Townsville (o/n)
 - Karumba
 - Groote Island
 - Darwin (o/n)
 - Kupang
 - Bima
 - Surabaya (o/n)
 - Jakarta
 - Singapore



5 February - Melbourne

- The Australian War Cabinet was reluctant initially to reinforce Timor because Australia had only two trained battalions at Darwin, but
- on 5th February, on the advice of the Chiefs of Staff, they decided that the 2/4th Pioneer Battalion should go to Timor.
- But ships would not be available until 15th February.



War Cabinet meeting in the War Cabinet room at Victoria Barracks, Melbourne.

Date is November 43 and some personnel have changed.

6th February - Air

- **Java**
- The second flight of the 20th Pursuit Squadron (P), of 10 fighters, took off from Timor for Bali with navigation escort by a Beechcraft.
 - En route the Beechcraft was attacked by a Japanese Nell twin engine bomber.
 - The fighters shot the Nell down but
 - Two of the fighters had dropped their auxiliary fuel tanks before attacking, so did not have enough fuel to reach Denpasar and crash landed on Lombok.
 - The other eight aircraft reached Surabaya that night.
 - Thirteen out of the squadron's twenty four aircraft had now reached Surabaya.
 - They claimed five enemy aircraft shot down in en route combats.



Nell twin engine bombers

9th February

- **Air**
- On the 9th R.A.A.F. ground staff at Penfui mistook three USAAF Douglas Dauntless dive bombers for enemy aircraft, and fired on them with small arms, so damaging two that they had to return to Darwin for repairs.
- Penfui had no knowledge that the Dauntlesses, in transit to Java, were due. A flight of nine Kittyhawks of No. 3 Fighter Squadron (provisional) accompanied the dive bombers, with a single Liberator to aid them in navigation.
- As they approached Timor their way was barred by heavy storm clouds and the pilots could not find Penfui aerodrome. Unable to aid the fighters further, the Liberator was forced to turn back to Darwin—for which only it had the needed range.
- After further vain attempts to land all the Kittyhawks were lost; one pilot was killed when he attempted a crash landing in the jungle and all the others baled out over the Atambua area and were brought in by an R.A.A.F. salvage party.

10th February

- **Command**

- Wavell left Singapore at midnight (night of 10th/11th). There was a delay in the arrival of a motor boat to take him out to his Catalina. He stepped out of the car to see what was happening but the driver had parked too close to the edge of the sea wall and the Supreme commander on his blind (left) side failed to see the danger. He plunged over the wall and crashed on the rocks and barbed wire entanglement below badly injuring his back.
- Despite his order that Singapore must be held to the last, he went "without much confidence in any prolonged resistance". He cabled to Mr Churchill stating that the battle for Singapore was not going well.

12th February

- **Land Timor**
- Brigadier Veale had been instructed to take command of Sparrow Force with its additional battalion. He and his staff had reached Timor by 12th February.

14th February

- **Timor**
- The weather was particularly bad at this period. On the 14th a Hudson of No. 13 Squadron took off from Penfui at dawn into a stormy sky and, while still near the aerodrome, crashed after being struck by lightning. The pilot, Flying Officer Mitchell, and all the crew were killed.

15 February – Timor Sea

- A convoy of four ships left Darwin for Koepang shortly before 2 a.m. carrying
 - the 2/4th Pioneer Battalion,
 - the 11/148th US Field Artillery and
 - a troop of Australian anti-tank guns.
- The convoy steamed westward, well to the south of the direct route to Timor, but even so, soon after 11 a.m., the convoy was sighted and shadowed by a Japanese flying-boat.



USS Houston escorts merchant ships in the Timor Sea, February 1942. Photo taken from HMAS Swan.

15 February – Dutch Timor

- By mid-February the surviving aircraft of the two Hudson squadrons, Nos 2 and 13, were all back operating from Darwin.
- The enemy maintained the intensity of air raids on Koepang, which varied from attacks by about 6 fighters to heavy assaults by 18 to 36 bombers.



Mitsubishi G3Ms, Allied reporting name "Nell")

Situation report 15th February 1942

Netherland East Indies

- The Japanese are advancing to the south and west and are operating aircraft carriers in the area. Macassar and Bandjermasin have been taken and paratroops have landed at Palembang in Sumatra, with a sea convoy of reinforcements in Banka Strait.
- Ambon has been taken and Australia has lost contact with the Australian Battalion Taskforce stationed there and Timor, defended by a third Australian Battalion Task force, is under threat. Wavell has sought to reinforce Timor and another Australian battalion and an American artillery battalion are at sea en route Darwin Timor.

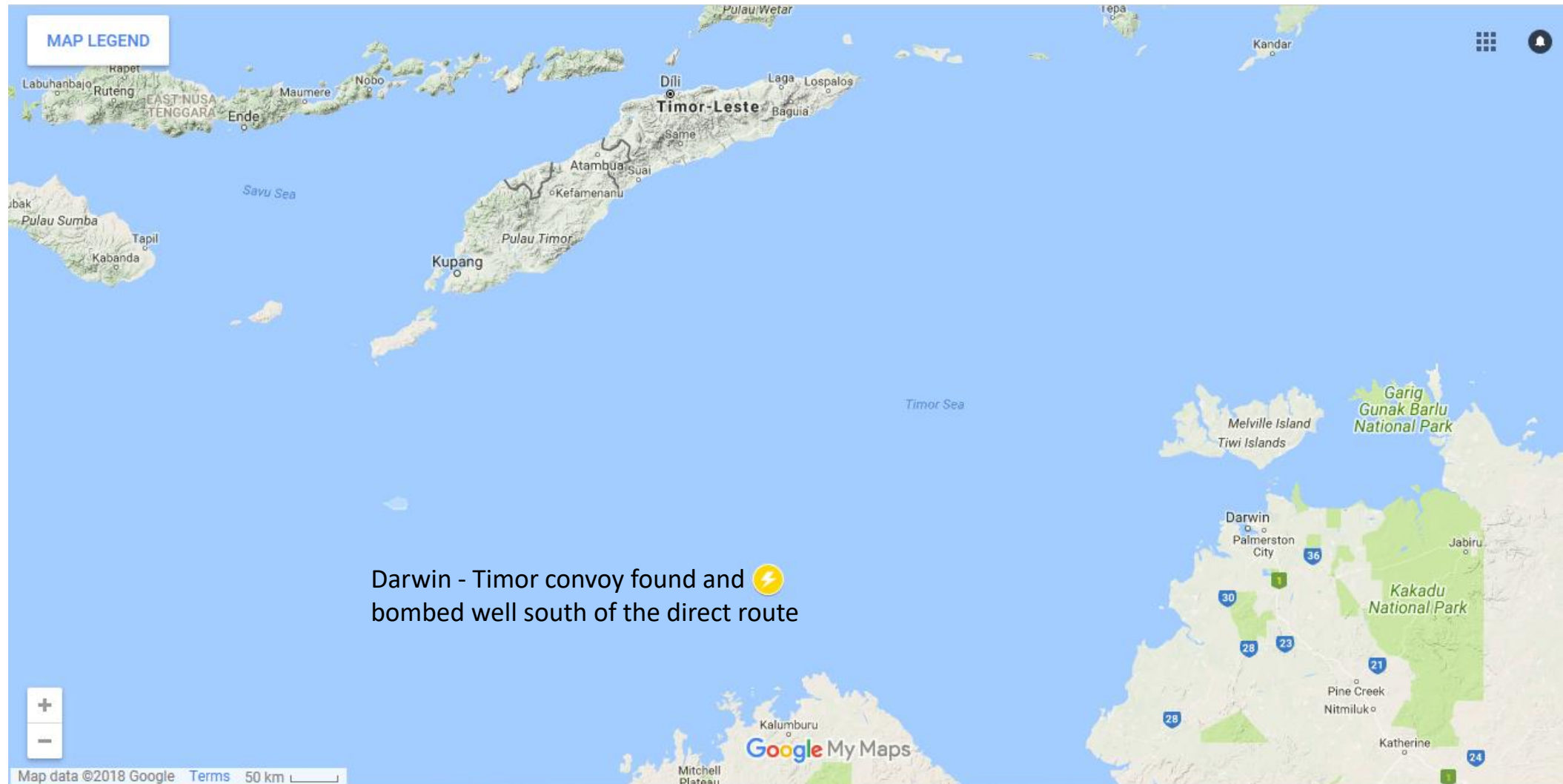
General Wavell,

- Supreme Commander of ABDA, has accepted that it will be difficult to hold Java and has recommended switching future reinforcements including the two Australian divisions to either Burma or Australia.

16 February – Timor Sea

- At 11.15 a.m. about 300 miles west and a bit south of Darwin, convoy and escort were attacked by thirty-six twin engined bombers and nine flying-boats.
 - In spite of determined attacks none of the ships received a direct hit.
 - The survival of the convoy was largely due to the heavy and accurate anti-aircraft fire, especially from USS Houston.
- At ABDA HQ enemy aircraft carriers were suspected to be in the vicinity. It was felt certain that more attacks would be launched on the convoy, so Wavell ordered it back to Darwin.
- Course was reversed at 3.15 p.m., and the convoy reached Darwin in the forenoon of the 18th.
- The 79th Light Anti-Aircraft Battery (a British unit sent by Wavell) arrived at Koepang from Surabaya on the 16th.

16 February – Timor Sea



16th February - Australia

- **Strategy**
- The Australian Chiefs of Staff, after reviewing these three papers by Sturdee, Wavell and Lavarack, expressed the opinion, in a report dated 16th February, that, if possible,
 - all Australian forces now under orders to transfer to the Far East from the Middle East should be diverted to Australia and that
 - Darwin was the first place in Australia that should be reinforced.
 - The recall of the 9th Division, which was in Syria, required early consideration.

17th February - Strategy

- Acting on the advice of the Chiefs of Staff, Curtin immediately sent a further telegram to Churchill on the 17th
 - asking for the diversion to Australia of the 6th and 7th Divisions
 - and the British armoured brigade of 3,000 that was with them, and for
 - the recall of the 9th Division at an early date.
 - Next day his action was confirmed by the War Cabinet, which also decided that Wavell should be asked where he intended to use the advance party of 3,400 Australian troops at Batavia.
- The Minister for the Army, a representative of a northern Queensland constituency, found these (MacKay's) military arguments so disturbing that he referred them to the War Cabinet on 17th February with a recommendation that
 - "the policy of the Government should now be defined as a determination to defend the whole of the populated areas of Australia to the utmost of our ability, and to prevent the enemy by every means within our power from obtaining a foothold on our shores".
- The request for the diversion of the A.I.F. to Australia crossed in transit suggestions from both Churchill and Roosevelt that they be diverted to Burma.
- The reports from Wavell and the general situation after the surrender at Singapore were discussed in the British War Cabinet and Defence Committee on the 16th and in the Pacific War Council on the 17th.

17th February

- **Strategy**
- On the 17th, Lavarack had cabled that the *Orcades* with 3,400 troops, mostly Australian, had been ordered to Batavia, that he had represented to Wavell that they should not be disembarked, but that Wavell did not agree, being "anxious to avoid appearance precipitately changed plan which might compromise relations Dutch and prestige generally; also wishes them to protect aerodromes in Java".
 - Lavarack added that he considered there was no possibility of employing the A.I.F. to advantage in Java.
 - Sturdee commented that if the troops landed and were distributed in Java it would be difficult if not impossible to withdraw them.

18th February - Australia

- The War Cabinet decided on 18th February
- that the memorandum by Mackay should be considered by the Chiefs of Staff before being submitted to the War Cabinet and it directed the Chiefs of Staff to submit a fresh appreciation on the defence of Australia. The appreciation was to
 - pay regard to the importance of holding Australia as the main base in the south-west Pacific for the development of counter-offensive action against Japan with American assistance and to
 - consider the strength and disposition of the forces necessary for the defence of Australia,
 - taking into account both the return of the A.I.F. and the possibility of American and Canadian reinforcements.
- that Blamey should return to Australia, and Morshead should command the A.I.F. in the Middle East.
- to tell Wavell that Lavarack considered the Australian troops now at Batavia could not be employed to advantage in the Indies.
- that the Department of Munitions would have a general authority to continue production of munitions as existing orders were completed in anticipation of further orders.
- After the Chief of the Air Staff told the War Cabinet that the first six squadrons of American fighters assembled in Australia were to go to ABDA Command,
- the War Cabinet decided to ask General Wavell that some at least of these machines be retained in Australia for the defence of Darwin, as well as the east coast areas and Port Moresby.
- On 18th February the Minister for War Organisation of Industry, Mr J. J. Dedman, announced decisions prohibiting the manufacture of a wide range of non-essential commodities and requiring manufacturers to provide information on the number and types of workers who would become available for war work as a result of the ban.

18th February – The Strategic Debate

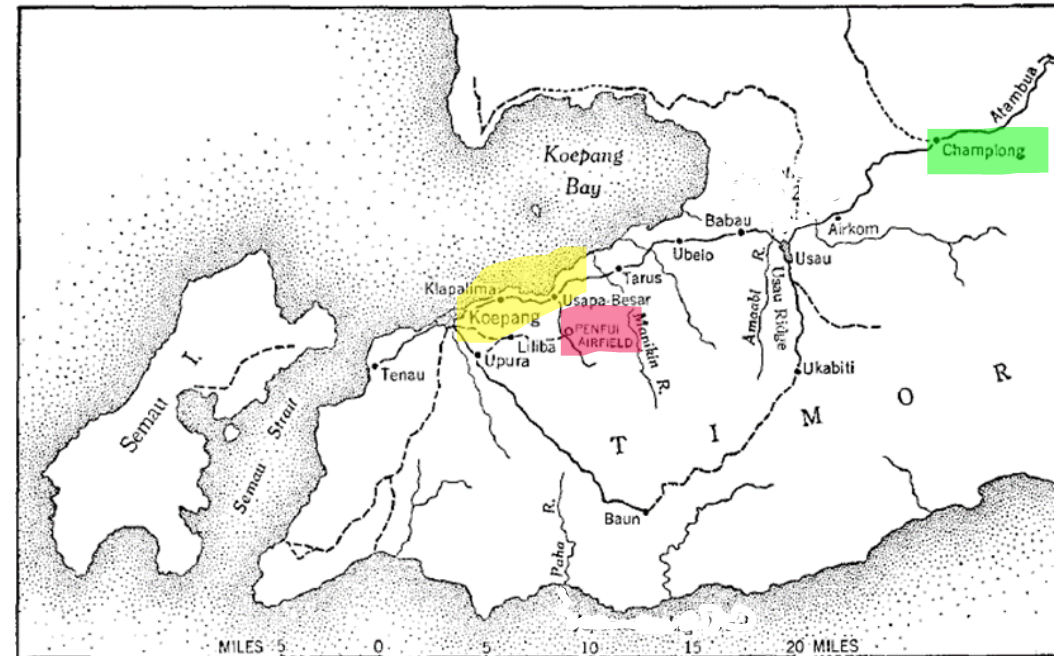
- **Australia**
- In the afternoon, after the war bond rally in Sydney, Curtin suffers an attack of gastritis, and is admitted to St Vincent's Hospital for treatment, where he remains overnight.
- **London**
- Page strongly recommended that the Australian Government should concur in this proposal (to divert the 7th division to Burma).
- His arguments were reinforced by those of Bruce in a personal telegram to Curtin sent on 18th February.
- **Australia**
- Late on the night of the 18th Curtin replied to Page warning him of the "very strong probability" that the Government would adhere to its decision for the return of the A.I.F. to Australia
 - and that, in the meantime, the convoy should not be committed to Burma.
 - Further advice would be given to him "within the next half day"
- **London**
- About the same time as he received this message, Page learnt that Wavell's appreciation of 16th February, on which Page had relied to a large extent in recommending the diversion of the 7th Division to Burma, had not yet been sent to Australia and, after arranging for its urgent transmission, he cabled to Curtin begging him to defer a final decision until he had studied Wavell's views.
- **Australia**
- When the Advisory War Council was informed on 18th February of the action taken by Curtin to request the return of the A.I.F., non-Government members also asked that the question be deferred,

18th February

- **Timor**
- **Air**
- On the 18th Headlam received orders to evacuate all the R.A.A.F. staff except small maintenance and signals parties. Every man volunteered to remain. Six officers and 23 other ranks were selected, including Flying Officer Cole and his party who were absent salvaging what they could from the crashed American Kittyhawks.
- At dusk that day 6 Hudsons arrived to take the main staff to Darwin. On their way 4 of them, led by Ryland, had attacked an enemy submarine. Since they carried no bombs they dived as low as 10 feet over the water to fire their guns, but without success.
- At 3.30 a.m. on the 19th the Hudsons left again for Darwin carrying all but the selected rear party which, in company with members of Sparrow Force, began the pre-arranged demolitions and the mining of the aerodrome.
- Sparrow Force was informed that **Penfui** would cease to be an operating station, and become a refuelling point only. Its use even for this purpose became questionable when news was received that the Den Pasar airfield at Bali, used as a further stage in flying fighter aircraft to Java, had been so heavily bombed as to be unserviceable, and was under frequent attack.
- **Army**
- Darwin was asked by Leggatt to state the future role of Sparrow Force in these circumstances, but no reply was received.

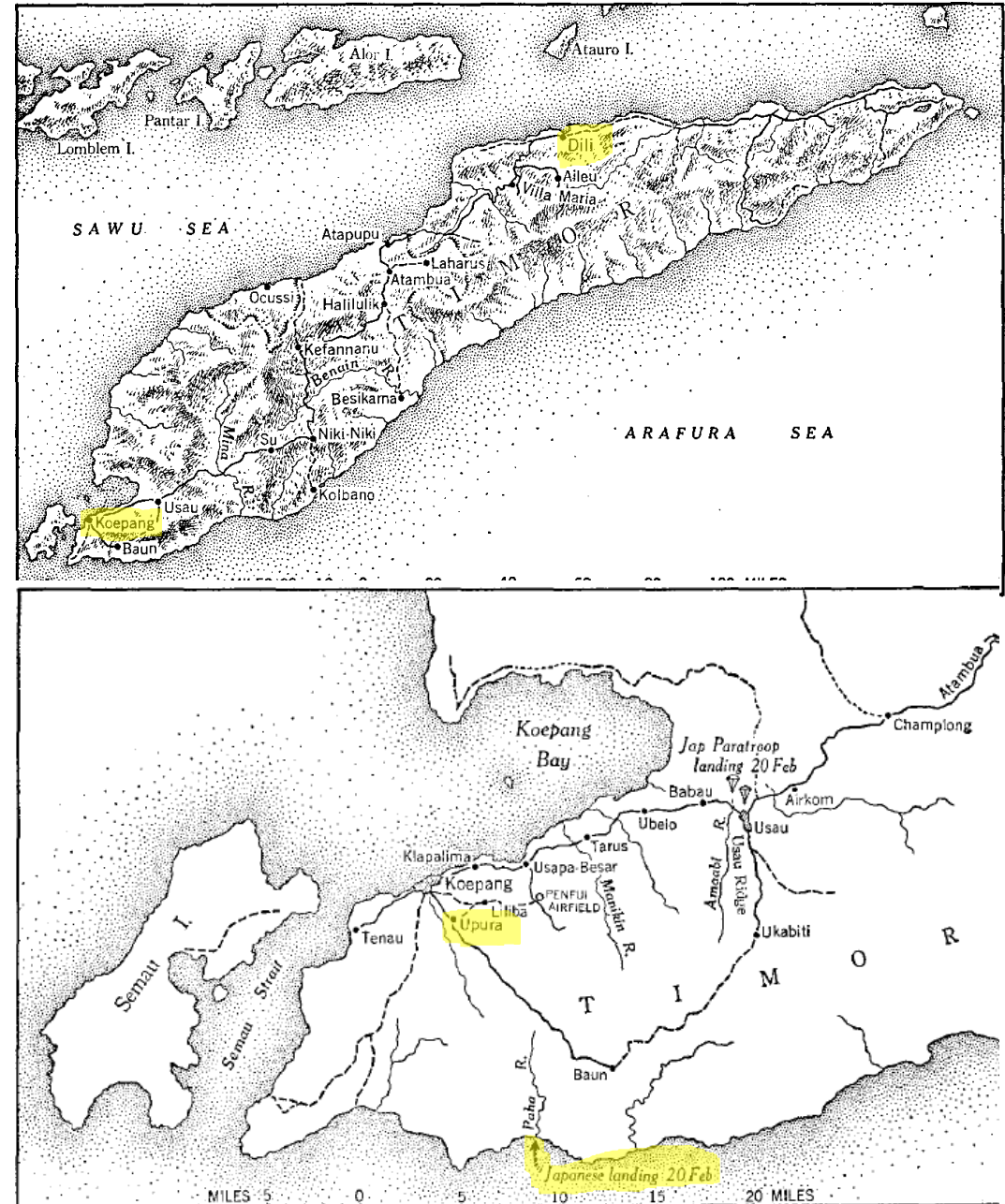
19 February – Dutch Timor

- News reached Timor of the devastating air raid on Darwin.
- The report stated that a Japanese aircraft carrier, a cruiser and five destroyers were 80 miles east of Kolbano, on the south coast of Timor.
- During the evening a lookout on Semau Island, south east of Koepang, reported thirteen unidentified warships and transports approaching from the north-west.
- Sparrow force was divided between beach defences from Koepang to Usapa Besar and the defence of the airfield at Penfui. The force's base was in Champlong.

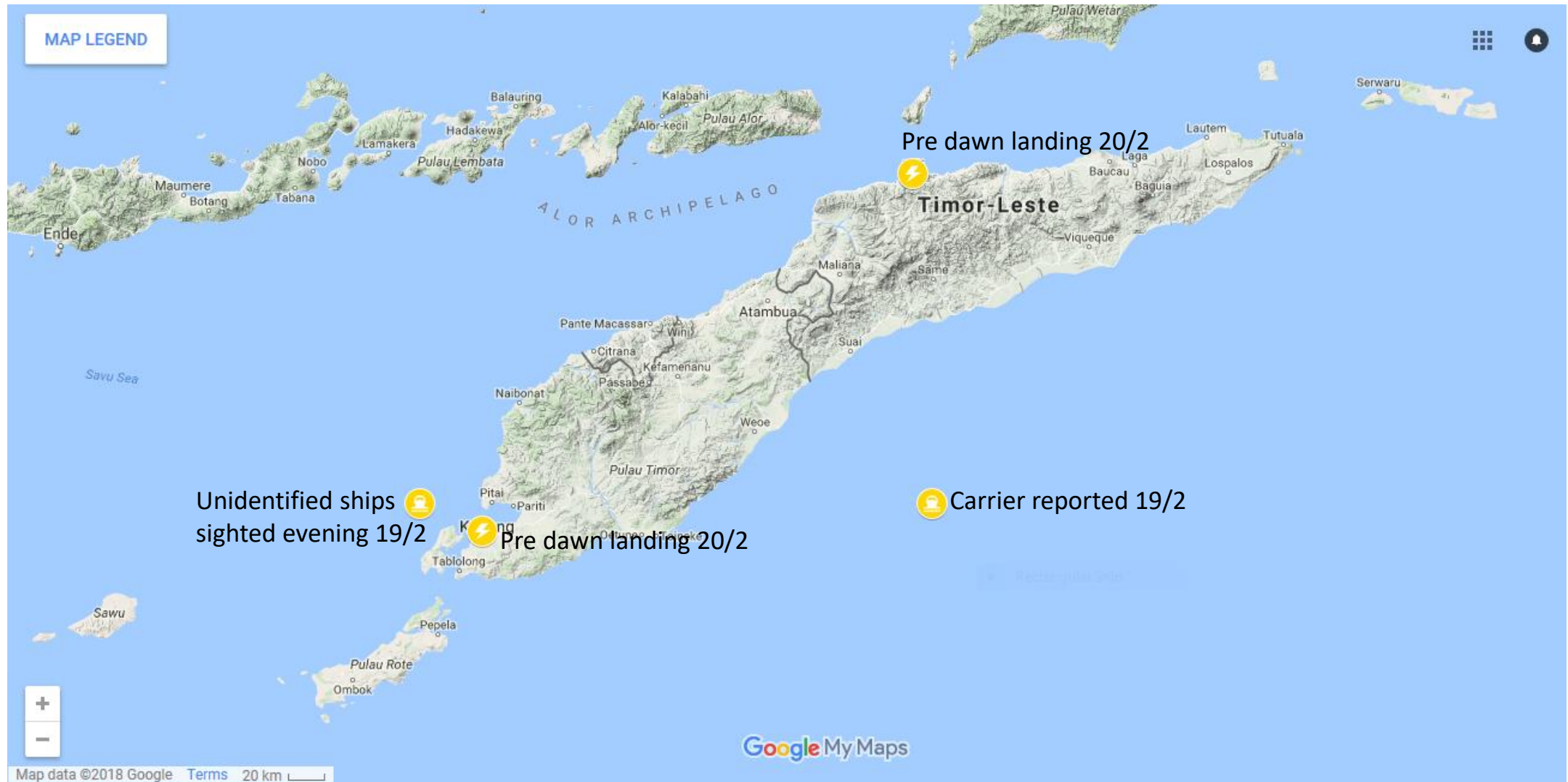


19/20 Feb - Dutch Timor

- That night the Japanese were reported landing on the south coast near Koepang and at Dili.
- At 5 a.m. on the 20th, Japanese warships began shelling the airfield. The bomb dumps were then blown up.
- The reserve company (Captain Trevena) was sent to **Upura**, astride the road to Koepang from the south coast. The company was machine-gunned by aircraft while on the move.



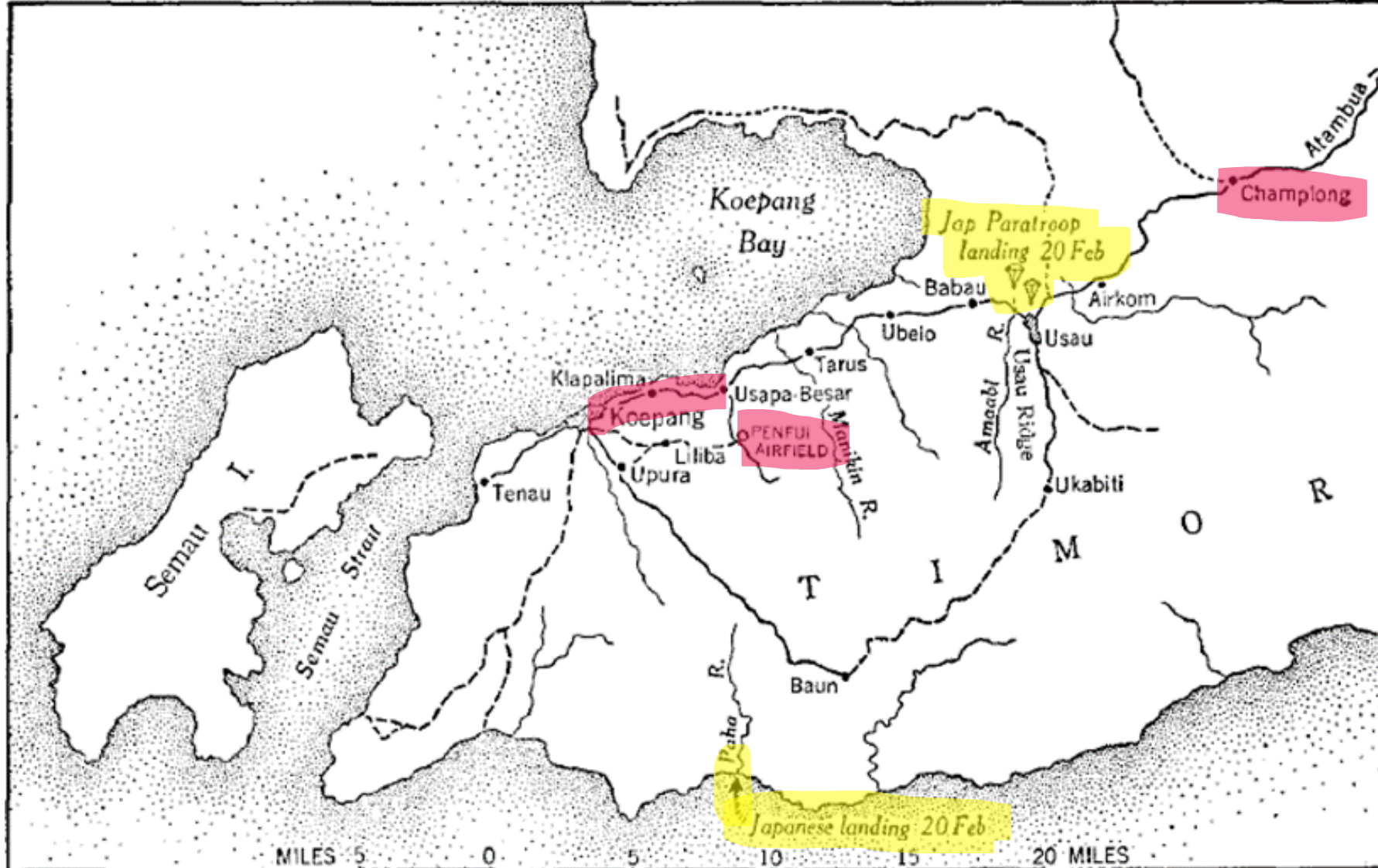
19 & 20 February - Timor



20th February – Dutch Timor

- Japanese bombers attacked the fort at Klapalima on the 20th, mortally wounding the commander, Major Wilson. After another bombing attack both guns there, having become ineffective as a result of the destruction of their communications, were put out of action by their crews.
- At 9.30 a.m. hundreds of Japanese paratroops landed five miles north-east of Babau.
- The whole force was jeopardised by the landing of these paratroops astride the only road into the centre of the island, as it cut the battalion off from its main ammunition dumps and supplies at Champlong.
- The only men in the Babau area were the cooks and "B" Echelon personnel, and the men of headquarters company, together with a few patients and medical orderlies in a small dressing station.
- Captain Trevena's company was summoned back to Babau, and the men in the threatened areas were ordered to defend them meanwhile.
- The paratroops entered Babau at 10.50 a.m. 20th February, against resistance from two improvised platoons of Australians, armed only with rifles, plus artillerymen fighting as infantry. After suffering severe losses the Australians were forced out of the village early in the afternoon, and withdrew to Tarus.
- When Trevena's company became available it advanced on Babau. It attacked from a start-line about 500 yards west of Babau at 4.30 p.m. The left platoon, advancing through maize fields, forced its way into the eastern end of the village. The other platoons, under mortar and machine-gun fire, advanced to the market place, Lieutenant Corney being killed in an attack on a machine-gun post.
- A considerable number of paratroops were killed in the village and a useful number of automatic weapons captured, but enemy machine-guns firing from the concealment of the maize made the Australians' position untenable. When it was almost dark, and there seemed to be hundreds of Japanese moving into the village, Trevena withdrew his men to Ubelo, a good defensive position.

20 February – Dutch Timor



11 January 1942

- **Menado**
- On the morning of 11th January the enemy launched their first paratroop attack.
- More than 300 men parachuted from transport aircraft over Langoan airfield, close to Menado.
- The small Dutch force could not contain these paratroops who, though scattered over a wide area at first, succeeded in capturing the airfield.

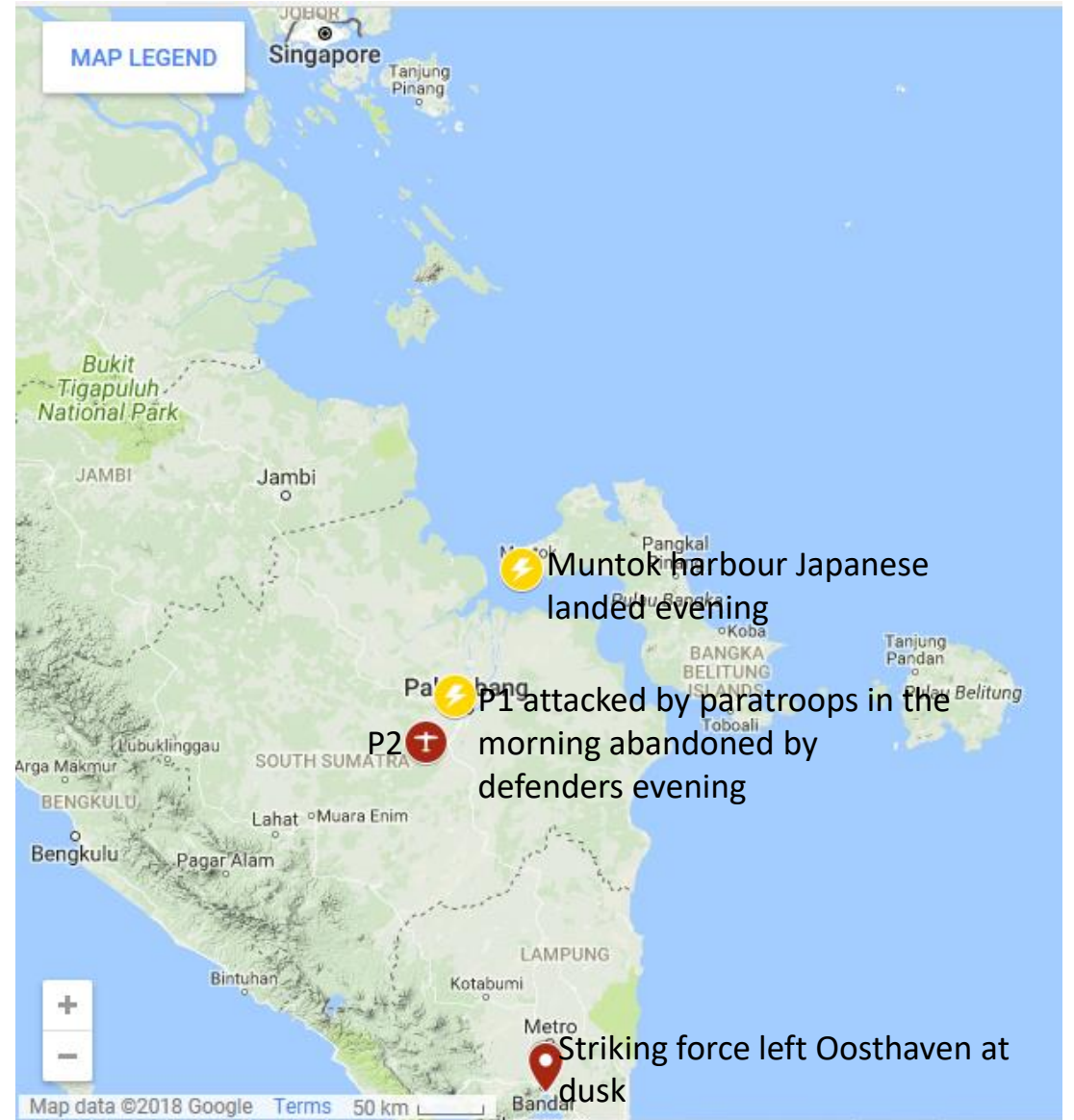


14th February – Sumatra, Air

- The Japanese target was P.1.
 - Bombers first drenched the aerodrome with light bombs,
 - then their large escort of fighters swept it with gunfire.
 - Almost immediately after this attack, troop carriers droned over and dropped two groups of parachutists.
 - About 260 paratroops, landed in scrub at two points between 400 and 800 yards to the south and the west of the aerodrome.
 - About the same time about 100 paratroops descended over the oil refinery area several miles west of the aerodrome.
- An attempt by the paratroops to rush the aerodrome was checked by the crews of the British anti-aircraft guns, now with 8 3.7-inch guns and 8 Bofors, the Dutch infantry force with its two aged armoured cars, and about 60 R.A.F. ground defence gunners. There were casualties on both sides.
- The Japanese then established a roadblock and prevented two attempts by the defenders to get support from Palembang to their aerodrome force.

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15 February - Sumatra

- On the morning of the 15th another force of enemy paratroops, about 100 strong, was dropped over P.1 aerodrome.

20th February

- **Government**

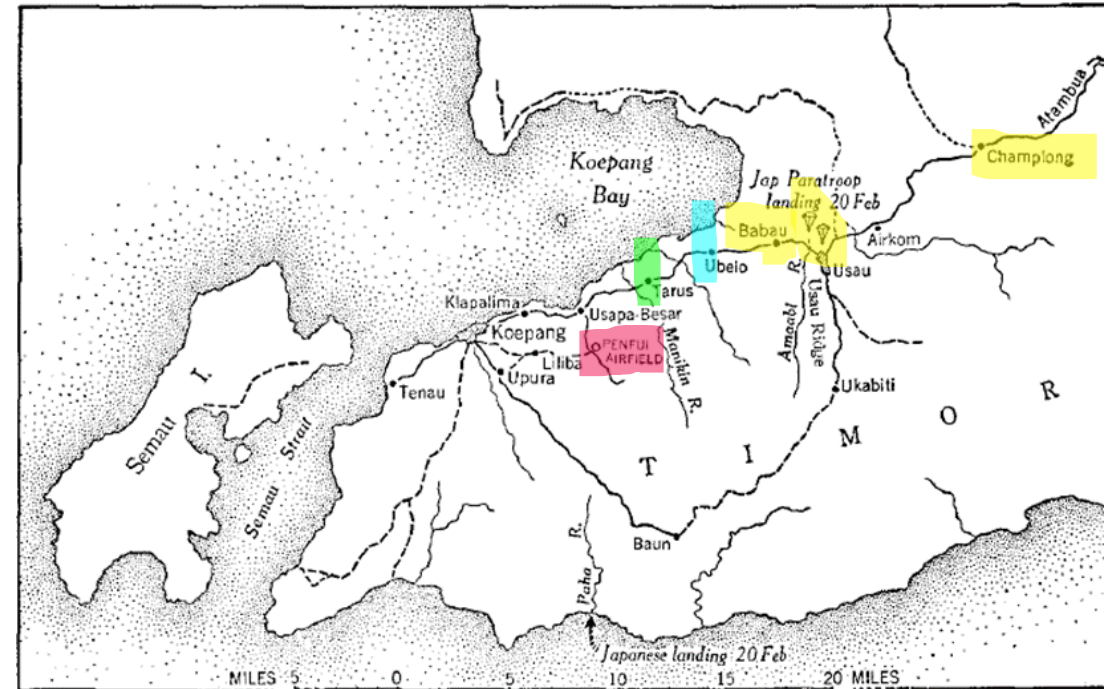
- Curtin Checks out of St Vincent's Hospital and drives straight to Canberra to address a joint session of Parliament. Later he makes a statement on casualties and damage as a result of the attack on Darwin.

- **Strategy**

- When Curtin's telegram of the 19th arrived Page assumed that the decision had been made before some additional cables, from Wavell and the US chiefs of staff, had been received. Accordingly, he reported, he was holding Curtin's final instruction secret until he received further advice and no instructions to divert the course of the convoy had been sent.
- Curtin told Page to act at once in a telegram which left Canberra shortly after midnight on the night of 20th-21st February (Eastern Australian time).
- On the evening of the 20th (London time), Page reported that the Australian decision had been communicated officially to the Pacific War Council and instructions had been issued for the diversion of the convoy to Australia.
- Still on the 20th Churchill cabled Roosevelt that
 - "the only troops who can reach Rangoon in time to stop the enemy and enable other reinforcements to arrive are the leading Australian division", but the Australian Government had "refused point blank" to let it go.
 - He appealed to Roosevelt to send him a message to pass on to Curtin.
 - Roosevelt did so, emphasising that he was speeding troops and planes to Australia and concluding "Harry [Harry L. Hopkins] is seeing Casey at once".
- Also on 20th February, Australia received a telegram from the Dominions Office
 - repeating information from Field Marshal Dill then in the United States, that a division and some base troops would leave America for Australia in early March.
 - In these circumstances would it not be wise to leave the destination of the Australian 6th and 9th Divisions open?
 - Dill asked whether Australia would be prepared to give up one of her own divisions in exchange for an American division.

21 February – Dutch Timor

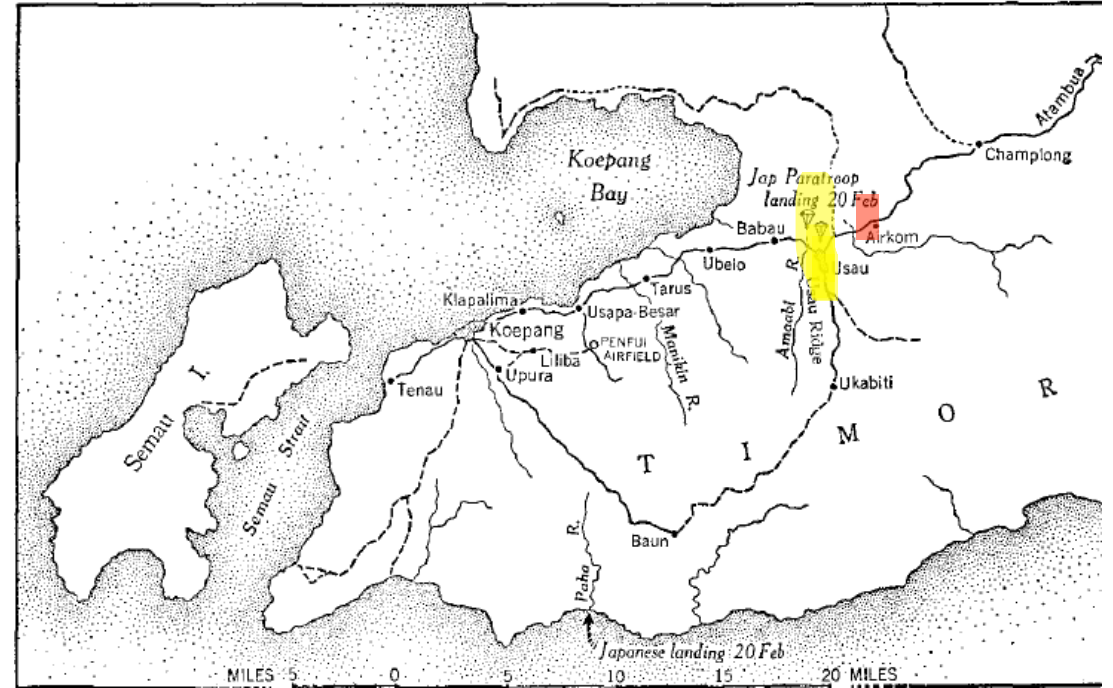
- At 22.00 on 20th Feb Leggatt decided to withdraw from the airfield.
- He intended to recapture Babau and Champlong, obtain the supplies he needed, and then wage guerrilla warfare.
- He ordered the force to concentrate at Tarus.
- At Tarus about midnight Leggatt ordered an attack on Babau at 5.30 a.m. on the 21st.
- Roff's and Trevena's companies, each with a section of carriers, an armoured car, and a mortar detachment under command, would attack from a start-line at Ubelo.
- The attack went very slowly but was in Babau by 8.00 pm and Sparrow force concentrated there that night.



- From 7 a.m. the Australian column was strafed and dive-bombed by Japanese aircraft.
- At 8.30 a.m. it was reported that 300 more paratroops had been landed in the same area as the previous day.

22 February – Dutch Timor

- Leggatt decided to move the whole force on to Champlong.
 - About a mile from Babau a roadblock was seen at the bridge over a River and many Japanese, with a mountain gun, were seen digging in on the **Usau** ridge which crossed the road.
 - Three attacks on the roadblocks in company strength with mortar and machine gun support failed.
 - An enemy force pursuing the column was being held off by the rearguard, when a battalion strength attack went in at 5.25 pm.
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- This attack got through Usau about 6.00 pm.
 - When, at 9 p.m., the convoy was not moving Maddern went forward again and found the leading driver asleep. The column reached **Airkom** by 23.30.
- Timor Part 1 © Jerry McBrien February 2021
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23 February – Dutch Timor

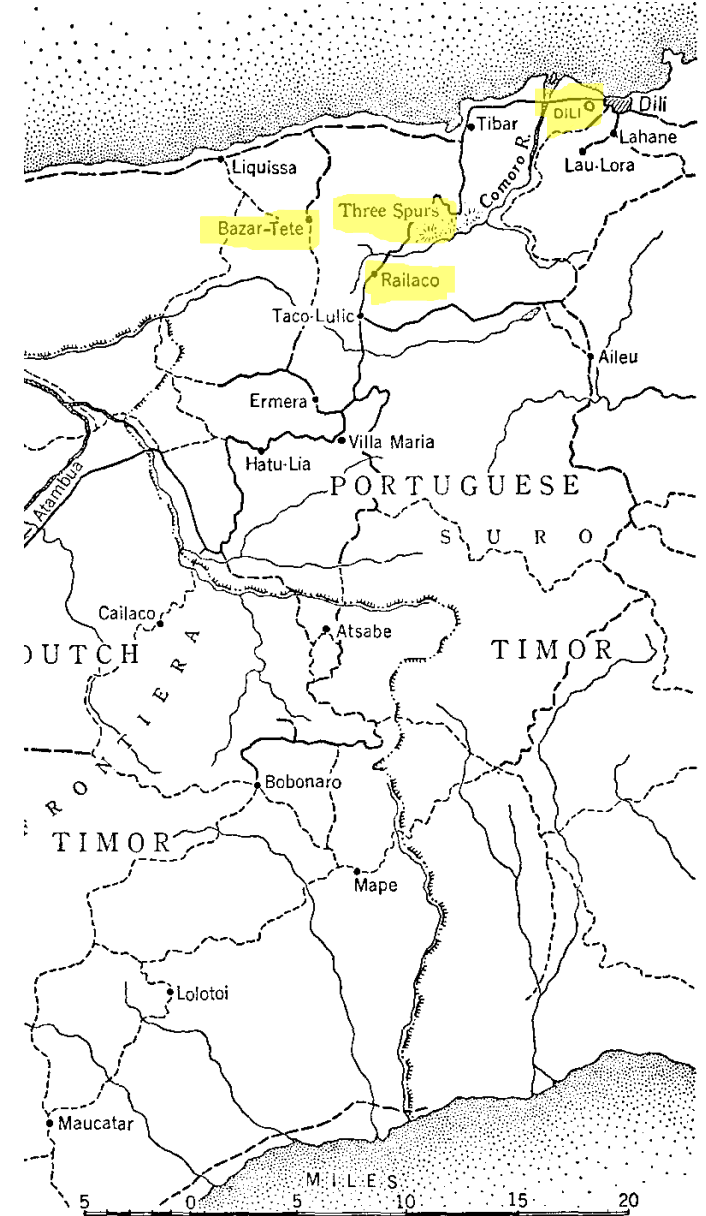
- Soon after 6 a.m. Lieutenant Sharman's platoon moved off in two trucks preceded by a machine-gun carrier. No news had been received from this little force when,
- at 07.50, a Japanese column led by tanks, flying a flag thought at first to be white but later seen to be a furled Japanese flag, moved up to the tail of the column. When this was realised, the tanks were so close to the rear of the Australian convoy that two antitank guns that had been manoeuvred into position could not be fired without endangering the Australians.
- The Japanese commander called on the Australians to surrender. He said that if there was no surrender by 10 a.m. the convoy would be bombed continuously and fire would be opened.
- Leggatt ordered his officers to obtain the feelings of the troops. All units were unanimous in the opinion that further resistance was useless. All troops also indicated that they would continue to fight if Commander ordered it. The decision to surrender was made at 0900.

23 February – Dutch Timor

- At 10 a.m. a wave of Japanese bombers appeared and bombed both the Australian and the Japanese columns indiscriminately killing some in both forces and destroying four enemy tanks.
- They made a similar attack at 10.10, but when a third wave of bombers appeared the Japanese had placed many flags around and the aircraft did not attack.
- At the time of the surrender the Australian battalion had practically no food or water, only 70,000 rounds of ammunition, 84 men had been killed, and nine trucks containing 132 wounded were within close range of the enemy 's weapons.

20 February - Portuguese Timor

- The 2/2nd Independent Company was dispersed inland from Dili with headquarters and hospital at **Railaco** and a platoon at "**Three Spurs**".
- Laidlaw's platoon was in the **Bazar-Tete** area in a position to control the coast road west from Dili, and had an observation post overlooking the airfield.
- A section (Lieutenant McKenzie) was stationed at the airfield.



20 February - Portuguese Timor

- Near midnight of 19th-20th February, Private Hasson, one of the sentries on the Dili airfield, reported noises, which he thought might indicate a landing.
- Next came a report from another sentry that he could hear foreign voices but these could have been Dutch or Portuguese.
- Then shell fire was heard.
- McKenzie sent a patrol and a Bren gun team to cover the entrance to the airfield from Dili.
- The patrol returned with a negative report.

20 February - Portuguese Timor

- The report was interrupted by a burst of fire from the Bren team. They were in action, mowing down the foremost of a party of Japanese who had been loudly laughing and chattering as they marched along the road.
- Another party of Japanese ran into heavy machine-gun fire at the back of the hangar.
- With rifle and machine-gun fire the Australians prevented all attempts to infiltrate their positions.
- As dawn approached McKenzie, whose communications had failed, arranged a dawn counter-attack to cover withdrawal. This attack enabled the airstrip to be cratered by the sappers and the withdrawal to proceed.

23rd February - Timor

- Many troops who were out of contact with the battalion when it surrendered immediately dispersed into the hills.
- On the 23rd Brigadier Veale, at Su, learnt that Leggatt had surrendered. The only force still available to him was about 250 Australians, most of whom were in the Ordnance, Army Service, and Army Medical Corps.
- Veale decided that he would move most of the Australian troops to villages in the north coast area west of Atapupu, allow small organised parties to attempt to reach Australia, and himself move with a small reconnaissance party to south-west Portuguese Timor, where, he considered, there was the best chance of maintaining a force.

28 February – Portuguese Timor

- The Independent Company was left to fend for itself.
- They moved farther back into the hills.
- By the end of February headquarters was at the Villa Maria with a platoon farther inland, at Hatu-Lia.
- A platoon continued to patrol the Bazar-Tete—Tibar area.
- They had large reserves of ammunition which they had built up in the inland areas before the arrival of the Japanese.
- Their own vigorous patrolling and information from native and Portuguese sources kept them well aware of Japanese movements.

