

# War in the Pacific

## Defending Australia

### The First Six Months

Chapter 5

## December 11th 1941 ..

# Situation Report after three days of war.

- The 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.
- 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 land and air battles continue in Malaya and the Philippines and Hong Kong.
- In Malaya an Indian/Australian/British army and a British/Dutch/Australian Airforce are reeling after the first Japanese attacks.
  - The Australian squadrons were the first in action and have suffered casualties to air and ground crew and have withdrawn in disarray from the northern airfields.
  - The Australian 8<sup>th</sup> Division AIF is in the south guarding against the danger of new Japanese landings.
  - The 11<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Indian divisions in the north prepare to meet the attack from the Japanese forces that have landed in southern Thailand.

# 11<sup>th</sup> December – War Cabinet

- **The War Cabinet decided:**
- to call up 114,000 men into the Australian Military Forces to full time duty to bring the AMF to a strength of 246,000.
  - By calling up for home defence:
    - all men between 35 and 45 years of age who were unmarried or widowers without children
    - and all married men and widowers with children between 18 and 35 and all youths reaching the age of 18 years in 1941.
  - And by deleting from the List of Reserved Occupations:
    - brewing, malting and the wine and spirits trade; monumental masons; and jewellery manufacture.
    - men in these industries were now permitted to enlist and became subject to conscription.
  - It was repeated once again that the militia would not be used outside Australia except in Commonwealth territories or in territories under Commonwealth control.
- to conserve electric power by prohibiting shop window displays, advertising signs, night tennis and greyhound racing and
- to further reduce petrol rations.
- It was announced that the Army Minister has decided not to permit, for the present, the transfer of militiamen to the A.I.F.



The War Cabinet

John Curtin - Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Coordination

Frank Forde - Minister for Army

Ben Chifley - Treasurer

Doc Evatt - Attorney General and Minister for External Affairs

Jack Beasley - Minister for Supply

Norman Makin - Minister for Navy and Minister for Munitions

Arthur Drakeford - Minister for Air

John Dedman - Minister for Interior (from 11 December 1941)

Not pictured Forde, Evatt and Beasley.

# 11<sup>th</sup> December

- The Chiefs of Staff described the possibilities to the War Cabinet as follows:
  - A probable initial Japanese course of action would be an attempt to occupy New Guinea (Rabaul), Papua (Port Moresby) and New Caledonia (Noumea) from the Japanese bases in the Carolines and Marshall Islands. An attack on Rabaul, which is within long range of land-based aircraft operating from the Japanese bases is a likely first step, but simultaneous attacks on some or all of these places cannot be excluded.
    - Capture of any of the outlying islands would provide the enemy with bases for attacks against mainland Australia.
    - Occupation of New Caledonia would deny a link in the chain of communications to the US and give Japan access to strategic nickel deposits.
  - Darwin is the only main fleet operating base for Allied naval forces operating in the eastern end of the Malay Barrier. There are 100,000 tons of fuel oil there. It is an air force station. The target is an attractive one and, in spite of the fact that it would be necessary for enemy naval forces to penetrate the Malay Barrier, an attack by bombers or carrier-borne aircraft is a strong possibility.
    - The capture of Timor would greatly facilitate air attack. Seaborne raids . . . are considered unlikely at present in view of the size of the army garrison, but
    - an attempt to seize Darwin would become a strong possibility in the event of defeat of Allied naval forces or the capture of Singapore and the Netherlands East Indies.
  - The most probable form of attack on the mainland of Australia at the moment is naval and air bombardment of objectives such as industrial works at Sydney, Newcastle or Kembla by a fast capital ship and cruisers with or without aircraft carriers. However, the vulnerable points which would be the object of such raids can be protected by considerable army forces.
- The defeat of the Allied naval forces or the capture of Singapore and the Netherlands East Indies leading to occupation of bases to the north-east of Australia would enable the Japanese to invade Australia. These happenings are possible and as no reliable estimate of the time factor can be deduced, it is necessary to establish and train now the forces that would be required to prevent and to meet an invasion.

# 11<sup>th</sup> December

- The Chiefs of Staff thought that a Japanese attack on any one of the outlying centres—Rabaul, Port Moresby, New Caledonia or Timor—would probably be carried out by a division, with accompanying naval forces, including aircraft carriers, and any attempt to invade Australia itself would probably be carried out by a force of about eight divisions with accompanying naval forces, including aircraft carriers, supported by air attack from bases in adjacent islands.
- One of the most pressing dangers existed in the weakly-garrisoned outlying bases. The Chiefs of Staff recommended that the existing garrison of Rabaul should be reinforced to provide an army brigade. An air force general-purpose squadron should also be stationed there.
- The Chiefs of staff identified that the most serious weaknesses were in the air force. There were only 12 squadrons in Australia compared with 30, thought necessary to repel raids, or 60 required to defeat an invasion. This was a shortfall of over 200 aircraft even compared with the 30 squadron target. There was also a deficiency (of around 10 to 20%) in the number of trained crews to fly the aircraft which were available.
- The fact that two thirds of the first line strength of the RAAF were Wirraways, advanced training aircraft with minimal combat value, was not highlighted, nor was the complete absence of fighter aircraft.
- These deficiencies arose because aircraft which Australia had ordered from overseas and had planned to build locally had not been delivered. Australia was still awaiting delivery of about 550 aircraft for which orders had been placed.
- Australia had also contributed men and machines to other theatres. Two squadrons were in the Netherlands East Indies, three squadrons in Malaya, one in the United Kingdom and one in the Middle East and 6,742 aircrew and 2,294 ground staff, trained in Australia, had left Australia for the Royal Air Force.

# 11<sup>th</sup> December

- It was hoped that
  - 107 Hudsons on order from the United States would be delivered steadily month by month until April 1942.
  - The delivery of 300 Vultee Vengeances would commence in January 1942, be half-completed before the end of July and be completed in December.
  - 54 Beaufighters would be delivered by the United Kingdom by March 1942.
  - The Australian Aircraft Production Commission would deliver 90 Beauforts in 1942.
  - Prospects for the delivery of amphibians, transport aircraft and Catalinas were uncertain.
- These aircraft that the Allies' allocation system had allocated to Australia were nearly all types for which there was no demand by airforces with higher priority.
- The RAAF had no fighter aircraft in commission or on order.
- In a telegram to the Dominions Office on 11th December, Australian air strength was reviewed in detail.
  - RAAF responsibilities were compared with its resources.
  - Australia asked that the assurance given to Menzies in April should be carried out and that an immediate review of air resources should be made with a view to their redistribution to meet the dangers of all fronts.
  - In lieu of the return of the R.A.A.F. squadrons from overseas, 9 Catalinas and 18 long-range bombers were requested for the defence of Australia.
- Shortages of weapons and ammunition for the land forces varied from 10% (rifles) to 25% (field guns), 50% (anti-tank guns) and 100% (tanks, where estimated requirements were 968 and only 18 were available).
- After the destruction of the Eastern fleet, which had been the fundamental basis of Australian defence planning for more than twenty years, and the rampant and widespread success of the Japanese onslaught, this briefing on the remaining air and land defences of Australia must have been daunting for Curtin and the War Cabinet.

# 11<sup>th</sup> December

- **Australia**
- HMNZS Achilles, en route to join the Eastern Fleet at Singapore, reached Port Moresby at 4.30 p.m., she was ordered back to the New Zealand Station.
- **Hong Kong**
- At dawn the Japanese troops turned the left flank of the Scots, and though the Grenadier company and a detachment of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps were brought into action, the position became so critical that withdrawal of the mainland forces, except 5/7th Rajput, was ordered.
- The Rajputs were to occupy Devil's Peak Peninsula, covering the narrow Lye Mun Passage between the peninsula and the island.
- The Japanese stepped up artillery and air attack. Withdrawal of the British forces from the mainland, was carried out during the night. The withdrawal was an exhausting task for the Indian battalions, short of transport, they had to manhandle mortars and other equipment over difficult country and fend off the enemy, while under dive-bombing attacks and mortar fire.
- **Philippines**
- The Interceptor Command, now left with only thirty pursuit aircraft, could no longer promise even a semblance of protection for air or naval installations. It was decided to conserve the few planes remaining by using them chiefly for reconnaissance.
- Bad weather gave the Americans respite from air attacks.
- By the end of the day all of the B-17's had fallen back on the Mindanao base.



Japanese bombers attacking Hong Kong

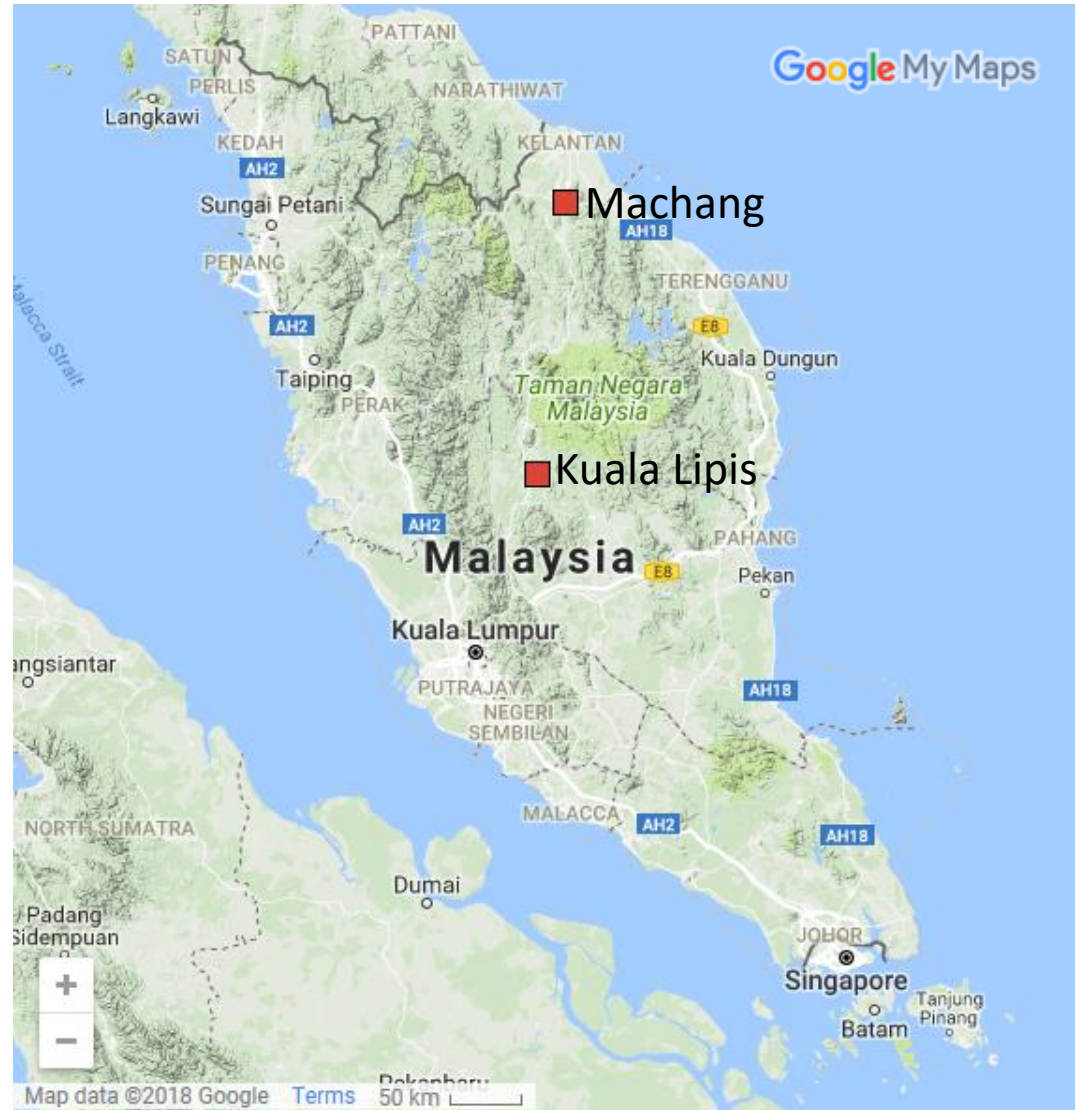
# 11<sup>th</sup> December





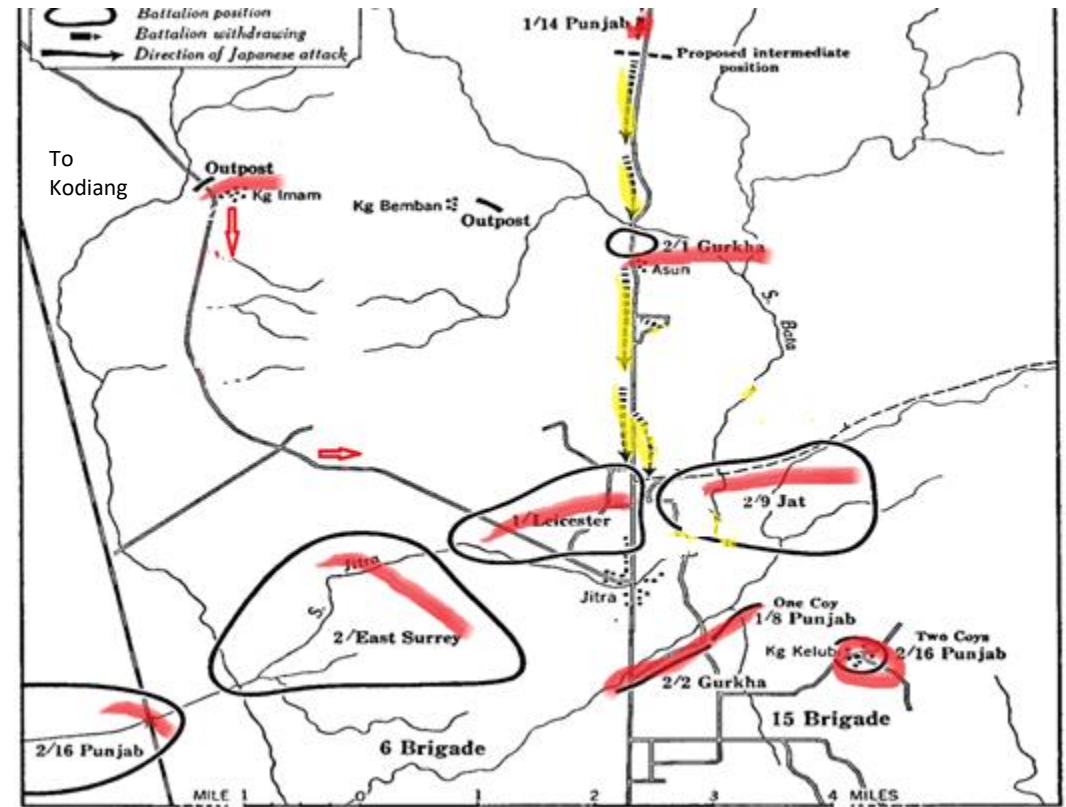
# 11<sup>th</sup> December

- **Malaya**
- **East**
- By the 11th December (8<sup>th</sup> Indian Brigade) was occupying positions at Machang. The withdrawal had been accompanied by demolitions along the road and railway, and at the Gong Kedah and Machang airfields, from which the airforce had withdrawn.
- General Barstow (commanding 9th Indian Division, of which 8th Brigade was part) submitted to General Heath (commanding III Corps) a proposal that the brigade be withdrawn to Kuala Lipis. He pointed to the danger of reliance on a single railway from Kuala Krai southward as the brigade's line of communication. The purpose of maintaining troops in Kelantan having now disappeared, they might be lost if they remained there. On the other hand they might be more useful in the west, where the main threat seemed likely to develop.
- Heath agreed, but, as General Percival disagreed, Heath decided to go to Singapore on the night of 11th-12th December to impress upon him this point of view.
- There were no aircraft for army communication purposes so he had to travel by train.



# 11<sup>th</sup> December - Malaya

- **West**
- **Jitra Line**
- During the morning of 11th December, the Japanese pressed the 1/14th Punjabs where they had concentrated at Changlun. Two anti-tank guns were lost, and a further withdrawal was ordered to a position about two miles north of Asun.
- This withdrawal was in progress when, about 4.30 p.m., in heavy rain, Japanese medium tanks, followed by motorised infantry, attacked the rear of the column. In the surprise and confusion, the Japanese broke through, overran two anti-tank and two mountain guns, and approached the bridge in front of the Asun position held by the 2/1st Gurkhas. The bridge demolition charge failed to go off, but the leading tank was stopped by fire from anti-tank rifles, and blocked the road, halting the tank advance.
- Japanese infantry, however, attacked the Gurkhas in front and from the flanks, cleared the road and allowed the tanks to resume their advance. They broke through the outpost position, overwhelmed most of the forward troops and isolated the battalion headquarters. Only small parties succeeded in fighting their way out.
- By 8.30 p.m. the tanks had overrun a forward patrol of the 1/Leicesters, but once more the leading tanks were disabled, forming a temporary road block. However, they continued firing while the Leicesters hastily constructed a further obstacle of tree trunks, wire, and mines.
- On the Kodiang road, withdrawal was continued on 11th December. A premature bridge demolition resulted in the trucks and carriers of the outpost troops, four mountain guns, and seven anti-tank guns being left behind although there had been no fighting.



In the absence of Garrett, who was missing, the 15th Brigade was placed at this stage under the command of Carpendale; the 2/2nd Gurkhas from the 28th Brigade were ordered to reinforce the 15th Brigade.

# 11<sup>th</sup> December

- **Krohcol**

- the Japanese increased their pressure towards Kroh. Successive attacks in strength during the afternoon of 11th December were repulsed by the 3/16th Punjab in their position near The Ledge, but at the cost of heavy casualties, and outflanking movements were threatening the position. Colonel Moorhead, who estimated that his force was opposed by three battalions was given permission to retire if necessary. Consequently he arranged for the 3/16th to withdraw through the 5/14th Punjab early on 12th December.

- **Jitra**

- Murray-Lyon (11 Indian division), concerned at the speed at which the threat to his line of communication from the road through Kroh was developing, at what seemed to him to be a serious threat to his right flank at Jitra, and the fact that his reserve had been committed and his men were tired, now asked for permission to withdraw from Jitra to Gurun, 30 miles southward. General Heath was on the train to Singapore so this request went straight to Percival. He thought such a withdrawal would demoralise both the troops and the civil population, and would prejudice chances of denying west coast airfields to the enemy. Percival ordered that the battle for north-west Malaya should be fought out in the Jitra position.

- **Air**

- On 11th December, after daily air raids on Penang airfield from 8th December, Georgetown was raided. The main town on Penang Island and shipping in its harbour, were bombed and machine-gunned by more than 40 bombers escorted by fighters. After three days of attacks on the airfield which caused no damage to the town the inhabitants saw no need to take cover. In the absence of anti-aircraft defences and defending fighter aircraft, about 2,000 casualties were inflicted. Civilian services broke down and dead civilians were left lying in the streets.
- By 11th December the enemy air forces, having gained superiority in the air over northern Malaya, began to attack the defending land forces.
- The remainder of No 21 Sqn moved by road and rail, arriving at their new base, Ipoh, at 3.30 a.m. and camped by the roadside because no quarters could be found for them at the time.
- 21 squadron was issued 16 replacement Buffaloes and allocated a proportion of new pilots. That night a group of the unit's pilots left by train for Singapore to bring back these aircraft.

# 11<sup>th</sup> December

- **Singapore**
  - Admiral Layton told the Admiralty that his broad policy would be "to hold as much of Malaya as possible, to secure Singapore as a base for the Eastern Fleet, to keep trade moving, to effect the maximum damage by air and submarine on the enemy". He asked for all possible reinforcement of submarines, minesweepers, destroyers and aircraft to carry out this policy, but added: "battleships should not come further than Colombo until accompanied by cruisers, destroyers and aircraft."
  - The Dutch put three submarines, K14, K15 and K16 at Layton's disposal.
  - HMAS Vampire covered a minelaying operation off Kuantan.
- **London**
  - Reviewing the Far Eastern situation, the British Chiefs of Staff decided that the 18th British Division and some anti-tank and anti-aircraft regiments, which were at sea on their way to the Middle East, should be placed at the disposal of General Wavell, then Commander-in-Chief, India.
- **Eastern Pacific**
  - After many false alarms and too many depth charges wasted on neutral fish the Enterprise task force found a real submarine. 200 miles north east of Oahu, Lieutenant (jg) Edward Anderson flying an SBD from Enterprise spotted a 2,000 ton submarine and dive bombed it. The attack caused so much damage the submarine was unable to submerge and another SBD dive bombing attack sank it.



Vice Admiral Layton



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FORECAST: Fine. Map, Page 8.



# The Courier-Mail

**LATE CITY**

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No. 2582

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BRISBANE, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12, 1941.

10 PAGES—26

## PLANES SINK JAPANESE BATTLESHIP



### 2000 Survivors From British Ships JAPANESE CHECKED IN MANILA LANDING

THE Japanese battleship Haruna (29,330 tons) has been bombed and sunk off the Philippines.

American army planes bombed her and scored three direct hits and three near misses. She was 10 miles off the coast of northern Luzon.

More than 2000 survivors—of a total complement of 2700—from the sunken battleship Prince of Wales and the battle cruiser Repulse have reached Singapore. (See cols. 1 and 2.)

Germany and Italy have declared war on the United States, and Rome says that a military alliance against the United States and Britain has been signed by Germany, Italy, and Japan.

The Japanese attacks against the British in the Philippines have made several British ships in the Philippines sea no longer trying to fight, and the fighting in the Philippines has gone against the land at Kuantan, halfway down the coast of Malaya.

In northern Malaya the Japanese have not gained any ground, but their bombing of the Japanese has gone against the land at Kuantan, halfway down the coast of Malaya.

### BATAVIA HAS AIR RAID ALARM

BATAVIA, capital of Java, had its first air raid alarm on Wednesday night. It lasted an hour and 15 minutes. No bombs were dropped.

According to the Associated Press, Japanese aircraft were seen in the vicinity of Batavia, but no bombs were dropped.

The Japanese Navy has announced that it has captured the battleship Prince of Wales and the battle cruiser Repulse.

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### 60 Planes Bombed Lost Battleships

SINGAPORE, December 11.—The battleship Prince of Wales was attacked by more than 60 Japanese planes for three hours before she was sunk off the Malayan coast. The battle cruiser Repulse, which was sunk in the same engagement, was attacked by another force of planes after the Prince of Wales was sunk.

Both ships sank several hours after the attack.

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### Married Men In Call-Up; Black-Outs, Petrol Plan

THE War Cabinet decided yesterday on the following emergency measures, which will operate immediately the necessary regulations are drafted.

Immediate call-up of new groups for full-time army service and for home guard. Single men and widowers without dependents 16 to 18, married men and widowers with children, 18 to 30, (single men in this age group already called up.)

Conscription of reserved occupations.

While powers to State Government to enforce air raid precautions.

Black-outs as usual.

Black-outs as usual.

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Black-outs as usual.

Black-outs as usual.



### BRITISH COUNTER-BLOW IN MALAYA PREDICTED

American correspondents in Singapore say that the British forces have re-formed for a preliminary counter-attack at Kota Bharu and that the Japanese have failed to achieve air mastery, except in a small area near the Thailand-Malayan border.

A Singapore correspondent writes: "An important British counter-attack is being planned for the night of December 12/13. It is expected that the British will be able to achieve air mastery, except in a small area near the Thailand-Malayan border."

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# 12<sup>th</sup> December

- **The War Cabinet decided**
- To retain the existing garrison of Rabaul.
  - The Chiefs of Staff had considered three courses of action:
    - (a) to reinforce the existing Rabaul garrison up to a brigade group;
    - (b) to withdraw the existing garrison and abandon Rabaul;
    - (c) to retain the existing garrison.
  - They recommended adoption of the third course.
  - The recommendation was approved by the War Cabinet, it being noted that "the situation is to be kept under observation and if U.S. cruisers and destroyers fall back on Darwin, sufficient naval forces may become available to reinforce and supply Rabaul".
  - The implication of that statement is that the garrison was being left in place despite the fact that, in the face of a Japanese threat, there was no force available which could continue to supply the garrison let alone reinforce or evacuate it.
- To compulsorily evacuate children and women other than missionaries, who might wish to remain, and nurses from Papua and New Guinea.
- To curtail transport services and cut out all special holiday services by road or rail in order to save coal, power, fuel, equipment and manpower and also to avoid the risk of having large numbers of people away from their homes in a serious emergency.
- And requested a supplementary appreciation from the Chiefs of Staff on the best disposition of the Australian forces to defend
  - Newcastle, Sydney, Port Kembla and Lithgow.
  - Darwin, Port Moresby and the islands to the north-east of Australia including New Caledonia.
- In reply to their request for a general review of the new war situation, the Australian Government was informed on 12th December by the Dominions Office that it was not considered likely that there would be any immediate large-scale threat to the territory of Australia, much less New Zealand.
  - The Dominions Office quoted the Far East appreciation which had been given in August 1940, envisaging the possibility of nothing more than raids by enemy cruisers and seaborne aircraft, and
  - said that for the present they did not recommend any changes in the dispositions for local Australian defence from those which had been discussed in London with Mr Menzies in April 1941.

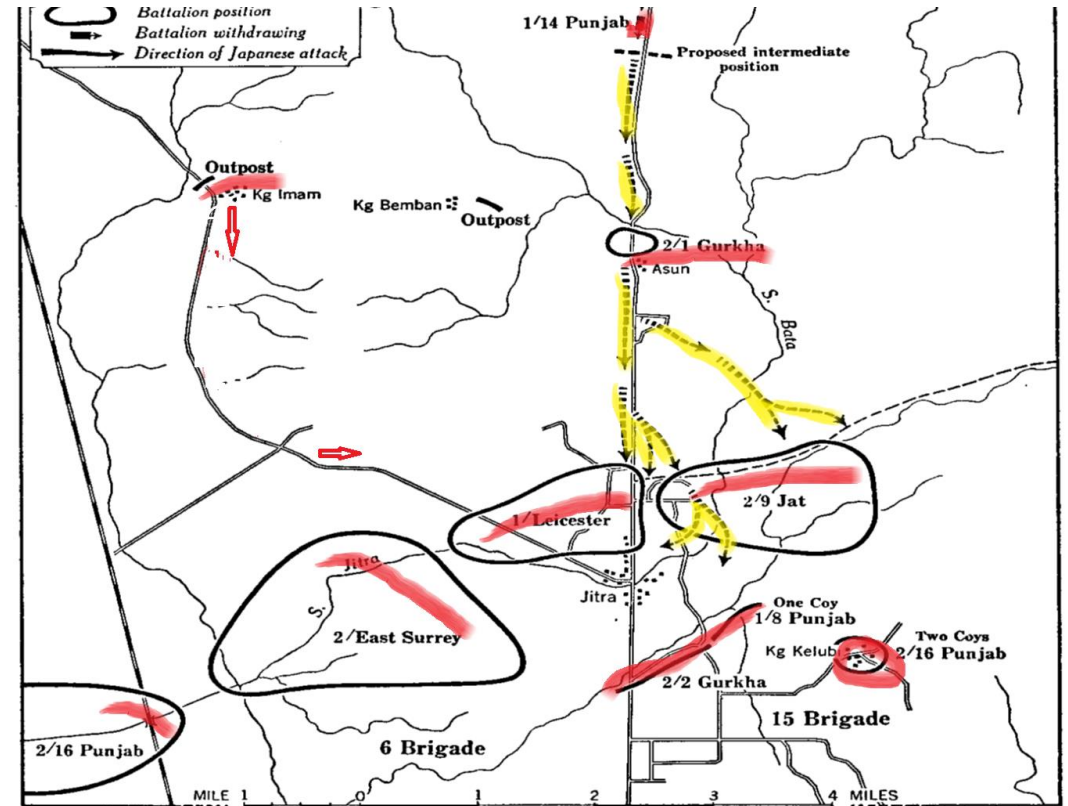
# 12<sup>th</sup> December

- **Western Pacific**
- The Pensacola convoy arrived safely in Suva under orders to proceed to Brisbane. HMAS Canberra and Perth sailed from Sydney to escort the convoy on the final stage of its journey.
- **Hong Kong**
- Because of the weight of the attack and rapidly increasing water transport difficulties, Devil's Peak Peninsula, the last foothold on the mainland, was evacuated, with naval aid, early in the morning. The whole of the northern portion of the island now came under mortar and artillery fire.
- **Philippines**
- An invasion force in seven transports escorted by cruisers, seaplane carriers and destroyers reached Legaspi, in the south of Luzon in the early morning and landed its troops. The US submarine S39 was patrolling near San Bernadino Strait to resist attacks from this direction but her efforts were defeated by vigorous depth charge attacks by the escorting destroyers.
- The Catalinas of Patwing 10 had been conducting war patrols for about a week following up reports of Japanese shipping movements. This morning the squadron at Olongapo sent out all its seven planes searching for a carrier force reported off the coast of Luzon. As the PBYs were returning to base they were shadowed by zeros, which attacked them at their moorings and destroyed all seven.
- **NEI**
- Zealandia and Westralia reached Koepang, without incident, and landed Sparrow Force in the morning. The force consisted of 1,400 men made up of 2/40th Australian Battalion, the 2/2nd Australian Independent Company, and attached artillery, engineer, signals and medical units. The main task of this force was to defend the Bay of Koepang and the airfield. Positions south of Koepang were to be held by the Dutch, and those to the north by the Australians, who were also made mainly responsible for the defence of the Penfui airfield.
- The Dutch sent Layton two more submarines, O19 and O20.
- The Dutch submarine K 12 sank a transport off Kota Bharu and O 16 attacked and severely damaged four large transports at Patani.
- **Britain**
- Churchill, with a staff of eighty senior military and civilian advisors, sailed from Glasgow in the new battleship Duke of York for the United States and discussions with President Roosevelt and the American Chiefs of Staff.
- Before sailing Mr Churchill appointed Mr Duff Cooper (who had been Minister of State in the Far East since July 1941) Resident Cabinet Minister at Singapore for Far Eastern Affairs.



# 12<sup>th</sup> December - Malaya

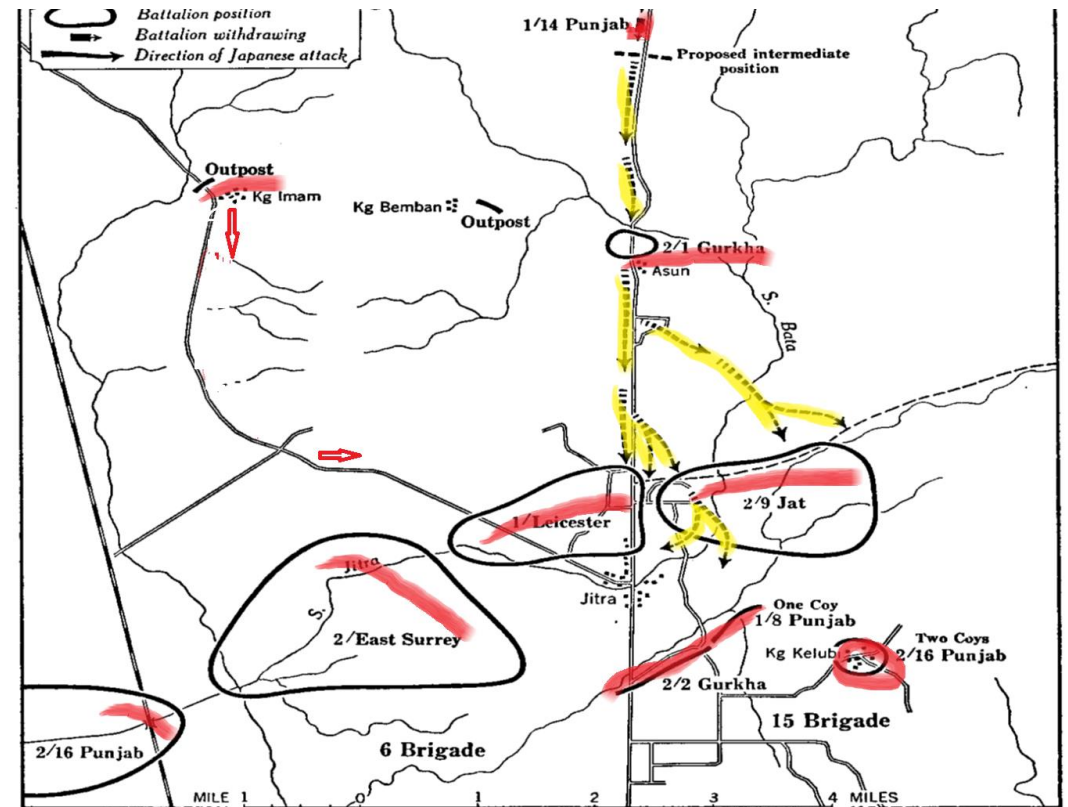
- **Jitra**
- On the main road before dawn on 12th December the Japanese succeeded in reaching the right forward company of the Leicesters. During three hours of sharp fighting, the Leicesters held the Japanese at bay in this area, but the enemy managed to penetrate some distance between the two battalions.
- The Japanese then attacked again east of the road. The left forward company of the Jats was overwhelmed, and a wedge was driven between the Jat and the Leicester battalions. Soon the Japanese were in contact with 2/2nd Gurkhas and were attacking the Leicesters' right flank.
- At this stage the Japanese were repulsed by the carrier platoon (sixteen Bren guns in tracked vehicles) of the 2/East Surrey who had been sent from 6th Brigade, and the Gurkhas and Leicesters stood their ground.
- Parties which had been cut off in earlier fighting (among them Brigadier Garrett) were now coming in, and being used as reinforcements.





# 12<sup>th</sup> December - Malaya

- **Jitra**
- A gap of about one and a half miles, between the Leicesters and the Gurkhas, had become a serious danger. Murray-Lyon gave orders that the Leicesters should be moved to close the gap, and that the Jats should be withdrawn.
- These orders were misconstrued, and did not reach the right forward company of the Jats. Attacked while they were taking up new positions, the Leicesters lost heavily, and the movement became badly confused. The situation in the Jat sector rapidly deteriorated, and soon troops and transport were streaming in disorder southward over the bridge.
- Murray-Lyon ordered withdrawals from the 6th Brigade sector, sought to restore order, and at 7.30 p.m. again asked for permission to withdraw to Gurun.
- Heath, after consultation with Percival, replied that the task of the 11th Division was to fight for the security of north Kedah; that he estimated it was opposed by one Japanese division at most; and that the best solution seemed to be to halt the advance of the enemy tanks on a good obstacle and dispose the forces of the 11<sup>th</sup> Division so as to obtain considerable depth, and scope for its artillery.
- Murray-Lyon was accordingly given discretion to withdraw.



# 13<sup>th</sup> December

- **Australia**

- A submarine was reported "sighted" in Port Phillip Bay.

- **Hong Kong**

- At 9 a.m. a launch flying a white flag reached the island from Kowloon, with a letter, demanding the surrender of the colony. The offer was sharply rejected, an increasingly heavy bombardment of the island followed, and Japanese were seen to be collecting launches in Kowloon Bay.
- The British forces were reorganised into East and West Brigades.

- **Philippines**

- The Pensacola convoy carried the ground echelon of the 7th Bombardment Group (H), approximately 2,500 other air service personnel, 18 P40s and the 52 unassembled A-24s of the 27th Bombardment Group, in addition to large supplies of aviation fuel and ammunition.
- General Barnes, senior officer present, was told that his principal task was to get the men, planes, and munitions to the Philippines by any means available and as quickly as possible.
- The news that reinforcements were on the way, was received with enthusiasm in Manila. But Admiral Hart's response to MacArthur's request for help in bringing the convoy in dampened this enthusiasm. Hart thought the cause of the Philippines was a hopeless one. The Japanese, he believed, would have established a complete blockade of the Philippines before the convoy could arrive, and he could not, he told MacArthur, take the responsibility for protecting the convoy between Australia and the Philippines.
- Japanese aircraft attacked Southern Luzon again, with destructive attacks on airfields. The attacks continued throughout the day some with as many as 100 aircraft.

# 13<sup>th</sup> December

- **Philippines, Air**
- Capt. Jesus Villamor led six P-26's of the Philippine airforce in interception of some fifty-four attacking bombers; the harassing tactics of the Filipino flyers minimized damage to their Batangas field.
- Lieutenant Wagner in approaching Aparri on a reconnaissance mission claimed four enemy fighters shot down and went on to strafe others on the field.
- An elderly B18 departed Clark for Del Monte carrying spares and salvaged parts from burnt out B17s and Major David Gibbs, who was to take command of Del Monte relieving Major O'Donnell, who had been recalled to Clark. The B18 evidently ran into severe weather en route and was lost with no survivors.
- **Malaya**
- **Krohcol**
- The 5/14th, now the covering troops, withstood a further attack early on the 13th until its flanks were endangered. It then fell back to Betong, where it destroyed the road bridge, and by dusk had joined the 3/16th.
- The road southward from Kroh to Grik, and thence to the main west coast road at Kuala Kangsar, was thus uncovered. Although north of Grik it was little better than a mountain track, there was a danger that the Japanese would use it as a means of striking at the lines of communications of the Indian Corps, farther to the south.
- Heath therefore on 13th December sent a company of the 2/Argylls and some armoured cars from Ipoh to Grik, and the rest of the battalion to Baling in support of Krohcol.

# 13<sup>th</sup> December

- **Jitra**
- A difficult, disorganised, and costly withdrawal from Jitra followed.
  - Murray-Lyon's plan was that the division should move to Gurun in two stages, the first of which would be a position on the south bank of the Sungei Kedah, at Alor Star.
  - No transport was available for the troops, so they had to march fifteen miles.
  - The Bata bridge was destroyed at 2 a.m. on the 13th after a Japanese attempt to rush it had been frustrated by 2/2nd Gurkhas, and they withdrew through a rearguard of the 2/9th Gurkhas.
  - Owing to darkness, breakdowns of communications and the generally tangled situation, withdrawal orders failed to reach several units, who were thus left stranded in their positions. Some parties from these units eventually made their way back as best they could by land, river, and sea.
- The 15th Brigade emerged from the battle barely 600 strong, and the 1/Leicester alone of its units had any carriers or mortars left. The 6th fared less badly, but had suffered serious losses in men and equipment. The 2/1st Gurkha had been reduced to one company, and other units of the 28th Brigade had suffered substantial casualties.
- Two commanding officers and twenty-five other officers had been killed or lost. Losses of guns, vehicles, and signalling equipment were heavy.
- Many of the men who remained with or later rejoined the division were badly affected by their experiences and unfit for further action in the near future.
- **Kota Bharu /East Malaya**
- Heavy fighting continued at Machang on the 13th. The Japanese were sufficiently checked to enable the withdrawal to the railhead at Kuala Krai to be continued without serious interference.

# 13<sup>th</sup> December

- **8th Div AIF**
- On 13th December a message was received from Malaya Command that a large convoy was moving from the southern tip of Indo-China towards the south-east coast of Malaya. Percival called next day on Bennett, who recorded:
  - He is anticipating a possible attack on Singapore Island direct from the sea, and asks what would be the position of the A.I.F. if such an attack developed and help from the A.I.F. were required.
- **Penang**
- Penang was subject to another attack by about thirty bombers in the morning. Shipping was attacked with at least two ships damaged. The native crews of most ships fled.
- Orders were given to evacuate the European and Indian populations of Penang, but only about 520 Europeans, got away.
- The hasty, government organised departure of most of the Europeans from Penang on the night of the 13th, shocked the Asian inhabitants of Malaya and many Europeans also. The Asians were left to whatever fate might befall them.
- **Singapore**
- On the 13th December Layton told the Admiralty that the Japanese plan appeared to be infiltration of Malaya from the north, and that if it succeeded the island of Singapore would become virtually a beleaguered fortress, and the naval base untenable for ships.
- He proposed that before this happened he should embark and take all available surface vessels either to Colombo or Batavia—preferably the former as being the probable assembly port of the main British Far Eastern Fleet. The Admiralty (who for the time being were unable to send him any reinforcements) agreed that, when he considered it necessary, he should proceed to Colombo and fly his flag on shore there.
- On the 13th December K 12 sank a tanker, near Kota Bharu.

# 13<sup>th</sup> December

- **Air**
- No. 453's 16 replacement Buffaloes were dispatched early on 13th December for Ipoh in four flights.
- One flight of three lost their direction in very bad weather. In attempting forced landings all three aircraft were destroyed and only one pilot survived.
- The other pilots flew to Ipoh by way of Butterworth where one flight—Vanderfield, Sergeants Reads and Collyer—had just refuelled when enemy bombers made another attack on Penang across the strait.
  - The three pilots immediately took off and intercepted three enemy bombers which were quickly joined by six dive bombers.
  - Vanderfield found that the undercarriage of his aircraft would not retract but he attacked. He claimed two bombers and Read and Collyer three dive bombers between them.
  - After rearming and refuelling Read and Collyer made successful low-level gunnery attacks on enemy troops and road transports to the north of Alor Star.
- By this time another flight of Buffaloes had reached Ipoh. They had just refuelled when warning of the approach of enemy aircraft was received. All available Buffaloes took off to intercept more than 40 enemy fighters.
  - Vigors engaged the enemy until his petrol tank exploded and the aircraft caught fire.
    - He baled out over Penang and as he descended one enemy pilot made several attempts to kill him. Though he had been badly burned on the legs, hands and arms, and wounded, in one thigh, he succeeded in collapsing the canopy of his parachute when each attack was made and landed in a clearing on Penang Mountain from where he was carried to hospital by a rescue party.
    - Residents of Penang reported that three aircraft had crashed into the sea near the island, and, though there was no confirmation that they had been shot down by Vigors, he was believed to have been the only pilot to have engaged them.
  - Pilot Officer Angus was attacked before he had climbed beyond 800 feet. His aircraft was seriously damaged but he crash-landed in a paddy field and escaped with a wound in one leg.
  - Flying Officer Grace was scarcely airborne when he was attacked, but he succeeded in shooting down one of the enemy fighters.

# 13<sup>th</sup> December

- **NEI**
- **Gull Force**
- The Australian force for Ambon, "Gull Force", commanded by Colonel Roach, consisted of the 2/21st Battalion and 213 men in detachments of anti-tank artillery, engineers and other arms and services.
- On 13th December Roach wrote to Major Scott, who was staff officer for his force at Army Headquarters, to say that
  - there had been insufficient reconnaissance, and that he had not enough anti-tank guns and no field guns.
  - He asked for a troop of 25-pounders, two more anti-tank troops, six more mortars, anti aircraft guns "if available", two additional infantry companies and more automatic weapons "if you can spare them".
  - The letter ended with the postscript: "As a test of communications could you acknowledge this please."
- **Burma**
- After Japanese air raids on the airfield at Victoria Point in southern Burma, the field was evacuated on 13th December. Thereafter such planes as had sufficient range were to be flown from Rangoon to Sabang, off northern Sumatra, and thence to Singapore. Fighter planes had to be sent by sea, with consequent delay in their arrival.
- **UK**
- Over a hundred Australian EATS aircrew stuck at No 3 Personnel Reception Centre at Bournemouth, without immediate prospects of getting posted to a squadron, petitioned for immediate return to Australia.

# 14<sup>th</sup> December

- **Australia**

- The evacuation of women and children from Darwin was ordered by the War Cabinet.
- "Gull Force" sailed from Darwin, a total of 1,090 troops, in the Dutch merchant ships Both, Valentijn, and Patras, escorted by Adelaide and the corvette Ballarat.

- **Hong Kong**

- Accurate and intensive Japanese shelling began putting guns out of action on the 14<sup>th</sup>. Serious fires, civil disorder, sniping by "fifth columnists" and desertion of locally-enlisted army transport drivers contributed to the island's difficulties.

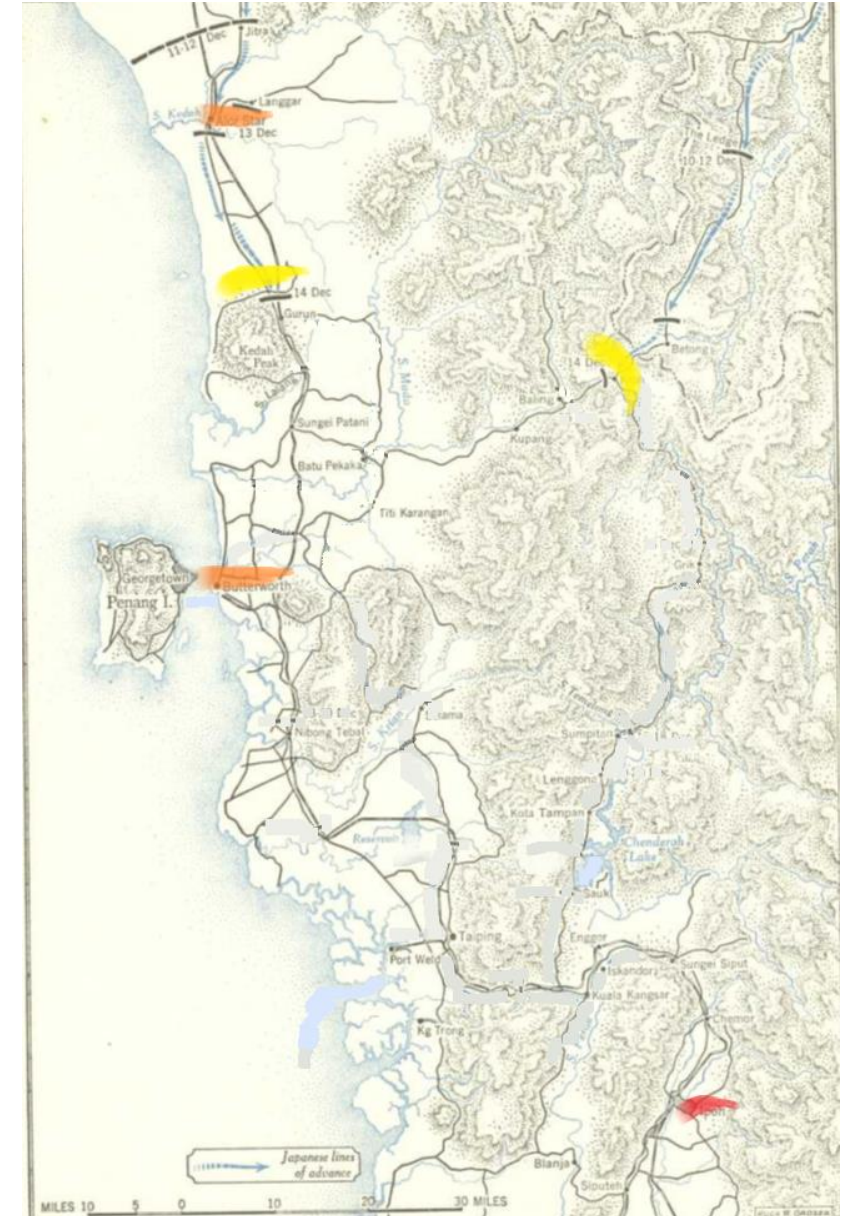
- **Philippines**

- USS Seawolf had a chance to sink a seaplane tender offshore the landings at Aparri. She fired a spread of four torpedoes. One hit but failed to explode.
- During the morning Japanese light bombers and fighters attacked airfields. Later 26 twin engine bombers with fighter escort attacked shipping in Manila Bay.
- Six B-17's were scheduled for an attack on a Japanese bridgehead near Legaspi, but only three reached the target. One plane returned safe, the other two were forced to crash land after attacks by fighters. No damage to the targets was observed.
- During the evening a P40 on a reconnaissance flight made a strafing attack at Legaspi, damaging two zeros and five twin engine bombers.



# 14<sup>th</sup> December

- **Malaya**
- **Jitra**
- The withdrawal from Jitra to an area south of the Sungai Kedah by the 11th Indian Division on 12th-13th December gained little respite. Intermittent firing, and penetration by Japanese troops to the south bank of the river, from which they were expelled in a counter-attack by the 2/9th Gurkha, indicated that further pressure was accumulating. Eight carriers of the 2/East Surrey were cut off when a bridge was prematurely demolished.
- Murray-Lyon decided that the withdrawal must be continued. In heavy rain, and with many mishaps, a badly congested stream of traffic moved on during the night of the 13th-14th to Gurun.
- The Gurun position, 19 miles south of Alor Star was regarded by Percival as perhaps the best natural defensive position in Malaya. The position had not, however, been prepared before the war for defence. This task therefore faced the fatigued and disconcerted troops.
- Dispositions taken up on 14th December were:
  - right sector, 28th Brigade, reconstituted under Brigadier Carpendale (Brigadier Garrett having resumed command of 15th Brigade); left,
  - 6th Brigade, astride road and railway and to Kedah Peak;
  - in reserve, 15th Brigade, now only about 600 strong, astride the road a mile south of Gurun.



# 14<sup>th</sup> December

- A Japanese patrol approached a crossroads a mile north of 6 Brigade's line, and at 2 p.m. three tanks, followed by troops in lorries, came into action. Although one tank was hit and the others withdrew, the enemy infantry forced back the defending patrol and gained control of the road junction.
- A counterattack led by Brigadier Lay checked further penetration, but when Heath visited the 11th Division's headquarters during the afternoon, Murray Lyon said he considered his troops unfit for quick successive encounters, and emphasised the danger that the enemy would cut in on his rear by using the Grik road. He recommended that any further withdrawals should be such as to provide sufficient time for rest and concentration.
- Although Heath replied that the division must hold the Japanese for the time being at Gurun, he told Percival by telephone during the evening that he considered it should be withdrawn to the Sungei Perak, with an intermediate stand at the Sungei Muda to allow Penang to be evacuated.
- **Krohcol**
- On 14<sup>th</sup> December Heath handed over command of the Krohcol to Brigadier Paris of the 12th Brigade, and instructed him to hold the Kroh-Baling road. Paris ordered Krohcol to withdraw during the night of 14th-15th December, leaving the Argylls to defend Baling.

# 14<sup>th</sup> December

- **Air**

- Next day five Buffaloes of No. 21 and 453 Squadrons attacked Japanese transport columns moving down the roads from the north. Three enemy dive bombers intercepted and Flight Lieutenant White, who was last seen attacking one of them from the rear, is believed to have been killed by the enemy rear-gunner's fire. Sgt Board claimed one of the enemy shot down. Sergeant Seagoe had one shoulder shattered, but with the other three surviving pilots succeeded in returning to Ipoh.
- Later in the day two more Buffaloes successfully strafed M/T and troops near Alor Star.

- **Pacific**

- Wilson Brown's Lexington task force, having been unable to refuel at sea due to rough weather finally finished refuelling at Pearl on the afternoon of 14<sup>th</sup> (local). Brown's orders were to make a diversionary air strike on Jaluit on or before 22<sup>nd</sup> December. The Lexington taskforce set out from Pearl in the afternoon of the 14<sup>th</sup>.

# 15<sup>th</sup> December

- **Australia**

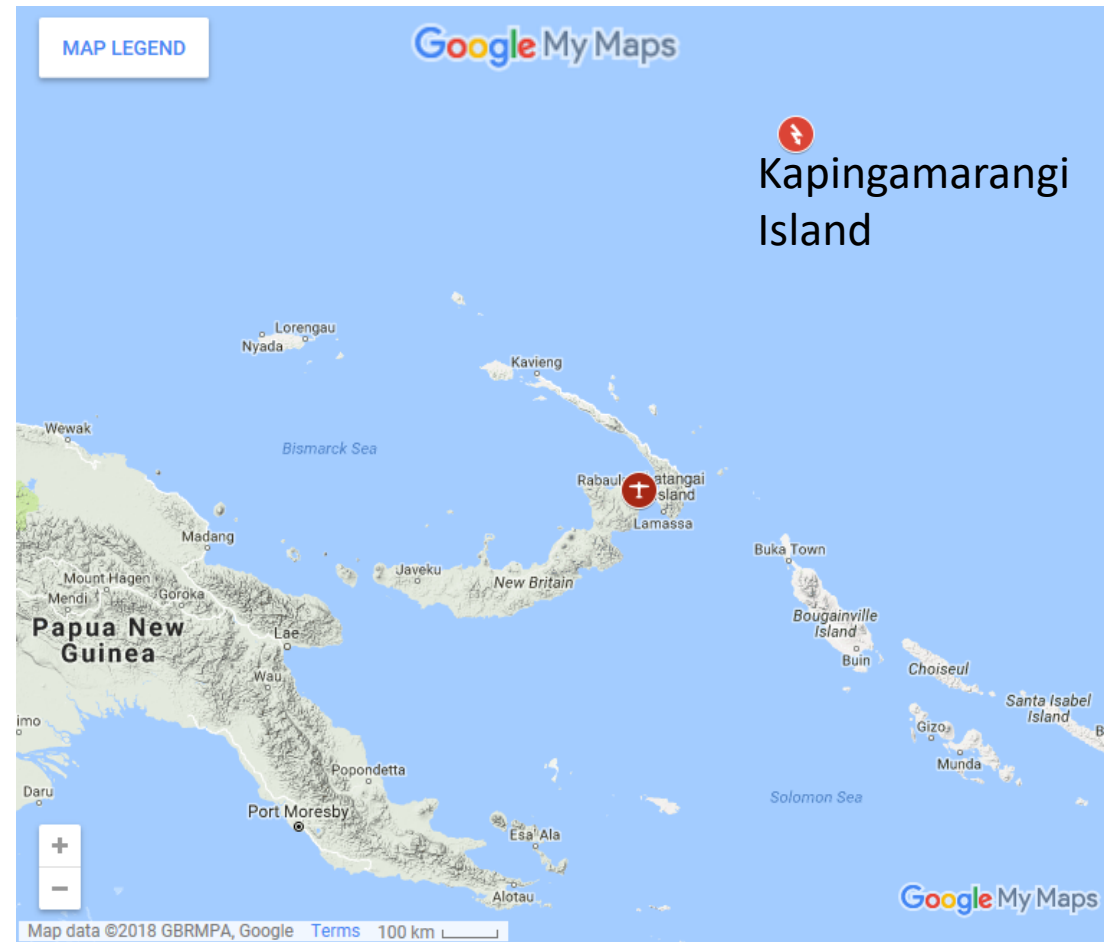
- On 15th December 1941 Curtin announced:
- Cabinet decided today, as a war measure, to approve of the principle of the extensive employment of women in industries where men were not available in sufficient numbers to attain the scale of production approved as a war objective.
  - A sub-committee of Cabinet has been appointed to confer with representatives of the trades union movement and employers in order that an acceptable plan may be developed immediately so that regulations may be promulgated, where necessary, to enable the employment of women in occupations and under conditions which might be contrary to peace-time determinations.
  - The Government will give an undertaking that all women employed under the conditions approved shall be employed only for the duration of the war, and shall be replaced by men as they become available.

- **Pacific**

- Wake Island was attacked at midday by 51 twin engined bombers, and at dusk by three four engined flying boats.
- Saratoga entered Pearl Harbour at 9.00 on 15<sup>th</sup> December, having made good 20 knots from San Diego but being delayed 12 hours by a midget submarine scare at Pearl which she was diverted to avoid.
- To save time Kimmel dispatched Tangier, with supplies for the marines, and the oiler Neches escorted by destroyers, on the 15<sup>th</sup> to go on ahead while Saratoga finished fuelling.

# 15<sup>th</sup> December

- **Rabaul**
- On 15th December Flight Lieutenant Erwin of No. 24 Squadron made a photo reconnaissance flight in a Hudson over Kapingamarangi Island about 300 miles north of Rabaul. A merchant ship of between 4,000 and 5,000 tons, which put to sea as the Hudson flew over and opened fire with light anti-aircraft guns without harming the Hudson, was the only vessel of size sighted.
- This ship was selected for the first combat strike in the area. A flight of three Hudsons, one piloted by Erwin and Flight Lieutenants Murphy and Paterson, found it about 20 miles north of Kapingamarangi and bombed it without obtaining a direct hit; one "near miss" was observed.



# 15<sup>th</sup> December

- **Hong Kong**

- Accurate and intensive Japanese shelling on the 15th was mainly directed at pill boxes along the north shore.
- After dark Japanese troops attempted a landing on the north-east part of the island, using small rubber boats and rafts, but were repulsed.
- Resistance was encouraged by reports that Chinese forces were moving towards Hong Kong, though Maltby (GOC) considered that they could not give effective assistance until early in January

- **Philippines**

- MacArthur was informed on 15 December that the strategic importance of the Philippines was fully recognized and that there would be no wavering in the determination to provide support. The dispatch of sixty-five new heavy bombers had been authorized in addition to fifteen LB30s repossessed from the British, the transfer to be completed by 21 February 1942.

- **South East Asia**

- O 16, on her return passage to Singapore ran into the British East Johore minefield, and was lost with only one survivor on 15<sup>th</sup> December.

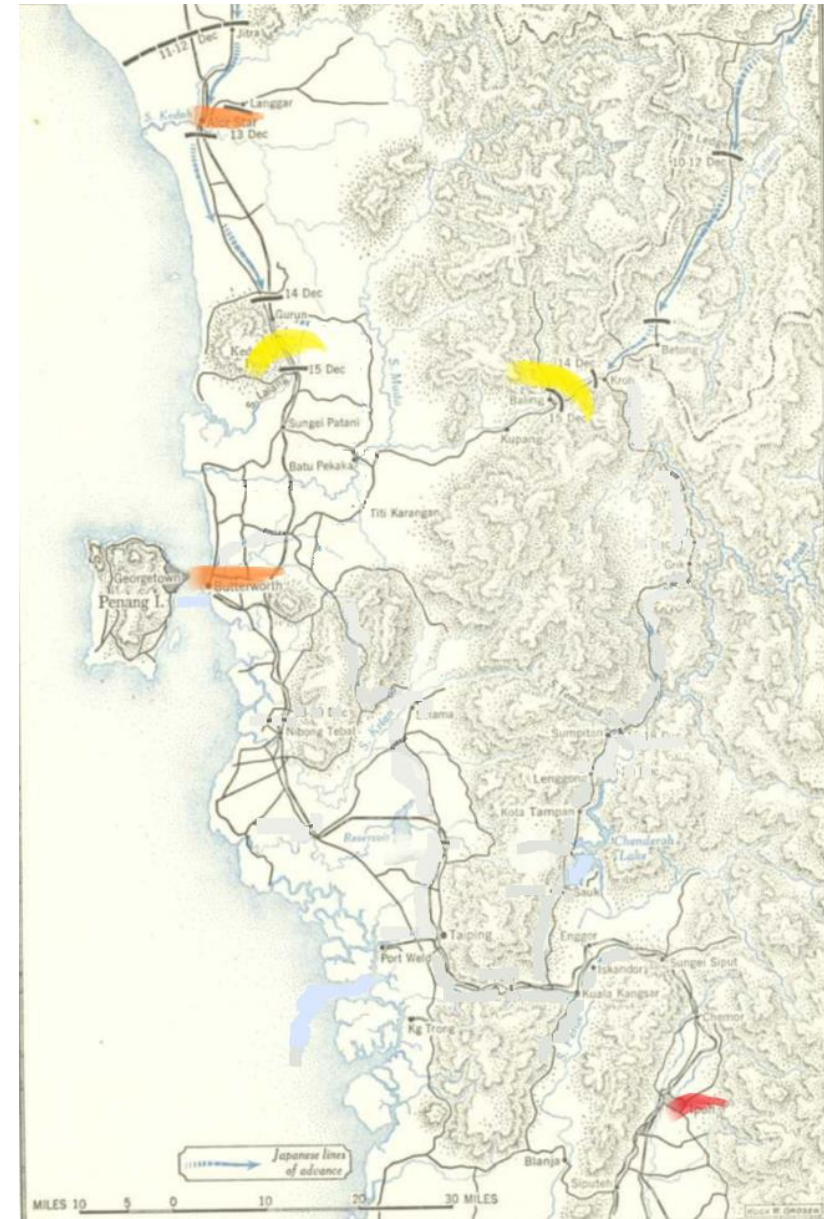
- **Singapore**

- Mr Duff Cooper disclosed to Mr Bowden, Australia's representative in Singapore, misgivings about the military situation, and said he saw the probability of a gradual withdrawal to a line approximately covering the southern half of Johore, to be held pending arrival of reinforcements about a month hence.



# 15<sup>th</sup> December

- **Malaya**
- **West Coast**
- From 10 p.m. until 1 a.m. on 15th December, the 1/8th Punjab was under heavy mortar fire. Then the Japanese thrust through the battalion and infiltrated the 6th Brigade area.
- Having seen Japanese passing his right flank, the battalion commander concluded that it had been isolated. He withdrew what remained of it, and a company of 2/East Surrey under his command, towards the coast.
- The enemy then overwhelmed the headquarters of the East Surreys, killing the commanding officer and five others, and broke into brigade headquarters, killing all its occupants, including seven officers but not Lay.
- Carpendale redispersed 28th Brigade in an endeavour to stem the enemy advance, but Murray-Lyon decided early on 15th December to make a further immediate withdrawal. He ordered his division to a position on the Sungei Lalang, seven miles south of Gurun.
- Later in the day, as reports indicated how badly the division had been disrupted, he decided that it should continue during the night to behind the Sungei Muda. Helped by supporting fire from the 88th Field Regiment, contact with the enemy was soon broken, and next morning the division was south of the Muda; but losses of vehicles and equipment were again heavy.
- **Penang**
- Any prospect of more than a brief stand at the Muda was slight, and an outbreak of cholera and typhoid on Penang Island, off the coast a little to the south, appeared likely in the rapidly worsening conditions then existing there. Heath therefore ordered that the small garrison now left on the island be evacuated by daylight' on 17th December.



# 15<sup>th</sup> December

- **Air**
- By (daylight) 15th December the two fighter squadrons at Ipoh) (21 & 453) had been able to put three aircraft into the air.
- The whole burden of maintenance had been placed on the already overworked and understaffed ground crews of No. 21 Squadron, who also had to cope with increased trouble with the Buffaloes' guns.
- When 3 Buffaloes intercepted 3 unescorted enemy bombers over Ipoh, only 4 of the total of 12 guns would fire. One bomber was shot down but there was little doubt that had all their guns been serviceable, the Buffalo pilots would have brought the score to 3.
- The harassed armament staff and Sergeant Haines in particular worked tirelessly to overcome the trouble. The pilots paid tribute to him when, in their next engagement, all their guns were operating.
- Before daylight on the same day Allshorn led a flight of 7 replacement Buffaloes from Sembawang to Ipoh. They encountered "the dirtiest weather we had ever seen . . . solid front stretching high up and miles long and raining like hell". Three pilots attempted to fly through the weather but became lost and attempted to land at an emergency landing ground at Port Swettenham. One landed safely but two ran off the runway and overturned, though both pilots were uninjured. The four other pilots returned to Sembawang.



# 15<sup>th</sup> December

- Squadron Leader Harper, back from his visit to Australia, flew in to the base leading a formation of 10 replacement aircraft, including the 4 21 Squadron aircraft which had turned back from the previous flight.
- Due to recent fighter losses AHQ now ordered fighter operations limited to airfield defence and tactical reconnaissance.
- 20 Japanese fighters made a strafing attack on Butterworth airfield.
- 25 twin engine bombers bombed Kuala Trengannu.
- Japanese fighters and bombers started operating out of Alor Star airfield in support of their ground forces.
- The final element of promised Dutch reinforcements arrived in Singapore, a flight of 6 Brewster 339 fighters arrived at Kallang from Java.
- **North Borneo**
- About midnight on the 15th-16th December ten enemy transports escorted by three destroyers and two seaplane tenders, arrived off Miri in North Borneo and anchored.
- **Burma**
- After Japanese air raids on the airfield at Victoria Point in southern Burma, the field, evacuated on 13th December, was occupied by Japanese troops on 15<sup>th</sup>.



Test flying a B-339D Buffalo over Long Island.

# 16<sup>th</sup> December

- **External Realities**

- Duff Cooper appointed a War Council to assist him. Mr VG Bowden, the Australian Government Representative in Singapore, was appointed to this council on 16th December.

- **Government**

- To conserve coal and power, lighting such as display advertising was prohibited and the "late shopping night" in those cities and towns where this custom existed was also prohibited.
- It was announced that, instead of closing down from Christmas Eve until 2nd January, as was the long standing practice in many workplaces, there should be only three days' holiday and that all must keep at their jobs on the other days, at holiday pay rates if their awards provided for the holiday. Nobody could take annual leave "until the Government intimates that the situation will permit of that being done".

- **Strategy**

- To make good the losses on the west coast, Brooke-Popham asked, on 16th December, that a brigade group and reinforcements from India for III Corps be dispatched immediately.
- It was arranged that the 45th Brigade Group of the 17th Indian Division, due to sail from Bombay on 22nd December for Burma, would be diverted to Singapore, and that reinforcements for the 9th and 11th Divisions would be sent from India as quickly as possible.

# 16<sup>th</sup> December

- **Pacific**

- USS Swordfish sank an 8000ton freighter off Hainan on the 16<sup>th</sup>.

- **Wake Island**

- Wake Island was attacked about midday by 41 twin engined bombers.
- Captain Tharin shot down a four engine flying boat which attacked about 17.30.
- Saratoga's task force finished fuelling at Pearl and got underway, for the relief of Wake Island, at 11.15 on the 16<sup>th</sup>. The intelligence picture available to Admiral Fletcher remained very unclear. The whereabouts of the fleet that attacked Pearl Harbour was still unknown. Many submarine sightings had been reported and Midway and Johnstone had been shelled.

- **Hong Kong**

- Continuous pounding from land and air, mainly of military objectives, caused extensive damage and put a heavy strain on the defenders.

- **Borneo**

- The convoy anchored off Miri made pre-dawn landings on the 16th. There was no opposition and though hampered by heavy weather, the Japanese were ashore by daylight.

- **Timor**

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

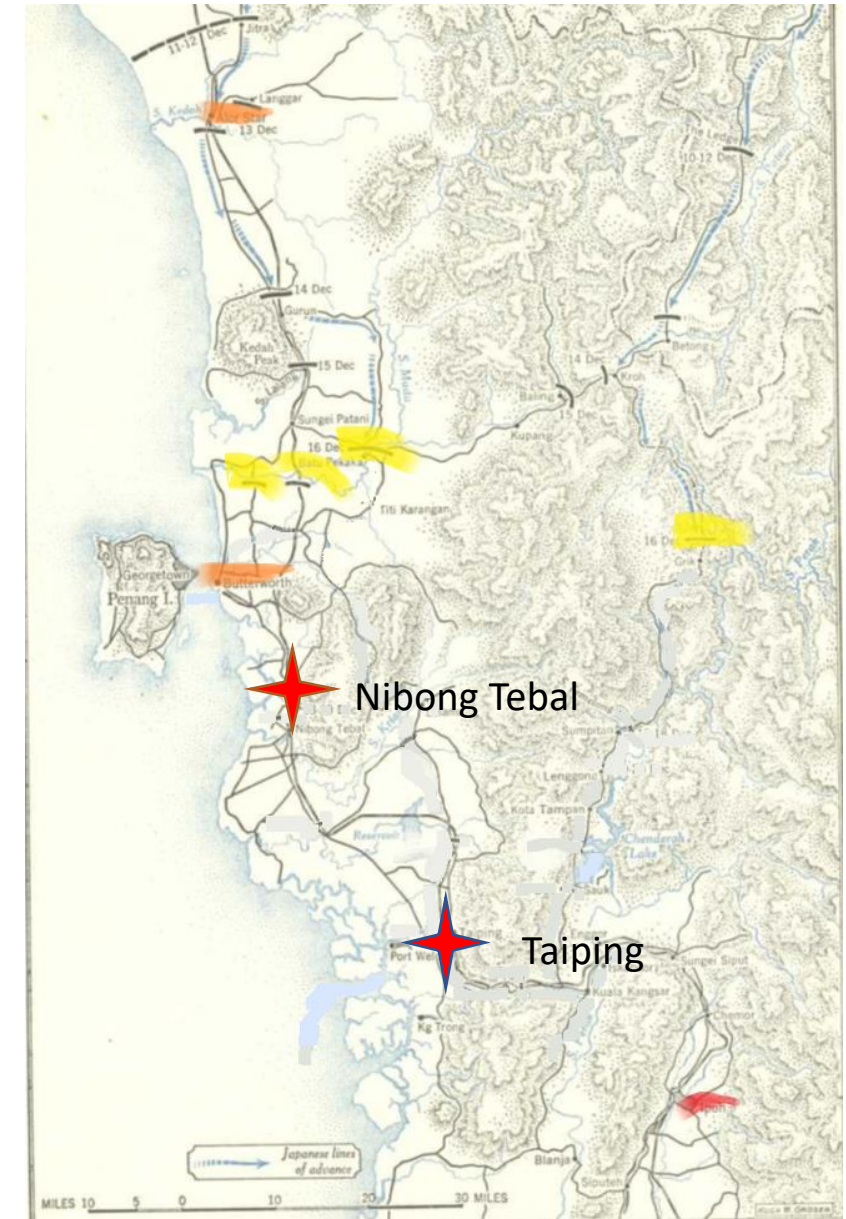
# 16<sup>th</sup> December

- **8th Div AIF**
- On the 16th, Bennett wrote to Army HQ in Melbourne:
- I have seen a total absence of the offensive spirit. . . . Counter-attacks would put a stop to this penetration. . . . The position has arrived when something must be done —urgently. I strongly urge that, should the request be made, at least one division of the A.I.F. from the Middle East be transferred to Malaya.
- Bennett also sent a letter to be read to all ranks of his command, saying:
- The recent operations in northern Malaya have revealed the tactics adopted by the Japanese in their offensive movements. It is simply that they endeavour to infiltrate between posts, or if that is difficult, to move small parties via the flank to threaten the flank or the rear of our position. . . . This is not a new system; it is as old as war itself. . . There will be no withdrawal; counter-attack methods, even by small parties, will be adopted.



# 16<sup>th</sup> December

- **Penang**
- Hurried steps were taken to destroy and demolish everything of value to the enemy, but the broadcasting station was left virtually intact and many small craft remained in the harbour after the garrison had gone.
- About 500 Asians of the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force were eventually offered evacuation but elected to remain with their families.
- **West Coast**
- Heath decided on the morning of 16th December to withdraw the 11<sup>th</sup> Div behind the Sungei Krian. He ordered the 28th Brigade, in relatively good condition, to occupy a position covering the Krian, from the road and rail bridge at Nibong Tebal westward to the sea, and the 3/16th Punjab, with the 10th Mountain Battery, to hold a crossing of the Krian at Selama.
- The rest of the division was ordered to Taiping to rest and refit.
- Paris had ordered the 5/2nd Punjab to hold a bridge over the Muda at Batu Pekaka. On the 16th a Japanese force which had swung inland from the main road confronted the 5/2nd Punjab. Led by infantry in Malay clothes, the enemy attempted to rush the Batu Pekaka bridge. They were driven off, however, and the bridge was destroyed.
- **Air**
- A second Japanese convoy arrived off Singora and Patani on 16th December, the landings were carried out under strong air protection without serious threat from the defenders' air forces.



# 16<sup>th</sup> December

- **Philippines**
- On 16th December, Lieutenants Wagner, Church, and Strauss were allowed to break the routine of reconnaissance by bombing the enemy-held airfield at Vigan. As they went into a dive, Church's plane was hit and set afire by AA, but he continued the attack, released his bombs, and crashed. Wagner dropped six fragmentation bombs and strafed a fuel dump and approximately twenty planes parked on the runway.
- It was now planned to withdraw the B17s another 1,500 miles to Darwin, Australia. In addition to the growing danger that Del Monte would soon be subjected to constant air attack, there was a general lack of maintenance facilities there which seriously limited the operations that could be undertaken.
  - There was no radar set on Mindanao,
  - no fighters were available for air defence and
  - the base had no large-calibre anti-aircraft guns.
  - The air warning system consisted of lookouts on hills north and south of the field with a telephone line to the operations room.
  - Until Del Monte could be greatly strengthened, it seemed advisable to withdraw the bombers to a base that would afford an opportunity for thorough maintenance of the already badly battered planes. Mechanics began to service the B17s for the 1,500-mile flight to Darwin.

# 17<sup>th</sup> December

- **Strategy**
- Percival authorised a withdrawal by the weakened 11th Division to the line of the Perak if necessary.
- Admiral Layton was informed on 17th December that one of four unmodernised "R" class battleships was being sent to the Far East, and the Chiefs of Staff hoped eventually—perhaps by April 1942—to reconstitute the Eastern Fleet at a strength of five modern capital ships, with the four "R" class battleships and three or four aircraft carriers.
- The British Air Ministry arranged on 17th December that 51 Hurricane fighters, in crates due to reach Durban in convoy next day, should then be trans-shipped and sent to Singapore with pilots and ground staff for one squadron. Arrangements also were made for 52 Hudsons to be sent, but these would take several weeks to reach Malaya.
- On 17th December the United Kingdom, replying to the Australian representations of 11th December, said that, "immediate reinforcements" had been sent to the Far East in the shape of 12 Blenheim IV bombers from the Middle East.



# 17<sup>th</sup> December

- **Western Pacific**

- Wake Island was attacked about midday by 25 twin engined bombers, after a dawn attack by two four engined flying boats.
- Commandant 14th naval district radioed Wake that dredging of the channel should continue; "give estimated date of completion"
- Commander Wake replies "We are concerned only with preserving life and defending the island. No estimate of date of completion can be made. This outlook would be improved by relief."
- The Saratoga task force caught up with the Tangier-Neches convoy during the forenoon of the 17<sup>th</sup>, and sent their destroyer escort back to Pearl. The taskforce's speed of advance was then limited to 12 knots by the oiler.

- **Rabaul**

- When Northern Area Headquarters received the report of the Kapingamarangi bombing raid the reaction was sharply critical. A letter to the squadron on the 17th complained that the whole operation had been wasted effort and described the bombing attack as "lamentable".
- On the same day a signal from Area headquarters told the commanding officer that the Chief of the Air Staff was "perturbed at the lack of information and bad reconnaissance reports submitted", and had complained of the weak attack, the absence of flight organisation and that too many bombs had failed to explode.
- Then followed a signal from the Air Board asking for answers to five specific questions concerning the operation and a further signal from Area Combined Headquarters, Townsville, asking for reasons for the delay in submitting the report.
- Lerew in his written report, having explained that his signals and cipher staff was "totally inadequate to cope with the volume of signals associated with even one operation carried out by one aircraft", closed with the statement:
  - It is regretted that all these misunderstandings and annoying delays have occurred, creating a position in which more worry is being caused from the south than from the enemy situated in the north.
- Between these exchanges Lerew himself flew a Hudson to Kapingamarangi. His aircraft was met by accurate and heavy anti-aircraft fire through which he dived to attack a seaplane as it was taking off, but without success. He then dropped two bombs on one of the slipways and an anti-submarine bomb (which failed to explode) among moored seaplanes. Enemy aircraft endeavoured to attack the Hudson but Lerew eluded them and returned to Rabaul.

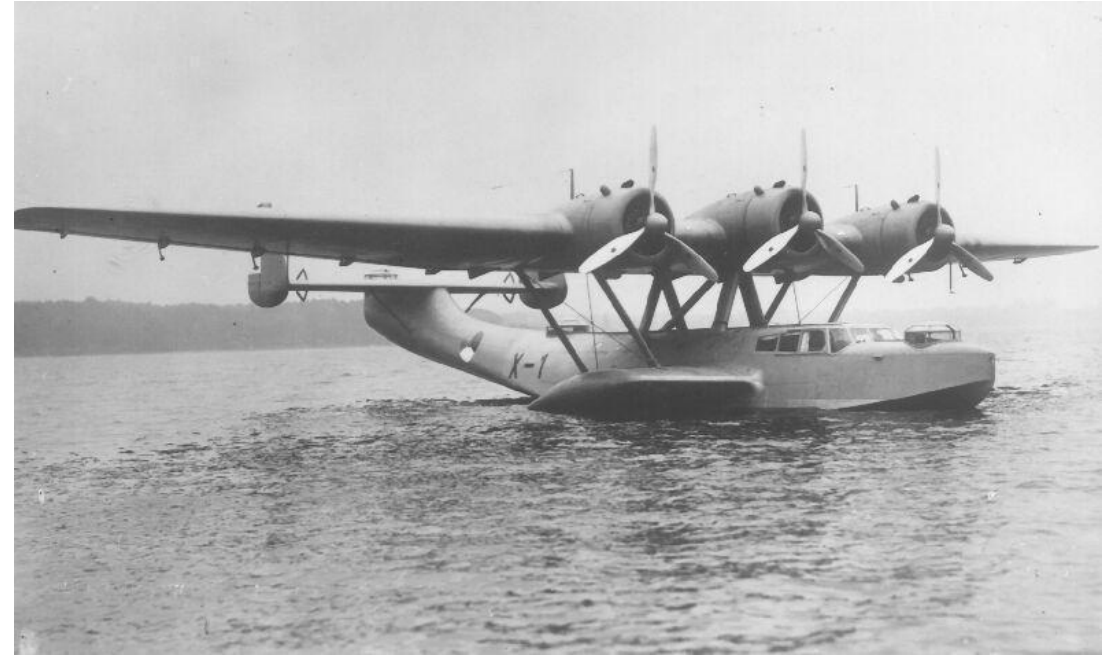


# 17<sup>th</sup> December

- **NEI**
- **Ambon /Gull Force**
- "Gull Force" 2/21st Battalion and attached units disembarked at Ambon on the 17th December. Part of No. 13 Squadron R.A.A.F., with Hudson bombers, had been established there since 7th December.
- The 2/21st Battalion had been formed soon after the fall of France, from men eager to go overseas and fight. It was a disappointment when, in March, they were ordered to Darwin. Spirits had been further depressed when on two occasions 10 per cent of its men were sent to the Middle East as reinforcements.
- On 17th December Roach again wrote to Scott listing deficiencies in the arms and equipment of the force, and concluding "Health and morale good".
- The Dutch garrison on Ambon, numbered about 2,600 men. They comprised several small companies of Indonesian troops, mainly officered by Dutchmen, and some Dutch coast artillery. The companies were below strength, and lacked their full complement of commissioned and non-commissioned officers. Gull Force had a total strength of about 1,100.
- Gull Force came under command of the Dutch island commander and was allotted positions in both the east and the west of the island, interposed with those of the Dutch force.

# 17<sup>th</sup> December

- **North Borneo**
- The ships off North Borneo were attacked on the 17th, by Dutch aircraft, and flying-boat X 32 sank a destroyer at Miri, where flying-boat X 33 also damaged a small transport.
- X34 also attacked but was shot down.
- In bad weather 6 Dutch Glenn Martin bombers, from Singkawang II, also attacked the enemy ships off Miri on the 17<sup>th</sup>.
- **Timor**
- Australian and Dutch officers met the Governor of Portuguese Timor on the 17th. The Governor said that his instructions were definitely to ask for help only after Portuguese Timor was attacked.
- He was told that this would be too late; the troops were on their way, and must land.
- After delays while the governor sought instructions, he announced that he definitely must not allow troops to land unless Portuguese Timor was attacked, and that therefore his forces must resist such a landing.
- The delegation expressed the hope that there would be no fighting, pointing out that the Portuguese force was too small to succeed.
- That afternoon the troops landed unopposed, on a sandy beach about two miles west of Dili and at dusk the Australians were digging in around the airfield.



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

# 17<sup>th</sup> December

- **Malaya**
- **West Malaya**
- **Kroh Rd**
- The small force on the Grik road was forced back under continuing pressure to Sumpitan, south-east of Selama.
- **Air**
- In daylight a standing patrol was kept over the airfield at Ipoh
- When three Zeros dived in at low level. The standing patrol engaged them eagerly. It was the first time the Buffalo pilots had had an opportunity of meeting the Zero pilots on anything like equal terms. After a ten-minute inconclusive battle the Zeros evaded further action and disappeared, leaving the Australians more impressed than ever by their flying qualities; their own aircraft had been outflown in every manoeuvre their pilots could perform.
- Later in the day weaknesses in fighter control allowed two bombing attacks on the airfield to get through without interception. Destroying a number of aircraft on the ground.

# 17<sup>th</sup> December

- **Command**
- The disaster at Pearl Harbor aroused the President to the dangers of divided command. Determined that there should be no repetition of the confusion of responsibility in Hawaii, the Navy was given command effective 17 December.
- President Roosevelt, on the advice of Secretary Knox, relieved Admiral Kimmel from active service in the Navy on the 17th December 1941.
- Admiral Chester Nimitz, appointed Commander in Chief Pacific Fleet in his stead was in Washington.
- Vice-Admiral Pye, Commander, Battle Force, who had lost his flagship, California, at Pearl Harbour, was appointed C-in-C, Pacific Fleet, pending the arrival of Nimitz at Hawaii.
- the Navy on the 17<sup>th</sup> also relieved General Short, and Maj. Gen. Frederick Martin, the air commander.



Admiral Chester Nimitz

# 18<sup>th</sup> December

- **Government**
- On 18th December the War Cabinet confirmed the stern decision, of 12 December, that the existing garrison at Rabaul should remain there unaided, though it was agreed that the prospect for reinforcing it should be reviewed constantly in the light of the naval situation.
- The War Cabinet at the same time approved the reinforcement of the garrison at Port Moresby to the strength of an army brigade, and the air strength there, on threat of attack, to the capacity of the airfields.
- Dependence on aircraft from Britain and America, and the quality of the support available, is illustrated by the orders then outstanding:
  - 94 Hudsons
  - 297 Vultee Vengeance dive bombers
  - 54 Beaufighters
  - 27 Douglas C-47A (Dakota) transport aircraft
  - 6 Walrus amphibians
  - 9 Catalinas
- The Australian contribution to the E.A.T.S. was reviewed on 18th December. 523 trainees were then ready to embark; 428 of them for Canada and 95 for Britain. The navy could provide escort to New Zealand, but not the whole way. The War Cabinet held to its earlier decision that no further trainees should go overseas until the relation of the scheme to the new problem confronting Australia had been examined.

# 18<sup>th</sup> December

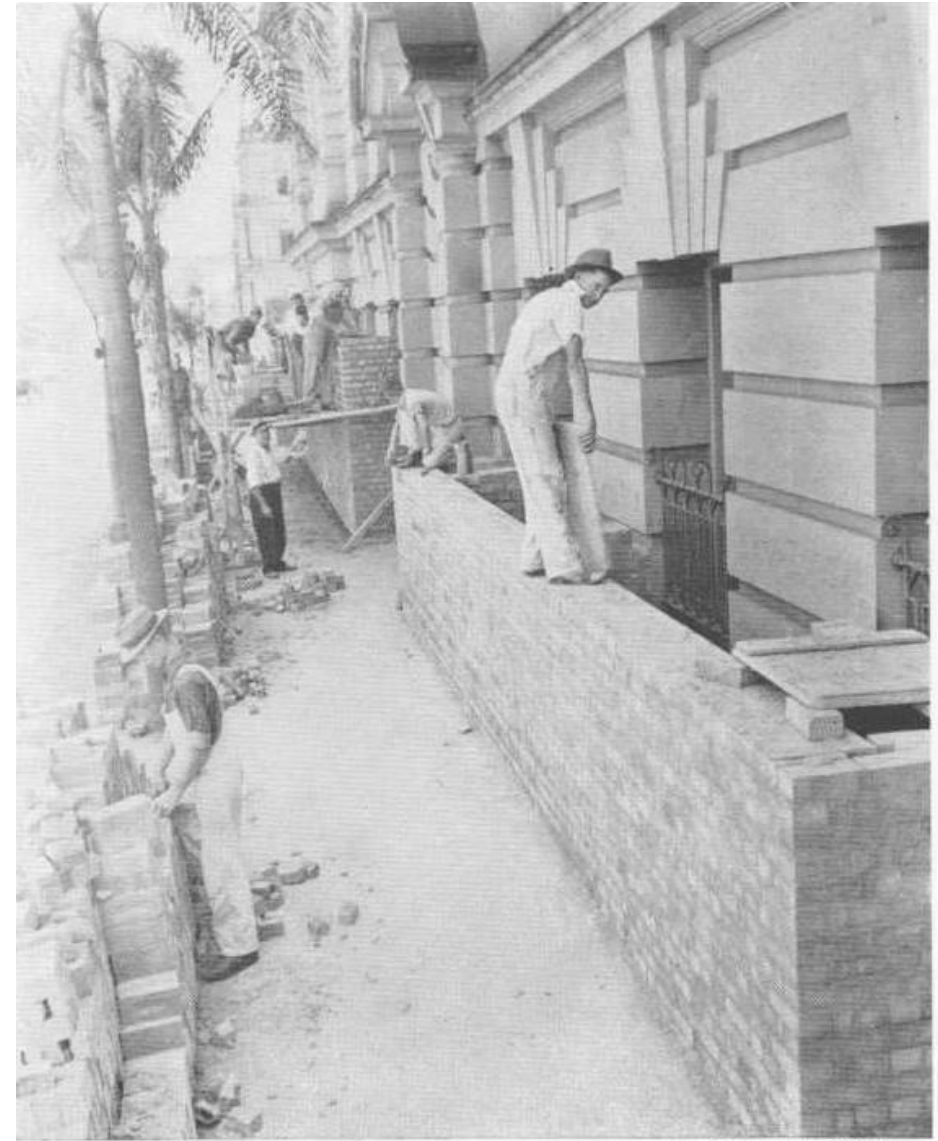
- On 18th December there were long and critical discussions in the War Cabinet and Advisory War Council on aircraft production in Australia.
- There was an urgent need for aircraft and successive promises for the production of Beauforts had dwindled from early estimates of 176 by the end of December 1941, to an estimate of eleven.
- Decisions were taken to abolish the Aircraft Production Commission, appoint the Director-General of Munitions, Essington Lewis, to the additional post of Director-General of Aircraft Production, with full powers for the purpose, and to appoint a general manager for Beaufort production with the immediate aim of producing 90 Beauforts by the end of June 1942.
- It was also decided that the production of Wirraways, which was expected to reach a total of 500 by the end of December, should continue.





# 18<sup>th</sup> December

- **Australia**
- Building a brick screen to protect a building in Brisbane, 18th December 1941.
- The work of air raid precautions was accelerated in all states.
- In the cities:
  - plate glass was removed,
  - display windows were boarded up and
  - Doorways and windows were protected by brick screens or sandbags.



# 18<sup>th</sup> December

- **Strategy**

- On 18th December a conference in Singapore, attended by Britain, the United States, Holland, Australia and New Zealand, sent a report to the British Chiefs of Staff. It was held that reinforcements needed for Malaya must include
  - four fighter and four bomber squadrons with reserves, and
  - aircraft to complete existing squadrons and their reserves;
  - an infantry division and a brigade group,
  - three light and two heavy anti-aircraft regiments,
  - an anti-tank regiment,
  - fifty light tanks,
  - and reinforcements for the III Indian Corps.
- The conference endorsed Percival's policy of holding the enemy as far north as possible.
- **Philippines**
  - On 18 December the 27<sup>th</sup> group commander Maj. Davies and a dozen other pilots, were flown to Australia to ferry back the first of the group's long-awaited A-24's.
  - Japanese light bombers and fighters based at Aparri and Vigan made softening up attacks on the beach defences at Lingayen.
  - The Catalinas of Patrol Wing 10 headed south to join tender Childs at Menado.

# 18<sup>th</sup> December

- **Hong Kong**

- Next day, 18<sup>th</sup>, Japanese shelling and air raids became more widespread. Petrol and oil tanks were set ablaze. Shelling of the north-east sector was particularly heavy, and frequently cut communications with the pill-boxes.
- More boats were observed being concentrated on the mainland. The destroyer Thracian had been disabled, and the only British naval vessels in action were two gunboats and a depleted motor torpedo boat flotilla.
- On the night of 18th-19th December Japanese forces swarmed over the strait and landed on a two-mile front in the north-east of the island.
- Despite concentrated fire from the Rajputs, defending the sector, and shelling by British artillery, the Japanese landed and penetrated 5 kilometres inland and captured some commanding heights.

# 18<sup>th</sup> December

- **Strategy**

- On 18th December, after conferring with Heath, Percival ordered:
  - that a flotilla comprising a sloop and some light craft be formed to oppose enemy movement by sea between the mouths of the Krian and the Perak;
  - that delaying positions be prepared east and south-east of the Perak, at Ipoh and Tanjong Malim;
  - that the 9th Indian Division be retained on the east coast to prevent enemy use of the airfield at Kuantan and penetration from that quarter;
  - that what became known as "Roseforce" be formed to raid Japanese communications west of the Perak;
  - that the 6th and 15th Indian Brigades be amalgamated and that the 12th Brigade be incorporated with them in the 11th Division.
- Percival's decision to limit losses of strength in northern Malaya was in line with guidance which had been given by Mr Churchill on 15th December.

- **Borneo**

- In bad weather Dutch Glenn Martin bombers, from Singkawang II, attacked the enemy ships off Miri on the 18<sup>th</sup>. Several landing craft were sunk.

# 18<sup>th</sup> December

- **West Malaya**
- Four carriers of the 2/12th Frontier Force Regiment were ambushed by Japanese who dropped grenades into them from trees they had climbed. This simple ruse was far removed from the training which most of the British forces had been given.
- **Air**
- The fighter squadrons at Ipoh were again attacked several times by enemy fighters and bombers three aircraft were destroyed by enemy action or operational accident and several more damaged. The defenders failed to intercept any of the attackers.



Universal Carrier

# 18<sup>th</sup> December

- **Burma**
- The American Volunteer Group had been recruited to aid the Government of China against Japan, in April 1941, when an unpublished executive order was signed by President Roosevelt.
  - 100 P-40Bs were obtained. The group, recruited from the U.S. Army, Navy and Marine Corps for service in China, assembled at RAF Mingaladon in Burma in November 1941 for training, where it was organized into three squadrons.
  - On 18th December Nos. 1 and 2 Squadrons of the AVG moved to Kunming in China. By dawn next day 34 Tomahawks were ready for combat with a fighter control headquarters linked to the Yunnan warning set and to the Chinese code service that monitored Japanese operational radio transmission and tapped the enemy's signals.
  - No. 3 Squadron remained at Mingaladon.



Claire Chennault. On the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, he became Chiang Kai-shek's chief air adviser, training Chinese pilots and organizing the Squadron of mercenary pilots. In 1940/1 he formed and commanded the AVG



# 19<sup>th</sup> December

- **External Realities**

- On 19<sup>th</sup> December the battleships Valiant and Queen Elizabeth were blown up in Alexandria Harbour by Italian midget submarines. Both were put out of action for several months.
  - This brought total British battleship losses to five out of the fourteen available at the beginning of November.
  - Three of the remaining nine being the R class which Churchill had described as “easy prey to modern Japanese vessels” being “unable to fight or run.”
  - The fleet offered to Admiral Layton by the Chiefs of Staff two days ago on the 17<sup>th</sup>, of five modern capital ships and the four R class battleships, would if actually sent to the Far East, now strip the Atlantic and Mediterranean of every one of the Royal Navy capital ships.
  - The loss of battleships in the Pacific, and elsewhere, deflected Bomber Command from its strategic attack on Germany, it was ordered to “make neutralisation of enemy battleships a matter of highest priority under the present situation.”

- **Government**

- On 19<sup>th</sup> December, in a cable to the Australian Government, Bowden wrote.
  - "I feel strongly, that before further Australian troops are committed every possible guarantee should be taken that they will not be abandoned with those already here." and added that in his view the real defensive strength of Malaya fell far short of previous publicity; and that assurances should be sought immediately from Great Britain that Malaya would not continue to be regarded as a secondary theatre.
- Bennett reported on 19<sup>th</sup> December that the situation was grave and asked for the dispatch of an Australian division from the Middle East.

- **Strategy**

- On 19<sup>th</sup> December, Churchill said in a further cable for the COS, that Duff Cooper had conveyed to him anxieties similar to his own. He added:
  - "The CinC (Far East) should now be told to confine himself to defence of Johore and Singapore, and that nothing must compete with maximum defence of Singapore. This should not preclude his employing delaying tactics and demolitions on the way south and making an orderly retreat."

# 19<sup>th</sup> December

- **Hong Kong**
- Fierce fighting continued throughout the night (18/19<sup>th</sup>). Trying to check or repulse the invaders, Lawson sent forward a counter attack by the Winnipeg Grenadiers. At first they made good progress but were then dislodged, and forced back. Few of the company escaped being killed, wounded, or taken prisoner.
- At 10 a.m. on the 19th, Lawson, commanding West Brigade, reported to Headquarters that the Japanese were firing at point-blank range into his headquarters and he was about to fight it out in the open. He and nearly all the staffs at the headquarters were killed.
- Maltby (the GOC) took over command of the brigade.
- **Borneo**
- Dutch bombers attacked the enemy ships off Miri sinking several landing craft.
- Enemy bombers attacked Kuching and Pontianak. Apart from the destruction of a large oil fuel dump the damage was slight.
- **Malaya**
- The port at Penang was occupied by Japanese troops on the 19th December.
- Dutch submarine O 20 was sunk by gun fire by a Japanese destroyer near Kota Bharu, 19 Dec 1941.
- Vampire left Singapore in company with Dragon and Durban, escorting S.S. Erinpura (5,143 tons) with survivors from the two capital ships, towards Colombo. The marine complement of the ships remained in Singapore to reinforce the defenders.
- **East Side**
- The 8th Brigade's withdrawal was well controlled, and losses of men and materials were relatively light.
  - Evacuation by rail from Krai of stores and equipment was carried out so successfully that of the 600 motor vehicles with the force only sixty were lost in Kelantan.
  - Forty casualties occurred when the railway station was bombed during the morning of 19th December, but the railhead had been evacuated by the end of the day.
  - The brigade's strength had been reduced by 553 all ranks killed, wounded or missing. Its losses of machine-guns, mortars, and antitank rifles had been heavy.

# 19<sup>th</sup> December

- **Air**
- Another air attack on Ipoh destroyed two more Buffaloes leaving only five fit for combat. The enemy ground forces were now only about 40 miles north of Ipoh, and Air Headquarters ordered that it should be evacuated.
- No. 453 Squadron with their 5 aircraft moved to Kuala Lumpur. No. 21 Squadron received orders to move all equipment, fuel, bombs and ammunition to Sembawang on Singapore.
- As enemy forces approached Kuala Lumpur, 153 Maintenance unit was evacuated from there to Java.
- The Australian Hudson squadrons and the Catalinas of No. 205 Squadron, were now responsible for reconnaissance off the east coast and in the triangular sector between Singapore, the Natuna Islands and Banka Island.
- The two RAAF squadrons were reduced to only six serviceable aircraft between them.
- 12 officers left Singapore by Qantas flying-boat on 19th December for Darwin to take delivery of eight replacement Hudsons which had been taken from No. 6 Squadron then based at Richmond.

# 19<sup>th</sup> December

- **Philippines**

- On 19<sup>th</sup> December a high altitude bombing raid did more serious damage to navy yards at Manila. Fuel stocks, the water mains and the radio station were destroyed. Thereafter that part of the bay was virtually abandoned.
- Del Monte experienced its first serious air attack.
  - As dusk fell, three B-18's had just landed, one of them bringing General Clagett from Manila, and before they could be dispersed and camouflaged with coconut leaves, twelve enemy fighters skimmed the field and destroyed the bombers by strafing.
  - Several camouflaged B17s, loading for their trip to Australia, were overlooked and took off for Darwin that night as scheduled.

- **Pacific**

- Wake Island was attacked about midday by 27 twin engined bombers and at dusk by two four engined flying boats.

- **Burma**

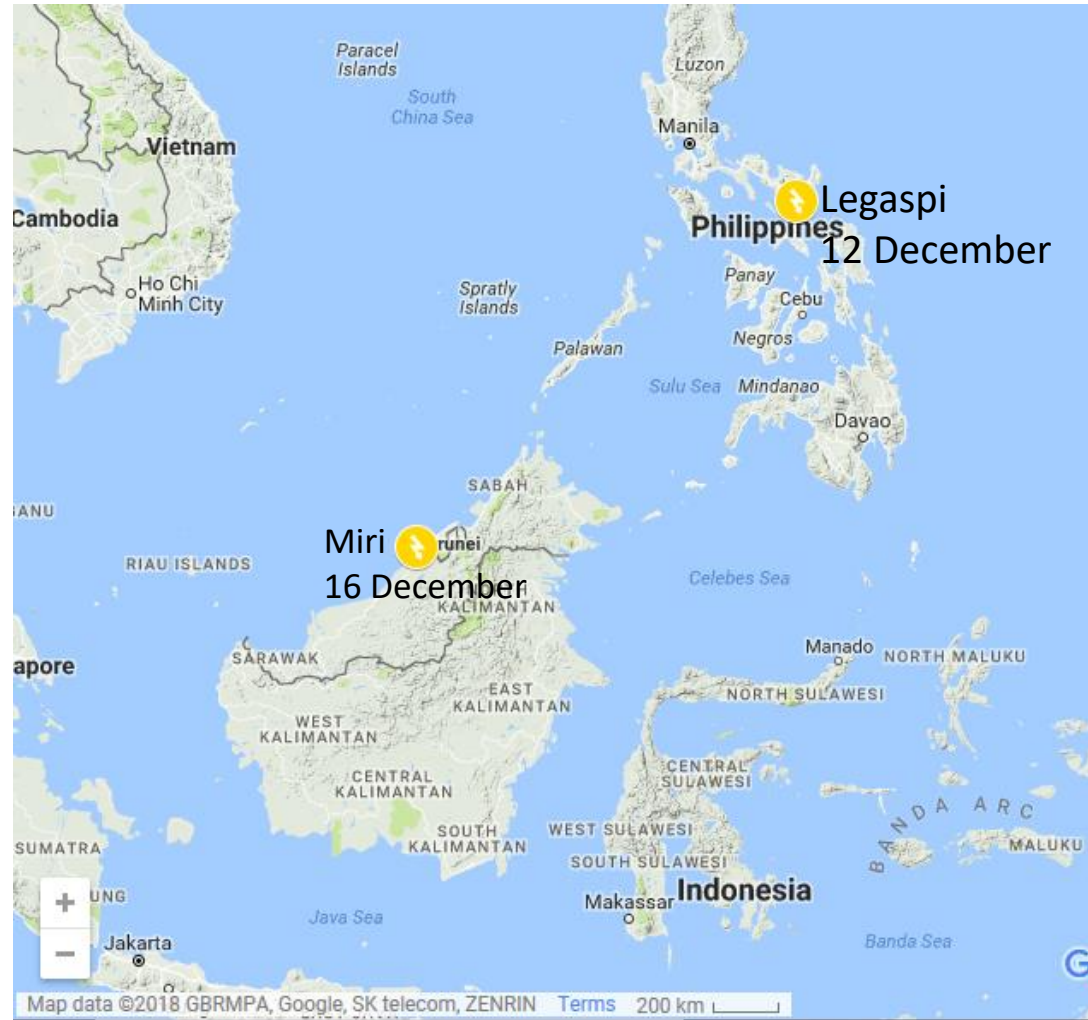
- The day after their arrival at Kunming, 19<sup>th</sup> Dec, the A.V.G. pilots went into combat. Ten Japanese bombers were compelled to jettison their bombs harmlessly, and three were shot down and several more damaged for the loss of only one Tomahawk, the pilot of which escaped with slight injuries.

# Australian Outposts in the Dutch East Indies

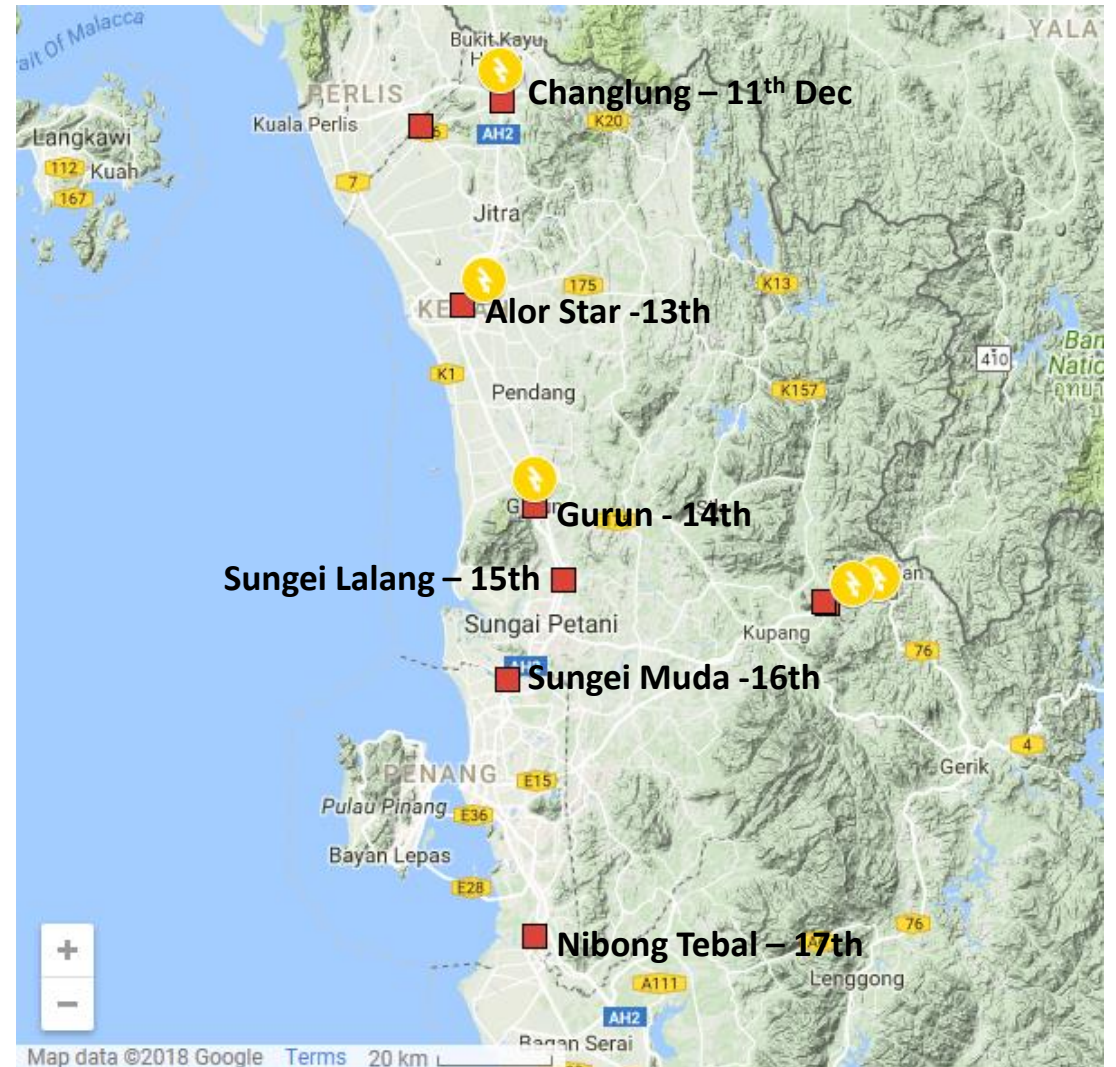




# New Japanese landings



# 11<sup>th</sup> Division Withdrawals





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## JAPANESE TROOPS LAND ON HONG KONG

### Island's Position Serious

### PENANG THREAT

**JAPANESE** troops have landed on Hong Kong island in force, and heavy fighting is in progress. The position is described in London as serious.

The evacuation of civilians from Penang, island naval base off the west coast of Malaya, has begun. One ship load and train loads of refugees have reached Singapore.

Japanese forces now hold the Malayan mainland opposite Penang, and British forces have reformed along the River Krian, the first national defensive line south of the border.

Latest news from war zones in the Pacific last night was:

**Hong Kong.**—Japanese claim that they have landed on the north-east part of the island, which is separated by a narrow channel from the mainland, and have taken Jardine's Hill.

**Malaya.**—No marked enemy activity for 24 hours. British civil evacuation of Penang begun. Mainland to be defended further south.

**Philippines.**—Japanese planes bombed Panay Island, causing some damage and casualties. Americans drove back Japanese in the Vigan area (north-west Luzon).

**Timor.**—No fresh developments reported since Australian and Dutch troops entered Portuguese Timor. Portuguese Parliament summoned; protest to Britain expected.

**Burma.**—Indian reinforcements have reached Rangoon and gone to battle stations. The Governor of Burma said that the forces were preparing to take the offensive.

### Hong Kong Attack

Advance landed on Hong Kong. It is believed in London that the Japanese are dead to capturing the island. As soon as the first landings were made, reinforcements were rushed across the narrow channel.

The attack was made after a 12-hour bombardment. The Japanese are now maintaining a position on the island. It is believed that the Japanese are now in a position to take the island.

### Timor Move Disturbs Portuguese

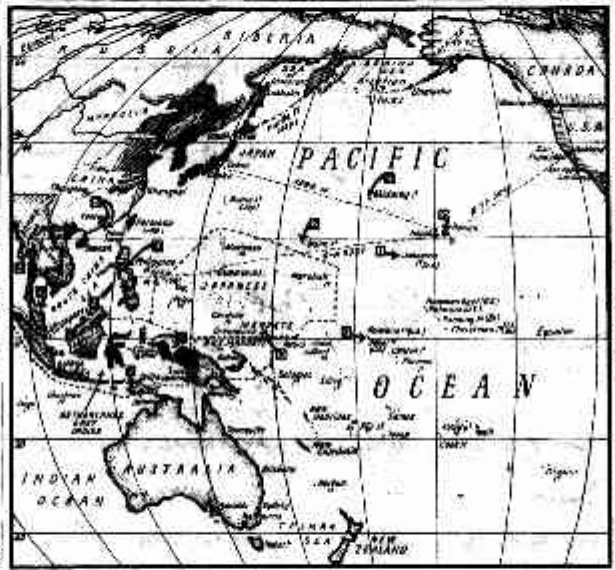
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### ALL STATES TO AID FEDERAL PLANS FOR ANY EMERGENCY

**CANBERRA, Friday.**—Plans for the co-operation of the State Governments with the Commonwealth are being evolved by State Premiers and Federal Ministers for the fullest exercise by the States of the emergency powers conferred on them by the Federal Government last week.

At a private meeting with the Prime Minister, the emergency powers of the Commonwealth are being evolved by State Premiers and Federal Ministers for the fullest exercise by the States of the emergency powers conferred on them by the Federal Government last week.

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### New Army Of 3M. In Soviet Onslaught

**LONDON, December 19.**—A miracle seems to have occurred in Russia, where the Soviet forces continue their forward march.

It is confirmed that Stalin is now using an army of three million well-trained and fresh fighting men. One of their greatest feats was performed near Klin, where they surrounded three German divisions and did not leave one man alive.

The Germans are withdrawing along the whole line, but it is not yet a decisive retreat.

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### AMERICAN HELP IN MIDDLE EAST

**LONDON, December 19.**—The American aid to the Middle East is being increased. The American aid to the Middle East is being increased.

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### New Philippines Area Bombed; Japan's Setback

The Japanese are now maintaining a position on the island. It is believed that the Japanese are now in a position to take the island.

### DUFF COOPER MINISTER FOR FAR EAST

**CANBERRA, Friday.**—The Minister for the Pacific has been appointed Mr. Duff Cooper.