

War in the Pacific

Defending Australia

The First Six Months

Chapter 8

10 January 1942...

The Australians Go into Action

Singapore is Reinforced

Situation Report 10th January

- Many Allied Battleships have been destroyed but 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 have now extended their air war to attacks on New Guinea and the Dutch East Indies.
- Allied aircraft and American submarines, even in the most favourable tactical situations, have been ineffective.
- The Japanese army has landed in Malaya, the Philippines, Thailand and North Borneo and has invaded Hong Kong and Burma. Thailand has come to terms with Japan, Hong Kong has surrendered and resistance has ceased in Borneo. The Japanese air-force is establishing itself in all the areas seized by the army.
- The land and air battles continue in
 - Malaya where the 11th Indian division has been destroyed in the disaster at the Slim River and the 8th Australian division has been ordered to takeover the main defensive line and in
 - the Philippines, where the US forces have declared Manila an open city and withdrawn into the Bataan Peninsula.
- The American effort to strengthen and defend Wake Island lacked clarity of purpose and resolution and became an embarrassing failure.
- The US Navy and the Pacific Fleet are now under new management. Ships and aircraft have been transferred from the Atlantic but the losses at Pearl Harbour forced the Navy to adopt a temporary defensive role, to retain what America held in the Pacific as a base for future offensives and to secure communications along the lines West Coast/Panama-Pearl Harbour-Fiji-New Caledonia-Australia/New Zealand.
- All the allies are scraping the bottom of the barrel for forces and transport, with which to quickly reinforce the Far East. Enormous losses of equipment in two years of fighting against the Germans, the clamant needs for the battles in Russia and the Middle East and huge losses of shipping to the U boats have left the cupboard pretty bare.
- Reinforcements for the Philippines, which were at sea when the war broke out have arrived in Australia. The Japanese blockade is preventing forwarding them to the Philippines.

Situation Report 10th January

- Reinforcements for Malaya and Burma are starting to come in but the distances involved and the shipping required means that the build up will take months not weeks.
- Australia has established a line of reconnaissance posts through the islands to its north with which to detect approaching enemy forces, but has no effective naval or air-forces to resist a Japanese attack if detected. Australian troops have been sent to Ambon and Timor. Port Moresby is being reinforced with ground troops and an independent company has been sent to garrison New Caledonia. New Zealand has installed a strong garrison in Fiji. The Americans are sending garrisons to the other islands in the communications line back to Hawaii. None of these garrisons except possibly Port Moresby, could be supplied, reinforced or withdrawn if attacked by a Japanese aircraft carrier taskforce.
- Australia is building up its home defence army, while reinforcing its army and air-force in Malaya. Two AIF divisions in the Middle East are to be brought back to reinforce the Far East.
- Australian forces in New Guinea, the NEI and Malaya, Commanders in Malaya and the Philippines and the Australian Government are all calling loudly for reinforcements, particularly of fighter aircraft.
- In Washington the new allies, USA and Britain, meeting to establish joint machinery for directing the war effort approved the basic Anglo-American strategy.
 - Germany was declared the chief enemy, the Atlantic and Europe the areas in which the principal efforts should be applied.
 - In the Pacific positions should only be defended to “safeguard vital interests and deny Japan access to needed raw materials.”
- But it is now recognised in London and Washington that reinforcements of about 6 divisions and significant airforces will be required to hold the Malay Barrier.
- President Roosevelt has promised enormous and early increases in American weapons production, particularly aircraft, which provides promise for the future if the present can be survived.
- Unified Command of Allied forces in South East Asia has been established under General Wavell but the Australian Government has no involvement in determining his strategic instructions.

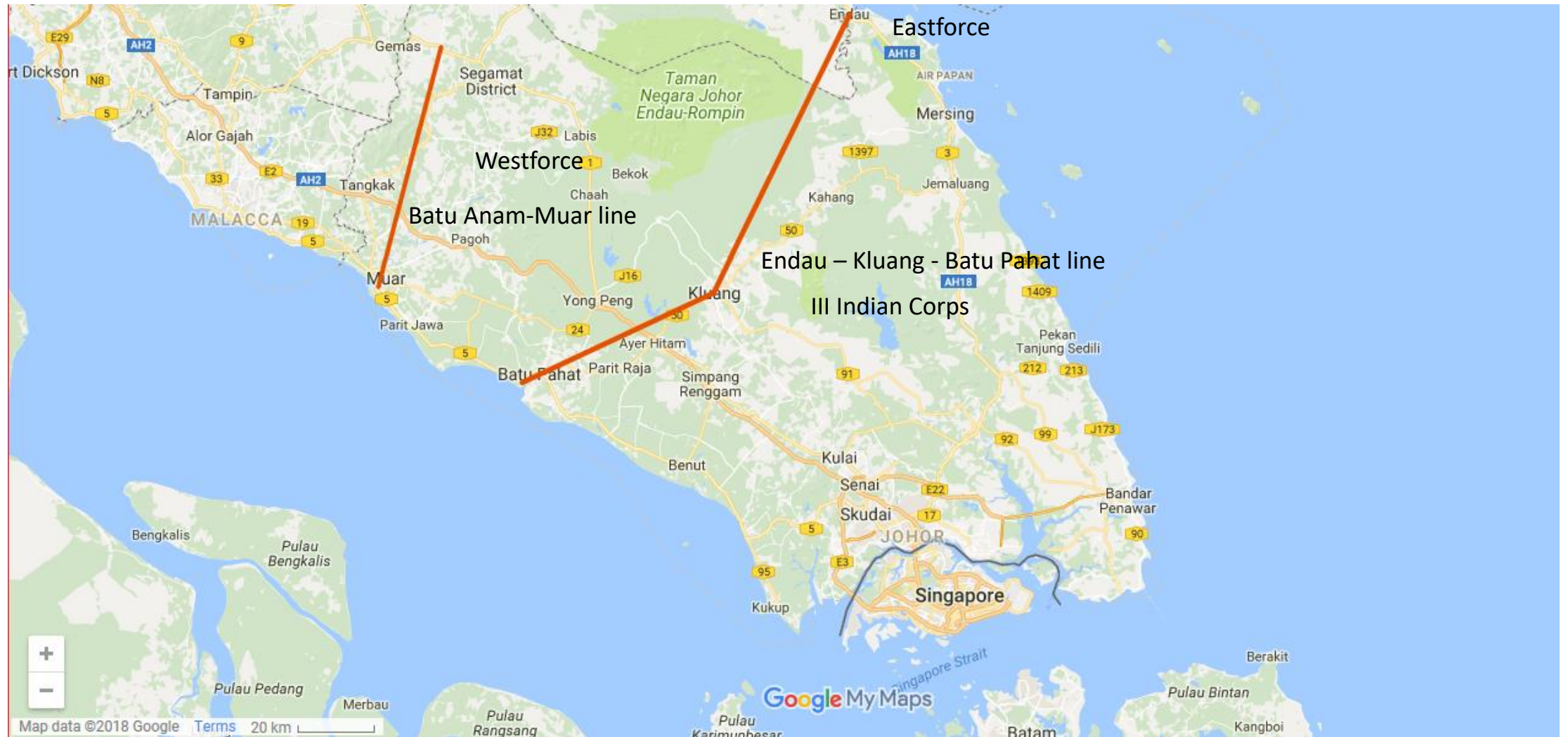
10 January 1941



10th January

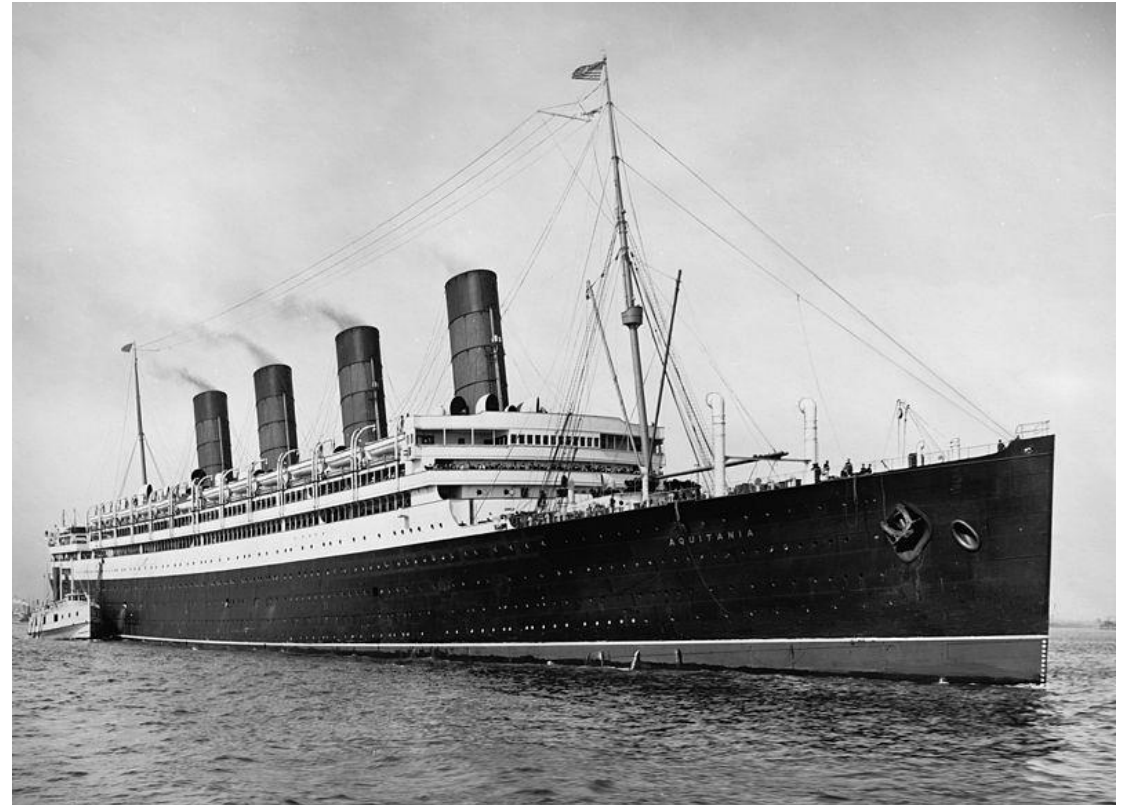
- **Malaya**
- When Wavell visited the III Corps on 8th January, and assessed its condition after the Battle of Slim River, he had promptly decided that it must be withdrawn to Johore for rest and reorganisation before again facing any major encounter with the enemy.
- He laid down next day (9th) the plan for the defence of what remained of Malaya:
 - III Indian Corps, after delaying the enemy north of Kuala Lumpur for as long as possible [Wavell did not expect it to be longer than 11th January] to withdraw into Johore, implementing the demolition scheme as they went.
 - The 8th Australian Division, leaving its 22nd Brigade Group in Mersing, to move to the north-west frontier of Johore and to fight a decisive battle on the line Segamat-Mount Ophir-mouth of Muar River.
 - The 22nd Brigade Group to join the remainder of the division as soon as it could be relieved by troops from Singapore Island. [Wavell considered that this could not be completed before the arrival of the 53rd Brigade.]
 - The 9th Indian Division, to be reinforced from the freshest troops of the III Indian Corps and the 45th Indian Brigade, to be placed under General Bennett for use in the southern portion of the position allotted to the Australian division.
 - III Indian Corps on withdrawal to take over responsibility for the east and west coasts of Johore south of the road Mersing-Kluang-Batu Pahat, and to refit the 11th Indian Division and to organise a general reserve from reinforcements as they arrived.
- The force under Bennett, to be known as Westforce, comprised :
 - 9th Indian Division;
 - A.I.F. less 22nd Brigade;
 - 45th Indian Brigade Group;
 - 2/Loyal Regiment (from Singapore Fortress);
- The composition of the other main force—III Indian Corps—was:
 - 11th Indian Division;
 - 22nd Australian Brigade Group and attached troops, including 2/17th Dogra Battalion from Singapore Fortress, under Brigadier Taylor (to be known as Eastforce);

The Wavell Plan 10th January



10th January

- 10th January convoys "MS.1" and "MS.2" sailed from Melbourne and Sydney respectively.
- There was only one ship—*Aquitania*--in convoy "MS.2", escorted by H.M.A.S. *Canberra*.
- *Aquitania* embarked a machine gun battalion and 1,800 reinforcements for the 8th division, for Singapore, carrying 3,456 passengers in total.
- The troops' motor transport and equipment was loaded on convoy MS1.
- "MS.1" was of three ships for Singapore and four for the Netherlands East Indies ports. The escort to Fremantle was *Kanimbla*. At Fremantle three more ships joined and *Hobart* strengthened the escort.



RMS *Aquitania*

Launched in 1914 she became a troopship and then a hospital ship at Gallipoli in the first world war. As an Atlantic liner between the wars she carried 2,200 passengers.

10th January - Malaya

- Japanese forces crossed the Sungei Selangor unopposed on the night of 9th-10th January, and forced their way to Klang, where they captured the bridge over the Sungei Klang held by the Jat-Punjab Battalion of the 15th Brigade, and forced its withdrawal. The battalion, reduced to about 200 all ranks, was then embussed and moved southward on the trunkroad.
- Another Japanese force had been moved by sea to the mouth of the Sungei Klang, and landed unopposed on the afternoon of the 10th.
- Both forces then set out for Kajang. The British Battalion, acting as the rearguard of the 11th Division, had withdrawn from Kuala Lumpur at 4.30 a.m. on the 11th, and the division was clear of Kajang when the Japanese arrived there that evening.
- For days past, smoke had billowed up at Kuala Lumpur from great quantities of stores which could not be moved because of the swift collapse at Slim River. Even so, much was left to the enemy. The southward move had begun on the morning of 10th January.
- All Saturday and Sunday, all day and all night, the great withdrawal continued. An interminable convoy, composed of all manner of vehicles, began to roll south:
 - large lorries filled with British troops so dog-tired that they slept in spite of bumps and jolts;
 - civilian motor-cars commandeered by the military and hastily camouflaged by being spattered with mud;
 - lorries bearing the names of half the rubber estates in Malaya;
 - dispatch-riders darting in and out of the traffic on their motor-bicycles;
 - eleven steam rollers . . . which had steamed all the way down from Kedah and Perak.
- the 11th Division moved without further fighting to successive positions in its withdrawal to Johore.
- On 10th January the Blenheim crews were called on to destroy 13 trains laden with British stores that had been stranded on the Malacca branch line because of the congestion and dislocation of traffic on the main railway. They achieved partial success.



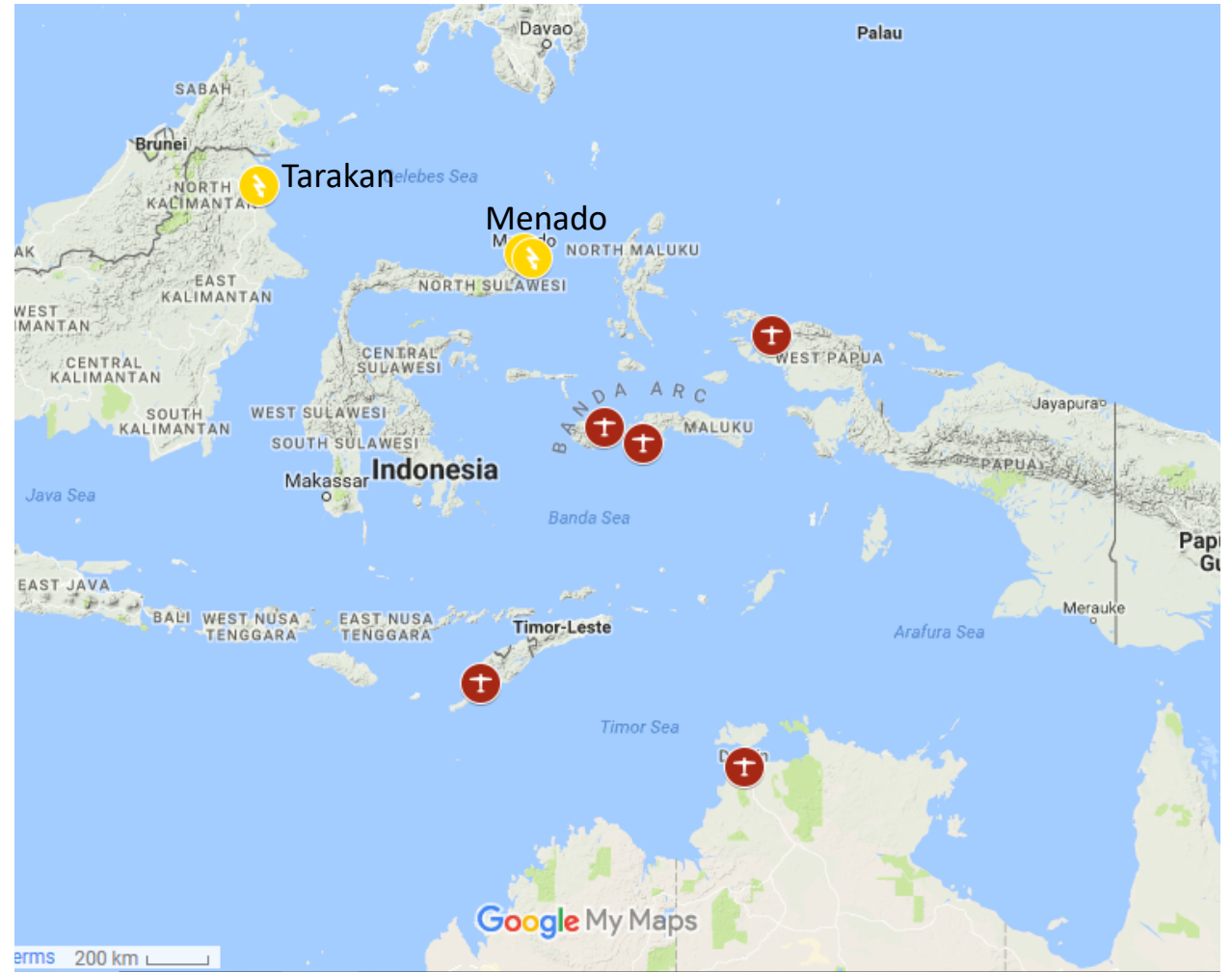
(Australian War Memorial)
Stocks of rubber were burned to prevent them from falling into the hands of the advancing Japanese.

10th January



10th January

- **NEI**
- A convoy of 16 transports with strong air and sea escort closed on Tarakan on 10th January,
 - they were detected and attacked by three Flying Fortresses from Malang, but this attack scarcely interrupted their progress.
 - As they approached the Tarakan coast a dense column of black smoke rising from the oilfields told them that they would not secure the oilfields intact.
- Late on 10th January reconnaissance aircraft sighted an enemy convoy bearing down on Minahasa, the northern arm of Celebes. The assessment of this force at A.C.H. was 26 warships and 6 transports.
 - An attack that night by Allied Catalinas was unsuccessful, and
 - A.C.H. ordered dawn strikes by the American and Dutch Catalinas, and the Hudsons from Laha and Namlea, and recalled the detached Hudson flight from Babo.
- On 10th January a Hudson piloted by Squadron Leader Ryland broke off from escorting an American Catalina engaged on a shipping reconnaissance over the Molucca Sea to attack a four-engined enemy flying-boat. The Hudson's gunners had caused some damage to the enemy aircraft when shortage of fuel forced Ryland to give up the attack.



11th January

- On 11th January six Catalina crews from Nos. 11 and 20 Squadrons set off for an attack on Truk Lagoon. Three of the Catalinas flew to Lorengau and three to Kavieng for refuelling before taking off for Truk.
- After crossing the equator the crews encountered extremely bad weather and for the last 300 miles visibility was reduced to about half a mile.
- Intermittent fierce thunderstorms made flying conditions still worse.
- Though five of the Catalinas reached the vicinity of the target, all were forced to return without attacking it.



Consolidated Aircraft PBY Catalina

11th January



11th January

- **Tarakan**
- The convoy lay off shore Tarakan overnight and before dawn on 11th the landing had been achieved. For the next 24 hours the Dutch garrison fought on but next morning (12th) they surrendered.
- **Menado**
- That same morning 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.
- **Ambon**
- 11th January, Lieut-Colonel Roach, the commander of Gull Force, signalled the Central War Room in Melbourne:
- Am very disturbed at complete absence of response in view latest position Can we rely immediate adequate support. If not the result must inevitably be as predicted. We are all completely in the dark and failing any information from your end prospects are gloomy. At present time factor apparently is twelve hours.
- Army Headquarters replied that a ship, the *Bantam*, was due at Ambon next day with 1,000,000 rounds of small arms ammunition, 5,000 mortar bombs, one ambulance, two 15-cwt vans, two motor-cycles and rations.

11th January

- **Air Attacks**

- When the Allied aircraft set out before first light on 11th January the enemy force was found to have divided, one formation having anchored off Menado and the other off Kema. Already the Japanese forces had landed.
- The Catalinas were met by a strong force of Japanese float-plane fighters which set upon the slow-flying Allied flying-boats and prevented them from reaching the target. One Dutch Catalina was shot down and two others were damaged. One of the American Catalinas failed to return.
- The Hudsons, with better speed, penetrated to the target area at both Menado and Kema to make low-level attacks. They scored a direct hit on one cruiser, a near miss on a transport and two more hits on undesignated ships. All the Hudsons returned safely, one of them damaged by anti-aircraft fire.
- Five Hudsons from Laha then attacked a light cruiser and destroyer, scoring two direct hits and three near misses. At Kema, lighters and troops on the beach were attacked with gunfire by some of the Hudsons.
- Half an hour later two Hudsons from Laha bombed a 12,000-ton transport and reported several near misses.
- Four Hudsons from Namlea bombed another large transport later in the day, without success. They were set upon by Japanese float-planes.



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

The Hudson gunners scored well in this engagement, two enemy aircraft being shot down in flames. A third was counted a "probable" and a fourth was seen to alight on the sea apparently damaged. Credit for this action went to two crews from No. 2 Squadron.

11th January

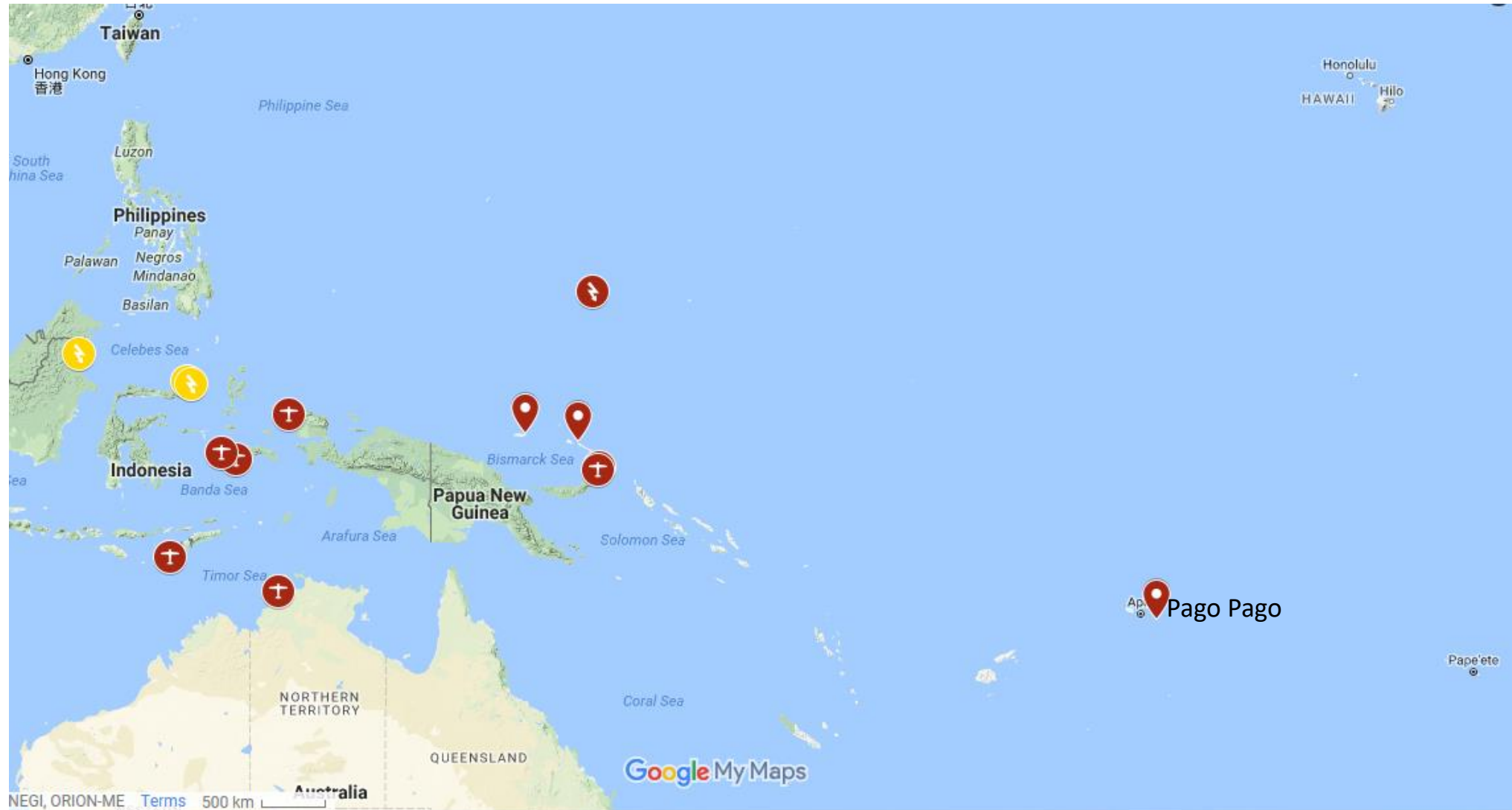
Naval

- The aircraft carrier *Saratoga* was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine, 500 miles southwest of Pearl Harbour. Six men were killed and three fire rooms flooded, but the carrier managed to reach Pearl Harbour under its own power. From there she went back to Seattle for permanent repairs.
- On the same day another submarine shelled the U.S. naval base at Pago Pago, in Samoa.
- Concerned that this attack and the concentrations at Truk might indicate an enemy thrust at Samoa, the Americans gave priority to escorting the convoy of Marine reinforcements to Samoa, and sent Admiral Halsey's *Enterprise* carrier group to cover it.
- Despite the transfer of the *Yorktown* from the Atlantic therefore, the available U.S. carrier task forces in the Pacific were again reduced to three, the third of which,
- the *Lexington* force, was covering the Midway-Johnston-Palmyra islands line to protect the Hawaiian group.



USS Saratoga

11th January



12th January

- **Darwin**
- The labour troubles on the Darwin wharves caused serious concern. The US General Barnes, complained bluntly to the Advisory War Council and asked for military labour. The *Holbrook*, with American artillery equipment on board, had waited at Darwin for three weeks before the equipment could be taken off. Two other ships for Darwin had to be held up at Townsville because the berths at Darwin were not being cleared. Under pressure from Barnes, Curtin agreed on 12th January to have immediate inquiries made. The Government's policy, however, was not to allow any servicemen to be used on the wharves until all local civilian labour had been absorbed.
- The Australian Chiefs of Staff regarded this problem so seriously that they had raised it with the War Cabinet on the day war with Japan broke out. Cabinet had invited Eddie Ward the minister of Labour to go to Darwin and resolve the problem.
- The problem was of long standing. An investigating officer, who had tried to discover the local causes of the difficulties at Darwin in December 1940, had found:
 - lack of coordination between Government departments,
 - bad facilities on the harbour and railways,
 - dishonesty among wharf and railway workers,
 - industrial troubles, shortage of labour and a low output due to the climate,
 - procrastination by the civil authorities and
 - "general malaise, lassitude and discontent".
- An RAAF officer in December 1941 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.

12th January

- **Ambon**
- At dawn on 12th January the Allied air attacks on the enemy forces invading Celebes were resumed.
- On their way to Menado five Hudsons from Namlea were intercepted by three enemy float-planes and five Zeros—the first of these Japanese fighters to be reported in the area. The Zero pilots immediately turned the tables on the Hudson crews. Four of the five Hudsons failed to return.
- The only aircraft to return was piloted by Flight Lieutenant Cuming who reported having seen the Hudsons flown by Hodge and Gorrie shot down.
- Attacks by three Hudsons from Laha on a cruiser and destroyer about 30 miles east of Kema were made through a smoke pall drifting out to sea from the fires burning on shore. Two runs were made but without success. Later three more aircraft from the same base reported no success in an attack on a cruiser and destroyer 120 miles to the south-west of Ternate.
- The loss of four Hudsons and their crews and the increasing repair and maintenance difficulties, forced A.C.H., Halong, to decide, on 12th January, that air attacks on distant and strongly-held targets must be discontinued.



Mitsubishi A6M Zeros

12th January

- **Ambon**
- Signal from ACH, Halong, to the Central War Room (dispatched 12th January) read:
- “Japanese now established Menado and Kema 359 miles from Ambon bases. Anticipate concentrated bombing from flying-boats based Lake Tondana as preliminary to invasion of Ambon. With present equipment Ambon could not resist for one day forces equal to those which took Menado [and] Kema. Again urgently request immediate reinforcement by fighters and dive bombers. Suggest Tomahawks and Wirraways respectively in largest number possible. Repeat only token resistance possible with present unsuitable aircraft all of which will certainly be destroyed in one day's action against carrier-borne forces.”
-
- Central War Room replied on the same day stating that the Halong message had been repeated to Bandung, and adding:
- "We cannot supply aircraft."
- The *Bantam*, escorted by *HMAS Swan*, duly arrived at Ambon on 12 January.

12th January

- **Air - Singapore**
- On the 12th eight Buffaloes, of No. 21/453 Squadron, took off from Sembawang to help defend Singapore against more than 100 enemy aircraft.
 - The Buffalo pilots picked out one formation of 27 bombers, clearing the target area after the attack.
 - With throttles wide open the Buffaloes gave chase.
 - When the enemy pilots saw that they were being overtaken, they too opened their throttles and went into a shallow dive and gained speed.
 - From that moment the Buffaloes were left behind.
- The enemy had bombed Seletar, Tengah and the docks at Keppel Harbour, and escaped without interception, leaving fires burning in each target area.
- No. 488 (Fighter) Squadron, R.N.Z.A.F., formed under the Empire Air Training Scheme, had its first air combat as a unit.
 - Based on Tengah, the squadron put 8 Buffaloes into the air.
 - Soon they were in action against 27 enemy fighters, which had the advantage of greater altitude.
 - Within minutes 2 Buffaloes had been shot down but both pilots parachuted to safety.
 - Three other pilots were wounded and 5 Buffaloes damaged.
- On Singapore Island the Buffalo pilots on the ground needed at least 30 minutes warning if they were to reach an altitude of 20,000 feet at which the Japanese formations usually flew. With the successive evacuation of Observer Corps posts as the enemy advanced down the peninsula and the inadequacy of the radar cover, warnings of 30 minutes were almost unknown.
- The Australian Buffalo pilots made another attempt to strike at the Japanese on the ground at Kuantan on the afternoon of 12th January. Again a wall of bad weather made approach to the target area impossible. Two Buffaloes collided. Both pilots survived but the planes were destroyed.

12th January

- **Washington**
- The string of island bases which constituted the vital airlink between Hawaii and Australia required troops for local defense.
 - New Zealand was assigned responsibility for Fiji, and
 - Australia for the ultimate protection of New Caledonia; but it was necessary for the United States to provide a large ground force immediately for the latter island.
 - Otherwise the prime necessity was for an early and substantial increase in air power for local defence of the islands and for a striking force farther west.
- The AAF had en route, at U.S. ports of embarkation, or earmarked for early dispatch to the Far East a number of air units and about 400 planes.
- The chief difficulty lay in the shortage of shipping rather than of aircraft or crews; for, whereas heavy bombers could be ferried out, shorter range planes and their crews, ground personnel, and supplies must go by sea.
- The need was so desperate that on 12 January the US. chiefs of staff suggested a review of the shipping priorities just established for the Atlantic.
 - By reducing the size of convoys for Iceland and Northern Ireland and by reassigning the ships thus released, it was possible to find troop space for 21,800 men, including
 - ground forces for New Caledonia and
 - AAF personnel for the Far East area, and
 - shipping space for the aircraft.
 - This plan was adopted; it retarded troop movements in the Atlantic and the shipment of lend-lease supplies to Russia, but it provided minimum forces for immediate defence against Japan.

13th January

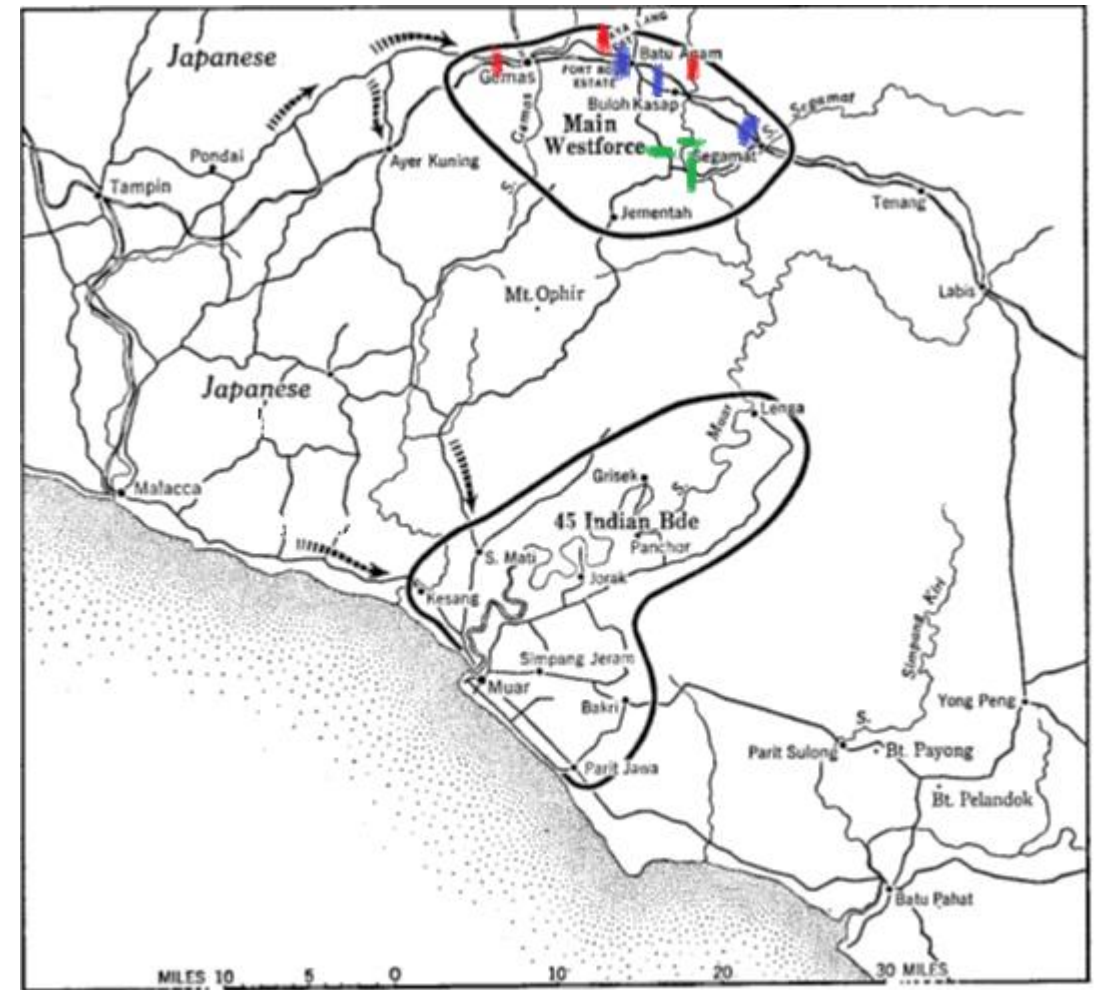
- **Australia**
- A signal from Nimitz regretted "the inability of the U.S. Pacific Fleet to operate against Japanese naval concentrations in the Carolines and Marshalls in the immediate future owing to other commitments" as Admiral Royle told the War Cabinet on 13th January.
- **Ambon**
- On the 13th January Roach (Gull Force) sent a signal to headquarters in Melbourne that
 - "in view of overwhelming enemy combined forces successfully operating Menado area and indications early attack on similar scale here we could NOT hold out for more than ONE day"; that he understood that no such support as he had asked for could be expected; and that to avoid purposeless sacrifice of valuable manpower and arms he recommended immediate evacuation of the combined force.
- Army Headquarters replied that Roach's messages
 - "should cease at once", and added "your staunch defence will have important effect . . . in regard future Australian Dutch cooperation".
- **Malaya**
- After a second visit to Malaya on 13th January Wavell cabled to the Chiefs of Staff that the battle for Singapore would be "a close run thing".



Vice Admiral Sir Guy Royle, RN, Chief
of Australian Naval Staff.

13th January

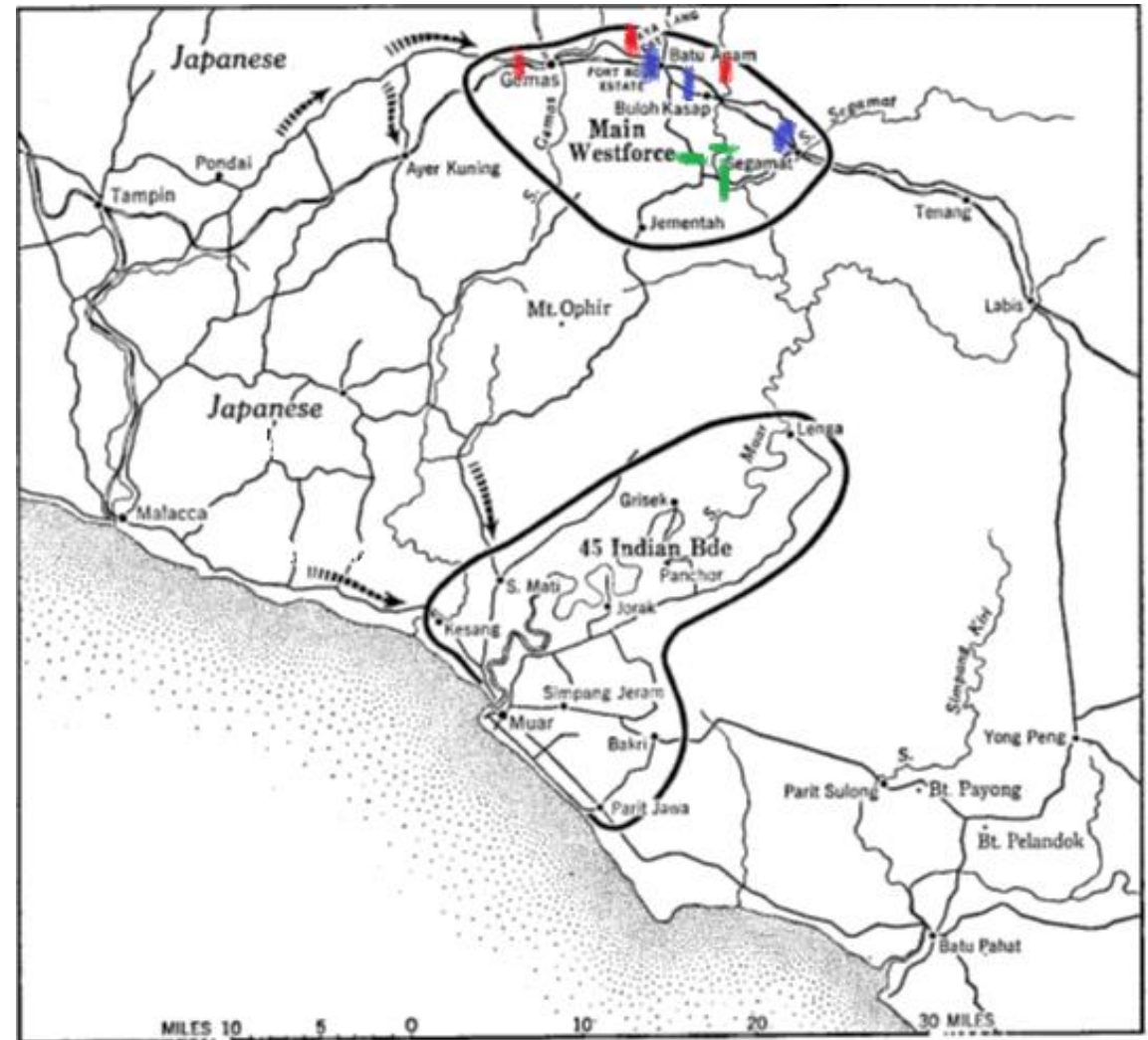
- **Malaya**
- The 9th Indian Division withdrew southward, from the east coast, and on the 13th reached the Segamat area, where it came under Bennett's command.
- the crossings over the Sungei Muar and Sungei Segamat in the vicinity of Segamat were to be secured strongly against all forms of attack by the 9th Indian Division and the 27th Brigade AIF.
- An ambush force and road-block were to be placed along the main road west of Gemas, where the main enemy thrust was expected.
- Units of the 9th Indian Division were allotted various responsibilities from Segamat to Batu Anam, and westward of the main road to guard approaches through Jementah, on a road from Malacca and the west coast.
- In the coastal area to the west the 45th Indian Brigade Group would cover the main coast road at Muar and the river to Lenga, about 25 miles inland.



The Westforce front, 14th January 1942

13th January

- The 27th Brigade was disposed on 13th January in the Segamat sector,
- the foremost position, on the trunk road three miles west of Gemas, was occupied by the 2/30th Australian Battalion (Lieut-Colonel Galleghan). The role of the battalion was to act as a shock-absorber at the first contact with the enemy, inflict as many casualties as possible, and hold its ground for at least 24 hours before falling back on the main positions.
- The 2/26th Battalion (Lieut-Colonel Boyes) was on the Paya Lang Estate, north of the trunk road, and between Gemas and Batu Anam.
- Behind the 2/26th was the 2/29th Battalion (Lieut-Colonel Robertson), at Buloh Kasap.
- The (9th Indian div) dispositions were:
- 8th Indian Brigade: 1/13th Frontier Force Rifles astride the road west of Batu Anam; 2/10th Baluch between Batu Anam and Buloh Kasap; 3/17th Dogras, Segamat.
- 22nd Indian Brigade: 5/11th Sikhs near bridge over Sungei Muar four miles west of Segamat on the road to Jementah; 2/18th Garhwals about the junction of the roads Batu Anam to Jementah and Segamat to Jementah; 2/12th Frontier Force Regiment, between the Garhwals and the Sikhs.

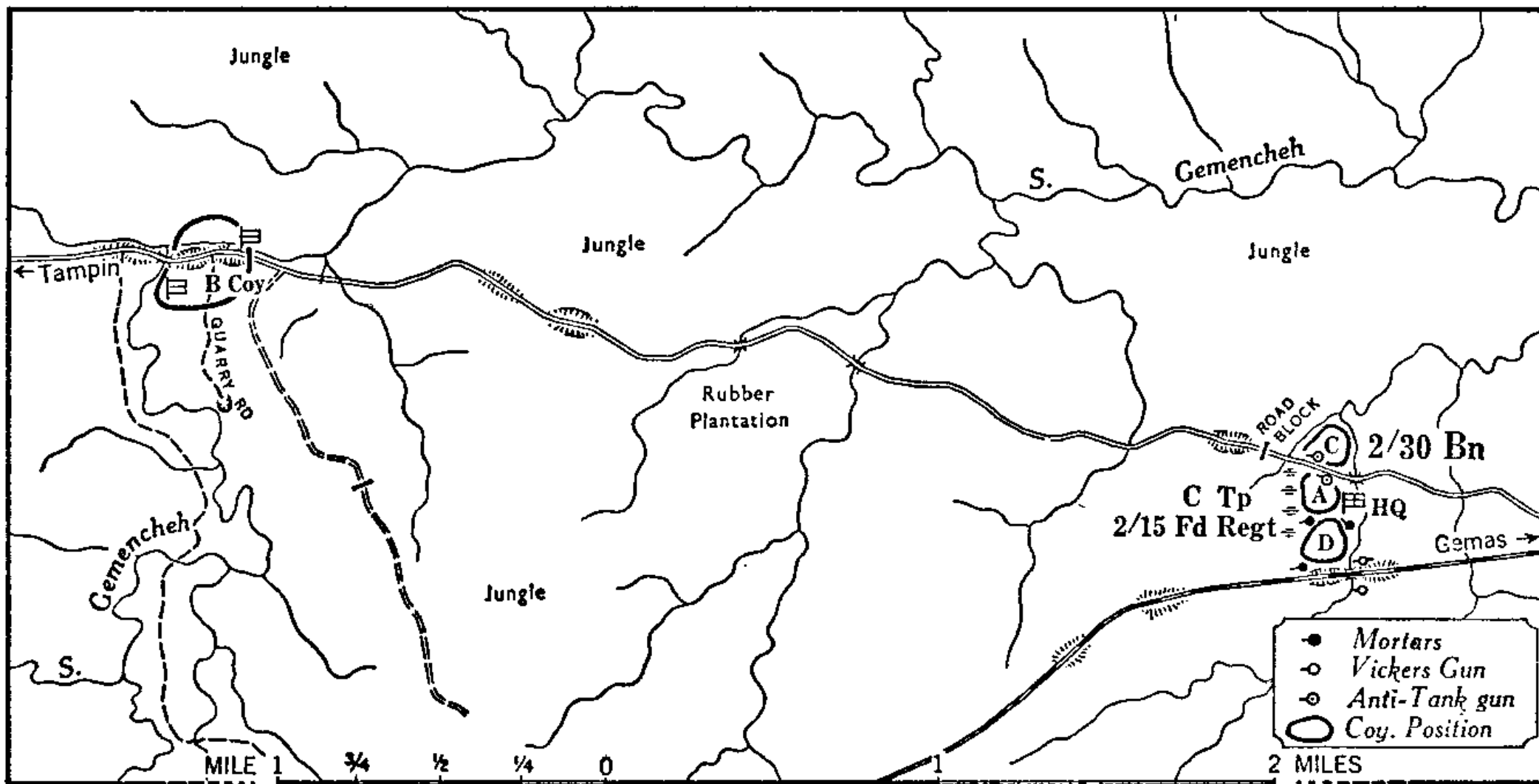


The Westforce front, 14th January 1942

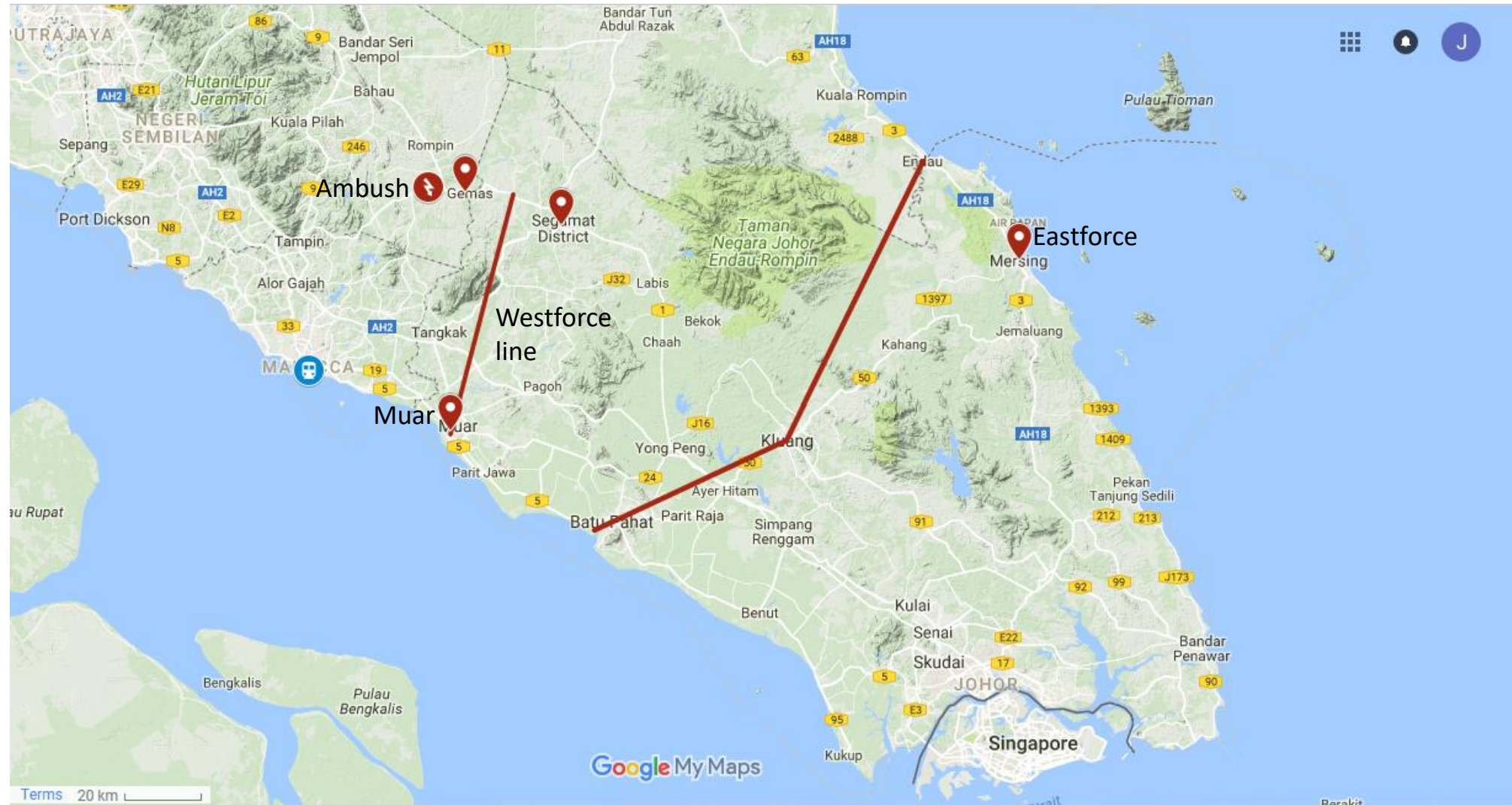
13th January

- **Gemas**
- The ambush was planned by the 2/30th Battalion, the spot chosen for the ambush was a length of the main road leading to a wooden bridge over a small river—the Gemencheh—about seven miles west of Gemas. Dense jungle grew on both sides of the road for about 500 yards, including a cutting, twelve feet high and forty yards long, which ended within 60 yards of the bridge, giving way to low scrub offering little or no concealment. On the far side of the bridge the road ran in a straight line for about 250 yards with open ground on either side.
- Percival, who visited the spot with Bennett, considered that it was too far in advance of where the main stand was to be made, near the Paya Lang Estate, but Bennett upheld the choice.
- The Battalion was disposed with "C" Company, on the right, with responsibility for establishing a road-block ahead of its positions, "A" Company in the centre, and "D" Company on the left.
- "B" Company manned the Gemencheh ambush, three miles ahead, in teeming rain on 13th January. Lieutenant Head's platoon lined the cutting with company headquarters near by. Platoons commanded by Lieutenants Geikie and Jones were in echelon along the road. Rear headquarters were established close to a track known as Quarry road, along which the company was to withdraw after taking maximum toll of the enemy. Galleghan was insistent in putting into practice his belief that the use of transport in the battle area should be kept to a minimum.
- Two signal lines were laid, one to battalion headquarters and one to the supporting battery, which was to fire on enemy troops following those who had been caught in the ambush.
- On his way to the ambush position Duffy had noticed the artillery signal wire lying conspicuously beside the road. The N.C.O. in charge of the truck from which the line was being laid undertook to send a party on foot to camouflage it after it had been laid.
- Engineers of the 2/12th Field Company prepared the bridge for demolition.
- All transport and carriers were sent to the rear except one truck for each company, two ammunition trucks, two carriers and signals trucks, and Galleghan's car.
- The 27th Brigade was now ready for its first experience under fire.
- Withdrawal of the III Indian Corps was completed on the night of 13th-14th January.

The Ambush at Gemas



The defence of Johore



13th January

- **Singapore**
- At dawn on 13th January No. 21/453 Squadron, with 14 Buffaloes, was ready for the big event—the arrival of the convoy carrying the 51 Hurricane fighters. As the convoy approached the island, enemy air formations numbering about 100 aircraft were reported to be approaching.
- At this critical moment the weather, which seemed to have favoured the enemy so consistently since the Malayan campaign began, turned against them. Closing in rapidly a heavy cloud formation completely screened the convoy from the Japanese bombers and screened the attackers from the circling Buffaloes.
- For the next 24 hours weather, as "bad" as Singapore had known for a long time, gave the convoy complete freedom from air attack not only in berthing but in disembarking its troops and unloading its cargo.

13th January

- **Singapore**
- The convoy, of large American vessels, brought in
 - the 53rd Infantry Brigade Group of the 18th British Division, and
 - a heavy and a light Anti-aircraft Regiment and
 - an Anti-tank Regiment, and
 - fifty-one Hurricane fighter aircraft with air and ground crew for one squadron.
- The Brigade group was without its transport or its guns, which were following in another convoy. These needs had therefore to be met from local resources.
- Percival hoped to use the 53rd Brigade, if time permitted, to release the 22nd Australian Brigade for Bennett's command; but having been at sea for eleven weeks, the 53rd Brigade was not considered to be fit for immediate employment.
- Its safe arrival produced a sense of exultation among those who knew what it had brought. They felt that the Hurricanes, at last, might be the turning point; here was the means to sweep the Japanese from the skies and stem their advance on the Malayan mainland.

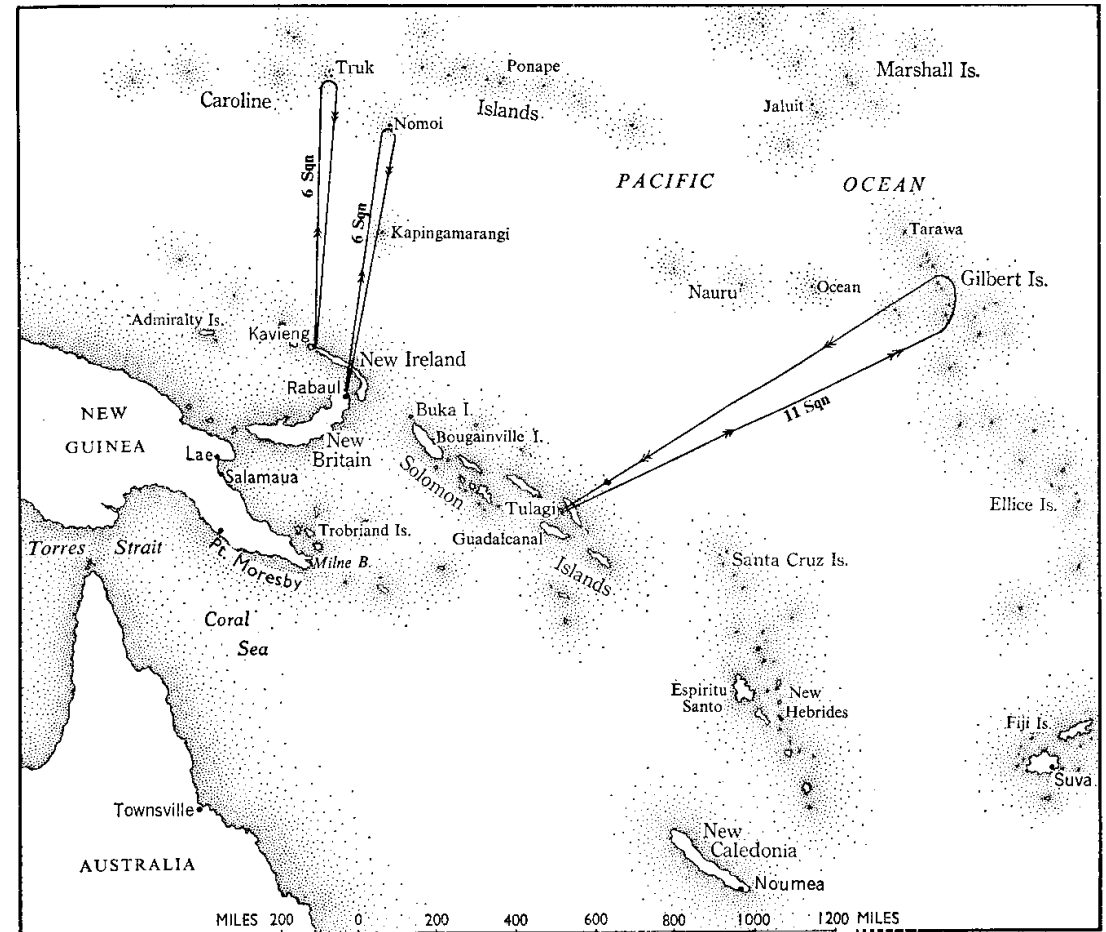


USS Mount Vernon (AP-22)

14th January

- **New Guinea**

- On 14th January Yeowart and his crew made a photo-reconnaissance of Nomoi, 120 miles south-east of Truk, which was thought to be a Japanese seaplane base. They found no activity there and an attack with gunfire on a Japanese lugger was the crew's only compensation for a long and hazardous flight.
- A similar reconnaissance of the Gilbert Islands, notable chiefly for its duration—21 hours—was made on 14th-15th January by a Catalina from No. 11 Squadron piloted by Squadron Leader Cohen, who, from Tulagi, covered nine separate islands in the group and took 100 photographs. No enemy naval units or aircraft were sighted and there was no evidence of any new enemy bases there.



Truk and other long-range reconnaissance operations, January 1942

14th January

- **Ambon**
- **Land**
- Next day (14th) Roach received a signal that Major Scott was flying to Darwin and would take over command of Gull Force; Roach to return to Southern Command. General Sturdee told General Wavell about this situation.
- **Air**
- On 14th January the Chief of Air Staff RAAF (Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Burnett RAF) sent a personal message to Wing Commander Scott, the senior RAAF officer at ACH Halong:
- "The position of Ambon is within the control of the Commander-in-Chief in NEI and must form part of the whole strategical plan and cannot be considered alone. It must therefore be held until orders are received from the Supreme Commander, General Wavell.
- I feel sure you would be the first to protest if Australians were withdrawn leaving the Dutch alone to meet the attack.
- Congratulate those concerned on good work accomplished."



Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Burnett
RAF

14th January

- **Philippines**

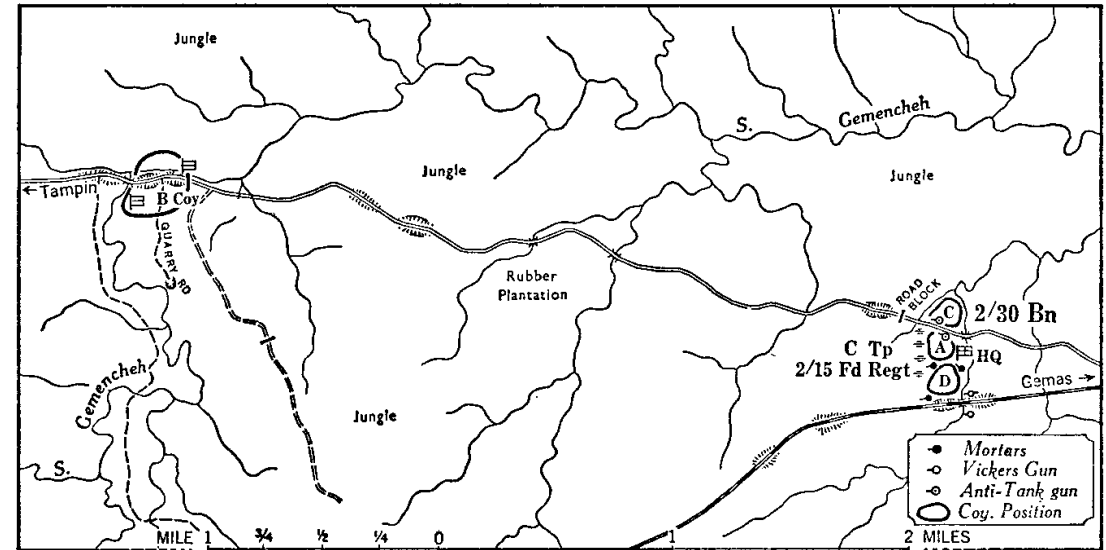
- Another Japanese attack on the Bataan line on 14 January at the boundary of positions held by the 41st and 51st Divisions penetrated to the Salian River Valley through a gap made by the 51st Infantry's withdrawal. But a patrol discovered the infiltration, and units of the 21st Division rushed to the valley and repulsed the attackers after a savage encounter.

- **Reinforcements**

- The 17th Pursuit Squadron (Provisional) was formed in Brisbane with 17 of the P40s which had arrived on the 22nd December convoy. 13 of the pilots were veterans from the Philippines the other 4 were new arrivals from the US.
- On the 14th Churchill in a cable to Curtin, after speaking of reinforcements on the way, found ground for hoping that a counterstroke against the Japanese would be possible in the latter part of February.
- Another forty-eight hurricanes were embarked, with their pilots, in H.M.S. Indomitable at Port Sudan for transportation to ABDA. Indomitable was escorted by the three Australian destroyers of the 7th Flotilla—Napier, Nizam, and Nestor. On the 14th, the four ships reached Port Sudan whence they sailed, with the aircraft embarked in Indomitable, next day.
- The second flight, of the NZ 14th Brigade arrived in Fiji on 14 January, on the Port Montreal, Rangatira, Wahine and the Monowai.

14th January - Gemas

- Galleghan, inspecting the position soon after first light on the 14th, also noticed the signal wire and gave instructions for its concealment.
- Shortly before 4 p.m., a few Japanese on bicycles rounded the bend near the Gemencheh bridge. Soon a column of blithely chattering Japanese push cyclists, riding five or six abreast, was streaming over the bridge. They resembled a picnic party rather than part of an advancing army, except that they carried arms.
- Reporting by telephone to battalion headquarters that the cyclists were moving through, Duffy found that the voice at the other end of the line reached him only faintly.
- Sounds along the road forward of his position suggested that motor transport, with perhaps the main body of the enemy convoy, was following. He therefore let from 200 to 300 of the cyclists pass, to be dealt with by troops in the rear.
- As it happened, only three motor cyclists appeared, followed by several hundred more cyclists. When these were tightly packed into the ambush, and on the bridge, and it seemed to Duffy that the head of the column would have reached the Quarry road position, he gave the order for the bridge to be blown.
- The charge hurled timber, bicycles and bodies skyward.

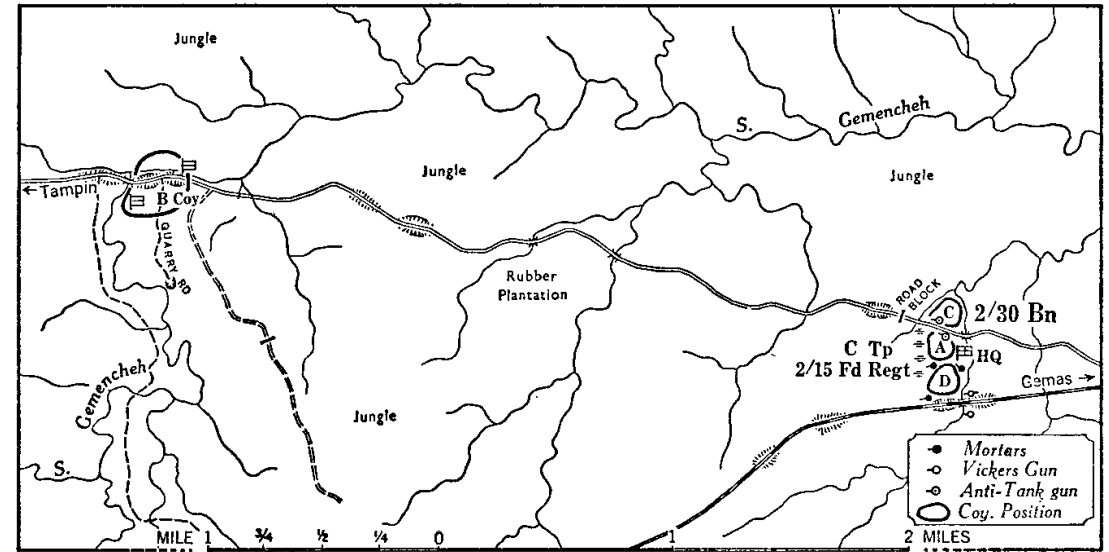


Duffy's three platoons hurled grenades among the enemy and swept them with fire from Bren guns, Tommy guns and rifles.

The din was so great that when Duffy ordered artillery fire the artillery forward observation officer thought his battery's guns were firing.

14th January - Gemas

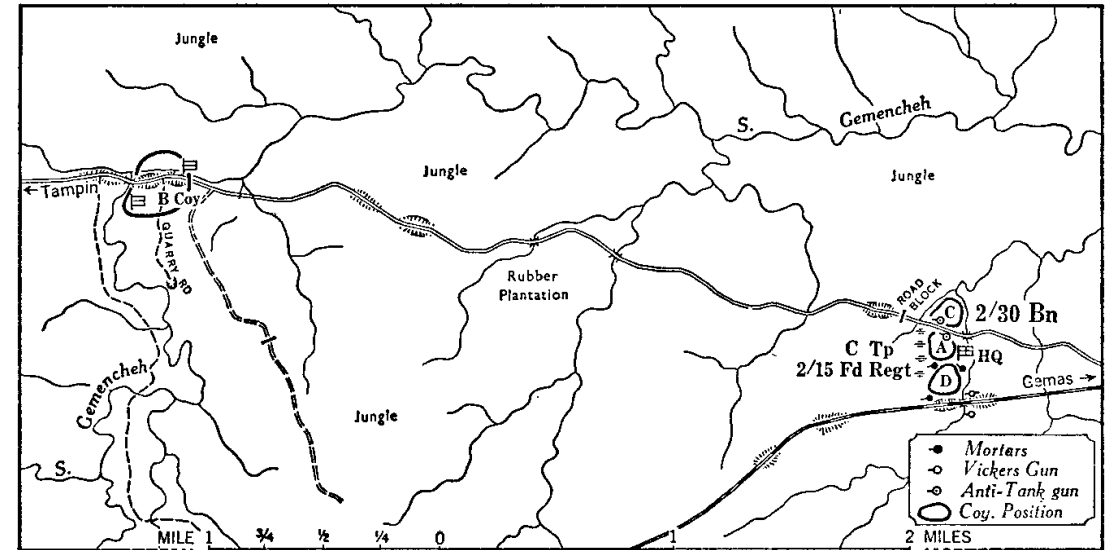
- Both he and Duffy soon found, however, that their signal lines back from the ambush position had gone dead—cut, it was believed, by Japanese who had discovered them at the crucial moment in the artillery fire plan. In the absence of radios there remained no means of calling down artillery fire on the enemy troops and transport which it was assumed would bank up on the far side of the bridge.
- Battalion headquarters, straining their ears for the sound of the bridge being blown, heard nothing they could rely upon as a signal that the action had commenced, and that would indicate when and where artillery fire was required.
- The ambush had caught the Japanese completely by surprise. Their rifles were strapped to their cycles, and there was little opportunity to use either their bayonets or their grenades.



- In twenty minutes it was all over. Of the sight across the river, Duffy related: "... the entire 300 yards of road was thickly covered with dead and dying men—the result of blast when the bridge was blown up and the deadly fire of our Bren guns."

14th January - Gemas

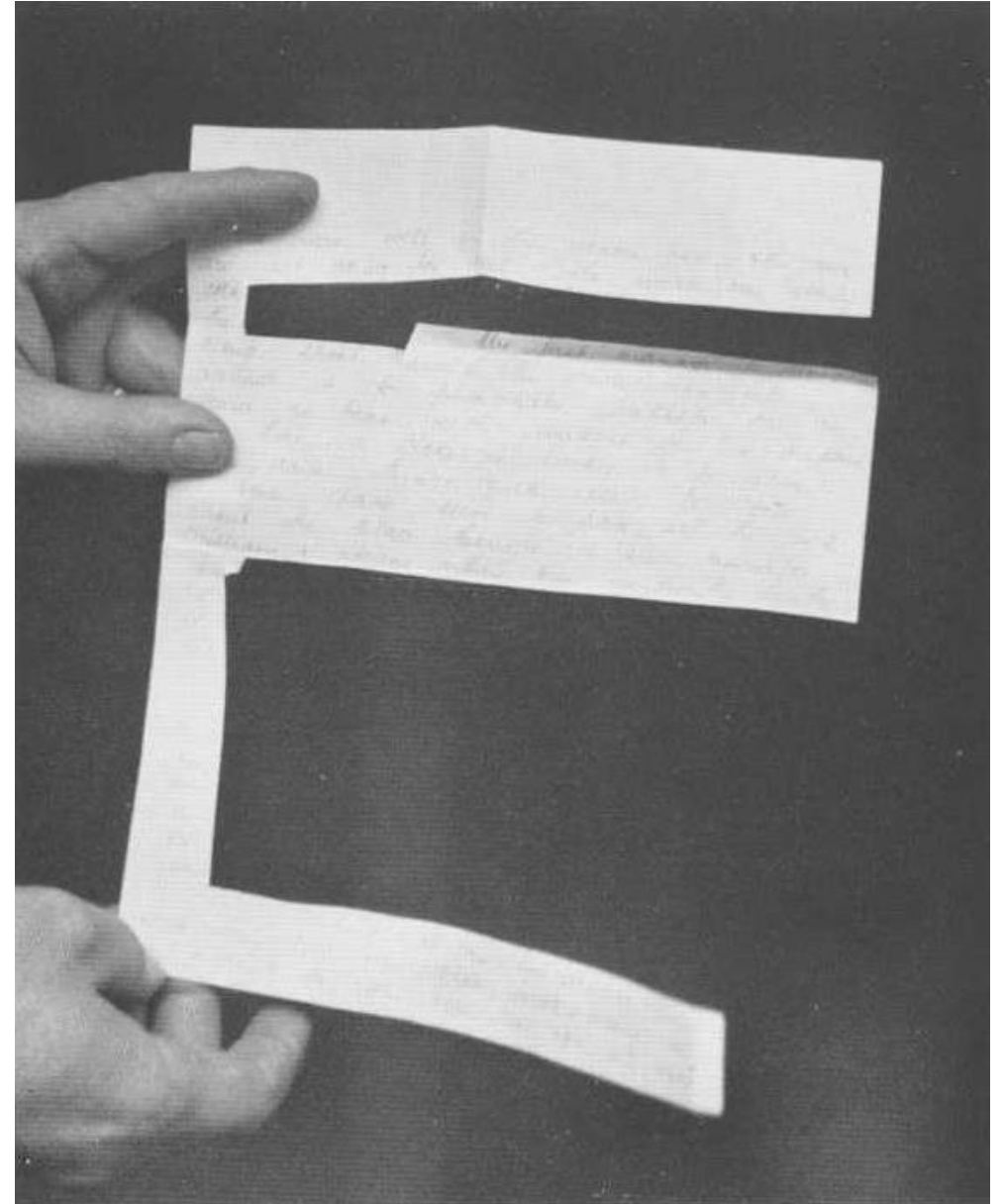
- Duffy now ordered withdrawal, especially as so many Japanese had been let through the ambush before the action commenced.
- In the withdrawal Head and some of his platoon became engaged with these Japanese, who had turned back. He shot an enemy officer, but was himself wounded and had to be supported by Sergeant Doolan to the rendezvous at Quarry road.
- Geikie, who with his platoon also encountered the enemy, led several successful bayonet attacks and he too was wounded, but not badly.
- Gordon's and Garner's parties, after fighting fiercely, joined company headquarters in the jungle near Quarry road. Jones' platoon also withdrew, fighting a rearguard action.
- As it appeared that the Japanese were in strength on the trunk road, Duffy led his company in single file through the jungle in an attempt to move round the enemy's flank.
- At battalion headquarters it was realised that the signal lines to Duffy's company had been cut, and that action of some kind probably was in progress. Patrols were sent out to endeavour to restore communications.



- The patrols became involved in several clashes with enemy troops. It was discovered that the Japanese were in control of the Gemencheh ambush area (where they restored the bridge for traffic within six hours of its having been blown up) and were advancing in force, with tanks, towards the battalion's main position.

15th January

- **Australia**
- The Post and Telegraph Censorship'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.
- The Censor was also required to report to the government on public opinion and morale.
Throughout January 1942 Censors reported:
 - "dangerous and idle gossip", criticism of lack of equipment in the Army, stories of bad discipline in camps, criticism of training, stories of evasion of controls, rackets and profiteering,
 - more stories that other people are evading military service,
 - fear of fifth columns, fear of defeat,
 - criticism of parliament and politicians and the administration in general and further criticism of aliens.
 - The Malayan situation became more and more the centre of criticism and letter writers turned to condemnation of Churchill.



15th January

- **Philippines**

- On 15 January, the 1st Regular Division of Brigadier General Fidel Segundo, defending the Morong sector, came under heavy bombardment, but held the line. The Japanese penetrated through a huge gap in the Silangan-Natib area and established a roadblock on Mauban Ridge, threatening to cut off the division's rear. Repeated attacks by the 91st Division and 71st Division, and 92nd Infantry failed to dislodge the Japanese.

- **New Guinea**

- **Administration**

- Page, the senior officer in the Administration at Rabaul, telegraphed to Canberra on 15th January asking that immediate consideration be given to the evacuation of the whole of the civilian population, and the withdrawal of civil administrative officers either to the New Guinea mainland or to Australia. He said:
 - It now appears that the defence policy for the territory is to be limited to demonstration of force rather than any serious attempt to hold the territory against any enemy attack in force and there are indications that such an attack will take place in the near future."

- **Air**

- The Catalinas of Nos. 11 and 20 Squadrons were now again called on to attempt an attack on the Truk base. On 15th January, three crews took their aircraft to Kavieng for refuelling while the other three went to Lorengau.
 - In taking off from Kavieng the Catalina piloted by Squadron Leader Davies crashed. All the crew and the aircraft were lost.
 - Hutchinson brought his aircraft down at the scene of the crash in a vain attempt to rescue the crew.
 - The three aircraft from Lorengau reached the target but failed to see the base at all.
 - Beaumont, in the remaining aircraft from Kavieng, reached Truk an hour later, when a break in the overcast gave Beaumont and his crew a brief sighting, sufficient for them to make two runs and drop sixteen bombs.
 - The weather closed in again almost immediately and they were unable to see the result of their attack. All four Catalinas returned to their base.

15th January

- **Ambon**
- On 15th January Laha suffered its first air attack. 26 bombers and twelve zeros attacked the airfield and the flying boat base at Halong.
- Two Dutch Buffalo fighters were shot down and a Hudson and two Catalinas were destroyed on the ground.
- At Laha the runway was so cratered by bombs that it was unserviceable for 24 hours.
- The remaining Hudsons survived by taking off and seeking shelter in the clouds.



15th January - Gemas

- Preceded by a storm of machine-gun fire, two Japanese tanks appeared soon after 9 a.m. on 15th January near the road-block in front of Lamacraft's company, but turned tail under assault by anti-tank guns.
- Next came three tanks—two medium and one light—which fired along the road. Armour-piercing shells either passed through or ricocheted off them, but when high-explosive shells also were used the first tank was set ablaze, the second one was disabled, and the third towed it away.
- The blazing tank served as a screen for three more tanks which then appeared, soon followed by another. The tanks, and machine-guns dismounted from two of them, were quickly sending a stream of fire along the road. This was supplemented by fire from mortars and machine-guns brought up by Japanese infantry, but the Australian mortar and anti-tank fire was so effective that the first of the four tanks was hit, the second disabled, the third set on fire, and the fourth wrecked by a mortar bomb which exploded after entering its turret.
- Artillery now opened fire on the troops in the Japanese rear. The Japanese still pressed forward along the road and commenced flanking movements, but the combined effect of the Australian artillery and infantry fire was too much for them. The assault was over within an hour, at heavy cost to the enemy.
- To Galleghan this seemed to be the time for an attack which he had planned. Melville's company was chosen to advance on a hill occupied by the Japanese about 1,000 yards from the company's position, hold it if possible till dusk, and then return.
- As reports flowed in to battalion headquarters it was realised that the Japanese were massing much more quickly than had been thought likely. Their use of tanks, so soon after the Gemencheh bridge had been blown, added to the danger that the battalion would be overpowered or cut off if it attempted to hold on to its advanced position. It was accordingly decided that a plan for the battalion's withdrawal behind the Sungei Gemas should be put into effect that evening.
- Japanese planes were bombing Gemas, and suddenly dive bombers pounded battalion headquarters. A divisional signals wireless truck was destroyed, but from it emerged an unscathed signaller holding a broken buzzer key. Suspecting that the Japanese had been able to locate battalion headquarters by its wireless signals, Galleghan abandoned use of radio. The dive bombers next attacked in the area held by Anderson's company.

15th January - Gemas

- At 12.45 D Company advanced in open formation across the clearing. While Melville was leading his men forward a report was received that the Japanese were only 300 yards ahead of the start-line. It was by then too late to change the plan, and the company was soon under heavy fire from ground and air.
- Although the supporting artillery fire was landing too far behind the Japanese, the company pushed them back and inflicted heavy casualties on them.
- Melville was soon wounded, but directed his men until they were out of range of his voice, when Captain Morrison took command.
- Privates Dever, Hilton and Williams of Parry's platoon, using bakelite grenades and then their bayonets, captured two Japanese guns and destroyed their crews.
- Private Beattie, racing towards a Japanese machine gun which was holding up Lieutenant Hendy's platoon on the right flank, was killed within twenty yards of the gun.
- It was not until the men came under cross-fire and were confronted by several tanks that the attack was halted. As the tanks now were a serious threat Morrison ordered the company to return to its former position.
- In carrying out a supporting attack Anderson's company had also encountered tanks. They had therefore returned to their original positions.



(Australian War Memorial)

Laying an Australian 25-pounder field gun, Malaya, January 1942.

Directed by Major Ball, a troop of guns of the 30th Battery, which had been placed forward of Anderson's company, was firing over open sights while these withdrawals were occurring, and probably was responsible for keeping the Japanese tanks in check.

15th January - Gemas

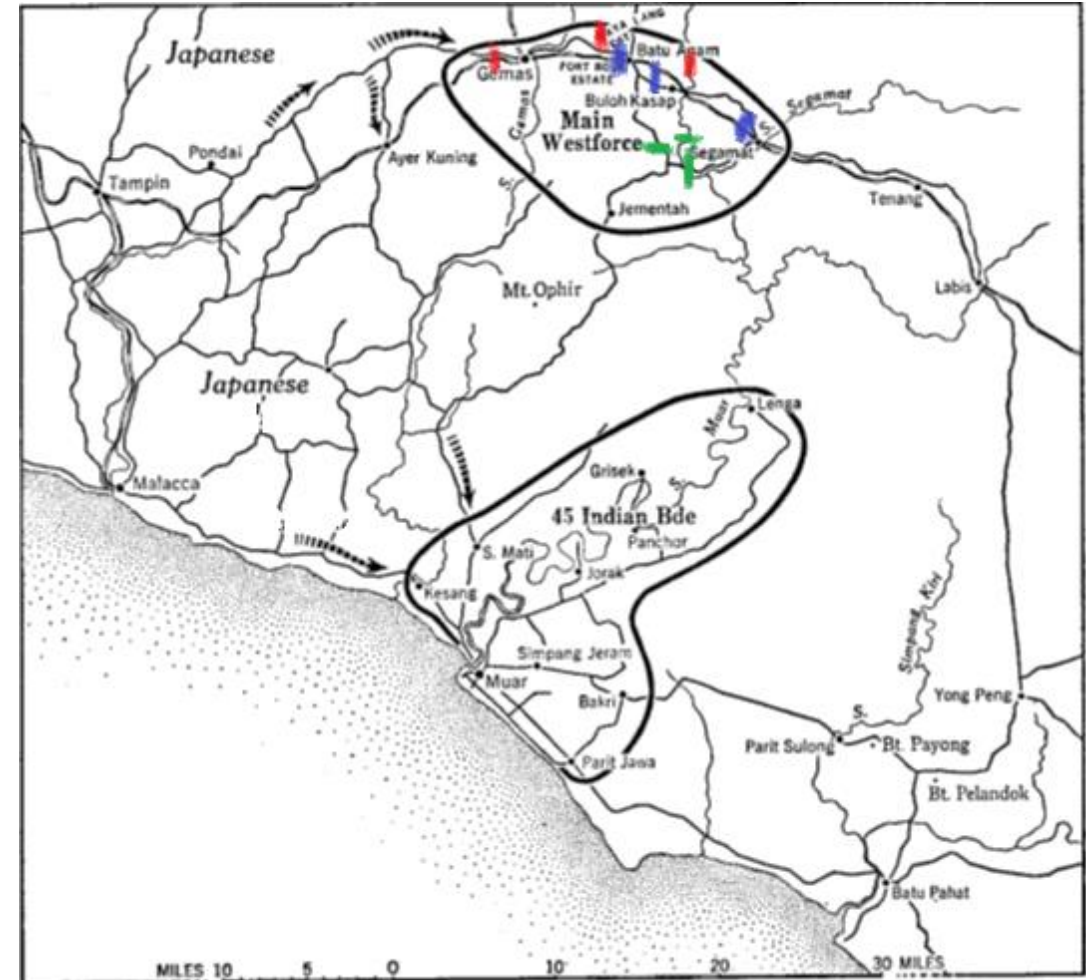
- Early in the afternoon, tanks moved against Lamacraft's company, with mortar and air support. As another signal line had been cut, the company could not call up mortar fire, and the tanks were protected by trees from the anti-tank guns; but they were spiritedly attacked with hand grenades and bullets from the cover of trees and logs in the course of a running fight.
- Lieutenant Clemens, shot through the heart, was the first of the battalion's officers to be killed in the campaign. The fire from the tanks was wild and largely ineffective, and they withdrew.
- Valuable aid to the infantrymen had been given throughout the day by the accurate fire of the mortars, acting on information from the forward companies and from Private Reid of the mortar platoon from his observation post in a tree.
- Owing to the rapidly mounting strength of the Japanese on the immediate front, the battalion began to withdraw in mid-afternoon.
- Although they were being fired at by a Japanese tank over open sights, and were also under heavy mortar fire, Bren carriers under Captain Thompson persisted, until they were ordered to withdraw, in attempts to pull out antitank guns. They then picked up other weapons, walking wounded, and a section of Lamacraft's company, on their way back to Gemas.
- Heavy mud had bogged anti-tank and field guns, and only one—a 25-pounder was saved. Most of the trucks in the area were got out, several (carrying ammunition) under fire.
- In the two days action the battalion's casualties were one officer and sixteen other ranks killed, nine men missing and fifty five wounded. The battalion had taken heavy toll of the enemy, and although the withdrawal took place in daylight, a clean break was made.



Major General Bennett briefs Australian and British war correspondents on the successful ambush north of Gemas. At this stage, he was confident of turning the tide of the campaign.

15th January - Muar

- The 45th Indian Brigade had been posted along the Sungei Muar to guard Westforce's left flank. The brigade had been mobilised in August 1941 and arrived in Malaya only in December. The officers of the Australian artillery battery supporting them were concerned about their lack of training and inexperience.
- Successive Japanese air attacks on Muar from 11th January were followed by the appearance on the 15th of Japanese troops at the northern approach to the ferry. They were fired upon by the 65th Battery, but the telephone line to the battery's observation post on the far side of the river was severed handicapping the battery.
- One of its guns, in charge of Sergeant Buckman, was then brought to the southern end of the ferry crossing and fired over open sights.
- A Rajput company, also on the far side, reported just before its telephone line failed that Japanese were coming down the road from Malacca.
- The battalion's advanced headquarters in the township found itself out of telephone contact with two other companies also, and with rear headquarters near Bakri.



The Westforce front, 14th January 1942

15th January

- **Air**
- Two Buffaloes from No. 21/453 Squadron, on reconnaissance over Seremban and Gemas on 15th January, found a large enemy convoy on the Gemas road and attacked it with gunfire.
- That day two other aircraft from the same squadron sighted a convoy of small enemy ships near Port Dickson. Six Hudsons from No. 8 Squadron and 3 Blenheims escorted by 12 Buffaloes went to attack, but the ships had taken cover and the bomber crews could not find them.
- About 9.30 a.m. on 15th January three Buffaloes piloted by Vanderfield, Flight Lieutenant Kinninmont and Flying Officer Bowes were patrolling at 20,000 feet when they sighted a formation of 21 enemy bombers about 4,000 feet below them. The bombers' speed was such that the Buffalo pilots each were able to make only one attack, but two of the enemy bombers were destroyed and one probably destroyed.
 - Kinninmont's aircraft was damaged and he had to make a forced landing.
 - Soon after this combat 6 Buffaloes were airborne in an attempt to intercept another enemy formation, this time numbering 27, but they failed to close for action.
- Airfield construction in Malaya had latterly been left largely to No. 1 Aerodrome Construction Squadron R.N.Z.A.F..
 - Early in January a party from the squadron had almost completed a bomber airfield at Bekok, about 100 miles north of Singapore, when it received orders to drag obstacles across the runway and withdraw leaving only a small party to lay mines for demolition.
 - Bekok was evacuated on 15th January and next day the mines were fired.
 - At Tebrau the squadron began construction of a bomber aerodrome within sound of gunfire. This work completed, the new aerodrome was prepared for demolition, as was, an airfield known as Rifle Range Strip, constructed on the rifle range at the Johore military barracks.
 - Completed by mid-January except for final grading and surfacing, this strip actually accommodated the light aircraft of the Malayan Volunteer Air Force. It was the only aerodrome made by the squadron on the Malayan mainland that was used for operations.

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.
- On 15th January Churchill asked in a message to Wavell
 - "How many troops would be needed to defend this area (Singapore Island)?" "What means are there of stopping landings [such] as were made in Hong Kong?"
 - What are defences and obstructions on landward side?
 - Are you sure you can dominate with fortress cannon any attempt to plant siege batteries?
 - Is everything being prepared, and what has been done about the useless mouths?"



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.

16th January

- Churchill told Curtin in early January that he believed that the United States would be willing to send 50,000 troops to Australia to reinforce the Australian home defence troops, and asked Curtin the direct question: Do you think you are in immediate danger of invasion in force?
- Curtin asked the Chiefs of Staff for their advice and was told on 16th Jan that
 - the danger of invasion in force would remain
 - until a front had been stabilised along the Malay barrier
 - or until the United Nations had secured supremacy over the Japanese Fleet.



16th January

- **Air**
- **Brisbane**
- The ground crew of an American bomber unit assembled 138 Kittyhawk fighters in 58 days. Provisional fighter squadrons were formed to absorb the aircraft and pilots as they disembarked at Brisbane. The first of these squadrons (No. 17P) set out from Brisbane on 16th January for Darwin en route for Java. The commander and 12 of the pilots had fought in the Philippines; the other four were second-lieutenants who had just arrived from the United States.
- Partly trained American aircrew, whose average total flying time in pursuit aircraft amounted to only about 15 hours were rushed through an improvised training program. Fighter pilot training was conducted at Amberley and dive bombing at Archerfield.
- **Rabaul**
- Raids on Rabaul were resumed on 16th January when flying boats dropped 40 bombs. There was no very serious damage.
- **Ambon**
- A daylight raid (on Ambon) by 36 aircraft on the 16th was mainly directed at the harbour. HMAS *Swan* and the transport *Bantam* were in harbour. *Swan* engaged the bombers and neither ship suffered damage.
- Two riflemen and two signallers of the 2/21st Battalion were killed.
- The Dutch naval aircraft were withdrawn that day; the American airmen left soon after.

16th January

- **Command**
- With the establishment of ABDA, the responsibility of the CinC, Eastern Fleet, for naval operations in the ABDA Area ceased; and on 16th January Admiral Layton sailed for Colombo.
- Admiral Hart took charge of the naval branch of ABDA and appointed Palliser his chief of staff. This necessitated a new commander of the convoy escort vessels, and Captain Collins, R.A.N., was appointed Commodore-in-Charge. Collins assumed his appointment on the 16th, and hoisted his broad pendant in the depot ship *Anking* at Tanjong Priok.
- The ships in the ABDA Area now under Collins were regarded as a detachment of the Eastern Fleet, known as China Force. Collins then assumed the title of Commodore China Force.
- China Force met and took over incoming convoys from their ocean escorts just outside Sunda Strait, and escorted outgoing convoys to the open ocean, and there either dispersed them or handed them over to an ocean escort.
- H.M.A.S. *Yarra*, had sailed from Alexandria on 16th December 1941 and reached Tanjong Priok on 11th January. On the 15th she was allotted to China Force and started escort work.
- On the 20th China Force consisted of H.M. cruisers *Dragon*, *Durban*, and *Danae*; H.M. destroyers *Jupiter*, *Encounter*, *Express*, *Electra*, *Stronghold*, and H.M.A.S. *Vampire*; and the sloops H.M.I.S. *Jumna* and H.M.A.S. *Yarra*.



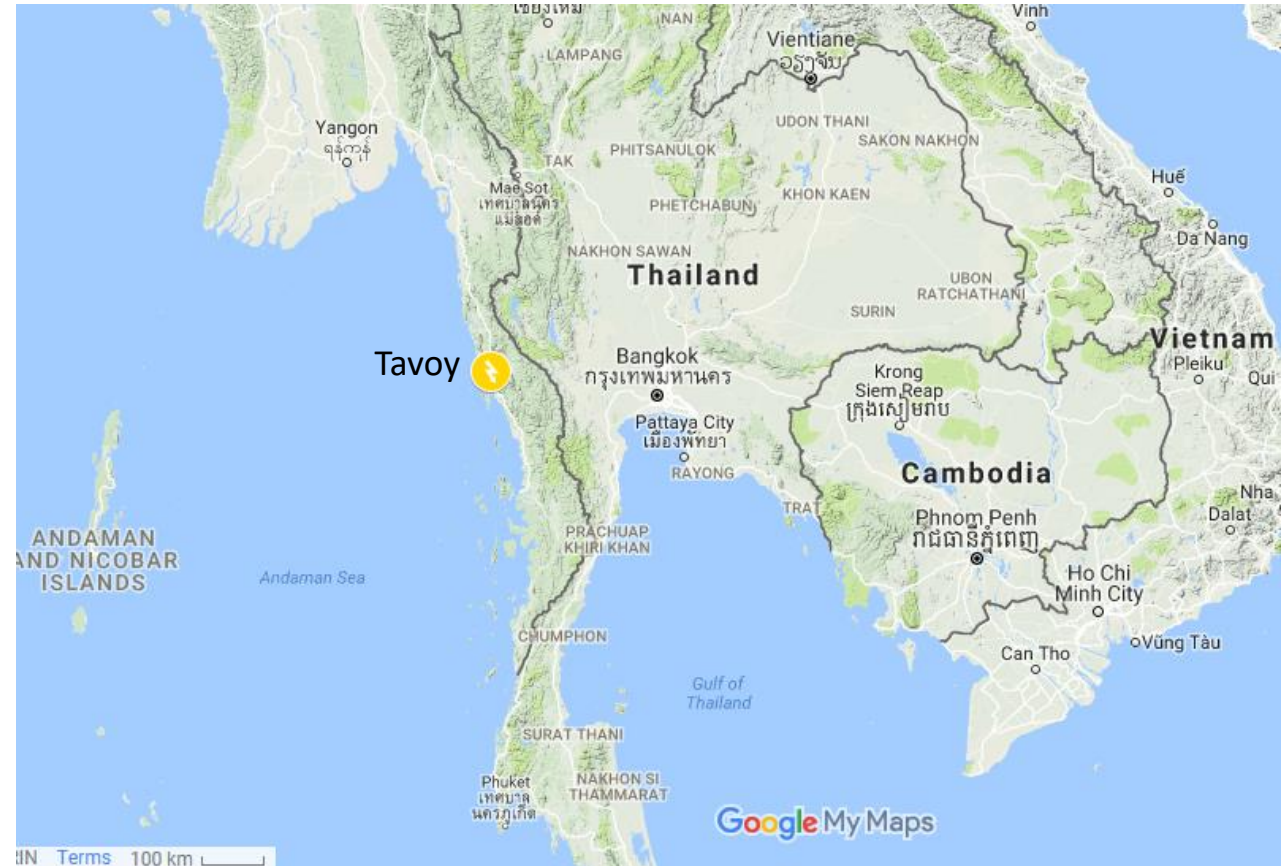
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Captain Collins with General Bennett in Malaya

16th January

- **Singapore**
- General Bennett was quoted in the *Singapore Times* of 16th January: “his troops were confident that they would not only stop the Japanese advance, but put them on the defensive.”
- **Burma**
- On the 16th January The Japanese began the invasion of Lower Burma from Siam with an attack on Tavoy.
- **Ambon**
- Scott, the staff officer at army headquarters responsible for Gull Force, having recommended to the Director of Military Operations that Roach be recalled, had offered to command Gull Force himself and had been appointed.
- He (Scott) reached Ambon on the night of the 16th, and Roach accepted an opportunity to fly to Darwin early next morning. Scott took over Gull force, whose officers and men were strangers to him, when the threat of Japanese invasion was imminent.



16th January - Gemas

- On the 16th air reconnaissance showed a heavy concentration of enemy vehicles on the main Gemas-Tampin road. Twelve Buffaloes from No. 21/453 Squadron went in to attack with gunfire and though 5 of the aircraft were damaged by ground fire they did much damage to the convoy.
- Later in the day 6 Dutch Glenn Martins, which the Buffaloes escorted, returned to this target.
- In the attack the road convoy was heavily bombed and strafed. Enemy anti-aircraft fire hit several of the attacking aircraft but there were no casualties. The bombing completed, the Buffaloes escorted the Glenn Martins to within a safe distance of their base at Sembawang and returned to make further gunnery attacks on the convoy.
- Many Japanese troops were killed in the series of assaults and their vehicles blasted or burned but delay in getting the Dutch bombers to the target after the initial attack by the Buffaloes gave the Japanese time to clear the road and so save the convoy from almost complete destruction.
- Later on 4 Buffaloes from No. 21/453 Squadron attacked enemy barges, a 200-ton steamer, and several launches at Malacca, sinking 4 of the barges.
- Meanwhile 6 Hudsons attacked barges on the Muar River.

16th January

- **Gemas/Segamat**
- In the Segamat sector artillery had ceaselessly pounded the enemy line of approach during the night of 15th-16th January, after the withdrawal of the 2/30th Australian Battalion.
- Ground action on the 16th consisted chiefly of exchanges of artillery fire. The Japanese were busily repairing or replacing demolished bridges along the two railway lines and the trunk road which converged at Gemas, and were also engaged in flanking movements.
- Duffy's company of the 2/30th had split into a number of groups in penetrating the jungle after the ambush some of which had further encounters with the enemy. All these groups bar seven killed or missing had rejoined the brigade by 16th January.
- **East Coast**
- On the east coast, strong Japanese patrols were being encountered north of Endau—clear warning of an impending attack on the Australian 22nd Brigade in the Mersing area.



(Australian War Memorial)

Laying an Australian 25-pounder field gun, Malaya, January 1942.