

War in the Pacific

Defending Australia

The First Six Months

Chapter 6

Christmas 1941 ..

Situation Report after two weeks of war.

- More Allied Battleships have been destroyed:
 - the Americans at anchor in Pearl Harbor by carrier based aircraft,
 - the British at sea in the South China Sea by land based aircraft and at anchor in Alexandria harbour by Italian frogmen..
- The American aircraft carriers were not at Pearl Harbour during the attack and remain at sea.
- Allied air-forces in Hawaii, the Philippines and Malaya have been substantially destroyed. The performance of Japanese aircraft and the skill of their pilots has been a great and unpleasant surprise everywhere.
- The Japanese army has landed in Malaya, the Philippines and Thailand and has invaded Hong Kong, and is continuing to advance on all those fronts.
- The Japanese air-force is establishing itself in all the areas seized by the army.
- Only at Wake Island has the Japanese offensive been effectively resisted and an invasion attempt been defeated.
- The British/Indian/Australian army in Malaya has suffered a very significant defeat and the realisation is beginning to dawn that the forces in the theatre are not strong enough to win the battle.
- Reinforcements for the Philippines, which were at sea when the war broke out, in the Pensacola convoy and in individual ships, have been ordered to Australia.
- Australia is working to build up its home defence army, while continuing to reinforce its army and air-force units in Malaya and maintaining three AIF divisions in the Middle East.
- The land and air battles continue in Malaya and the Philippines and Hong Kong.
- At sea Japanese and American aircraft carrier forces are now converging on Wake Island.

20th December

- **Government**
 - Next day, 20th Dec, the Australian Government received the substance of a report Wavell had made to the Staff in London stressing the seriousness of the outlook.
 - Curtin at once sent a direct personal message to Churchill asking to be told precisely what was Wavell's assessment of the situation in Malaya and his capacity to meet it. Now that the actual threat had come and the enemy was making substantial progress on several fronts, the situation must be met boldly and not by "penny packet" dispositions.
- **Command**
 - Admiral Ernest King formerly CinC Atlantic Fleet was appointed Commander in Chief United States Fleet (Cominch).
- **Pacific**
 - On the afternoon of the 20th Pye, as acting Cincpac, ordered Brown to turn north and support Fletcher, then slowly closing Wake.
 - Halsey's Enterprise group departed Pearl on the 20th to operate West of Hawaii, in a position to support Fletcher.



Admiral Ernest King
Cominch

20th December

- **New Caledonia**

- The Free French destroyer, Le Triomphant, escorted the Australian coastal liner Ormiston to New Caledonia, carrying 350 men of the 3rd Independent Company, A.I.F., 70 civilian road workers, and service cargo. The two ships left Brisbane on the 20th December.

- **Hong Kong**

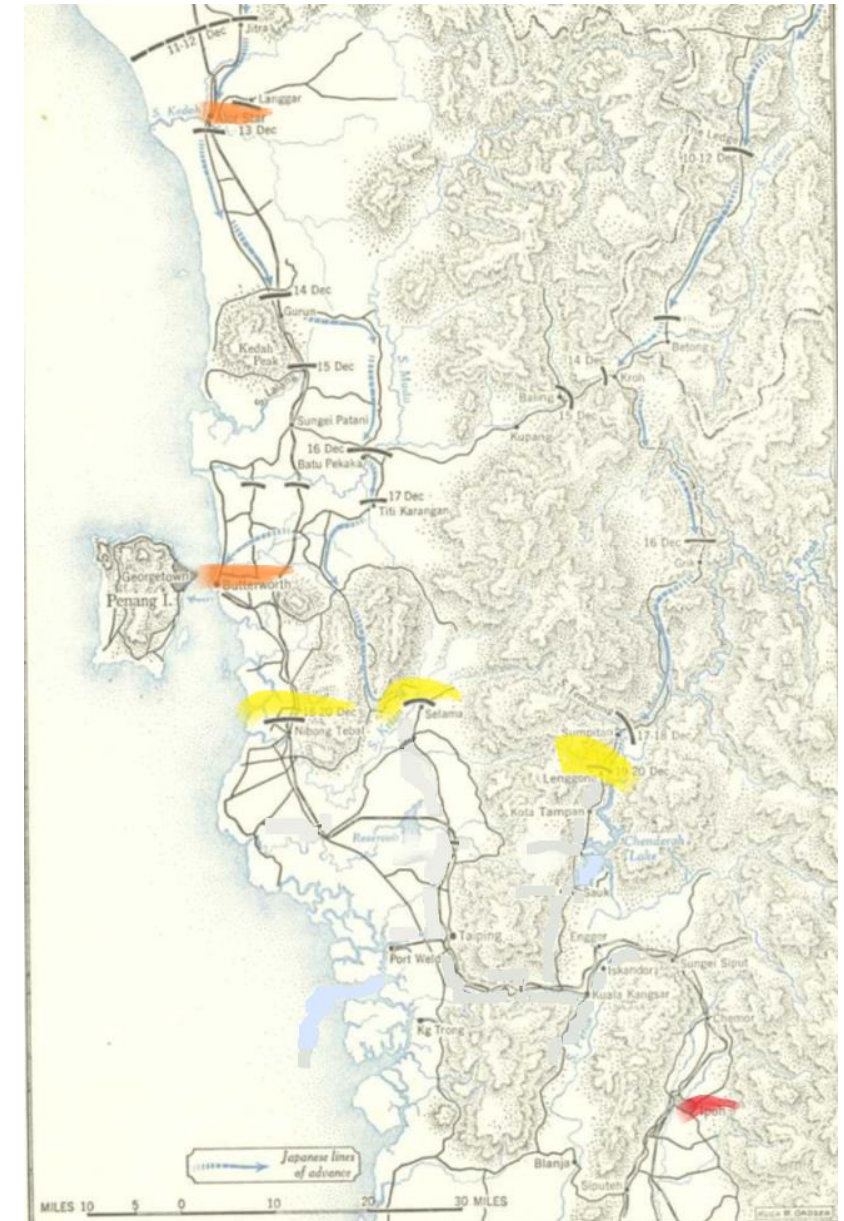
- A motor torpedo boat attack on Japanese being ferried to the island met with some success, but fire from both sides of the harbour, and from fighter aircraft, prevented it from being developed as planned. Efforts by the West Brigade to dislodge the Japanese gradually gave way to defence on its north-south line.
- The Rajputs having been practically destroyed in opposing the landings, the East Brigade was withdrawn to a line running east-westward to Repulse Bay, covering Stanley Peninsula. Misunderstanding of an order, lost the brigade its mobile artillery in the process.
- The brigade was organised in its new position for a counter-attack on 20th December. The advance was commenced at 8 a.m. The advance generally was soon halted by superior numbers and as night closed in the brigade fell back on its former positions.

- **Philippines**

- A Japanese force of fourteen transports escorted by a cruiser, destroyers and smaller craft, arrived off Davao during the night 19th-20th December, and began landing with little opposition in the early hours of 20th under air cover provided by carrier aircraft. On the evening of the 20th the Japanese set up a seaplane base just south of Davao.

20th December

- **Borneo**
- Six Dutch Glenn Martin bombers returned to the attack, escorted by two Brewsters, claiming a hit on a cruiser. Japanese sea plane fighters intercepted and the Brewsters claimed one shot down. Both Brewsters crash landed on return.
- 26 Japanese twin engine bombers raided the area south west of Kuching including Singkawang.
- Dutch Submarine O20 sank a destroyer off Miri.
- **Malaya**
- **West Side**
- Japanese who tried to cross the Krian at Selama on 20th December were repulsed by the 3/16th Punjab.
- **Grik Road**
- A Japanese force pressed the Argylls defending Kota Tampan. The battalion therefore withdrew behind the causeway, which was then demolished.
- **Withdrawal**
- Two British officers, with a few Gurkhas and a Jat, cut off during the withdrawal from Jitra landed in Sumatra in a native craft, eleven days after the withdrawal had been ordered.



20th December

- **Air**
- On 20th December air photographs showed 50 enemy fighters on Sungei Patani airfield. Blenheim bombers from Singapore tried to attack them but failed in bad weather.
- Ten more Buffaloes were flown to Kuala Lumpur to restore the strength of No. 453 which was now the only fighter squadron based on the Malayan mainland.
- **NEI/Australia**
- Flight Lieutenant Church, advance operational base officer for the area, inspected all Dutch bases where R.A.A.F. units were stationed in the latter half of December. Aircraft refuelling equipment was much below requirements, he reported, and lack of workshop equipment made efficient maintenance almost impossible.
- Returning to Darwin, Church found the supply problem for the whole area "chaotic" both at the railhead and the wharves. Stores arriving for all three fighting Services —many of the crates were inadequately marked—were piling up rapidly and, when removed, often went to the wrong destination.

21st December

- **Pacific**
- Wake was attacked by carrier dive bombers for the first time. 29 Vals escorted by 18 Zeros attacking about 08.50. The usual midday attack by twin engine bombers was delivered by only 17 aircraft but they destroyed the fire director of Battery D.
- Two US Submarines, Tambor and Triton, had been patrolling around Wake Island. Tambor developed a bad leak and turned back to Pearl on the 16th. Triton, which had fired four torpedoes at an enemy ship on the 10th without achieving a hit, was recalled by Cincpac on the 21st, lest she mistake the approaching Saratoga task force for the enemy.
- At 10.00 on the 21st Commander Cunningham on Wake sent out an "Urgent" that he had just been attacked by carrier born dive bombers and at noon he stated that 17 heavy bombers had followed this up, inflicting heavy damage on the defences. Fletcher received these transmissions.
- At 20.00 on the 21st Saratoga was 600 miles from Wake.
- By the evening of 21/22 December Fleet Intelligence at Pearl Harbour estimated that at least two Japanese carriers, two battleships and two heavy cruisers were operating near Wake.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P02886.001

Aichi D3A Type 99 Carrier Bomber, Allied reporting name "Val"

21st December

- **Hong Kong**
- Progressively weakened, the defenders were driven southward and westward, and a wedge was driven between the East and West Brigades.
- **Philippines**
- Submarine USS Stingray on patrol outside Lingayen Gulf sighted and reported invasion convoys. They were far larger than the forces which made the previous landings in the Philippines. Admiral Hart ordered submarines, Stingray, Saury, Salmon, S38 and S39 to attack the target.
- Remaining personnel of 27th Group had been ordered to prepare three new airfields, at Lipa, below Manila, and at San Marcelino and San Fernando to the northwest, for the arrival of the A24s from Australia.
- The last of the B17s making a total of fourteen, arrived at Batchelor Field near Darwin.
- On the 21st Dec the enemy attacked Del Monte with 54 bombers.



Batchelor Field 1941

21st December

- The Dutch launched a strike at the rail system at Singora with four Hawk 75As.
- In the morning four of these aircraft flew from Pekan Baru in Sumatra, to Medan where they refuelled. They then took off for the 620 mile flight to Singora to bomb the main railway station.
- Immediately after take off from Medan two of the fighters collided, Ens Sanders and Sgt van Breen crashing to their deaths.
- Lt van der Poel headed for the target area with his wingman Sgt Mulder, but en route Mulder got lost in dense cloud.
- Van der Poel arrived over Singora alone, to find the clouds too thick for a diving attack, so he was forced to release his four 100kg bombs in level flight. He missed the rail lines but demolished a signal box. He then flew back to Medan where he landed safely.
- Mulder finally found the railway line 60 miles south of Singora. Shortage of fuel compelled him to drop his bombs at that point and then head for the nearest allied airfield at Ipoh.
- On arrival his recognition flares refused to work and the airfield opened fire on him. Mulder force landed in the jungle out of fuel.
- The crash knocked him out, and he remained unconscious in the cockpit until found by british troops three days later. Taken to hospital he made a remarkable recovery.



Curtis Hawk 75a

21st December

- **Grik Road**

- A fighting withdrawal to the Perak continued.

- **Air**

- In the first day of operations from Kuala Lumpur—21st December—Sergeants Peterson and Leys were flying the standing patrol when they intercepted about 14 dive bombers escorted by about the same number of Zeros. Leys turned on the enemy fighters while Peterson attacked the bombers.
 - Leys' Buffalo was quickly shot down. He baled out and as he descended the Japanese fired on him repeatedly. He escaped, though his parachute was perforated many times.
 - Peterson, evading the fighters, shot down one of the bombers, probably destroyed a second and damaged a third. The airfield was bombed but the damage was not extensive.
- **NEI**
- The remains of US Navy Patwing 10 with 10 PBYs reached Surabaya, from the Philippines via Balikpapan, and joined with the main force of Dutch flying boats.

22 December

- **Wake Island**
- Was bombed again by carrier dive bombers escorted by fighters, 39 planes. The last two wildcats were shot down. Captain Freuler crash landed after shooting down two zeros and Lieutenant Davidson was killed while trying to break up a group of bombers.
- Major Putnam and the twenty remaining officers and men of the fighter squadron joined the Defence Battalion as infantrymen.
- **Pacific**
- The Saratoga taskforce commenced fuelling the destroyers at daylight on the 22nd. The wind was 16 to 24 knots but a long cross swell made fuelling difficult. Several tow lines parted, seven oil hoses ruptured and only four out of the eight destroyers had been fuelled in a ten hour period.
- **Australia**
- The War Cabinet decided on 22nd December to send 1,800 reinforcements for the maintenance of the A.I.F., to Malaya.
- Canberra and Perth had been joined by H.M.N.Z.S. Achilles in the vicinity of New Caledonia, The three ships then met Pensacola and her convoy and all reached Brisbane on the 22nd.
- The convoy consisted of seven transports and the tender Niagara, escorted by the cruiser Pensacola.



A Grumman F4F-3 Wildcat

22nd December

- **Philippines**
- A Japanese invasion force of twenty-seven transports, escorted by a cruiser, with six destroyers and smaller craft, arrived off Lingayen, at 1.10 a.m. on the 22nd December.
 - Troops started landing at daybreak about 100 miles north-west of Manila.
 - As the landings began, Japanese aircraft made neutralising strikes on Fort Stotsenberg and Clark Field.
- By the time the submarines reached the gulf the Japanese ships were already in shallow waters where it was difficult for the submarines to operate.
 - S38 thrust into the shoals regardless and sank a 5000 ton transport at 09.00 on the 22nd but only narrowly survived the depth charge attack that followed.
 - A seaplane tender was also hit twice by shore batteries.
- The Japanese ships and landing forces were harassed throughout the day by attacks from PBYS and army fighters but the weather caused more delays to the unloading than air attacks.
- A second echelon of twenty-eight transports, escorted by a cruiser with seven destroyers and smaller ships, reached Lingayen at midnight on the 22nd.
- From its base at Darwin the 19th Group on 22 December mounted a mission of nine B-17's using Del Monte as a staging point.
 - After taking off from Batchelor Field, they reached Davao Gulf at sunset and dropped 30 x 500-lb. bombs on a cluster of seven ships.
 - No pursuit or AA interfered with the attack, but visibility was poor and results were negligible.
 - The B-17's landed after dark at the now much-bombed Del Monte field.

22nd December

- **Malaya**

- The 11th Indian Division had broken contact with the Japanese and was withdrawing to the line of the Perak river.

- **Air**

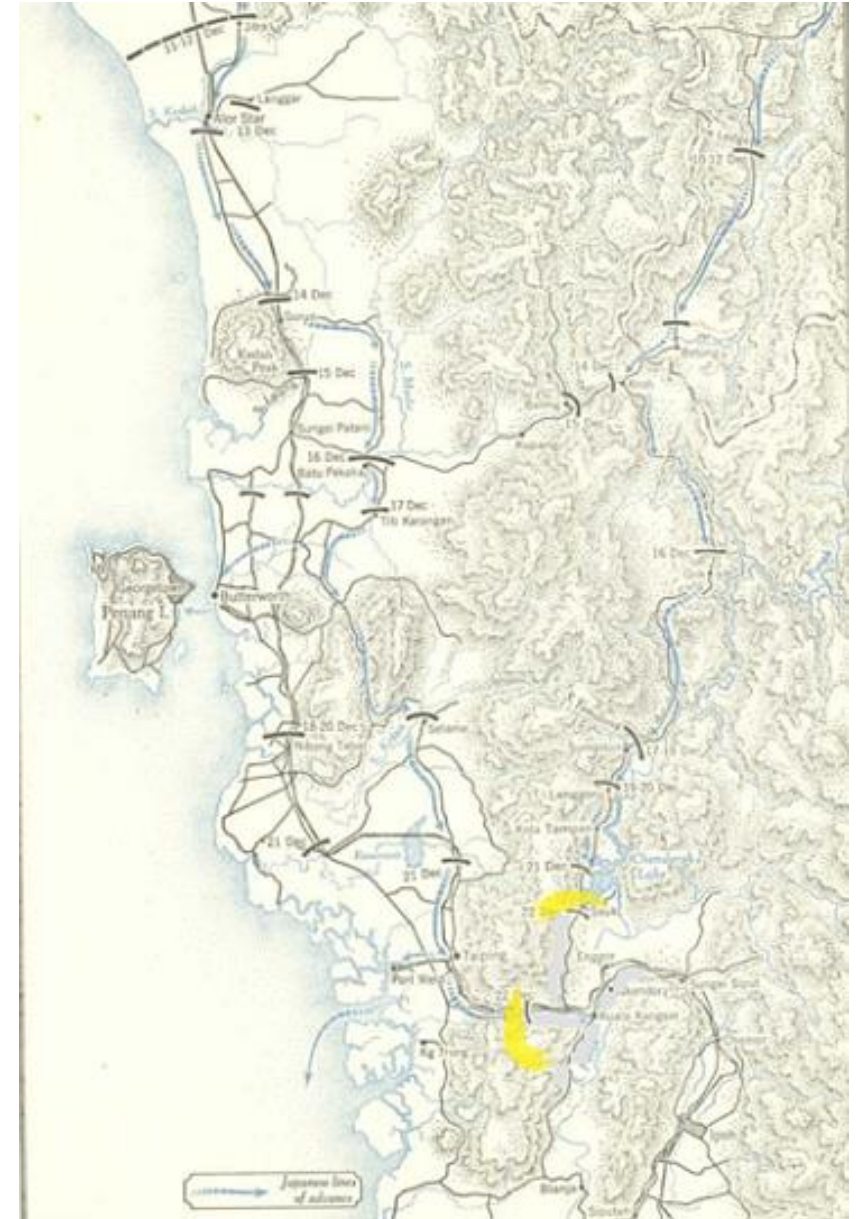
- In repeated raids on Kuala Lumpur airfield 6 buffaloes were lost and 3 pilots killed. The defenders claimed four attackers destroyed. The squadron now had only 3 serviceable aircraft left and Air Headquarters ordered its withdrawal to Sembawang.
- In the evening a flight of four reinforcement Hudsons reached Sembawang from Darwin crewed by No 1 and 8 squadron crews who had been flown back to Darwin by Qantas flying boat.

- **Borneo**

- By 22nd December fifteen Japanese medium attack planes and fighter aircraft were using an airstrip at Miri (Sarawak) despite the damage which had been done to it before the army withdrew.
- The Dutch were planning a strike on Davao, which was being used as a flying boat base by the Japanese. During the day three Dornier flying boats were moved from Sorong to Tondano Lake near Menado in preparation.

- **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.



22nd December

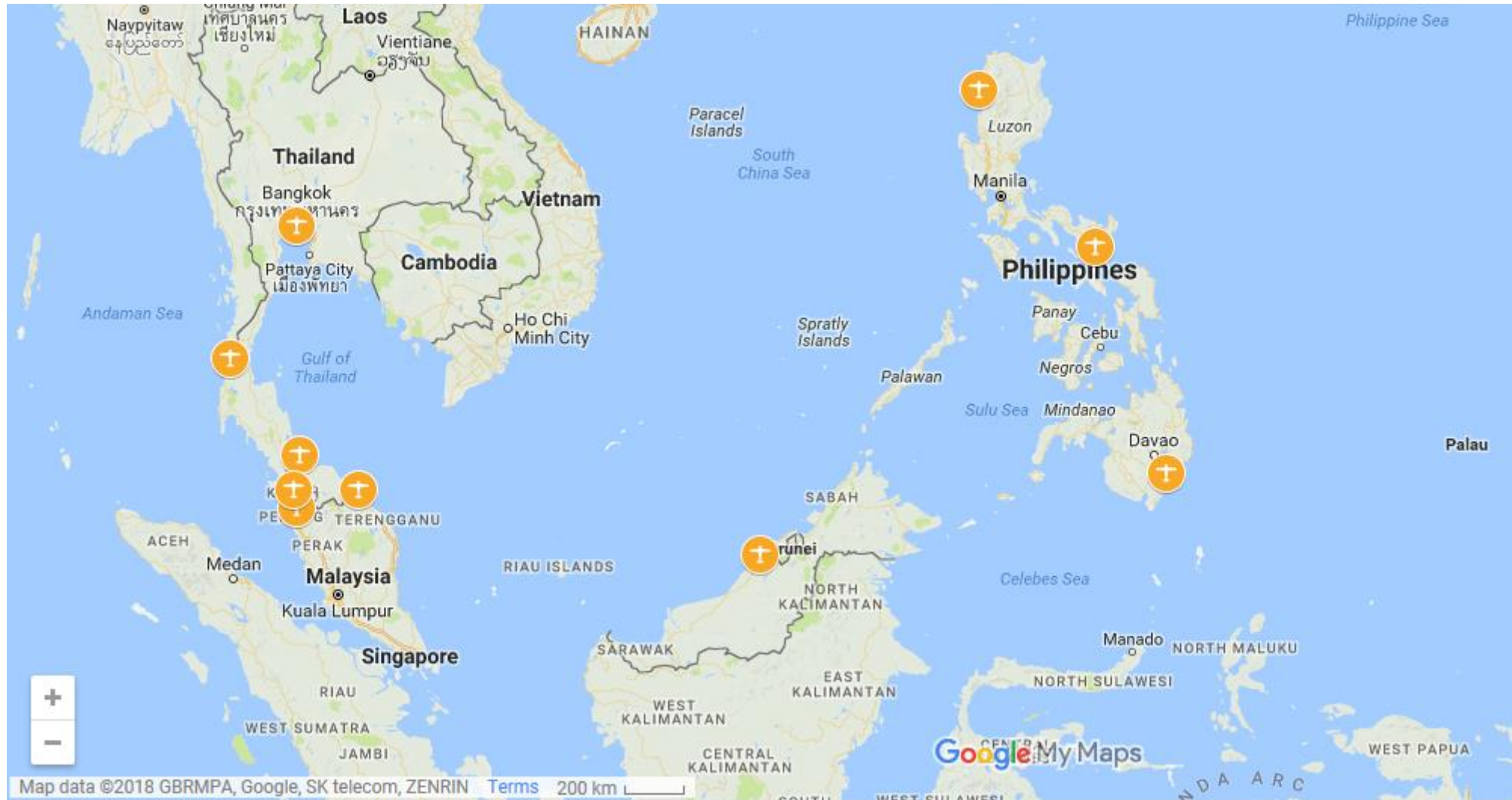
- **Strategy**
- Churchill and his party, reached Washington on the 22nd and met with Roosevelt for a series of conferences on the future conduct of the war.
 - A British suggested agenda was:
 - (1) a redeclaration of the fundamental bases of joint strategy;
 - (2) the interpretation of this strategy into terms of immediate military measures;
 - (3) the allocation of joint forces in harmony with the accepted strategy;
 - (4) the formulation of a continuing program to raise and equip the forces called for in that strategy; and
 - (5) the establishment of joint machinery for directing the war effort.



Joint News Conference by
President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill

Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum/NARA

Airfields captured up to 22 December



23rd December

- **Wake Island**
- At midnight on the 22nd, as a result of delays caused by fuelling the destroyers, Saratoga is still 500 miles from Wake, only 100 miles closer than she had been 24 hours earlier. Lexington was still over 800 miles from Wake.
- At 02.35 23rd December The Japanese make simultaneous predawn landings on Wilkes and the southern shore of Wake island. At 02.50 Cunningham signals to Pearl "Enemy apparently landing."
- Cunningham attempted to communicate with the submarine Triton and direct it to attack the Japanese ships ringing Wake. His signal is intercepted by Cincpac who informs him that: "the submarines are already returning to Pearl Harbour" and that "no friendly ships will be in the vicinity of Wake during the next 24 hours."
- The Japanese that came ashore on Wilkes Island were met at the water's edge by Captain Platt's unit of 70 marines, and after a four hour struggle were almost wiped out.
- Two converted destroyers, had been run ashore on the south coast of Wake island to land their troops. The marines' 5 inch guns would not bear but a 3 inch gun manned by 2nd lieutenant Hanna and a scratch crew engaged it scoring 15 hits and made it burst into flames, but most of the troops got ashore. Some of those Japanese troops attacked Hanna's gun which was defended by Major Putnam and the remnant of the Marine fighter squadron and a few civilians. These men resisted several hundred Japanese for six hours when all but one of them were killed or wounded.
- There were now 1,000 or 1,500 troops ashore opposed by fewer than 80 marines as most of the defenders were on Peale or the northern arm of Wilkes Island.
- At 05.00 Cunningham signals Pearl "The enemy is on the island. The issue is in doubt."

23rd December

- Communications between the marine positions had broken down, the island was ringed with Japanese ships and the Japanese had secured a firm beachhead. At 07.00 Japanese carrier bombers appear and attack all positions incessantly.
- At 09.11 22nd December (Hawaiian time) Admiral Pye orders Saratoga and Lexington to return to Pearl Harbour.
- At 07.30 Cunningham decides to surrender Wake. Fighting continues for hours while the order is communicated to every position.
- Captain Elrod, who had shot down two bombers and had been shot down in the act of bombing a destroyer, which blew up, is killed in the ground fighting.



Captain Hank Elrod

23rd December

- **Australia**
- On 22 December the Pensacola convoy arrived in Brisbane and next day began disembarking 4,000 American troops.
 - The American troops were quartered on the grounds of the Ascot and Doomben race tracks.
 - There were 2,000 ground troops, including 2 regiments of field artillery with 340 motor vehicles and four dozen 75-mm. guns.
 - There were 2,000 Air Corps troops including 48 pilots, most of whom still required operational training.
 - There were 52 Dauntless dive bombers and 18 P40 Kittyhawk fighters.
 - Air force supplies included 7 million rounds of .50 calibre ammunition, 5,000 bombs and several thousand barrels of aircraft fuel and oil.
 - The Archerfield and Amberley airfields were used for assembly of the aircraft.



23rd December

- **Australia**

- Only when the assembly of the aircraft from the convoy began was it realised that some essential parts for the dive bombers (trigger motors, solenoids and gun mounts) were missing.
- None of the dive bombers could be ready for operations until these parts had been ordered from Washington and flown to Australia.

- **New Caledonia**

- Le Triomphant and Ormiston reached Noumea with the Independent company on the 23rd.

Photo # NH 105333 SBD "Dauntless" in flight



23rd December

- **Philippines**
- On the 23rd General MacArthur decided to withdraw the forces on Luzon into the Bataan Peninsula on Christmas day, and the next day he moved his headquarters to the island fortress of Corregidor in Manila Bay.
- Admiral Hart informed the General that the loss of submarine material and facilities, resulting from this short notice, would drastically shorten the period of underwater defence of the Islands.
- A third echelon of twenty-one transports anchored at Lingayen in the early morning of the 23rd December.
- Seal sank a small freighter off Lingayen the next day 23rd December.
- Four B17s took off again from Del Monte shortly after midnight for Lingayen Gulf, almost 600 miles away. Again visibility was poor and although transports were bombed, no hits were observed. The Japanese put up a barrage of anti-aircraft fire which did no damage, but enemy fighters pursued with such persistence that the bombers could not land at San Marcelino as planned. Instead, they headed for Australia. One of the planes came down for refuelling at an emergency field at San Jose in Mindoro; the other three reached the Dutch base at Amboina before landing.
- Twelve P40s of the 17th and 20th pursuit squadrons took off at dawn to attack the landing. Only nine got through the heavy overcast to attack. The landings were defended by fighters and anti-aircraft but the P40s expended all their ammunition in attacks on transports, small boats and troops on the beach. All the P40s returned safely but 2Lt Sheppard's engine quit just before landing and the plane, which had over 200 bullet holes, had to be written off. 1Lt Boyd Wagner the commander of 17PS was wounded in the shoulder and both eyes and had to be evacuated to Australia.
- Another three B17s, had arrived at Del Monte from Batchelor for another mission against Davao.

23rd December

- **Hong Kong**
- The British forces in Hong Kong were subjected to persistent bombing and low-level fighter attacks. The skill and daring of the enemy airmen astonished them.
- **Borneo**
- A Japanese convoy of six transports, guarded by two destroyers, two seaplane tenders and other small naval units, was sighted and reported by Dutch reconnaissance aircraft on the morning of the 23rd December, about 150 miles north east of Kuching.
- The Dutch bomber crews at Sinkawang II airfield prepared for a strike but before they took off 22 enemy twin engine bombers attacked the airfield. Only two Dutch aircraft were destroyed, but the runway was so severely damaged that the Glenn Martins could not take off with bomb-loads. The field was so damaged that the planes stationed there were withdrawn during the afternoon to Palembang, in Sumatra.
- That evening the Dutch submarine K 14 successfully attacked the convoy as it arrived at Kuching. Two transports, were sunk, and one transport and a tanker were badly damaged.
- Kuching had an airfield and was only sixty miles north-east of the Dutch airfield at Sinkawang (which in turn was only 350 miles due east of Singapore) and was, for these reasons, defended by a small military force, a battalion of Indian troops, the 2/15th Punjab, and a body of native troops).
- The Kuching garrison learned of the impending invasion from coastwatchers at 6 p.m. on 23rd December. During that night demolition of the Kuching airfield facilities was carried out as effectively as possible.

23rd December - Malaya

- **West Malaya**

- Because of the growing threat to the vital crossings of the Perak, the 11th Division had destroyed the bridges and had withdrawn behind the river by the early morning of 23rd December. The 12th Brigade was now at Sungei Siput, and 28th Brigade at Siputeh.

- **East Malaya**

- General Heath had hoped that his 9th Division east of Malaya's central range might become available for transfer to the west to attack the Japanese left flank. It was decided, that to safeguard arrival at Singapore of reinforcement convoys, the division must hold Kuantan airfield and also deny the enemy access to central Malaya by the railway north of Kuala Lipis.
- The 22nd Indian Brigade supported by the 5th Field Artillery Regiment was at Kuantan on 23rd December to resist attack either from the sea, or on land from the north.
- Despite the lack of good roads, the Japanese leading elements, by horses, bikes, and coastal seacraft, reached Kuantan and were in contact with patrols from the 22nd Brigade by 23rd December.
- **Strategy**
- On the 23rd December Percival ordered Bennett to make preliminary arrangements to deal with an enemy advance down the main road from Kuala Lumpur towards Singapore and also with landings by "small enemy forces" on the west coast. He also ordered the Commander of Singapore Fortress to arrange for reconnaissance of the north shore of Singapore Island to select defensive positions in the event of enemy landings.



Generals Percival (left) and Bennett (right)

23rd December

- **Air**
- From 23rd December, the day on which the last squadron had been withdrawn from the mainland to Singapore, the Japanese began to attack the British ground troops with low-flying fighters.
- Five Blenheim 4s, out of a dozen dispatched from the Middle East on the 12th, had arrived in Singapore by the 23rd. One had crash landed near Kuwait, another suffered a double engine failure between Sharjah and Karachi and another crashed on landing at Sabang. A fourth was damaged in a Japanese raid on Rangoon. Three remained en route. The new aircraft and crews were posted to 34 Squadron at Tengah.
- **NEI**
- At 02.00 6 Dutch flying boats left Tondano Lake (Celebese) and Taisei Island (Dutch New Guinea) to attack Davao. They hit and sank a large tanker but were intercepted by float plane fighters. One of the Dutch planes was forced down but another alighted beside it and took off the crew.



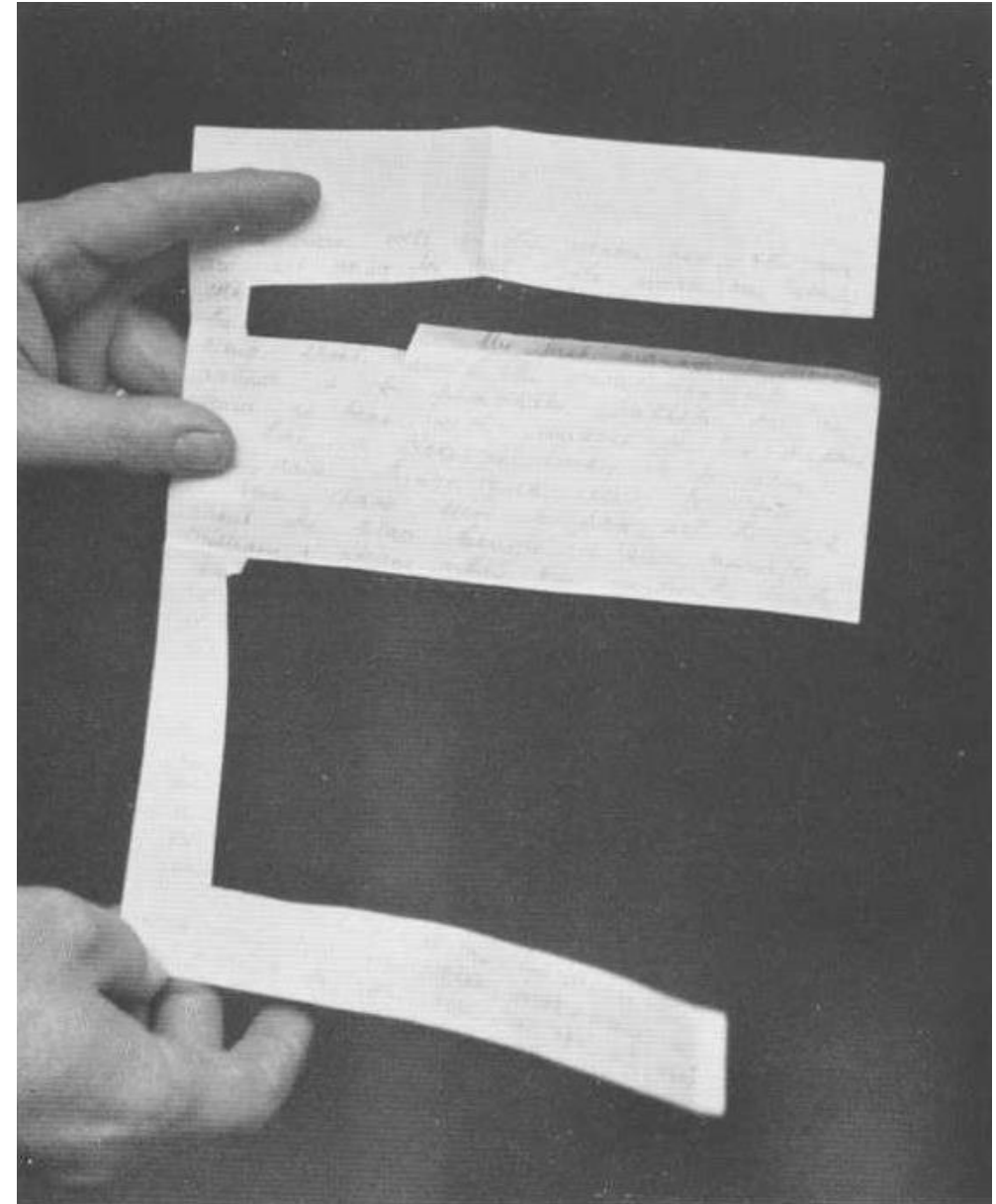
Nakajima A6M2-N float plane fighter
Allied reporting name "Rufe"

23rd December

- **Gull Force**
- On the 23rd Roach, from Ambon, signalled to Army Headquarters, Melbourne:
 - Imperative to have at once all those items mentioned para. K [guns and machineguns] plus a further Field Troop. When will they arrive? No items mentioned other paras yet arrived.
- **Burma**
- About 60 enemy bombers and 20 fighters attacked Rangoon on 23rd December. The main bombing force concentrated on the city and docks but one formation of bombers and later some fighters attacked Mingaladon airfield.
- As in practically every city experiencing its first bombing, the curiosity of the civilian population cost heavy casualties; on this day in Rangoon they numbered about 2,000 about half of whom were killed.
- The Buffaloes of No. 67 Squadron RAF, piloted largely by New Zealanders and Australians, and the A.V.G's Tomahawks intercepted the enemy. At least 12 Japanese aircraft were known to have been destroyed and several others probably destroyed. No. 67 Squadron accounted for 6 of these and for 3 "probables" without loss, while the A.V.G. also claimed 6 destroyed for the loss of 2 of their pilots.
- Mingaladon airfield was "a devil of a mess", damage was considerable and there were 30 casualties 17 of them killed.

24th December

- **Australia**
- The Courier mail made no mention of the arrival of six US ships or of 4,000 US soldiers marching up Racecourse Rd, something that many of their readers would have seen with their own eyes, because of the censor's rules.
- The Censor's main task was to stop the transmission of
 - information of value to the enemy or
 - likely to impair national morale or
 - adversely affect the war effort.
- One of the more irksome controls imposed in wartime was censorship of posts and telegraphs.
- **Government**
- Daylight saving was introduced to conserve coal and power.
- **Reinforcements**
- Sturdee informed Bennett next day (24th) that the Australian Government had decided to send to Malaya a machine-gun battalion and 1,800 reinforcements.
- **New Zealand**
- 'We have sent the only four heavy anti-aircraft guns and the only four Bofors guns we possess to Fiji', Prime Minister Fraser cabled to Churchill, then in Washington, on Christmas Eve 1941. He did not say that the New Zealand guns had been replaced temporarily by dummies.



24th December

- **Australia**
- No. 27 Group pilots who had reached Darwin from the Philippines left in a Qantas flying-boat, and on Christmas Eve alighted on the Brisbane River alongside the ships of the Pensacola convoy. After all they had endured Brisbane on Christmas Eve "seemed like the Promised Land."
- By 24 December all nine B17s from the 22nd Dec mission had returned to Batchelor Field , five proceeding directly from Del Monte.
- **Philippines**
- The rest of the 27th Group had just completed the move from Manila to the new landing fields (Lipa, San Marcelino and San Fernando) when another order directed all personnel to proceed to the Manila docks. From there by truck and boat they made their way to Bataan.



Flying boat landing on the Bulimba reach of the Brisbane river beside a freighter tied up at Newstead wharf

24th December

- **Philippines**
- Twenty four transports carrying a landing force escorted by a cruiser, with destroyers and smaller vessels entered Lamon Bay, across the narrowing neck of Luzon from Manila, before dawn on the 24th December with seaplanes providing air cover. They landed a division size force which marched off towards Manila subject to a few rearguard actions which delayed them very little.
- On the 24th, 18 American fighter aircraft struck at the transports in Lamon Bay with bombs and gunfire without significant effect. Two P35s failed to return. The small fighter force then returned to reconnaissance operations.
- At Del Monte, on 24 December the 3 B17s were each loaded with 2,100 gallons of gasoline and 7 x 300-lb. bombs in preparation for a mission against Davao. Two bombed Davao airfield from 15,000 feet, and the third attacked shipping in the Davao harbor. All three planes returned to Darwin, though two of them had sustained considerable damage.
- The evacuation into Bataan began on 24 December.
- General Brereton left the Philippines, on 24 December with members of his staff in two PBV's to establish a new headquarters in Australia.
- On Bataan, there remained the Interceptor Command. His handful of pursuit planes were distributed among three newly constructed fields at the head of the peninsula under a plan to fall back as required to the Mariveles, Cabcaben, and Bataan fields nearer Corregidor. Except for the few men required to fly and maintain these planes, the 24th Group was posted as infantry reserves.
- Canopus, the only remaining submarine tender at Manila, which was moored alongside at Cavite completely covered with camouflage nets, was finally hit by the bombers which had been overhead every day. The submarines had been submerging during the day and returning to moor alongside Canopus for maintenance at night.

24th December

- **Hong Kong**
- On the night of 24th December bombardment extended to the centre of Victoria, capital of the colony; of the naval dock yard; and of Fortress Headquarters. Japanese patrols were penetrating the outskirts of the city.
- **Borneo**
- At daylight on the 24th twenty landing barges loaded with enemy troops moved up the Sarawak River towards Kuching. Despite resistance by the defenders, the 2/15 Punjab battalion, which cost the enemy seven landing craft and a number of casualties, they had forced their way up the River to Kuching, and captured the city by 4.30 p.m. At nightfall they were advancing on the airfield.
- Five Blenheims and three 8 RAAF sqd Hudsons from Singapore attacked the convoy, causing minor damage.
- Singkawang 2 was attacked again by 18 twin engine bombers and six fighters. Another Dutch Glenn Martin bomber was destroyed in these attacks.
- Other Dutch aircraft from Samarinda attacked the ships off Kuching, claiming one sunk. Two of the attacking aircraft force landed on return.
- A Dutch submarine, K 16, torpedoed and sank a Japanese destroyer off Kuching, but K 16 was itself sunk the same day on her return passage to Singapore.
- **Malaya**
- **West Malaya**
- The next major stand was to be made at Kampar, north of a junction of the road and the railway, and 23 miles south of Ipoh. General Heath ordered the reconstituted 15th Brigade Group to occupy this position while the 12th and the 28th Brigades held their positions north and south of Ipoh.

24th December

- **Reinforcements**
- Two hurricane fighter wings had been en route from Britain to the Middle East when the Japanese war broke out. It was now planned to redirect these forces to the Far East.
 - 266 Wing had been on their way to the Middle East via Malta when their movement to Malta was interrupted by the sinking of the aircraft carrier Ark Royal, leaving half the force stuck in Gibraltar.
 - 267 Wing were at sea with the intention that they should disembark in Iraq and move north to the Caucasus to support the Russian army. The ship carrying the Hurricanes and some of the pilots reached Durban just before Christmas, while the troopships carrying the majority of the pilots had just docked at Freetown, Sierra Leone.
 - It was now planned to send one wing to Burma and the other to the East Indies.
 - Most of the pilots from Freetown were flown across Africa to Egypt. From there Hurricanes were to be collected and ferried via India and down Burma to Rangoon.
 - The pilots and planes at Durban were redirected to the East Indies, the pilots embarking on the troopship Dunera for Singapore, while 51 hurricanes were loaded aboard HMT Sussex with the intended destination of Tjilatjap, Java.
 - The pilots of one of the squadrons at Freetown were also flown over Africa to Port Sudan, where they were to be put aboard the aircraft carrier Indomitable together with crated hurricanes to be transported to a position within flying distance of Batavia, Java.
 - On Christmas Eve the pilots stuck in Gibraltar reembarked on HMT Athene, aboard which were 39 crated hurricanes, to be shipped to Takoradi, and flown over to Egypt to replace the Hurricanes flown to Burma.

25th December

- **Strategy**
- Bowden in a cable received in Australia on Christmas Day, declared
- deterioration of our position in Malaya defence is assuming landslide proportions and in my firm belief is likely to cause a collapse in whole defence system
- Present measures for reinforcing Malayan defences can from a practical viewpoint be regarded as little more than gestures.
- In my belief only thing that might save Singapore would be immediate dispatch from Middle East by air of powerful reinforcements, large numbers of latest fighter aircraft with ample operational personnel.
- Reinforcements of troops should be not in brigades but in divisions and to be of use they must arrive urgently.
- Anything that is not powerful modern and immediate is futile.
- As things stand at present fall of Singapore is to my mind only a matter of weeks.
- If Singapore and A.I.F. in Malaya are to be saved, there must be very radical and effective action immediately . . .
- plain fact is that without immediate air reinforcements Singapore must fall. Need for decision and action is a matter of hours not days.



Staff of the Australian Trade Commission office in
Shanghai, 1937.
VG Bowden (centre)

25th December

- **Strategy**
- The Australian Prime Minister, Mr Curtin, responded by addressing to both President Roosevelt and Mr Churchill, a cable dated 25th December in which, after referring to reports he had received, he said:
- “Fall of Singapore would mean isolation of Philippines, fall of Netherlands East Indies and attempt to smother all other bases. This would also sever our communications between Indian and Pacific Oceans in this region. The setback would be as serious to United States interests as to our own.
- Reinforcements earmarked by United Kingdom Government for Singapore seem to us to be utterly inadequate in relation to aircraft particularly fighters. . . .
- It is in your power to meet situation. Should United States desire we would gladly accept United States command in Pacific Ocean area.
- President has said Australia will be base of utmost importance but in order that it shall remain a base Singapore must be reinforced.
- In spite of our great difficulties we are sending further reinforcements to Malaya. Please consider this matter of greatest urgency.”



John Curtin Prime Minister
from 7/10/41

25th December

- **Strategy**

- A copy of Curtin's cable was sent to the Australian High Commissioner in London, Mr Bruce, together with the text of the message from Bowden. To Mr Bruce, directly, the Prime Minister added,
 - "Anything you and Page can do at that end should be done without any delay whatsoever.
- He sent an even more emphatic statement of the situation to the Australian Minister in Washington, Mr Casey.
 - "Please understand that stage of suggestion has passed, . . This is the gravest type of emergency and everything will depend upon Churchill-Roosevelt decision to meet it in broadest way."

- **Washington**

- Casey in Washington, reported on 25th December, on interviews both with Churchill and Roosevelt and with their Chiefs of Staff.
 - He reported that they realised the menace to Singapore.
 - Churchill and the British Chiefs of Staff agreed that the security of Singapore was of greater importance than that of any place outside the United Kingdom. They just did not know where they could obtain air reinforcements for Malaya in reasonable time.
 - There were no modern aircraft in India.
 - Fighter aircraft could not be flown from the Middle East into Malaya owing to Japanese control of southern Burma and northern Malaya.
 - There was no British aircraft carrier which could get fighter aircraft into Malaya under a month.

25th December

- Churchill cabled, also on the 25th, that Roosevelt had agreed that the leading brigade of the 18th British Division (which when Japan came into the war was rounding the Cape in American transports on its way to the Middle East, and was then diverted to Bombay and Ceylon) should go direct to Singapore in the transport Mount Vernon.
- He reminded Curtin of his (Churchill's) suggestion that an Australian division be recalled from Palestine to replace other troops going to Malaya, or sent direct to Singapore if that could be arranged.
- While indicating that he did not favour using up forces in an attempt to defend the northern part of Malaya, he spoke of Singapore as a fortress "which we are determined to defend with the utmost tenacity".
- Referring to current consultations between himself and Roosevelt, he said that not only were the Americans impressed with the importance of maintaining Singapore, but they were anxious to move a continuous flow of troops and aircraft through Australia for the relief of the Philippine Islands.
- The President was agreeable to troops and aircraft being diverted to Singapore should the Philippines fall, and was also quite willing to send substantial United States forces to Australia, where the Americans were anxious to establish important bases for the war against Japan.

25th December

- **Papua New Guinea**

- On Christmas Day, two Hudsons piloted by Paterson and Flight Lieutenant Diethelm, made another flight to Kapingamarangi which was now being used by the enemy as an advanced base for float-planes and probably a flying-boat refuelling base.
 - They bombed the base without observing any hits and took further photographs.

- **Philippines**

- A Japanese convoy of nine transports escorted by a cruiser and destroyers, reached Jolo Island, midway between Mindanao and Borneo.
 - Landings began before dawn on the 25th and
 - the island was secured by noon.
- Admiral Hart turned over the remaining naval forces in Philippines to Admiral Rockwell and left with his staff for Java.
 - He had planned to fly in two of the three remaining Catalinas.
 - One plane had left with an advance party on Christmas eve, but the other two were discovered by the enemy and destroyed.
 - This left only the submarine USS Shark to evacuate the Admiral.
- Canopus left Manila and steamed to Mariveles, on Bataan, and covered herself with jungle camouflage.

25th December

- **Hong Kong**
- Christmas morning presented a desperate situation. Failure of the water supply was imminent.
- Again the Japanese sent envoys—this time a British officer and a civilian whom they had captured—to testify to the formidable array of men and guns they had seen massed for final assault.
- It was nevertheless decided to fight on, but the military situation so deteriorated that soon after 3 p.m. Maltby (the GOC) told the Governor that no further effective resistance was possible.
- The governor formally surrendered the colony later in the afternoon.
- The British battle casualties in the defence of Hong Kong were estimated at nearly 4,500; and 11,848 combatants were lost in the fighting and as a result of the surrender.
- **Borneo**
- To avoid being cut off the defenders of Kuching were ordered to withdraw into Dutch West Borneo.
 - The force was attacked as this was in progress, and most of the rearguard, of two Punjabi companies, were killed or captured.
 - A further 180 men became separated from the force during the night at a river crossing and most of the transport was abandoned.
- With their base at Singkawang now so close to the Japanese forces at Kuching the two flights of Brewster fighters withdrew to airfields in Sumatra.

25th December

- **Malaya**

- Captain Spencer Chapman crossed the Perak on Christmas Day intending to meet Roseforce at a rendezvous and guide it to suitable targets. The rendezvous failed, but he lay by a roadside and watched the enemy. He saw:
- “hundreds and hundreds of them, pouring eastwards towards the Perak River. The majority of them were on bicycles in parties of forty or fifty, riding three or four abreast and talking and laughing just as if they were going to a football match. Indeed, some of them were actually wearing football jerseys; they seemed to have no standard uniform or equipment and were travelling as light as they possibly could. Some wore green, others grey, khaki or even dirty white. The majority had trousers hanging loose and enclosed in high boots or puttees; some had tight breeches and others shorts and rubber boots or gym shoes. ...
- Their equipment and armament were equally varied and were slung over themselves and their bicycles with no apparent method. . . . The general impression was one of extraordinary determination: they had been ordered to go to the bridgehead, and in their thousands they were going, though their equipment was second-rate and motley and much of it had obviously been commandeered in Malaya. This was certainly true of their means of transport, for we saw several parties of soldiers on foot who were systematically searching the roadside kampongs for bicycles and most of the cars and lorries bore local number plates. . . .”
- “All this was in very marked contrast to our own front-line soldiers, who were at this time equipped like Christmas trees with heavy boots, web equipment, packs, haversacks, water-bottles, blankets, ground-sheets, and even great-coats and respirators, so that they could hardly walk, much less fight.”

The War in the Pacific - The First Six Months ©Jerry McBrien



Chapman had trained Australian forces in guerrilla warfare and organised parties to stay behind in Japanese occupied areas³⁷

25th December

- By Christmas Day the replacement Hudsons from Darwin had all reached Singapore.
- Lessons from combat were now applied by engineering to give the Buffalo better performance. Modifications included:
 - removal of wireless masts and rear vision mirrors,
 - the flattening out of gun cowlings and reduction of the size of the gun ports to reduce external air resistance.
 - Very tubes, parachute flare bins and cockpit heaters were removed.
 - The two .5-inch calibre wing guns were replaced with .303 calibre guns.
 - The fuel and ammunition capacity was reduced. The loading of the aircraft was reduced by 1,000 lb.
- Tests showed that the Buffalo, so modified, could attain considerably more speed.
- Nothing could be done to improve the fuel pressure system. Pressure at altitudes above 18,000 feet still had to be obtained by operating a hand pump. It was quite impossible for a pilot to engage in combat while using the pump.
- Armament troubles also persisted and radio-telephone communication had to be abandoned.

25th December



26th December

- **Fiji**
- On Boxing Day, 27 Mixed Anti-Aircraft Battery, reached Suva with four anti-aircraft guns which had been dismantled from the harbour defences of Auckland and Wellington. They were the first anti aircraft guns to reach Fiji.
- The New Zealand garrison of Fiji on 8 December had totalled 4,943 all ranks, made up of 8 NZ Brigade Group and the Fiji Defence Force units.
- Artillery support consisted of six 18-pounder guns and fixed coastal defences of four 6-inch and two 4.7-inch naval guns.
- Air strength consisted of six Vincents, two old Singapore flying boats of doubtful quality, three de Havilland multi-engine civil type machines, and one Moth trainer.

Vickers Vincent (top) and Shorts Singapore



26th December

- **Philippines**

- The next day, 26th December, Japanese float planes and flying boats were operating from Jolo.
- About 90 twin engine bombers attacked shipping in Manila Bay sinking three ships. Light bombers attacked Nichols Field and the Harbour at Limay.
- Destroyers Peary and Pillsbury had remained at Corregidor to assist the inshore Patrol. Enemy air attacks forced them to manoeuvre to exhaustion until 26th Dec when after beating off an attack by about 45 planes the captains declared that they would have to cut and run or beach themselves as fuel was low and crews were exhausted. That night Admiral Rockwell directed them to proceed to Java and join Taskforce 5.
- Most of the USAAF had reached Bataan. After arriving most units found themselves woefully short of supplies. Many of their personnel left on supply runs back to still deserted airfields and Manila warehouses and returned with trucks loaded with a variety of supplies.
- Little direction was given to the USAAF units after they reached Bataan. On reaching Mariveles, at the southern tip of Bataan, 2nd Observation Squadron, soon to become infantry, were told to start walking north.

26th December

- **PNG**

- An Empire flying boat of 11 Sqd RAAF left Rabaul for Australia carrying 42 adult and 9 child evacuees.

- **Borneo**

- Seven twin engine bombers raided the airfield at Tarakan in North East Borneo, destroying one aircraft.
- On the 26th December, three Dutch Glenn Martin bombers from Samarinda again attacked shipping at Kuching and sank a Minesweeper and a transport.

- **Gull Force**

- Roach's signals of 23rd and 24th December drew a reply from the Deputy Chief of the General Staff, Major-General Rowell, on 26th December:
 - Concerned at your remarks regarding ammunition and food reserves since adequate supplies were dispatched Ambon before your arrival. Carriers left direct for Ambon 19/12 anticipate arrive first week January.
 - Additional units you ask for not repeat not available. Your task in cooperation with local Dutch forces is to put up the best defence possible with resources you have at your disposal.

26th December

- **West Malaya**
- The Japanese attacked 12th Indian Brigade at Chemor in the afternoon of 26th December.
- **Roseforce**
- "Roseforce" was formed to raid Japanese communications west of the Perak, composed of volunteers from the AIF and guides from the FMSVF, commanded by Captain Lloyd.
- It comprised two platoons armed with infantry weapons.
- Two naval motor launches, part of the Perak flotilla, formed to transport the force, picked them up from Port Swettenham, on 26th December for a landing up the Trong River, west and a little north of Ipoh.
- **NEI**
- Six zeros attacked Tondano Lake near Menado in the Celebes where the Dutch Dornier flying boats, which had raided Davao remained. All five of the multi engine flying boats present, which had been fuelled for a mission, were destroyed by fire.

26th December

- **Washington**
- Churchill took time out from the Arcadia conference to address both houses of Congress.
- He ended:
- “..Twice in a single generation the catastrophe of world war has fallen upon us. Twice in our lifetime has the long arm of fate reached out across the oceans to bring the United States into the forefront of the battle.
- If we had kept together after the last war, if we had taken common measures for our safety, this renewal of the curse need never have fallen upon us. Do we not owe it to ourselves, to our children, to tormented mankind, to make sure that these catastrophes do not engulf us for the third time?....”



Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of Great Britain, addresses a joint session of Congress in the Senate Chamber on December 26, 1941. credit: Senate Historical Office

27th December

- **Government**

- In a newspaper article on 27th December Mr Curtin wrote: . . .
 - the war with Japan is not a phase of the struggle with the Axis Powers, but is a new war . . . We look for a solid and impregnable barrier of democracies against the three Axis Powers and **we refuse to accept the dictum that the Pacific struggle must be treated as a subordinate segment of the general conflict.** . . .
 - The Australian Government, therefore, regards the Pacific struggle as primarily one in which the United States and Australia must have the fullest say in the direction of the democracies' fighting plan. **Without any inhibitions of any kind, I make it quite clear that Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom.**
 - We know the problems that the United Kingdom faces. . . But we know, too, that Australia can go and Britain can still hold on.
 - We are, therefore, determined that Australia shall not go, and shall exert all our energies towards the shaping of a plan, with the United States as its keystone, which will give to our country some confidence of being able to hold out until the tide of battle swings against the enemy.

- **Reinforcements**

- In a telegram on 27th December from Washington Churchill assured Curtin that he would do everything possible to strengthen the whole front from Rangoon to Darwin. The 18th British Division, leading brigade was going direct to Singapore. The 17th Indian Division was going to Malaya.
- **He had suggested to London on the 20th, when en route from London to Washington, that the Australian Government should recall one division of the A.I.F. from Palestine, either to go to India to relieve other troops or to go direct to Singapore. Some air support was already on the way.**
- Churchill still argued that the needs of Malaya were not pre-eminent but had to be balanced against the needs of other fronts. Although he spoke of the "paramount importance of Singapore", he also said that it would not be wise to loosen the grip on Rommel in North Africa when victory was within the Allied grasp. His view of the general strategy in Malaya was that forces should not be used up in attempting to defend the northern front of the peninsula but should fall back, fighting delaying actions and destroying communications so that they could defend Singapore and its approaches in Johore. **He thought of Singapore as a fortress.**

- **Australia**

- Le Triomphant was back in Brisbane on the 27th. It had been intended that she should proceed to Singapore to join the Eastern Fleet, but at Layton's request was retained in the Eastern Australian area.

27th December

- **Command**

- On the 27th of the month, as planned before war broke out, Lieut-General Sir Henry Pownall succeeded Air Chief Marshal Brooke-Popham as Commander-in-Chief, Far East.

- **Philippines**

- More raids hit the Manila area on the 27th. Bombers again raided Nichols field and shipping in Manila Bay. Americans were also destroying facilities and the skies were filled with fire and smoke.

- **Borneo**

- At the border, which was reached on the 27th December, the Sarawak State forces were released to return to their homes, and the much-reduced 2/15th Punjab continued alone and cooperated with the Dutch defenders of Singkawang II airfield.

- **West Malaya**

- Although by the end of the 27th 12 brigade had given little ground, its casualties were heavy and its men exhausted after twelve days of continuous action. Seeking to conserve his forces for the defence of Kampar, General Paris (11 Division) decided to move his two forward brigades to positions south of Ipoh. During the night of 27th/28th December 28 Brigade was moved to the right flank of Kampar, and the 12th Brigade was disposed in depth along the main road from Gopeng to Dipang, while the 15th Brigade prepared the Kampar position.

27th December

- **Roseforce**

- The Roseforce expedition was delayed when the engine of one of the launches could not be started. After half an hour's delay Lieutenant Sanderson's platoon went on alone. Sanderson and his men landed about 9 a.m. on 27th December near a road to the village of Trong.
- They succeeded in ambushing a Japanese car followed by three lorries and a utility, on the main south coast road. The car was hit by a grenade and ran off the road. Sanderson emptied a drum of Tommy gun ammunition into it, killing the passengers. The two leading lorries capsized over an embankment, and their occupants also were shot. The remaining lorry halted, and the utility turned over. Their occupants hid behind a culvert, but were killed by grenades.
- The platoon then rejoined the rest of the force. Five British soldiers who had become separated from their units in earlier fighting attached themselves to it.

- **Air**

- Six Blenheims from No. 34 Squadron and five Hudsons from No. 8 RAAF struck at Sungei Patani, at dusk, bombing from 1,500 feet and strafing for half an hour. Air reconnaissance had showed 105 enemy aircraft on the ground. Returning crews claimed many aircraft destroyed on the ground. Air photographs, taken next morning, showed that at least seven fighters had been destroyed and five fighters and three bombers damaged.
- Far East Command, on 27th December, instructed that "air protection for convoys bringing reinforcements will now take precedence before other tasks". To play its part the air force maintained wide reconnaissance over the South China Sea—undertaken chiefly by the two Australian Hudson squadrons—and arranged for fighter escort for the final approach to Singapore.

- **NEI**

- Six PBVs of Patwing 10, making their first sorties from Java, made a dawn attack on the shipping anchored around Jolo Island. They attacked in two flights of three planes, both flights were intercepted by zeros, all three of the first flight and one of the second flight were shot down. The majority of three crews were recovered. There were no survivors from Lt Hastings' crew.

28th December

- **Australia**

- A conference to plan air reinforcement of the Philippines met on 28 December at Amberley. Since the aircraft would have to be ferried over 2,000 miles to the jumping-off place at Darwin, it was decided to establish refuelling depots at Charleville, Cloncurry, Daly Waters, and Darwin.
- Though 100-octane gasoline could be procured from the Netherlands East Indies, this fuel had such a high aromatic content that it destroyed the leakproof lining of fuel tanks, so American fuel had to be imported. In addition to stocks built up before the war, the steamship Mauna Loa was on the way to Brisbane with a load of 400,000 gallons.
- It was also agreed to organise a training program for A-24 crews at Archerfield and for P-40 pilots at Amberley covering night flying, dive bombing, and aerial gunnery.

- **Philippines**

- Manila Bay was again attacked by bombers while four zeros strafed Nichols and Neilson fields.

- **Borneo**

- Three Dutch Glenn Martin bombers attacked Miri but were intercepted by zeros. Only one aircraft returned safe and it had more than three hundred bullet holes.

- **Malaya**

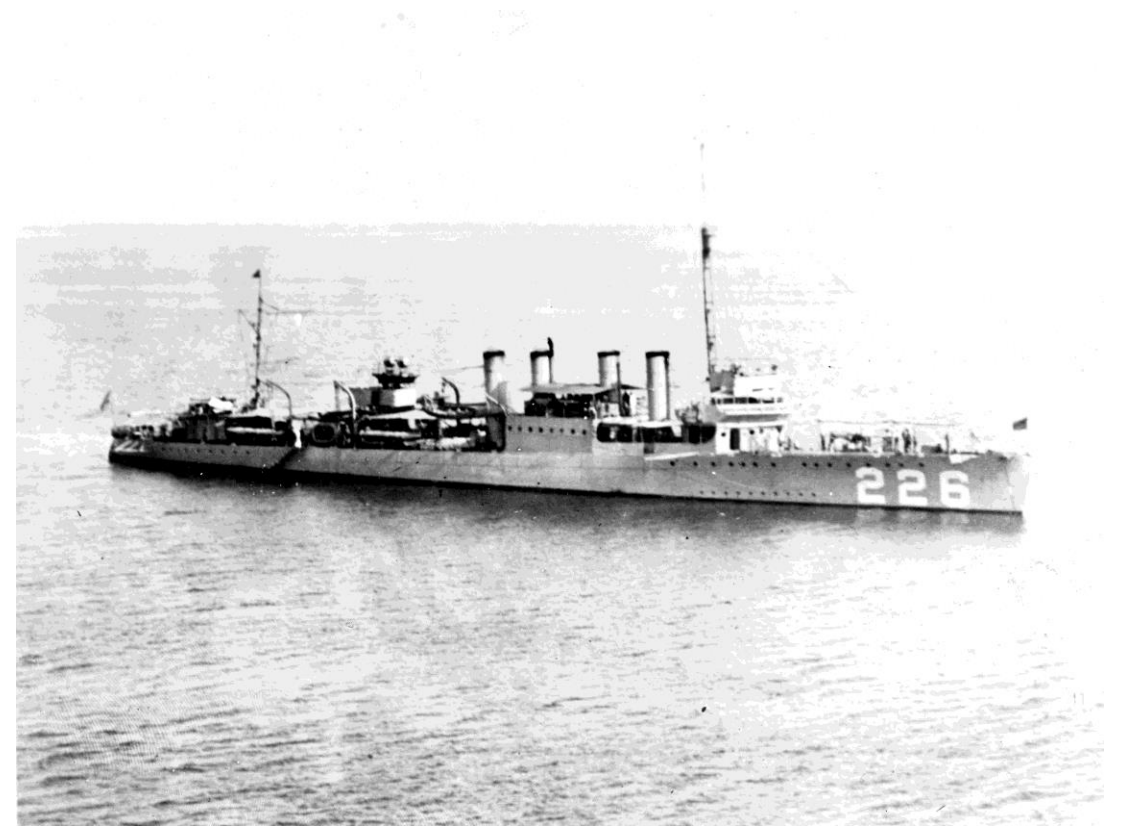
- Blenheims of 34 Sqd attacked Sungei Patani airfield again on the night of 28/29th. Six set out, four attacked the target and two failed to return, with the crew of one surviving a crash landing. Four Japanese aircraft were destroyed or damaged.

28th December

- **West Malaya**
- The main sector of the Kampar position rested against the mountain and was occupied by the 15th Brigade (the combined 6th and 15th) with the 88th Field Regiment and 273rd Anti-Tank Battery.
- On the right, at Sahum, astride a road which looped the mountain and rejoined the main road below Kampar, was the 28th Brigade.
- To guard against attack from the direction of Telok Anson, in the south-west, the 12th Brigade was to be withdrawn to Bidor after completing its covering task, and the 1st Independent Company was to be stationed at Telok Anson.
- The 12th Brigade was attacked at Gopeng on the afternoon of 28th December.

28th December

- **NEI**
- The sighting by an American Catalina of a destroyer steaming about 300 miles north from Namlea and 40 miles north-west from Menado in Celebes, was reported to A.C.H., Halong, on 28th December.
- There were no reports of friendly shipping in the area so three Hudsons from No. 2 Squadron at Namlea took off to attack.
- They found the destroyer and bombed with, it proved, unfortunate accuracy—the ship was the American destroyer Peary.
- Partly disabled by damage to the steering gear caused by a near miss she put in to Ternate for repairs. The crews of the Hudsons were not held blameworthy; they had made the attack under orders from A.C.H., Halong, which had no knowledge of the Peary's presence in these waters.
- That morning Peary, en route to Java from Manila, had survived three hours of bombing and strafing attacks by Japanese flying boats and torpedo bombers, by dint of some radical manoeuvring. Radical manoeuvring to avoid the Hudsons' attack caused one man to fall overboard.



USS Peary

28th December

- Sorong was again attacked on the 28th.
- Tarakan was attacked during the morning by seven zeros. Dutch Brewsters scrambled to intercept and claimed two zeros shot down but lost four of their own with two pilots killed.
- Tarakan was again raided later in the day by seven twin engine bombers escorted by fighters.
- U.S.S. Houston, flagship of the American Task Force 5, with destroyers Whipple, Alden and Edsall, escorting the transport Gold Star, the submarine tender Otus and the oiler Pecos, reached Darwin from Surabaya.
- Convoy ZK.5, transports Aquitania, Sarpedon and Herstein, carrying 4,250 Australian troops and 10,000 tons of equipment to reinforce Port Moresby, sailed from Sydney escorted by Australia, Canberra, Perth, and Achilles.
- The Pensacola convoy had been loaded on a peacetime basis. To find the equipment of the troops who were to remain in Australia and the parts for aircraft to be assembled there, it proved necessary to unload practically the entire cargo, sort it, and reload everything for shipping onwards to the Philippines.
 - Even then the missing parts for the A24s-trigger motors, solenoids, and gun mounts-were never found.
 - After many hours of fruitless search for missing parts, it was decided to reload all equipment for the Philippines on the two fastest ships, the Holbrook and the Bloemfontein.
 - With Australian dockworkers assisting in the effort twenty-four hours a day, the reloading was completed by 28 December.
 - The Holbrook sailed immediately.

28th December



29th December

- Churchill outlined the agreement on unity of command, agreed in Washington to the Australian Government:
 - (a) That unity of command should be established in the South-West Pacific;
 - (b) that General Wavell should be appointed C-in-C or "Supreme Commander" of all U.S., British Empire, and Dutch forces of land, sea and air, assigned to that theatre;
 - (e) that Wavell...would receive his orders from an appropriate joint body who would be responsible to Churchill as Minister for Defence and to Roosevelt as Commander-in-Chief;
 - (g) that India and Australia, who would have their own C.s-in-C., would be outside Wavell's sphere and are the two great nations through which men and material from Great Britain and the Middle East and the United States could be moved into the fighting zone;
 - (h) that the United States navy would remain responsible for the whole of the Pacific Ocean east of the Philippines and Australasia, including the approaches to Australasia.
- Wavell was a British General who had been CinC Middle East in 1940 and early 1941. The AIF had served under Wavell in successful campaigns against the Italians and the Vichy French and in defeats by the Germans in North Africa, Greece and Crete.



AIR CHIEF MARSHAL SIR ROBERT BROOKE-
POPHAM, COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF FAR EAST,
AND GENERAL SIR ARCHIBALD WAVELL.

29th December

- **Australia**

- The Bloemfontein, the second fast ship from the Pensacola convoy, left Brisbane for the Philippines.
- On 29 December General Brereton reached Darwin after conferring en route with American naval commanders and Dutch air and army officials at Soerabaja and Batavia.
 - His mission from General MacArthur was “to organize advanced operating bases from which, with the Far East Air Force, you can protect the lines of communications,
 - secure bases in Mindanao, and
 - support the defence of the Philippines.”
- When Brereton reached Darwin he announced his decision that the B17 group should move to Malang in Java.
 - In contrast to the pilots of No. 27 Group on arrival at Brisbane, the Flying Fortress crews had little to compensate them for all they had endured.
 - Batchelor Field must have looked like the outpost of a lost world. The weather—shade temperatures up to 118 degrees and frequent rain—took its toll, and
 - maintenance with no greater facilities than they had had at Del Monte, called for great effort.
 - The crews and ground staff welcomed Brereton's latest order.

- **Philippines**

- The Japanese mounted the first major bombing attack on the fortified island of Corregidor. Over 120 bombers with fighter escort attacked the 3 mile long island.

29th December

- **Roseforce**

- Roseforce returned to Port Swettenham on the 29th. Soon after, the depot ship for the Perak flotilla was bombed and sunk, five vessels on their way to reinforce the flotilla were sunk or driven ashore, and both the flotilla and Roseforce were disbanded.

- **West Malaya**

- By midday on the 29th 12 brigade had been forced back to within three miles of Dipang. The brigade was given permission to withdraw through Dipang after dark, and the 2nd Anti-Tank Battery had already gone back when a further enemy thrust, supported by tanks, nearly succeeded in disrupting the defence. The situation was saved only by resourceful action by 5/2nd Punjab, which checked the enemy less than a mile north of Dipang, enabling the brigade to withdraw to Bidor.
- Three attempts to demolish the Dipang bridge over the Sungei Kampar failed, but the fourth was successful.

- **Sea**

- The three escort vessels, Dragon, Durban and Vampire, having left Padang, Sumatra, on the 28th December, on the 29th met Hobart, escorting convoy "BM.9A" to Singapore, carrying an Indian Infantry brigade, and augmented the escort through Sunda Strait.

- **Air**

- A Dutch fighter squadron was withdrawn from Singapore to Palembang on 29th December to patrol the critical sea route through Banka Strait off eastern Sumatra.
- That night, 29th Dec, Japanese bombers renewed their attacks on Singapore.

29th December

