

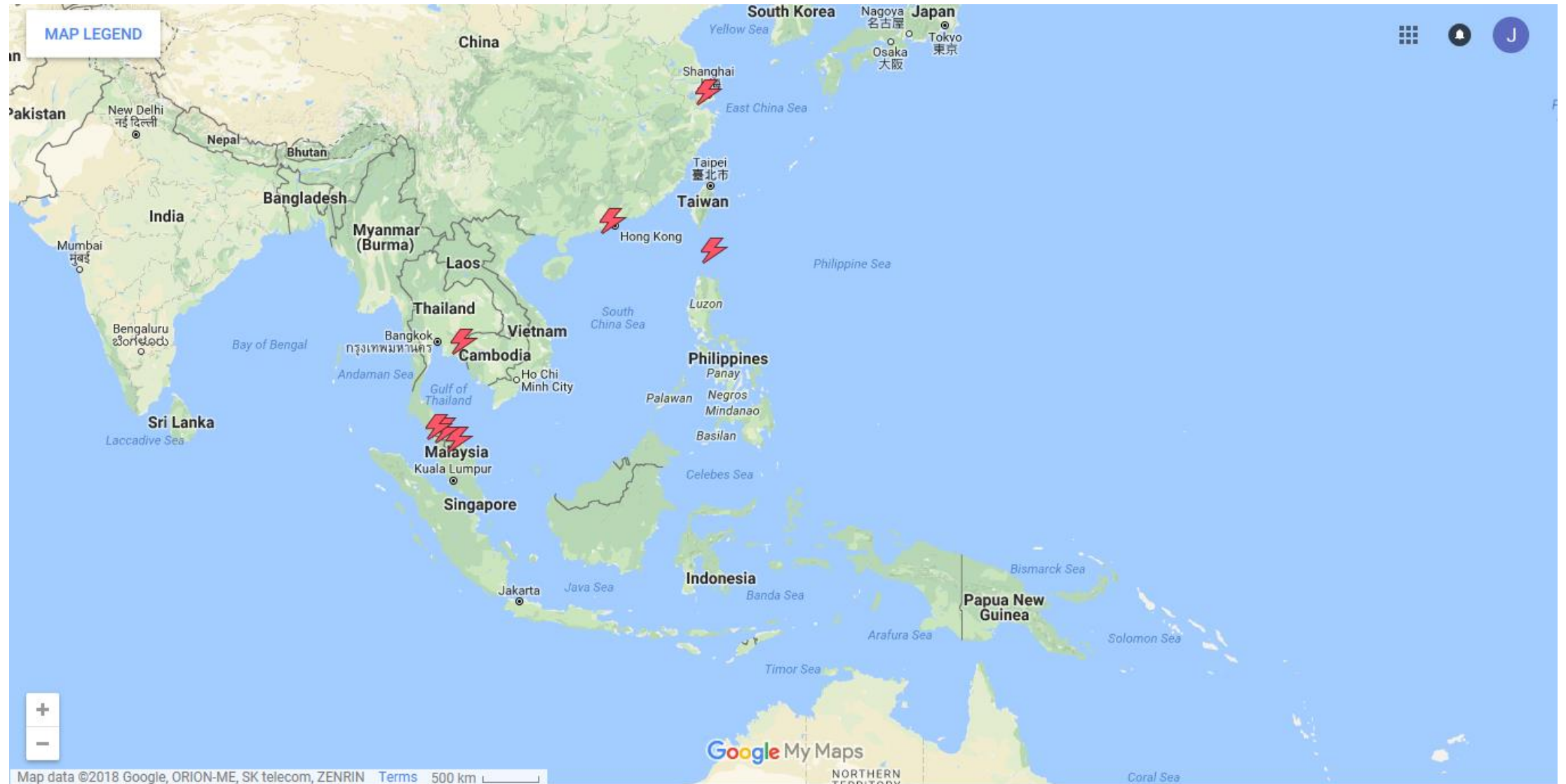


War in the Pacific

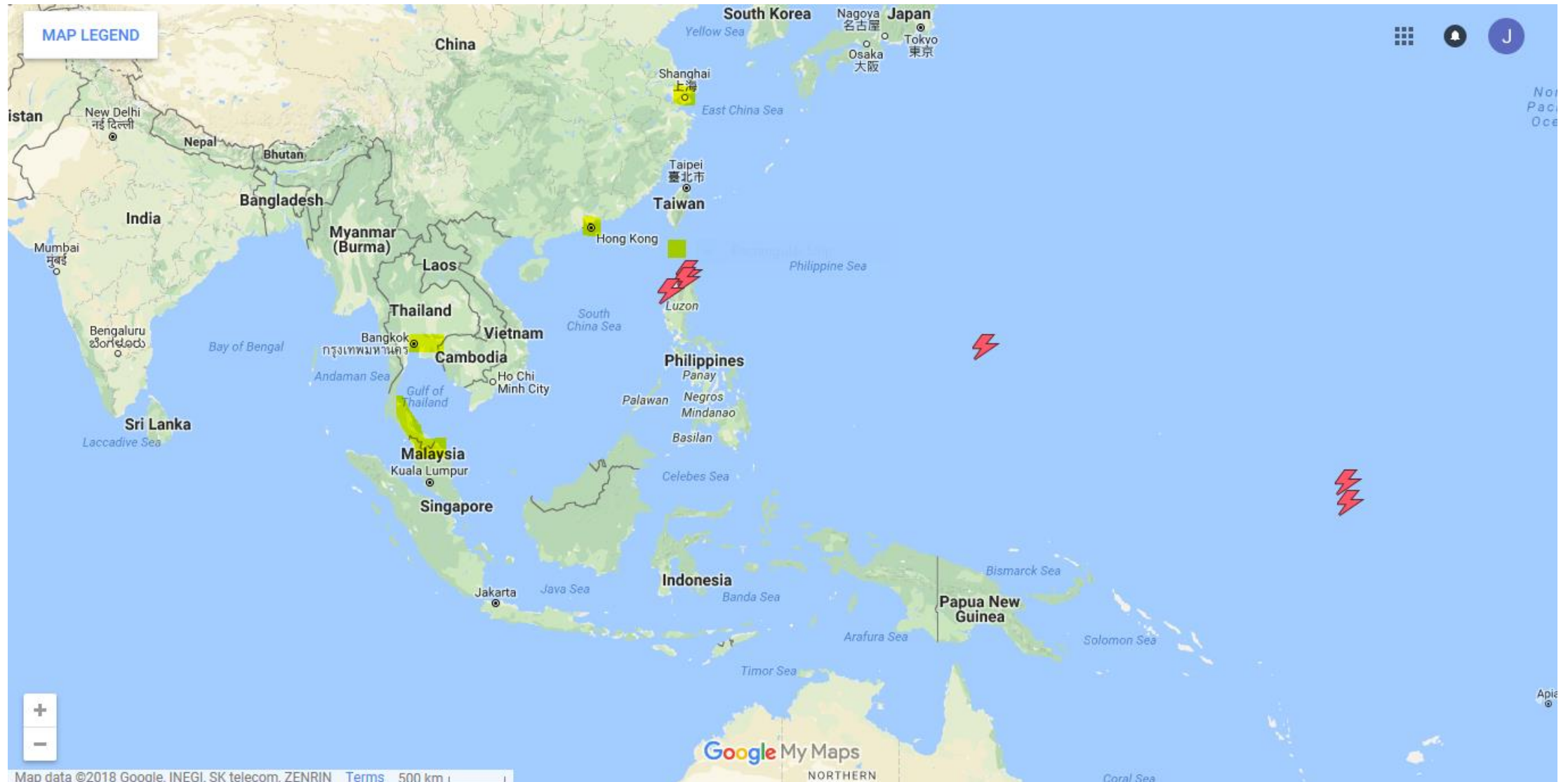
Campaigns in New Guinea and the Solomon Islands

- How did we get here?

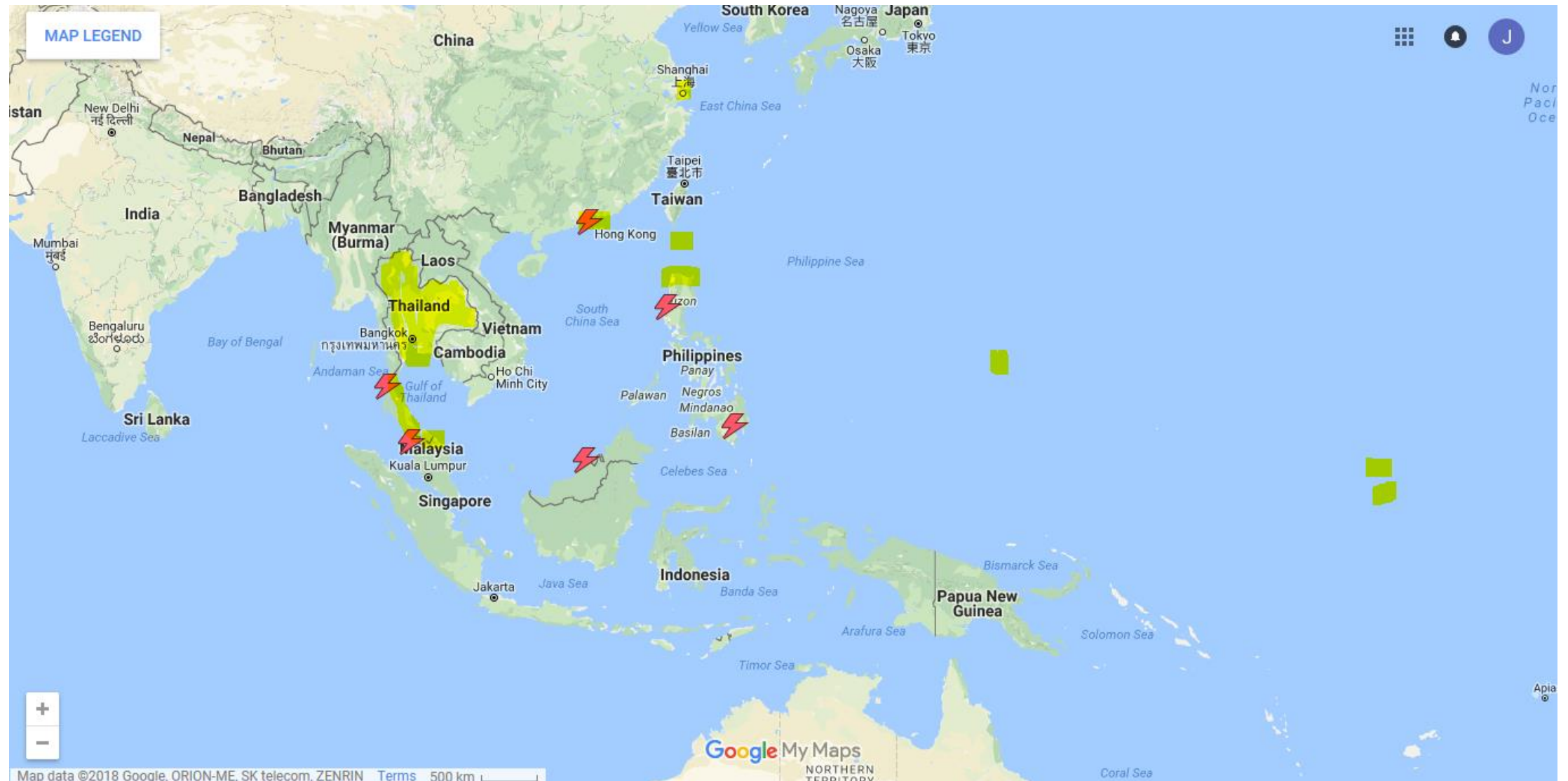
8 December 1941 – The Wave Breaks



9 to 13 December 1941



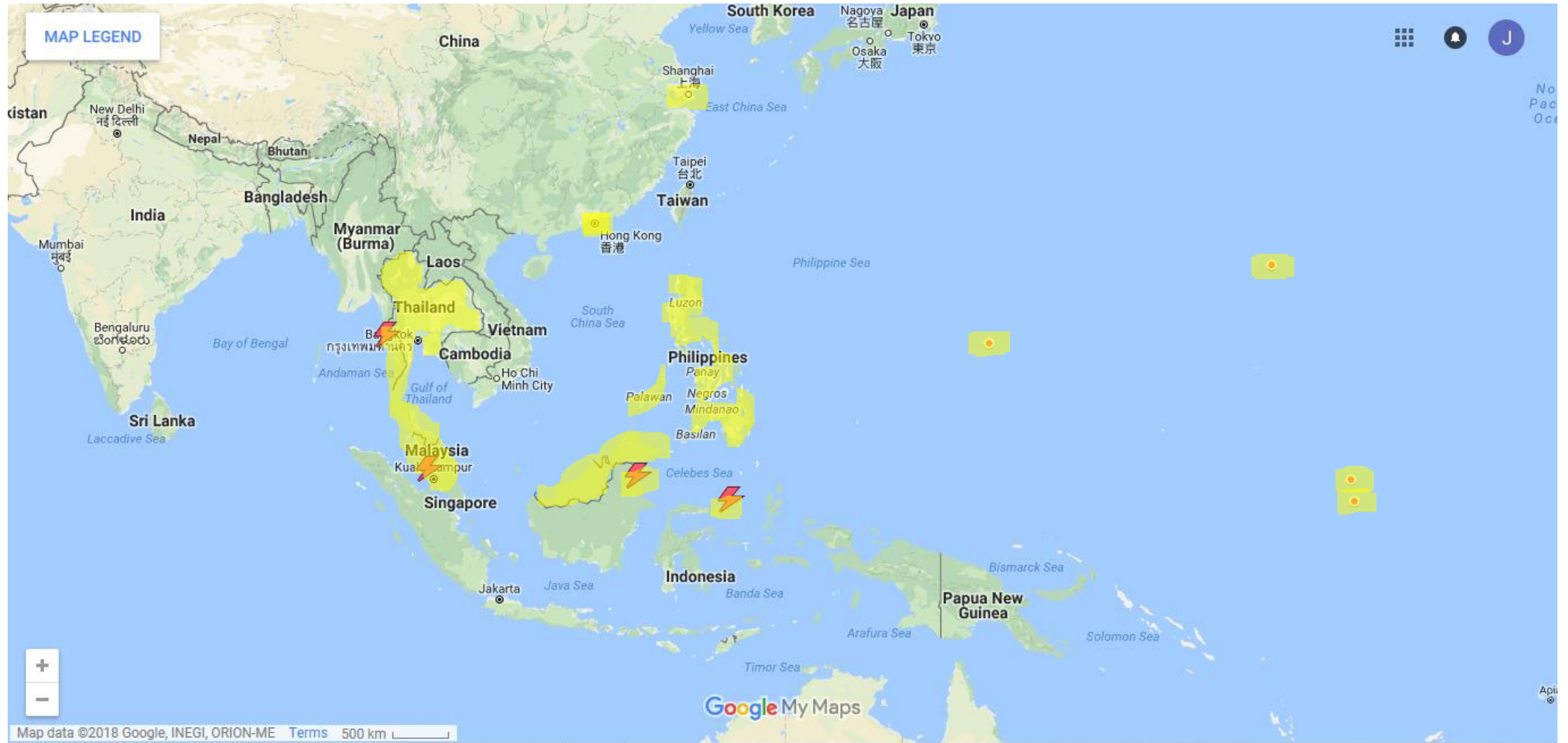
15 to 22 December 1941



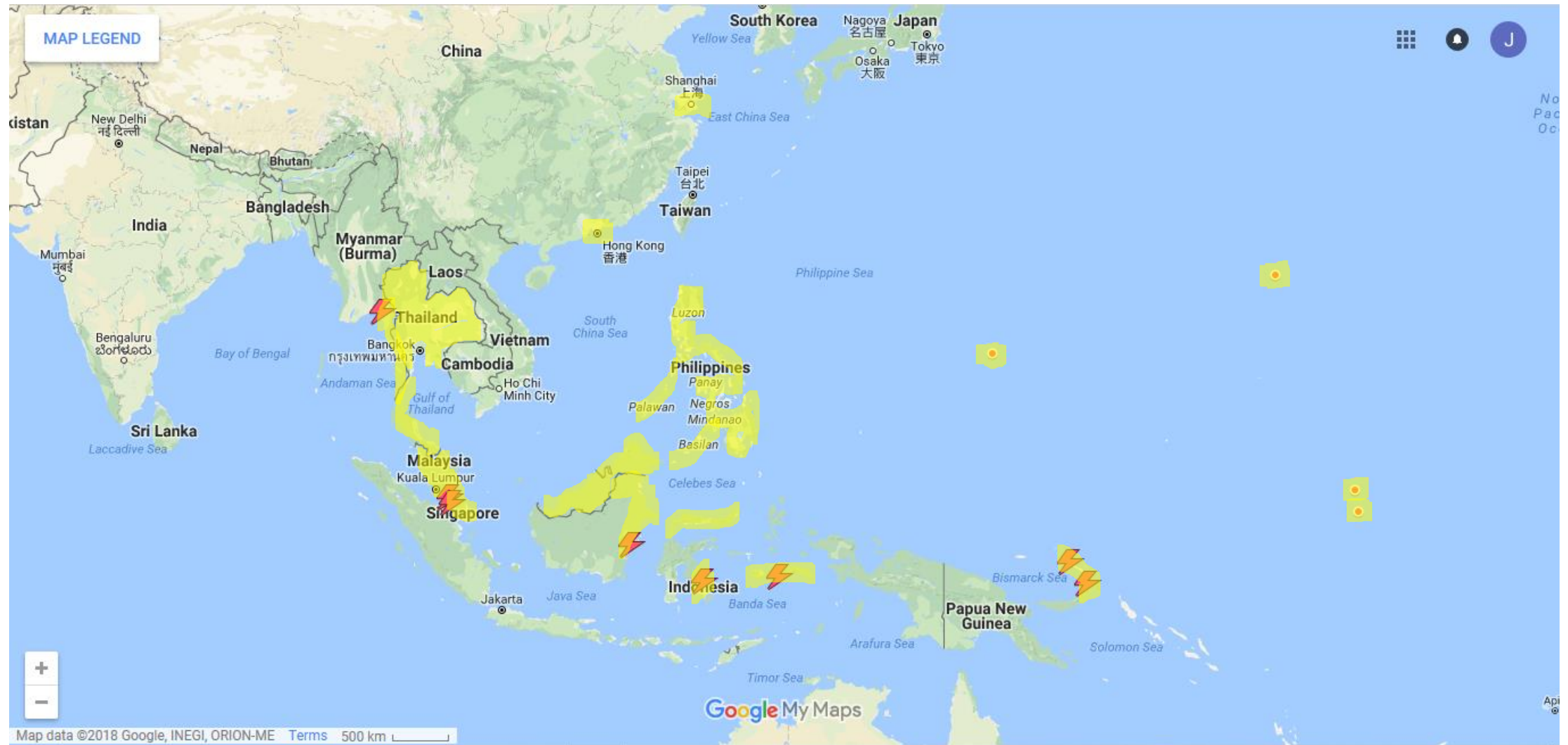
23 to 31 December 1941



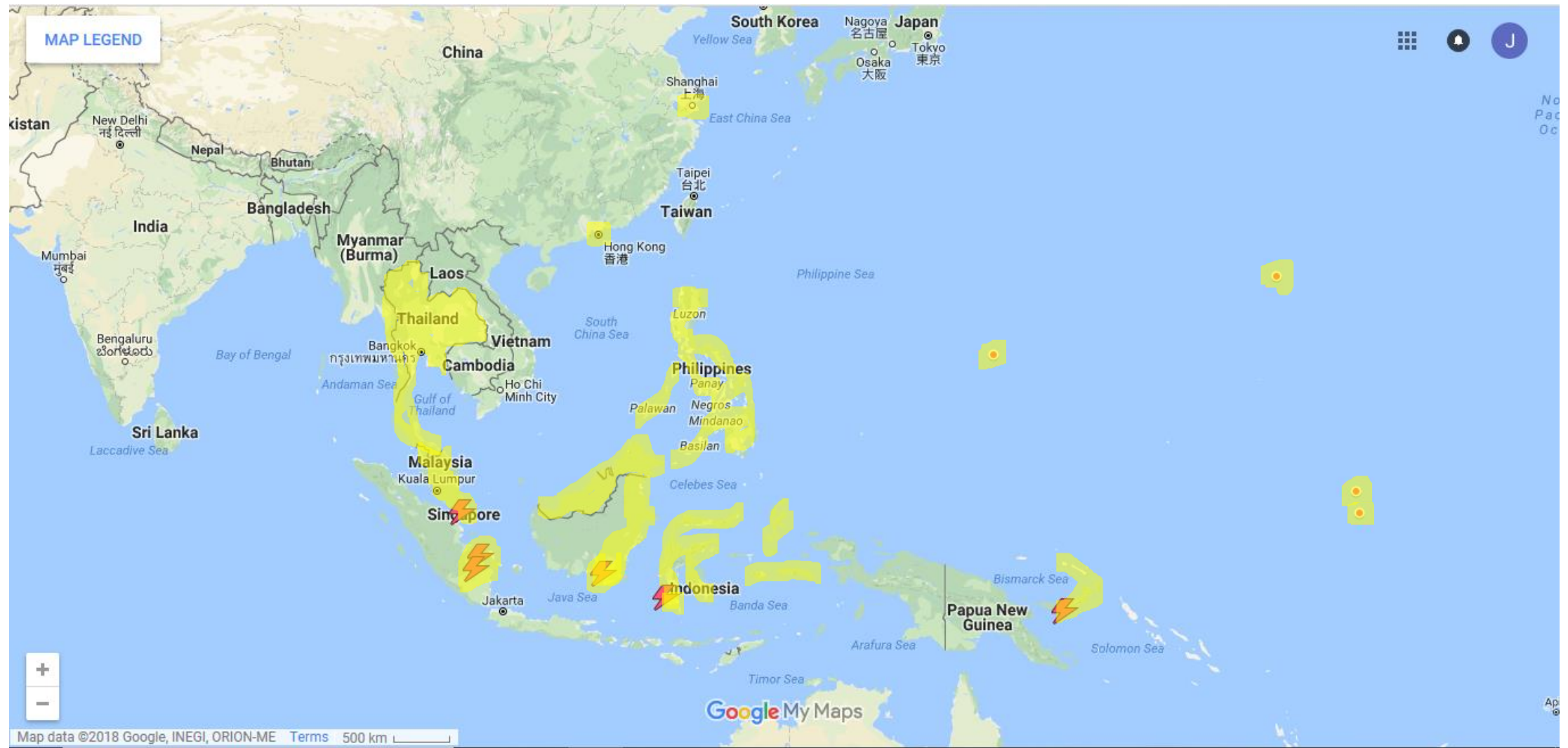
1 to 15 January 1942



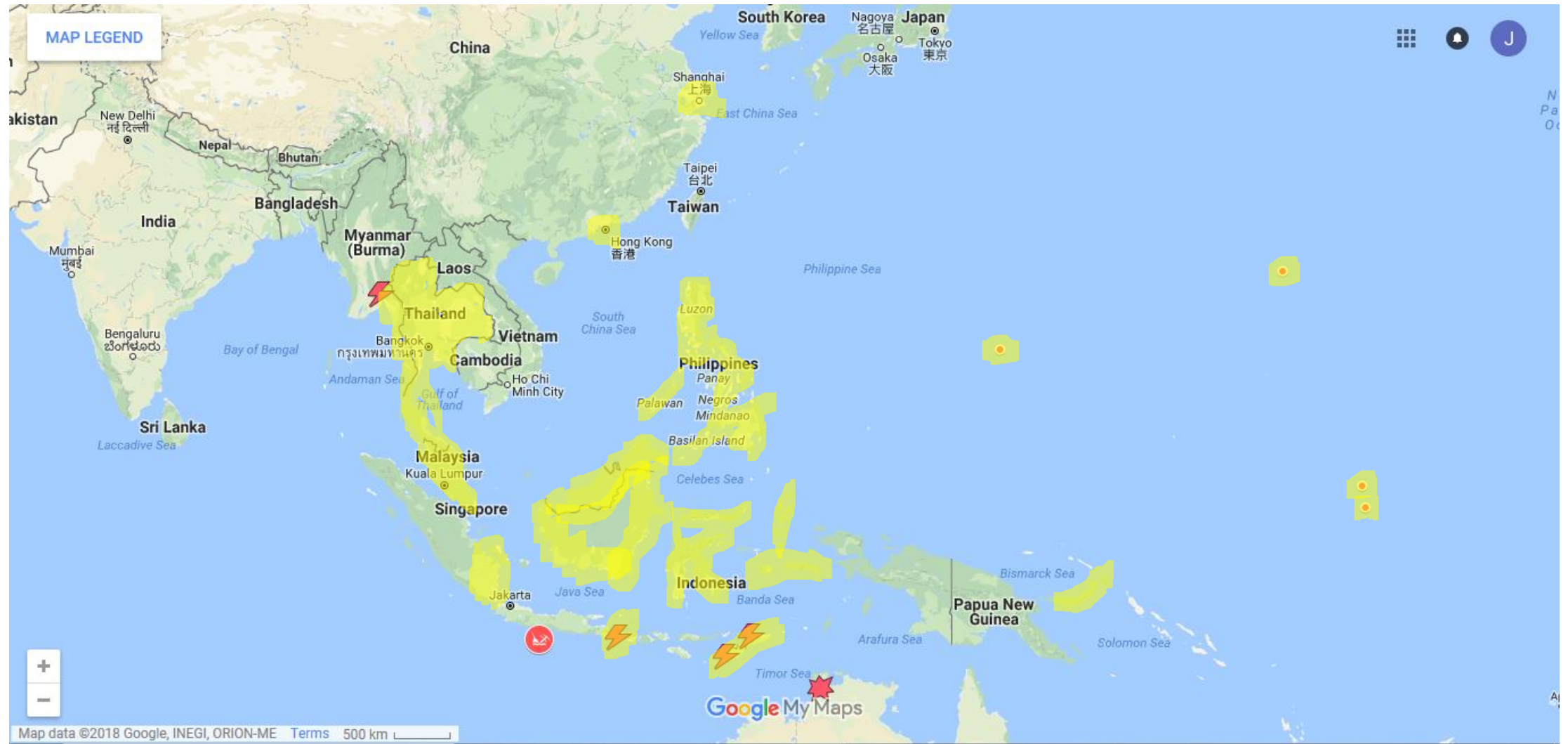
16 to 31 January 1942



1 to 15 February 1942



16 to 28 February 1942



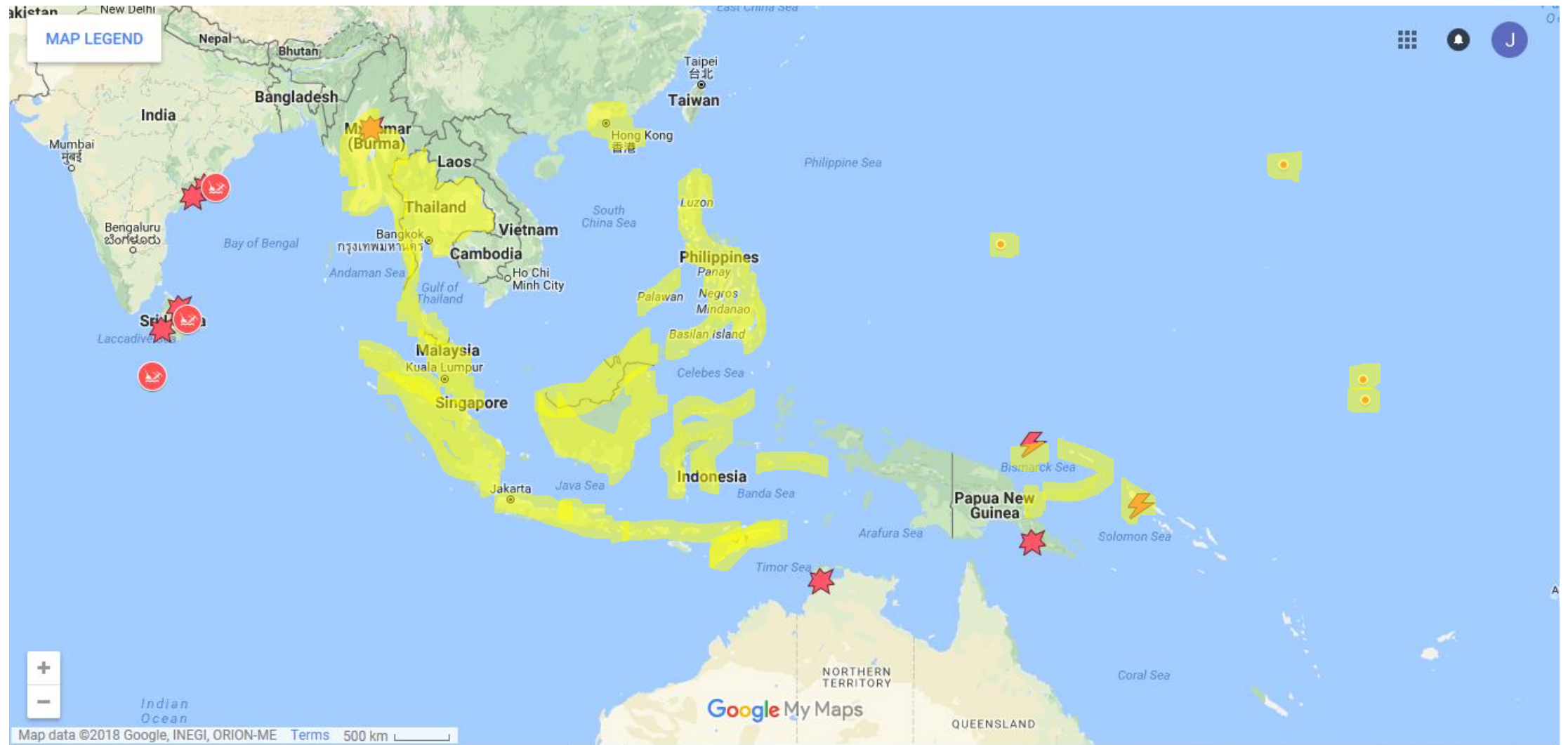
1 to 15 March 1942



16 to 31 March 1942



1 to 15 April 1942



8 April - Sea



16 to 30 April



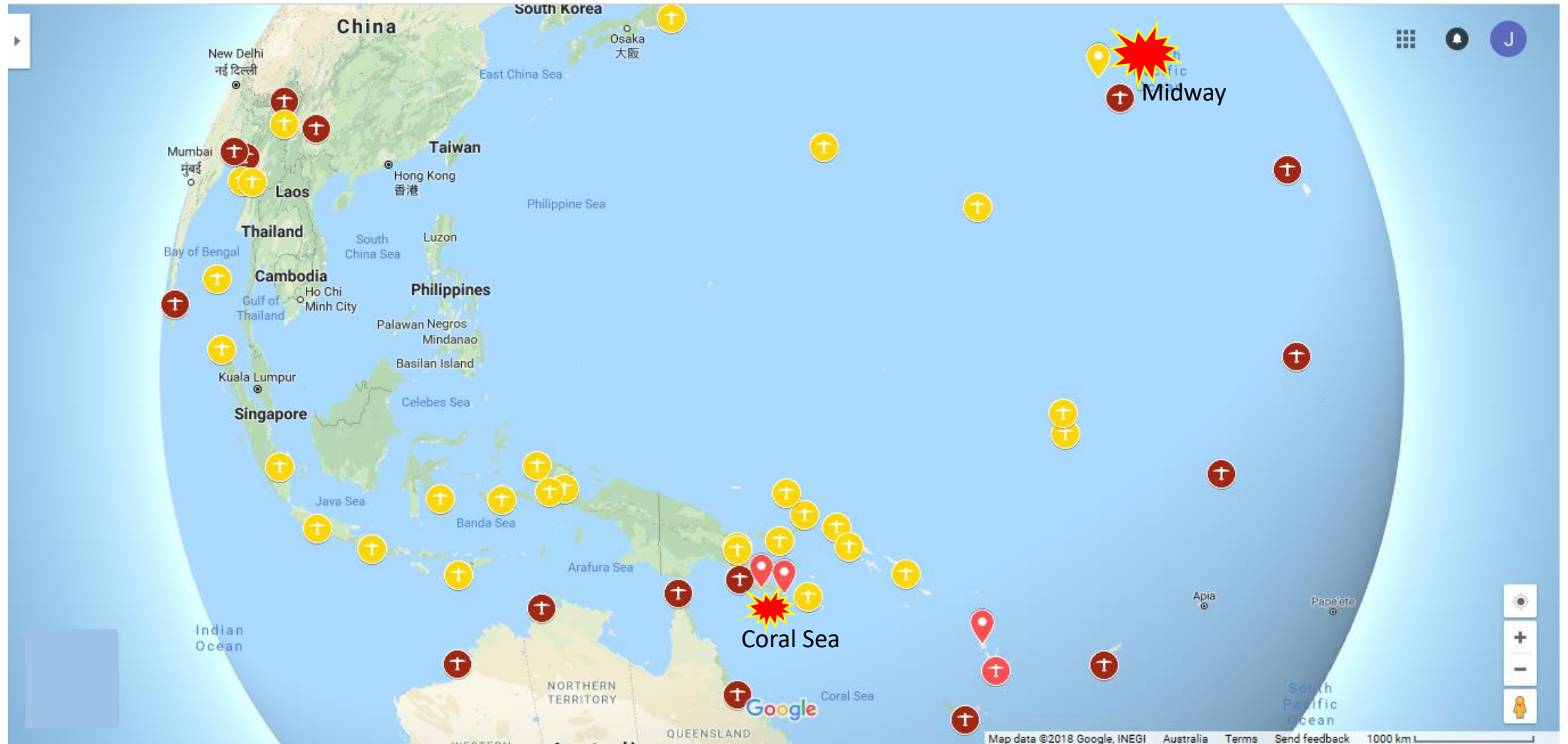
1 to 15 May 1942



May June 1942

- After 6 months of defeat and disaster and the destruction of the Western Empires in South East Asia the US Navy has fought a drawn battle in the Coral Sea to defend Port Moresby and won a great victory off Midway Island.
- The victory would not have been won without an American intelligence break into Japanese codes. The code book has now been changed and the Americans are back at square one.
- The extent of the victory is not entirely clear but it seems probable that Japanese losses have reduced their strength in large fast aircraft carriers to approximate parity with the Americans.
- The Japanese continue to outnumber the Allies in all other classes of ship.
- The extent of the Midway victory conceals the fact that it was a very close run thing and there were a number of American tactical disasters and material losses.
- Japanese land forces and navy surface forces have everywhere been tactically superior to the allies.

May and June 1942



Why have the Japanese been so successful?

- They achieved an extraordinary strategic surprise on the 8th of December. All their victims knew there was a crisis coming and were aware of some of the Japanese preparations but none of them could believe the daring and extent of the actual attacks and so had not prepared against them.
- After the first few days the Japanese had sunk enough ships and destroyed enough aircraft to achieve numerical superiority in naval and air forces which allowed them to deploy forces wherever required and made it hazardous for the defenders to bring in reinforcements.
- The Japanese then maintained the initiative by the energy and determination with which they pursued each of their campaigns.
- In some cases Japanese equipment was better than that of the defenders, most of whom had been starved of resources by the necessities of the war in Europe.
- Even allowing for these advantages the successes of the Japanese army and the speed with which they had been achieved were remarkable.

Why was the Japanese army so successful?

1939 A war of Attrition

- The Japanese captured Wuhan in October 1938, forcing the KMT to retreat to Chungking but Chiang Kai-shek refused to negotiate and continued the resistance.
- With casualties and costs mounting, the Japanese attempted to break Chinese resistance by launching massive air raids on civilian targets. Starting in January 1939 they hit Chungking and most other major cities in unoccupied China.
- The Japanese attempted to cut off the flow of supplies to China from the outside world by naval blockade and capture of the major ports.
- By the end of October 1938, Japanese troops had landed 35 miles north-east of Hong Kong, and surrounded it, cutting off supplies through Hong Kong, and positioning themselves for a swift and probably successful assault.
- There now remained three supply routes into China;
 - The North West from Russia,
 - French Indo China through Hanoi and
 - The Burma road.
- Chiang's main objective was to drag out the war for as long as possible, to exhaust Japanese resources.



The Japanese army had been fighting a war in China since 1937 during which they had made numerous amphibious landings as the map shows.

December - Land

- 9 December
- Hong Kong
- During the day the Japanese only engaged in patrol activity, but near midnight they surprised the defenders of Shing Mun Redoubt, a key position largely dominating the left sector of the Gin Drinkers' Line, and captured it, including a Scots company headquarters.
- 11 December
- Malaya
- 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, thus 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.
- 13 December 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.

December - Land

- 16th December – Bennett's letter to 8th Division
- 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.
- Hong Kong
- 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.

25th December

- **Malaya**

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

War in the Pacific - Jerry McBrien - Wk 2 - Analysis of Japanese success



Chapman had trained Australian forces in guerrilla warfare and organised parties to stay behind in Japanese occupied areas.²⁴

29 December Malaya

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

6/7 January Malaya

- A further infantry attack occurred soon after midnight on the 6th-7th along both the road and the railway; then,
 - after a heavy barrage of mortar and artillery fire, and in clear moonlight, tanks suddenly appeared on the road. These were part of a mechanised column with infantry interspersed between the armour.
 - Under covering fire, the infantry soon disposed of the first road-block in its path; the forward company of Hyderabad was overrun; and with guns blazing the column charged on.
 - Other Japanese troops renewed the pressure along the railway, and some of the tanks used an abandoned and overgrown section of old road in a flanking manoeuvre, with the result that rapid progress was made in this thrust also.
 - The column was checked only when the leading tank entered a mined section of the road in front of the forward company of the 5/2nd Punjab near Milestone 61. Fierce fighting ensued, but here the first of two more disused deviations, which it had been intended to use for transport when the time came for the battalion to withdraw, enabled the enemy to move to the flank and rear.
 - Again overrunning the position, the Japanese column advanced until it came upon more mines, in front of the reserve company of the 5/2nd Punjab. Furious fighting at this point lasted for an hour, but by exploiting the third loop section the Japanese achieved the same result as before.
 - The suddenness of the penetration so disorganised communications that it was not until 6.30 a.m., when the position had been lost, that a dispatch rider delivered to General Paris' headquarters at Tanjong Malim his first message from the 12th Brigade.
 - Even this contained only a vague reference to "some sort of break-through", for the information received by Stewart had lagged behind the night's swiftly-moving events.
- About this time (06.30) four enemy medium tanks reached the first of two road-blocks hurriedly erected by the Argylls. The blocks, and such resistance as the battalion, lacking anti-tank guns, was able to offer to the tanks, were also overcome, and an attempt to destroy the bridge at Trolak failed.
- The Argyll companies on the railway and the estate road held out until they were surrounded, and then tried to fight their way out, all but about a hundred of them being lost.

January - Land

- **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.

14 January at Gemas

- 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."
- 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.

16 January Gemas/Segamat

- 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.

19 January Bakri 2/19 Battalion

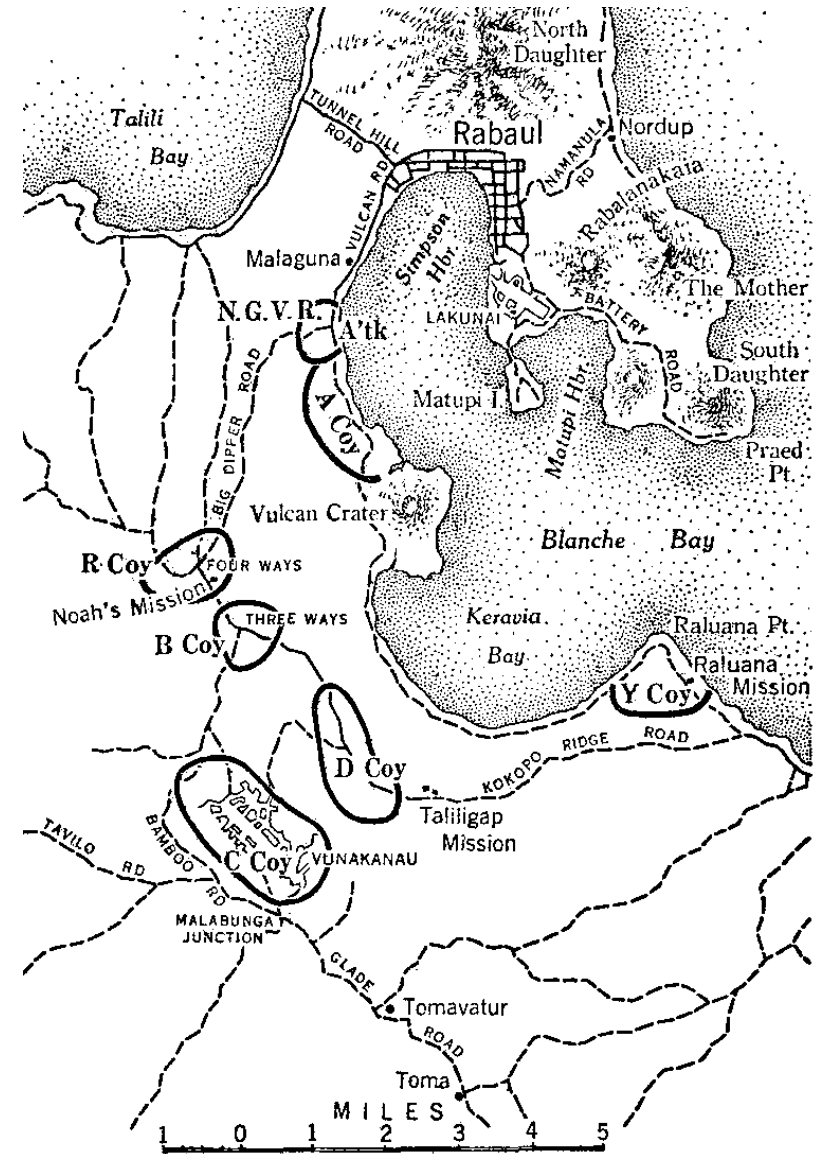
- Anderson quickly sent two A Coy platoons into the fight—one to make a frontal attack, while the other moved along the ridge against the enemy's right flank.
- When the attack had been launched, B company was moved back, parallel with the road, towards the ridge, to come in on the enemy's rear. These tactics caught the assailants on the wrong foot.
- One of B coy platoon commanders, recorded that the Japanese "literally ran round in circles". ...
- The third platoon of A company was thrown in against the Japanese right flank, to complete their confusion. It joined B company in a bayonet charge and hand-to-hand fighting. The Japanese were routed, leaving some 140 dead, as against ten Australians killed and fifteen wounded, most of them in A company.
- his companies becoming fully committed as the morning of the 19th wore on meeting threats from the south and north-west. Keegan's company (B) was again heavily attacked, but with the assistance of Bren carriers and Indian mortars, it drove the Japanese off and inflicted further substantial losses.
- Such reserves as Anderson possessed were sent to help resist attacks, which had reached serious proportions, on his companies.

20 January Bakri

- Keegan's company moved off at 7 a.m., but was held up at a swamp defile by Japanese dug in on a slight rise south of the road, and by a roadblock.
- The company fought vigorously, and Lieutenant Ibbott, a 36 year old farmer from Cootamundra, led a gallant flank attack in which he and three of his men reached the Japanese trenches before they were killed.
- Anderson's column encountered another and stronger block soon after midday on the 20th, comprised of some of the battalion's own vehicles reinforced by tree-trunks, and with troops, estimated at two companies or more, with six heavy machine-guns, entrenched on a slight ridge beside it.
- The number of wounded with the convoy now became a serious problem.

23rd January – Rabaul

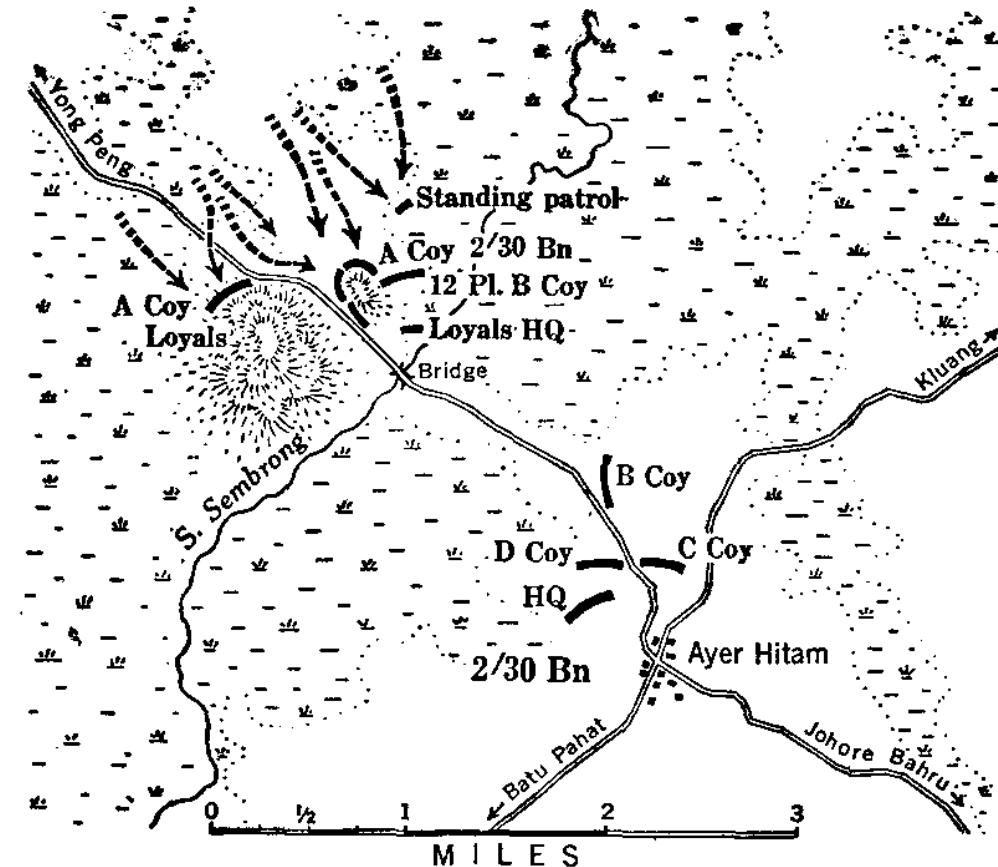
- On Y company's position at Raluana, Japanese had landed at 2.45 between Tolmer's pioneers and Milne's platoon.
 - The enemy overran the forward sections of company headquarters and Captain Shier gave the order to withdraw.
 - The company fell back in stages, platoon by platoon, to transport waiting on the Vulcan Ridge road, and began embussing.
 - At 3.30 the Japanese began infiltrating through the position and were fired on by a rearguard section which remained.
 - At 3.50 the last of the company withdrew from Raluana, joining a procession of trucks moving slowly in the darkness up the steep winding track towards Taliligap.



Dispositions, 2 a.m. 23rd January

25th January - Malaya

- At Ayer Hitam heavy tropical rain added to the discomfort of the troops on the 25th.
 - Patrol actions commenced at dawn and gradually developed into general fighting in the forward area, with heavy fire against the defenders and the bridge.
 - Near mid-afternoon attacking troops were led by an officer bearing a large Japanese flag.
 - He was shot down, and
 - so were a second and a third who attempted to carry it forward.
 - Beaten back by Australian small arms and mortar fire, the Japanese abandoned their emblem.
 - In the latter part of the afternoon the Japanese made a two-company attack on the right flank of Anderson's company but were repulsed by the Australians and the Loyals, and left many casualties lying on the ground.
 - A second attack in greater strength became bogged down in swamp and under mortar fire. Then, as light was failing, the enemy heavily attacked a company of Loyals west of the road.
 - The Loyals held on until some of them were in hand-to-hand combat, but were outnumbered, and after suffering heavily were forced from their positions.
 - Although the Japanese had been made to pay heavily, the casualties of the 2/30th Battalion were only four killed and twelve wounded or missing.



Ayer Hitam, 24th-25th January

26th January - Malaya

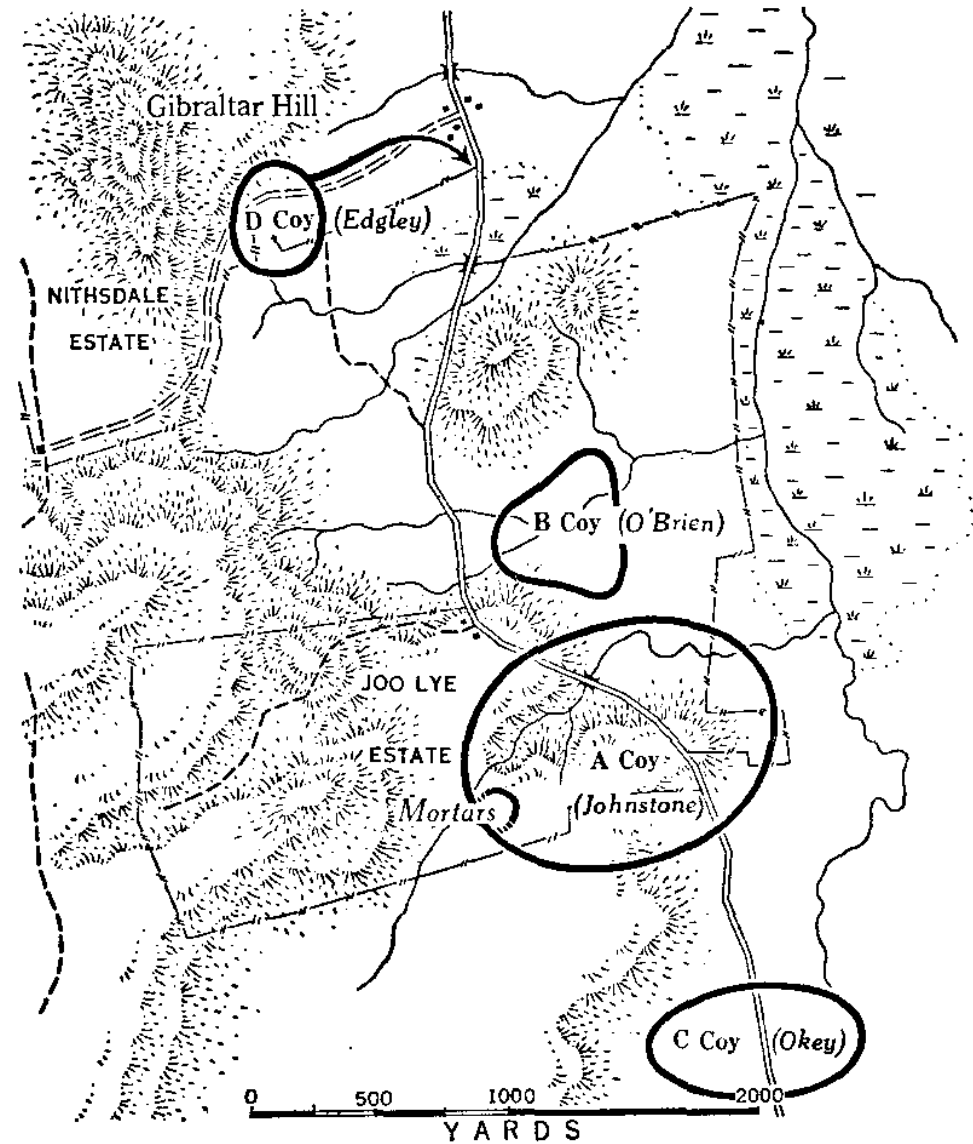
- On the 26th at 12.30 p.m. 53rd Brigade sent a column under Major Banham, of artillery, armoured cars, carriers and a detachment of infantry up the coast road towards Senggarang.
 - The column was in close formation when it ran into a road-block a little north of Rengit and was almost wiped out.
 - Only Banham's carrier broke through and continued on its way.
 - After negotiating a succession of Japanese road blocks, it dramatically toppled over the last one and reached Senggarang at 2 p.m. just as Brigadier Challen was about to launch a full-scale attempt to break through to the south.
- On Banham's report of the obstructions he had encountered, Challen decided that it would be useless to attempt to get his guns and vehicles to Benut.
- He therefore ordered them destroyed, the wounded to be left under the protection of the Red Cross, and the remaining troops to make their way across country past the enemy.



Universal Carrier

27th January - Malaya

- **East Coast**
- The 2/18th Battalion then planned a large-scale ambush.
- When the convoy was sighted on the 26th, it appeared that the 22nd Australian Brigade could expect to be attacked on a large scale. Arrangements were completed for the 2/18th's ambush, but with the stipulation, that the troops employed in it must withdraw through the 2/20th Battalion at Jemaluang immediately the ambush had been sprung.
- It was planned to let about a battalion of Japanese pass the two forward companies and come up on a block established by Johnstone's company. Guns of the 2/10th Field Regiment, the battalion mortars and machine-guns, would pound the trapped enemy, and an artillery barrage would creep forward, as Edgley's men moved in behind it.



Nithsdale Estate, 26th-27th January

2/18th Battalion's ambush positions

27th January - Land

- **East Coast**
- Patrols had exchanged shots with a Japanese patrol in the ambush area late in the afternoon of the 26th.
 - After dark increasing numbers of Japanese, finally estimated at battalion strength, were observed but allowed to pass into the area as arranged, despite the ideal target presented by enemy troops marching along the road in column of route.
 - Indiscriminate enemy fire, and the noise of crackers, broke out soon after midnight, apparently intended to make the Australians disclose their positions; but orders to hold fire were strictly observed.
 - Lieutenant Warden's platoon of Johnstone's company was attacked at 2 a.m on 27th., and retaliated with bayonets. Although the encounter was expensive for the Japanese, it resulted also in the death of the platoon commander, and two others.
- An hour later, when the pressure indicated that a large body of Japanese was engaged, the mortar and artillery fire was ordered.
 - Varley, who for some while had been vainly trying to get through to the forward companies by telephone, succeeded at this critical stage and ordered them to carry out the agreed plan.
 - Johnstone's company heard a stream of shells rushing over them into the defile, which became a shambles.
 - After about 20 minutes the barrage had moved far enough up the road to allow the forward companies to go into action.
 - Edgley's company's leading section attacked Japanese who were repairing a bridge; thereupon the Japanese fled to positions which had been hastily taken up by their force on high ground astride the road at the southern end of the defile. A two-platoon attack failed to dislodge them, and a platoon sent to their left flank was repulsed.
 - In savage encounters, the Australians discovered that the position was strongly held and came under an increasing volume of mortar and machine-gun fire, accompanied by grenades. Because of this, and communication difficulties, the fight was still raging when daylight came.
- O'Brien's company was also engaged, though with smaller numbers of the enemy, with whom it dealt successfully. It therefore moved towards the Japanese stronghold encountered by Edgley and itself encountered severe resistance.
- The battalion's losses in the ambush action were six officers and 92 others killed or missing; but the Japanese losses appeared to have been far heavier.

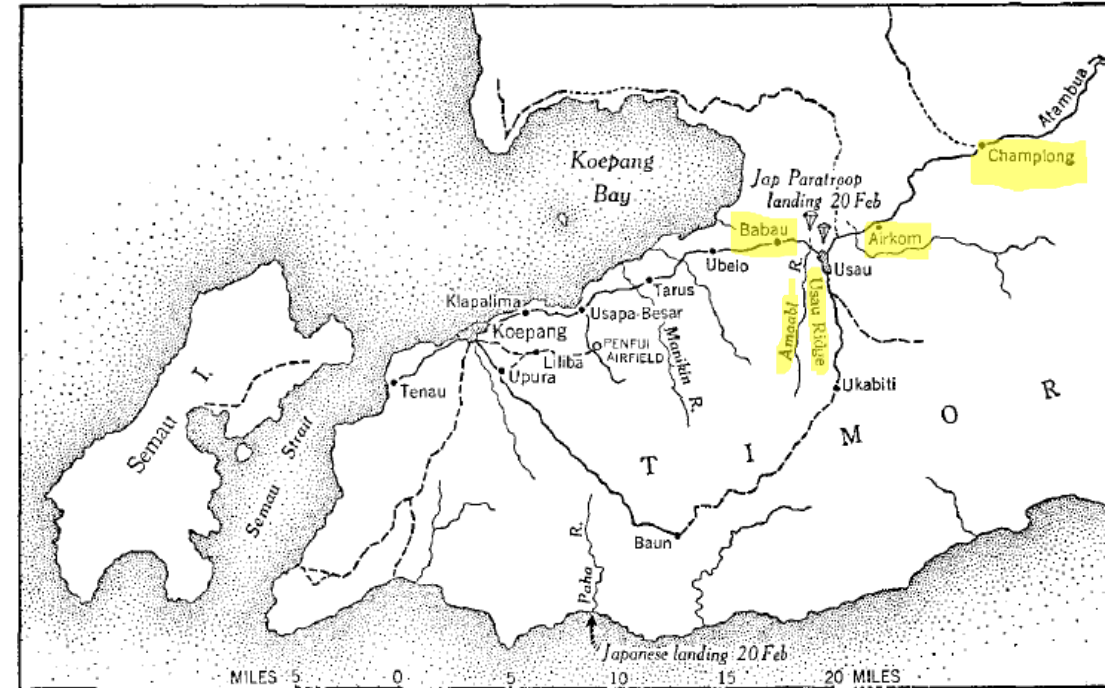
20th February – Dutch Timor

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

22nd February - Timor

- **Land**

- By 5.30 a.m. on 22nd February Sparrow force was concentrated in Babau.
- It was found that several captured Australians, including a medical orderly, had been tied to trees, and had their throats cut. One man, forced by the paratroops to carry a wireless set, had been bayoneted when he collapsed of exhaustion. He was still alive when his comrades found him, but died later.
- Leggatt decided to move the whole force on to Champlong. All rations and ammunition in Babau having been issued, the column passed the start-line at 8 o'clock. About a mile from Babau a road-block was seen at the bridge over the Amaabi River and many Japanese, with a mountain gun, were seen digging in on the Usau ridge over which the road passed.
- Three attacks on the roadblock and the ridge in company strength with mortar and machine gun support had failed and an enemy force pursuing the column was being held off by the rearguard, when a battalion strength attack went in at 5.25 pm.
- The fire support for the attack on Usau ridge was intense, and the ridge became obscured by dust and smoke. Roff's company on the right met fierce fire and soon he and his second-in-command, Lieutenant Gatenby, had been killed and a platoon commander and several NCOs wounded.
- At this stage the enemy still occupied the ridge to the right, the troops on the right were pinned down, Johnston's company was clearing the enemy from the village and the reverse slope, and Burr's, having made a wide sweep on the left, was approaching the village at right angles to the road, having lost heavily during its advance. The ridge was strewn with Japanese dead.
- "R" Company rushed the ridge. This company consisted of reinforcements who had enlisted in December 1941, arrived in Timor on 16th January with little training, and were now attached to Johnston's company, they killed all the surviving Japanese but one, whom they captured.



- From 6.5 p.m. the vehicles moved through Usau. Trevena's company, fighting from a series of rearguard positions, had protected them against the strong enemy force in the rear.
- At this stage Captain Johnston was killed moving forward to give orders to the head of the column. Maddern then went forward and ordered the move to begin, and the Intelligence officer reported that the area ahead was clear of the enemy. The men were now nearly exhausted. When, at 9 p.m., the convoy was still not moving Maddern went forward again and found the leading driver asleep. He set the column moving and it was at Airkom by 11.30. Some of the trucks had carried 30 men, and the Bofors tractors carried up to 60.

22nd February - Burma

- The 17th Indian Infantry Division had given "everything it had" at the Battle of Bilin River and was already weak. Now in retreat, they received permission to withdraw across the Sittang on 19 February. They disengaged from the enemy under cover of night, and fell back 30 miles (50 km) westwards along the track that led to the Sittang railway bridge.
- A small British Indian force made up of detachments from several different units defended the bridge.
- The remainder of the division were still further east, retreating along a jungle track towards the bridge, tied to the track by its motor transport. Strong Japanese forces moving round the flank cut in between the retreating brigades and the bridge.
- Desperately the two brigades east of the river fought to break through to the great Sittang railway bridge over the six hundred yard wide river.
- General Smyth had ordered his sappers to get ready to blow the bridge. In the early morning on 22 February, it became clear that the Japanese might capture the bridge within the hour.
- Smyth was roused in the middle of the night to be told that the small bridgehead on the east bank could hold out no longer, that the Japanese were almost on the bridge itself, his choices were to destroy the bridge, stranding more than half of his own troops on the wrong side, or to let it stand and possibly give the Japanese a clear march to Rangoon. He decided the bridge must be destroyed, and at 05:30 on 22 February, the bridge was blown up.
- The brigades broke through to the river bank but then had to destroy their arms and equipment before swimming the river. A number were drowned.
- The 17th Division's infantry manpower after Sittang was 3,484—just over 40% of its establishment, though it was already well under-strength before the battle started. Most of its artillery, vehicles and other heavy equipment was lost. Between them, they had 550 rifles, ten Bren guns and 12 tommy guns remaining. Most had lost their boots swimming the river.



1st March - Java

- B-17s and A24s of the U.S. 7th and 27th Bomb Groups, Vildebeest torpedo-bombers from 36 Squadron RAF and a Dutch Dornier flying boat worked round the clock to harass the eastern invading convoy at Kragan.
- Though they suffered some losses in troops and damage to their ships, the Japanese, with moonlight and calm weather to aid them, went ashore.
- Only one company of Dutch troops opposed them and these were quickly overcome. The invasion force then moved rapidly inland in two columns,
 - One towards Surabaya,
 - The other towards Tjilatjap.



Japanese invasion of Java

1st March - Java

- The convoy that landed at Eretanwetan had been sighted while it was still about 50 miles off shore. By this time there were only two Hudsons still combat-worthy, but these joined with the Blenheims in the attack.
 - One made three successive sorties over the convoy, on two of which they scored a direct hit on an enemy transport.
 - The attack was maintained late into the night and when it ceased the crews had almost reached complete exhaustion.
 - At daylight the invaders were attacked by twelve Hurricanes from 242 and 605 Squadrons RAF together with nine Brewsters and three Glenn Martins from the KNIL Air Force,
 - but a column moving in trucks and tanks, reached Kalidjati airfield (50 miles from the landing site) about 10 a.m. (on the 1st) achieving complete surprise.
 - The defenders, mostly British anti-aircraft gunners armed as infantry were caught in the process of withdrawing but went into action at close range and suffered heavy casualties.
- 2 of the 4 airworthy Hudsons took off for Andir, the Bandung airfield.
- Before the other 2 aircraft could be taken off the advanced elements of the Japanese column had reached the outskirts of the aerodrome.
- The defenders' stand gave one crew time to reach one of the remaining Hudsons and Flying Officer Gibbes, who had been unable to find a crew, time to race to the other.



Lockheed Hudson

- As both aircraft taxied out for take-off, Gibbes having started the engines of his Hudson single-handed, the enemy tanks opened fire on them, but before the tank gunners could get their sights adjusted both aircraft took off and escaped.
- Although alone, Gibbes circled and flew low over the aerodrome, firing his two forward guns into the enemy troops before setting course for Andir.

10 May - Burma

- On 10 May the Japanese finally caught Burma Corps at Shwegyin, where the road crossed the Chindwin river by ferry.
 - The ferry steamers were not built for vehicles and the process of getting transport, guns and tanks across the river was a struggle.
 - After two days of airstrikes on the force still trapped on the east bank, the Japanese mounted a strong attack on the perimeter, reaching high ground overlooking the jetty and preventing further operation of the ferries.
 - After desperate efforts to counterattack and dislodge them from the high ground had failed, the British withdrew along a jungle track with only what a mule or a man could carry.
- Burma Corps lost two thirds of its artillery, all its tanks and the majority of its transport although most of the four wheel drive trucks had been saved.
- They still had 200 kilometres to go to reach Imphal in India, some of it over steep mountain tracks.

Why was the Japanese army so successful?

- Experience, they had been fighting a war in China since 1937, including many amphibious landings.
- They were very effective at night operations, which reduce the advantage that well prepared defences have over attackers.
- When tanks and trucks were available they lead the advance but if the tanks got stopped they had a very effective drill to unload the infantry and start outflanking operations.
- If they did get past the flank of the defenders they quickly established a defensive road block across the defenders lines of communication, forcing the defenders to attack and clear the roadblock and suffer the casualties involved in attacking an entrenched position.
- They travelled light and moved quickly.
- Engineering operations to clear lines of communications and rebuild bridges were pursued with extraordinary speed.
- They had been very successful at commandeering local resources.
- They had not been deterred or even slowed down by heavy casualties.
- By retaining the initiative they obtained the freedom to eat when hungry, sleep when tired and apply all available forces at the critical point of the battle.

Why was the Japanese Navy so Successful?

5 April 1942 - Sea

- At 1 p.m., when the two cruisers were about 220 miles from Colombo, Cornwall sighted two enemy reconnaissance aircraft which shadowed them.
- Forty minutes later the dive bombers arrived, and within little more than a quarter of an hour first Dorsetshire and then Cornwall were sunk in a series of fierce attacks by waves of dive-bombing aircraft.
- Force "A" was then about 90 miles to the south-west.
- News of the enemy aircraft shadowing the cruisers had been received in a garbled signal by Force "A", where concern for the cruisers' safety was raised by subsequent wireless silence, and heightened about 3 p.m. by an intercepted wireless message from a reconnaissance aircraft reporting wreckage and a large number of survivors in the sea in the approximate position of the cruisers.
- This news, coupled with the numerous reports he was receiving of powerful enemy surface groups, brought home to the Commander-in-Chief that he was opposed by an enemy much superior in strength, and he decided to turn back and concentrate with Force "B".

6 June - Sea

- **Midway**
- The two damaged Japanese heavy cruisers Mogami and Mikuma were lagging far behind in the withdrawal.
 - As lone, lame ducks, they suffered three air attacks during the 6th, by aircraft from Midway Island, Enterprise and Hornet.
 - Mogami, reduced to a battered hulk, managed to make Truk.
 - Mikuma sank during the night of the 6th.
- Just after dark, Spruance, now 400 miles to the west of Midway, turned his ships back east to rendezvous with his oilers.



Mikuma

Carrier Dive Bombers



American - Douglas SBD

- Crew – 2
- Max speed – 410 km/h
- Range – 1,795 km
- Bomb load – 1,020 kg



British - Fairey Albacore

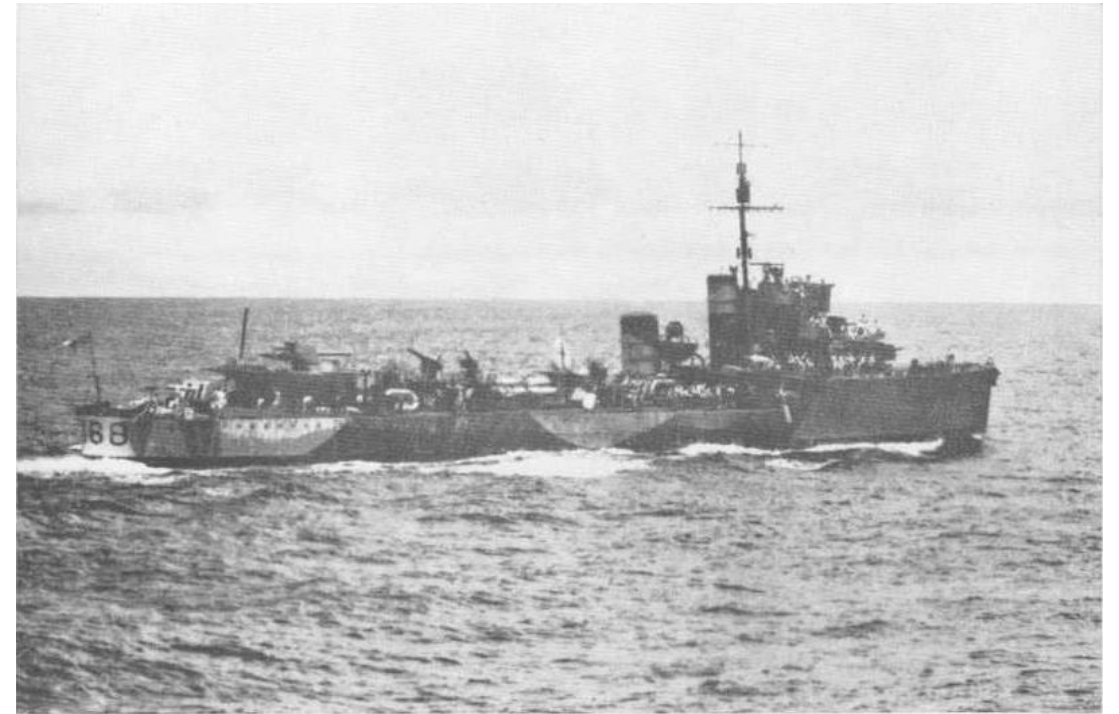
- Crew - three
- Max Speed – 259 km/h
- Range – 1,497 km
- Bomb load – 907 kg bombs or a torpedo
- The Albacores were equipped with ASV radar

9 April - Air

- **Ceylon**
- The expected Japanese air raid on Trincomalee took place at 7 a.m. on 9th April.
- The raid was detected by radar, and 17 Hurricanes of No. 261 Squadron R.A.F., and six Fulmar aircraft of No. 873 Squadron (which had been landed from Hermes) intercepted.
- About 55 Japanese bombers and 40 to 50 fighters, flying at 15,000 feet, bombed the China Bay airfield and the dockyard, causing major damage.
 - Thirteen Fleet Air Arm aircraft under erection or repair were destroyed, and
 - the monitor Erebus slightly damaged and the merchant ship Sagaing (7,958 tons) set on fire and beached.
 - Fifteen Japanese aircraft were claimed shot down by defending fighters for the loss of eight Hurricanes and three Fulmars, and
 - another nine were claimed by anti-aircraft guns.
- A striking force of nine Blenheims of No 11 Squadron R.A.F. sighted a Japanese force of three battleships, four or five carriers and four or five cruisers with destroyers, and attacked from 11,000 feet against heavy opposition, apparently without damaging the enemy ships.
- All of the Blenheims attacked and survived the anti aircraft fire but they were then attacked by forty or fifty fighters.
- Five of the Blenheims failed to return and the other four were damaged and unserviceable.
 - The Blenheim gunners claimed four defenders shot down.
 - Nine of the fifteen aircrew lost in the Blenheims were Australian.

9 April - Sea

- Ceylon
- Sixteen bombers then made for Vampire.
- Two near-misses shook the ship badly, and she was then stopped by a direct hit in the boiler room.
- Four hits followed in quick succession, and Vampire's captain, Commander Moran, R.A.N., ordered "abandon ship".
- Floats and rafts were launched when another hit broke the ship's back.
- The bow sank quickly, and the stern, which floated for some time, followed at 11.2 a.m. after a heavy explosion, presumably of the magazine.
- Between them Hermes and Vampire claimed four enemy aircraft shot down.
- Commander Moran, who was last seen on the bridge of Vampire, and seven ratings were lost.
- 307 men were lost from Hermes.
- 590 of the survivors from both ships were rescued by the hospital ship Vita and landed at Colombo that evening, some others were picked up by local craft or swam ashore.

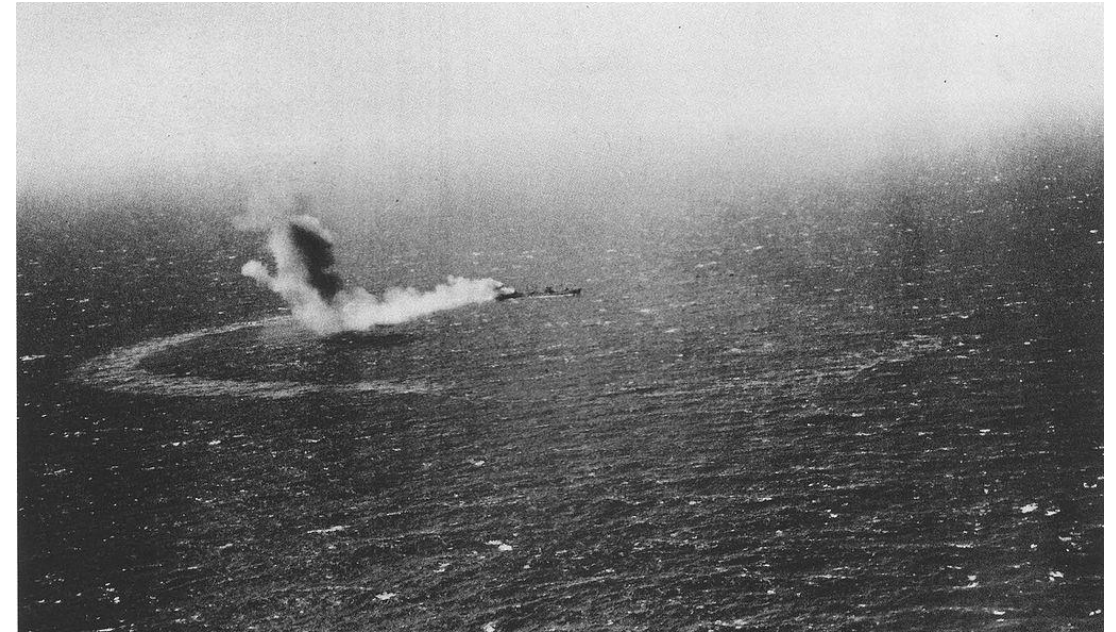


H.M.A.S. Vampire, 4th March 1942.

(R.A.N. Historical Section)

7 May

- **Neosho and Sims**
- Neosho and Sims were attacked by 36 dive bombers at noon.
- The Sims was hit by three bombs and within a few minutes she buckled amidships and sank stern first.
 - All hands began to abandon ship.
 - As the sea reached the top of the stack a tremendous explosion lifted the remains of the ship ten or fifteen feet out of the water.
 - Chief Signalman Dicken began picking up survivors in a damaged whaleboat but he found only 15 men alive.
- 20 dive-bombers concentrated on the Neosho.
 - Within a few minutes they scored 7 direct hits and 8 near misses.
 - The captain ordered “prepare to abandon ship, and stand by”.
 - A lot of sailors, who had just seen Sims blow up and sink, jumped overboard without waiting for further orders.
 - Two boats and some rafts were lowered or thrown overboard and a number of premature evacuees were brought back on board, but many were drowned and others, who had climbed onto rafts, drifted away as night fell.



Neosho, left burning after the Japanese dive bombing attack, drifted westerly before the trades with no power or communications and all hands frantically trying to keep her afloat.

27th January



HMAS Vampire
1,200 tons, 4 * 4-inch guns, 34 knots,
120 crew, launched 1916.

- **Malaya**
- The destroyers H.M.A.S. *Vampire* and H.M.S. *Thanet* were ordered to attack the Japanese concentration at Endau, and left Singapore at 4.30 p.m. on the 26th. They steamed northwards, adjusting speed to arrive off Endau after moonset;
- shortly before 2 a.m. on the 27th Moran, *Vampire*'s commanding officer led in at 15 knots towards Endau with the dark bulk of Pulau Tioman (an off shore island) as a concealing background.
- At 2.37 a.m. *Vampire* sighted a vessel, believed a destroyer, on the starboard bow. *Vampire* was apparently not sighted, and accordingly left this ship in the hope of finding a concentration farther in;
- three minutes later she sighted what seemed to be a second destroyer "right ahead and close". Moran altered to port, passed about 600 yards off, and fired two of his three torpedoes. Both missed.
- Meanwhile *Vampire* and *Thanet* lost the two Japanese ships in the darkness and continued in some seven or eight miles towards Endau until 3.13 a.m. when, having failed to sight any concentration, Moran altered course to S.E.by E. and increased to full speed.
- At 3.18 *Vampire* sighted a destroyer on the port bow. Moran told *Thanet* to fire her torpedoes. *Vampire* herself fired her one remaining torpedo, and again missed.
- There followed a brief, confused melee, with *Vampire* and *Thanet* retiring S.E. by E. at full speed and both sides engaging with gun fire.
- At about 4 a.m. *Thanet* was hit. "Great clouds of black smoke issued from her," recorded Moran, who tried to cover her withdrawal with a smoke screen. But the British ship was disabled and stopped, and was last seen by *Vampire*, her guns silent, with a pronounced list to starboard and smoking heavily.
- Moran believed he scored two shell hits on a destroyer; and that the Japanese ships engaged and damaged each other in the confusion.
- *Thanet* sank at about 4.20 a.m. on the 27th January 1942.
- *Vampire* suffered no damage or casualties, made good her escape, and reached the Singapore naval base at 10 o'clock that morning.

27th February - Sea

- **Java Sea**
- An allied aircraft sighted two Japanese cruisers and a destroyer flotilla, 100 miles north west of Bawean Island, steering south east. The report reached Doorman at 2.27 p.m. as he was entering Surabaya.
- Doorman at once turned his force and proceeded to sea again to seek and attack the convoy. Visibility was extreme. Electra first sighted the Japanese at 4.12 p.m., fine on the starboard bow, distant about ten miles, and crossing from starboard to port. The Japanese had two heavy and two light cruisers and twelve destroyers against the allies' two heavy and three light cruisers and nine destroyers.
- Doorman increased speed to 26 knots and held his north-west course, closing the range, which at 4.16 p.m., when the Japanese opened fire, was about 28,000 yards for the heavy cruisers, shooting at *Exeter* and *Houston*; and 18,000 for a light cruiser shooting at *Electra*.
- *Exeter*, *Houston* and *Perth* opened fire as targets came within range.



Admiral Doorman's flagship, the light cruiser,
HNLMS de Ruyter

27th February - Sea

- At 4.29 the Allied force altered course to W.S.W., parallel to the Japanese. About this time (4.31 p.m.) *De Ruyter* was hit in the auxiliary engine room by an 8-inch shell which failed to explode.
- Observers in *Perth*, *Exeter* and *Houston* believed they saw hits on enemy ships at this stage. The Japanese *destroyers* made smoke which temporarily obscured the opponents from each other, but the Japanese, with the aid of three spotting float-planes, maintained accurate gun fire.
- At 4.35 p.m. Doorman, again trying to get his light cruisers into action, altered course to west, and soon afterwards to N.W. by W.
- About 5.00 pm *Exeter* was hit in a boiler room by an 8-inch shell; six of the eight boilers were put out of action; and speed was reduced to 11 knots.
- During the confusion caused by *Exeter* falling out of line, at 5.15 *Kortenaer* blew up close ahead of *Perth*. "She capsized and dived under in a few seconds, then broke in halves." Tracks of other torpedoes were seen, but no other ships were hit.
- At 5.40 p.m. Doorman ordered the damaged *Exeter* to retire to Surabaya, escorted by *Witte de With*.



The heavy cruiser HMS Exeter

27th February - Sea

- Doorman ordered the British destroyers to attack. Because of smoke, made by *Perth* and destroyers covering *Exeter*, visibility was down to half a mile. *Electra* drove through the smoke and cleared its northern fringe just as three enemy destroyers were entering on opposite course. In a rapid exchange of fire (in which *Electra* claimed hits on the enemy leader) the British destroyer received a shell in a boiler room which immobilised her.
- A Japanese destroyer returned to the immobilised *Electra*, and though that ship fought back, quickly silenced her guns one by one. "Abandon ship" was ordered when only one gun was left firing. Apparently all survivors were in the water, when *Electra* finally sank slowly out of sight about 6 p.m.
- By 6.30 p.m. contact between the opposing forces was lost. Doorman led the Striking Force north-east, and subsequently on various courses searching for the convoy. About 8.00 pm Doorman led round to south. He had, it seems, concluded that he could not get at the convoy to the northward, and his best plan would be to go south and steam west along the coast, hoping to intercept there.
- at about 9 p.m. some 50 miles north-west of Surabaya the four American destroyers (having no torpedoes left) broke off and proceeded to Surabaya to refuel.
- Doorman swung west, and steamed along the coast close inshore. At 9.25, when about eight-and-a-half miles N.N.E. of Tuban, a heavy explosion wrecked and stopped *Jupiter*. It was thought that she had been torpedoed.
- Doorman turned northwards again, his every move being noted and passed on by the Japanese reconnaissance aircraft which watched him in the moonlight and dropped lines of bright calcium flares across his line of advance at each change of course.
- just before 11 p.m. two Japanese cruisers were sighted on the port bow by the Allied force. The Japanese increased speed, turned to a parallel course, and gun fire was exchanged, accurate but slow—both sides were tiring.
- The Japanese now launched a torpedo attack and hit *De Ruyter* and *Java*, which both blew up and sank, some 25 miles south-west of Bawean Island at about 11 p.m. on the 27th. *Perth* just escaped collision with *De Ruyter* by violent helm and engine manoeuvres. Doorman went down with his flagship.
- Waller (captain of *Perth*) took *Houston* under his orders, made a feint to the south-east, and then turned direct to Batavia at high speed.

4 April 1942 - Sea

- **Indian Ocean**

- Somerville reached Addu Atoll on the 4th, and started to water and fuel. At 4 p.m. a Catalina reconnaissance aircraft from Colombo reported a large enemy force 360 miles S.E. of Ceylon, steering north-west. Before it could report the composition of the force it was shot down.
- Admiral Somerville at Addu Atoll appreciated that the enemy's intention would be a dawn air attack on Colombo and Trincomalee, followed by a retirement to the eastward after he had recovered his aircraft. Somerville accordingly instructed Dorsetshire and Cornwall to sail from Colombo forthwith and join him in a position south-west of Ceylon, and, leaving Admiral Willis and the 3rd Battle Squadron (Force "B") to follow him as soon as ready, he sailed that night (4th) with Force "A"—Warspite (flag), *Indomitable*, *Formidable*, *Emerald*, *Enterprise*, *Napier*, *Nizam*, *Nestor*, and three R.N. destroyers.

- **Japanese waters**

- On 4th April Thresher aimed torpedoes at a merchantman in Japan waters. The fish appeared to be passing under but there were no explosions and no damage done to the enemy.

19th February - Sea

- **Bali**
- That night (18th/19th) an enemy convoy arrived in Sanur Roads, and proceeded to land troops in eastern Bali.
 - At daylight on the 19th Allied aircraft began a series of attacks on the convoy and escorts. Flying Fortresses made 11 sorties and claimed 5 direct hits. Two Dauntless dive bombers of No. 91 Squadron at Malang also attacked, using makeshift bombsights, they claimed hits on a cruiser and a transport.
 - The attacking airmen estimated the invading force at two cruisers, four or five destroyers and four transports.
 - Some damage was also inflicted by the U.S. submarine *Seawolf*, which attacked with torpedoes during the afternoon of the 19th.
 - The Japanese, however, successfully landed the assault force. There was no resistance on shore, and the aerodrome was promptly secured.
- Doorman arrived off Sanur in line ahead with *De Ruyter* in the lead, followed by *Java*. *Piet Hein* led the destroyer column three miles astern.
 - *Java* was the first to sight enemy ships to port, and opened fire at 10.25 p.m.
 - The Japanese destroyers illuminated with search - light and star shell and returned fire.
 - There followed a melee in which *a transport* was hit by *Java's* gun fire and possibly by a torpedo from *Ford*; and the Dutch destroyer *Piet Hein* was sunk, either by Japanese gun fire or torpedoes.
- Soon after 11 p.m. the action was over.
 - The Dutch cruisers headed north-east through Lombok Strait to round Bali north about to Surabaya;
 - the American destroyers headed south to return westwards to Tjilatjap.

20th February - Sea

- About two-and-a-half hours later the second Allied wave, the Surabaya force, which rounded the eastern tip of Java through Bali Strait and then followed in the wake of Doorman 's force, arrived off Sanur soon after 1.30 a.m. on 20th February.
 - With the American destroyers, led by *Stewart*, in the van; and with *Tromp* astern to follow up a torpedo attack with her 5.9-inch gun fire;
 - the column sped in to Badung Strait at 25 knots.
 - Again the action was a melee in which the initial Japanese opponents were *two destroyers*.
 - They were unharmed by the twenty or so torpedoes fired by the destroyers and had the best of a gun fire exchange in which they scored hits on *Stewart*, causing casualties, and flooding in the engine room.
- Apparently the first blow to land on the enemy was by *Tromp*, which soon after 2 a.m. hit one of the destroyers forward of the bridge with gun fire. *Tromp* herself meanwhile suffered hits in return. Shortly after, contact was lost with the Japanese ships, and the Allied force continued on north eastwards.
- At 2.19 a.m. on the 20th the retiring Allied force met two more Japanese destroyers head on. In a hot action of only a few minutes, in which both sides fired guns and torpedoes,
 - a Japanese destroyer was badly hit by *Pillsbury*, *Edwards*, and *Tromp*, so that she was immobilised and
 - *Tromp* took some punishment in return.
 - The Allied ships continued on to the north-east through Lombok Strait, cleared Bali by 3 a.m., and retired to Surabaya.
 - *Tromp*, severely damaged by ten shell hits had to be sent to Australia for repairs.

28 April

- **Pacific**
- Lt Cdr Fenno in the fleet submarine Trout was 35 days out from Pearl on patrol off the south coast of Honshu. In a midnight attack Trout slapped a torpedo into a patrol vessel, which sank in two minutes.
- As dawn was breaking, Fenno missed a cargo ship, and two hours later, a pair of torpedoes failed against a loaded tanker.
- Fenno was bewildered at the failure, the target should have been a sure thing.
- Trout now turned for home, having fired 22 torpedoes, observed 7 hits and sunk three ships.



USS Trout

Despite a number of bewildering failures this was the most successful American submarine patrol so far, which highlighted the fact that the achievements to date of the 73 submarines in the Pacific and Asiatic fleets had been intensely disappointing.

16 May - Sea

- **South China Sea**
- On 16 May Lt Cdr “Red” Coe in Skipjack saw the wake of one of his torpedoes pass directly under a fat transport off Camranh Bay. It was the second time it had happened on that patrol.
- **Australian Coast**
- At 8.34 p.m. on the 16th (May) an intercepted radio message reported the Russian steamer Wellen (5,135 tons) being attacked by gunfire approximately 30 miles east of Newcastle.
- Merchant sailings from Sydney and Newcastle were suspended for 24 hours.
- An anti-submarine search with all available A/S craft; and air searches were carried out without finding the enemy.
- Wellen reached Newcastle at 2.30 a.m. on the 17th, having suffered slight damage. Her captain, one officer, and one rating were injured.
- The submarine had fired seven rounds at 100 yards range, and Wellen replied with low angle and machine-gun fire, whereupon the enemy submerged, the flooding of tanks being heard in Wellen.



“Red” Coe, CO, Skipjack

29 May - Sea

- Skipjack returned to Fremantle having sunk three ships but these had not obliterated the memory of the unexplained torpedo failures. Coe wrote in his report:
 - “To make round trips of 8,500 miles into enemy waters to gain attack positions undetected within 800 yards of enemy ships only to find that torpedoes run deep and over half the time will fail to function, seems to me an undesirable manner of gaining information which might be determined any morning within a few miles of a torpedo station in the presence of comparatively few hazards”
- As far back as December Lt Cdr Jacobs, CO of Sargo, had experimented with shallow depth settings and had inactivated the magnetic exploder, hoping to account for the failure of 13 torpedoes to explode.
- Later he requested test firing to check depth control.
- Complaints to the Bureau of Ordnance brought the reply in February that the torpedoes ran four feet deeper than the setting only during the first half mile of their run.



James Wiggins (Red) Coe, CO USS Skipjack

20 June

- **Sea**
- On 20 – 21 June Captain Fife, of the South West Pacific Command, took matters into his own hands and caused torpedoes to be fired, under his personal supervision, against a fisherman's net target. The results proved that the torpedoes ran about ten feet deeper than set.
- **Land**
- On 20th June General Blamey ordered Morris to take steps to prepare to oppose the enemy on possible lines of advance from the north coast and to secure the Kokoda area



Captain James Fife

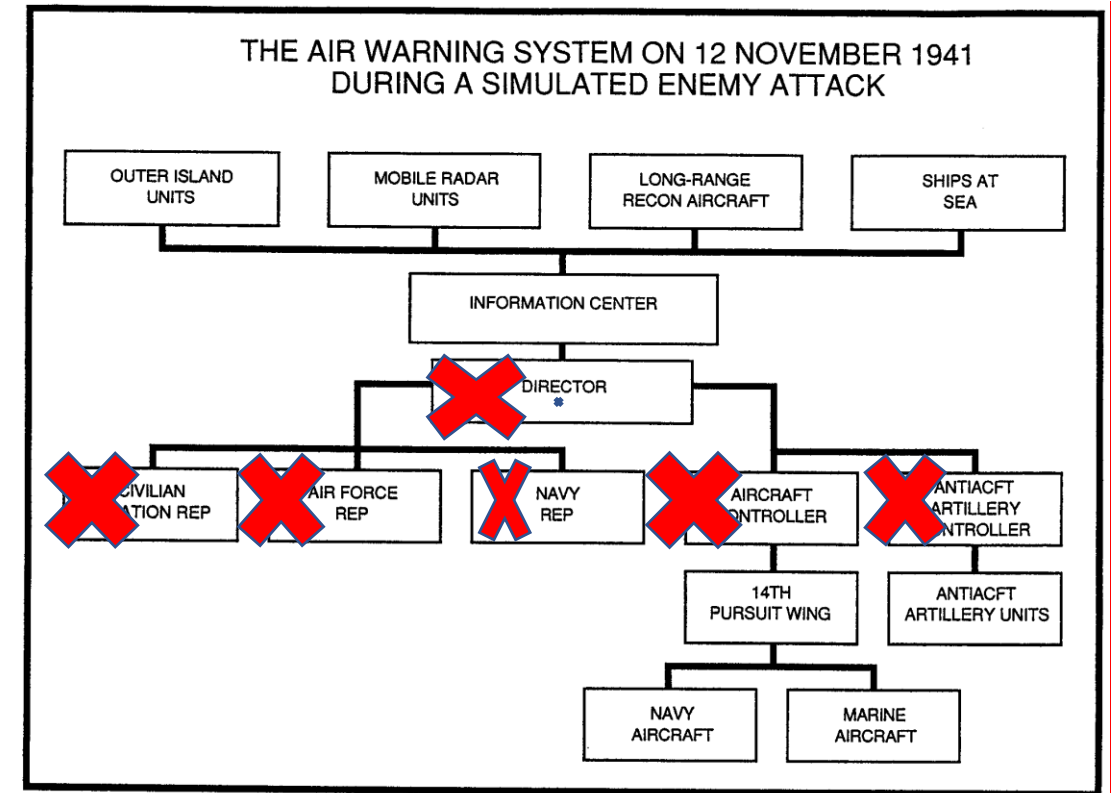
Why was the Japanese Navy so successful

- The Japanese carrier forces had achieved extraordinary successes against ships and land targets. The skill of their pilots and the effectiveness of their aircraft and weapons attracted comment everywhere.
 - Their performance at sinking warships with bombs and torpedoes was markedly better than the US Navy and the Royal Navy had no aircraft even remotely comparable.
 - The US Navy's victories in the Coral Sea and at Midway had been achieved with a huge intelligence advantage. That advantage had now been taken away by a new Japanese code book.
- The Japanese had won nearly all encounters between naval surface forces, most of which had occurred between evenly matched forces.
 - Their margin of superiority was greater at night than in daylight.
 - Japanese torpedoes were lethal. American and British torpedoes were not.

The Japanese Air War

Warnings and what became of them

- The Hawaiian air warning system (AWS), consisted of radar units, an air warning center, and the 14th Pursuit Wing at Wheeler. The air warning center contained an information center, fighter director, and an aircraft/ anti-aircraft weapon control system.
- In an exercise on 12 November 1941, the Navy launched a simulated strike from a carrier 80 miles out to sea. The radar stations easily picked up the attackers, the centre quickly identified them as enemy aircraft, and within six minutes interceptor aircraft were airborne and met the attacking force 30 miles from the island.
- Under the alert in force on 7th December, against sabotage with no external threat, the AWS was only manned to train radar operators and the plotters in the information centre.



Boxes crossed out were not required to be manned under the alert in effect on 7th December

1941 Australian Defence

- In February the War Cabinet advised by the chiefs of staff and Brooke Popham decided
 - that the 8th Division, instead of joining the Australian Corps in the Middle East as had been intended, be retained for use in the Australian area and East Asia.
 - to send one A.I.F. battalion to Rabaul.
 - and to hold two other such groups ready to go to Timor and Ambon when war became an immediate threat.
 - to move one A.I.F. infantry brigade group, to the Darwin-Alice Springs area. These, with units already at Darwin, could provide one battalion for Timor and one brigade group for the Darwin area, as well as coast and anti-aircraft units.
 - to distribute one militia battalion between Port Moresby and Thursday Island;
 - and decided to raise two reserve motor transport companies and one motor ambulance unit for service in Malaya, to overcome a shortage of drivers there which Brooke-Popham had mentioned.
- The latest intelligence on the performance of Japanese carrier aircraft was given to the War Cabinet by the Minister for Air in January 1941.
 - Of chief interest was a new naval single-seater fighter. Its armament was said to be two 20-mm cannon and two 7.7-mm machine-guns and its top speed was given as 300 miles an hour.
 - The Minister for the Army referred to the impression that the Wirraway would generally be able to counter Japanese seaborne aircraft. This information suggested that the Wirraway would not be able to compete with them.
 - Burnett, the CAS, who was present, replied that he thought the high-powered Japanese aircraft referred to would be relatively few in number. Having regard to the type of Japanese aircraft that would be used in an attack on Australia he believed that the Wirraway would be able to make "quite a good show". It was an obsolete type, but it had some fighting value.
- Neither Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation or Government aircraft factories had achieved their scheduled deliveries. The delays were blamed on failures of deliveries of tools, materials and components from overseas due to failures of suppliers and the sinking of ships by enemy action. An increase from 180 to 270 in the number of Beauforts to be built in Australia was approved by the War Cabinet on 12th February 1941.

8th December 1941

- At Kota Bharu Flt Lt Mitchell departs for Singora at first light in the reconnaissance Beaufort.
 - He finds a Japanese invasion force with 15 transports and numerous naval escorts off Singora and Japanese aircraft on the airfield there, and starts taking photographs at 20,000 feet.
 - He ignores a sighting of Japanese fighters based on intelligence briefings that they would not be able to reach the speedy high flying Beaufort.
 - The next thing he knows the fighters were all around him like hornets and tracer is passing his windscreen and the next second it is hitting the side of the aircraft down near his feet.
 - After the first pass he goes into a steep turn, then the port engine is hit, the Beaufort rolls over on its back and starts to spin.
 - It is down to 10,000 feet before Mitchell can get out of the spin and head for the nearest cloud. Both gunners were slightly wounded but they claimed one Japanese fighter destroyed.
- At Kuantan 8 Hudsons of No. 8 Squadron RAAF and eight Blenheims of No. 60 Squadron RAF take off at dawn in heavy fog to attack shipping at Kota Bharu
 - They find only the one merchant ship on fire, but 50 to 60 small power-driven boats and several armoured patrol boats. The small boats are then attacked with bombs and gunfire.
 - One of No. 8 Squadron's flights intercepts a broadcast message from the Kota Bharu operations room to divert all available aircraft to the enemy's sea-going force steaming away from the coast. A heavy rain storm prevents the pilots from finding the ships and the Hudsons return to continue the attack on small boats still afloat close to the shore.
 - Anti-aircraft fire is intense and two Blenheims are lost and another damaged. Two Hudsons are compelled to make a crash landing at Kota Bharu
 - The first report of enemy fighter opposition comes from a No. 8 Squadron Hudson piloted by Flight Lieutenant Hitchcock, one of whose gunners fired an accurate burst into the attacker; the Hudson crew saw it crash into the sea.
 - Three of the Hudsons that return to Kuantan have been seriously damaged by anti-aircraft fire, but casualties are light—two observers with minor wounds.
 - On return to Kuantan No 60 squadron is ordered back to Singapore.
- Nine Blenheims of 34 Squadron from Tengah also find only barges and troops on the beach to attack.
 - They encountered some fighter opposition, one aircraft being damaged and obliged to force land at Marchang.
 - The crews had been briefed to land at Butterworth but found a number of Japanese fighters over the airfield. Sgt Smith's aircraft was attacked and damaged and he had to make an emergency belly landing. Flg Off Dunlop was chased for twenty miles at tree top height until his gunner, despite a painful wound to the jaw, shot the attacker down.

8 December Clark Field

- A formation of twenty-seven Japanese bombers attacks the field followed by another formation of the same size, which continues the attack for fifteen minutes.
- Then more than 30 Japanese fighters sweep in to pick out the grounded American planes in low altitude strafing attacks that lasted more than an hour.
- The 17th and 21st Squadrons continue their patrols over Bataan and Manila Bay, unaware of the Japanese attack no more than sixty miles away.
- The B17s, in spite of being incompletely dispersed, suffered relatively little from bombs, but enemy fighters had chosen their targets so systematically that fourteen out of sixteen bombers on the field were destroyed. Half of the B17 force in the Philippines had been destroyed.
- Twenty out of twenty three of the 20th Pursuit's P40 Bs had been destroyed or severely damaged.
- Some units almost completely disintegrated during nearly two hours of attack but there were examples of outstanding leadership and heroism.

8 December Malaya

- Soon after 9 a.m. Japanese fighters arrive over Kota Bharu in formations of from five to nine aircraft, and, "peeling off" at between 5,000 and 7,000 feet, dive to fire their guns from almost tree-top level. The first attacks are against the anti-aircraft posts, but later they concentrate on men and aircraft on the ground.
- Within half an hour of the Blenheims' return to Alor Star from the attack on Pattani, while they are still being refuelled and rearmed, about 27 single engine bombers attack the airfield. Four Blenheims are totally destroyed and another five damaged, buildings are set on fire, a large petrol dump set ablaze and 6 men killed.

Air

- 9 December Malaya
- At 12.45 six of these aircraft were ordered to bomb Singora airfield. They met heavy fighter opposition and three of the Blenheims were shot down.
- 12 January
- 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.
- January
- 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.

- 12 January
- 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.

20/21 January - Air

- **Singapore**
- January 20th was a day of great excitement and rejoicing in Singapore. The Hurricanes went into combat over the city for the first time. Twenty seven enemy bombers came over unescorted. The Hurricanes shot down 8 without loss to themselves.
- On the 21st Japanese bombers were back with a strong escort of Zeros, after the losses they suffered on the 20th. The zeros shot down 5 Hurricanes without loss to themselves. Thereafter the Hurricane pilots were almost always at a disadvantage.



Mitsubishi A6M "Zero"

20th February - Pacific

- The Japanese detection of Lexington 453 miles from Rabaul demonstrated a very high quality reconnaissance effort, but one that must have been an enormous consumer of aircrew effort, aircraft hours and fuel.
- Launching a strike at a range beyond the capacity of fighter escort was a high risk decision.
 - The RAF had discovered, in September and December 1939, that daylight bombing of targets, defended by fighters with a radar control system, leads to unsustainable losses and achieves little if any damage to the enemy. The RAF had to completely change their plan for winning the war as a consequence.
 - The Luftwaffe discovered the same thing in August and September 1940.
 - It is surprising that the Japanese had to rediscover this the hard way two years later.
- Claims for enemy aircraft shot down are likely to be an order of magnitude more accurate in cases like this, where fighters are attacking unescorted bombers flying straight and level in formation, than in a melee between opposing fighter forces.

21st February

- **New Guinea**
- (on the 21st) the composite Hudson squadron had been named No. 32 General Reconnaissance-Bomber Squadron and Squadron Leader Kingwell was posted from No. 23 Squadron to take command.
 - With 10 aircraft the new unit had 29 officers (12 of them Hudson captains) and 176 other ranks. Because the rest of the aerodrome was treacherously boggy the aircraft had to be parked along the sides of the runway.
 - Remembering the defeat at Rabaul and fearful of losing all his aircraft on the ground in enemy air raids, Lerew had put every man to work, for "every daylight hour" in an effort to make a dispersal area.
 - One signal read: "Urgently require large labour gang and road-making equipment . . . To avoid continued repetition of this state of unpreparedness."
- As an immediate dispersal precaution he was instructed to use the aerodrome at Horn Island in Torres Strait, 400 miles to the south, and was told that an endeavour would be made to give sufficient warning of proposed operations to allow the crews time to move forward to Port Moresby as required.

10th March

- **Lae and Salamaua**
- A detailed report of the Japanese landings at Lae and Salamaua and a daily record of the movement of ships to and from the two harbours and aircraft landing and taking off from the two aerodromes was available to the Allied Command from a Coastwatcher, Leigh Vial, previously an assistant district officer in the New Guinea Administration.
 - Swiftly commissioned into the RAAF Vial was sent into the hill country round Mubo, overlooking Salamaua and Lae.
 - Aided by two natives who brought him his supplies, he maintained a watching post in the hills.
 - For six months his warning voice was familiar to all who listened to the X frequency, a quiet unhurried voice reporting aircraft on the way, their types, number, course and height.
- The raiders had actually sunk three transports and damaged another transport and a seaplane tender.
- Japanese ships in the Huon Gulf that day had been 5 transports, 1 light cruiser, 6 destroyers, a seaplane tender, a minelayer and 2 minesweepers.



Flight Lieutenant Leigh Vial

JIC 12th March

Midway. Two enemy planes were detected by aircraft detection devices to the westward of MIDWAY. Four of our fighters intercepted a Japanese 4-engine seaplane 45 miles from MIDWAY and shot it down. One of our fighters was damaged and the pilot wounded, but the plane reached its base. The other enemy plane is believed to have turned back.

17th March - Air

- **Darwin**

- On the 17th, No. 9 Squadron, the first of three squadrons, of No. 49 Pursuit Group USAAF, reached Darwin. This first step towards adequate air defence of Darwin was supplemented by the first Australian-built radar unit and a somewhat rudimentary fighter sector (No. 5) which was installed about a mile from the R.A.A.F. aerodrome.

- **Port Moresby**

- The Kittyhawks for No 75 squadron RAAF were ferried to Townsville, the first flight encountering bad weather and losing three aircraft in crashes, two of which killed the pilots. The urgency of the need was such that the pilots of the new squadron had only nine days for conversion to the P40s and an intensive course in fighter tactics, gunnery and the principles of fighter control.
 - The advance party of the ground staff had preceded the squadron to Port Moresby, arriving there on the 17th.

20th March -

- On 20th March Broome had its second raid, when bombs were dropped on the runway at the aerodrome, a civil aircraft was burnt out, and one man was killed.
- On 20th March, Derby, a cattle port about 90 miles north of Broome, was raided without damage or casualties.
- March 20, 1942 Port Moresby (Raids #15 & #16) The Japs made two raids this morning, the first with four fighters who machine gunned the aerodrome and were driven off by AA MG fire, the second with a single bomber that dropped its load and dashed off. Reconnaissance planes are over all the time. The raids today resulted in no damage and no casualties but Tokyo Rose claimed that Moresby had been 'devastated'!

22nd March 1942 – New Guinea

- At 6.30 a.m. on the 22nd 9 Kittyhawks took off, 5 of them, to make a strafing attack on Lae, and four more to provide top cover. The attacking aircraft dived through cloud and swept over the length of the runway so low that one wing of Piper's Kittyhawk was damaged through striking one of the enemy planes.
- Since it was clear that the enemy had been completely surprised, Jackson, contrary to accepted strafing tactics, led his flight in again for a second attack, this time through dense smoke rising from burning aircraft. 12 aircraft were left burning and 5 others had been damaged.
- The Kittyhawk pilots giving top cover had encountered three Zeros that had been flying a "standing" patrol at 10,000 feet.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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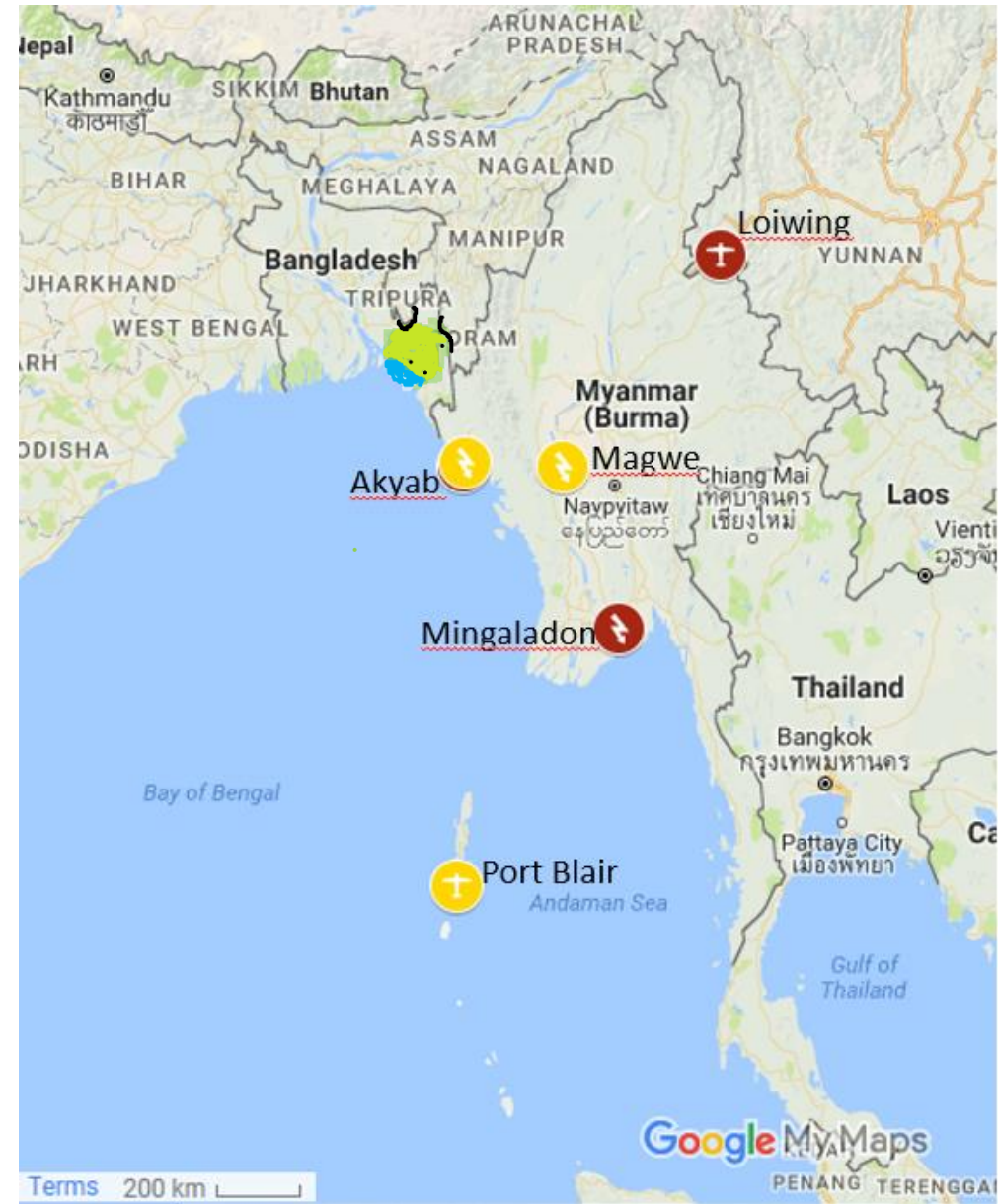
22nd March 1942 – Darwin

- The sixth raid on Darwin by 3 fighters on 22nd March was harmless. The fighters were seen as far south as Katherine.
- A Japanese reconnaissance aircraft over Darwin
 - was sighted by Coastwatchers on Bathurst Island,
 - tracked by the radar on Dripstone Cliffs and
 - shot down by a patrol of the recently arrived 9th Pursuit Squadron (part of 49th Group).
- 2nd Lts Harvey and Poleschuk were one of two patrols over Darwin at 20,000 feet in their P40s. After sighting the bandit they were able to climb towards it, close to 200 feet and open fire before the bandit reacted. The victory was awarded to Poleschuk after a coin toss.



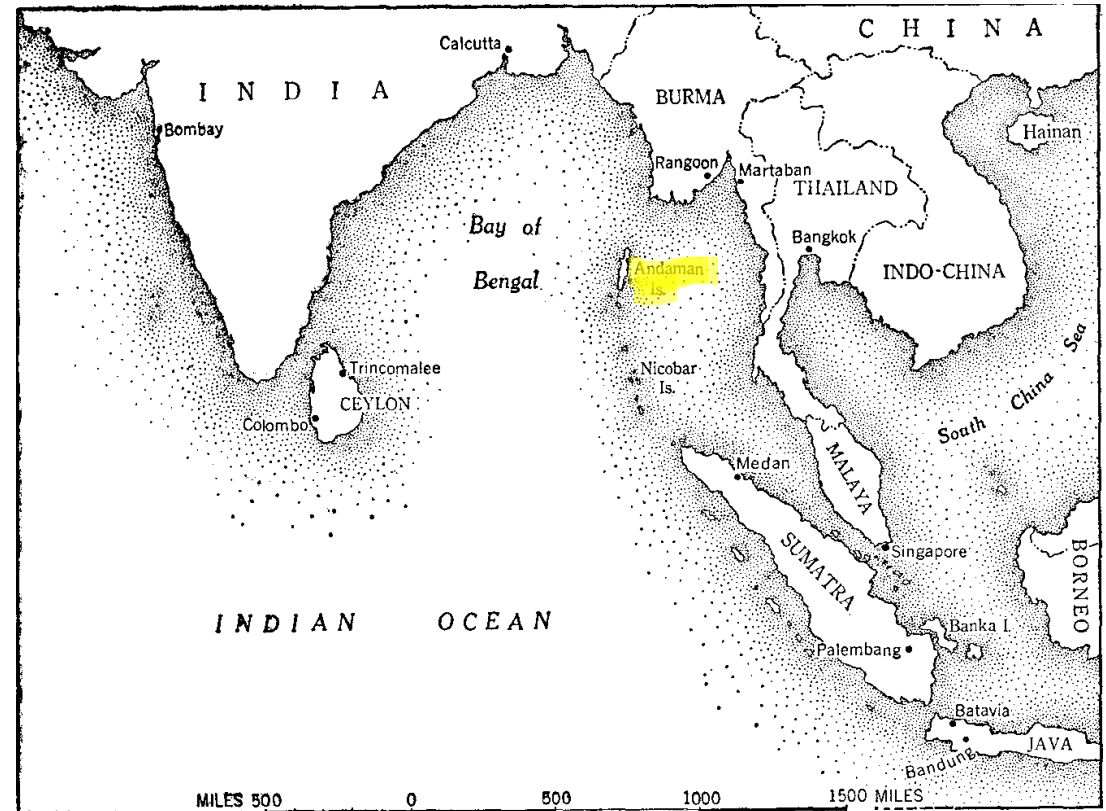
22 March 1942 – Burma

- The enemy attack (on Magwe) was sustained and 25 hours later (22nd) the Magwe base was stricken—the work of 230 enemy aircraft which had dropped more than 200 tons of bombs.
- Nine Blenheims and 3 Tomahawks had been destroyed on the ground with 5 Blenheims seriously damaged.
- Three of the 4 Hurricanes had been shot down.
- There remained 6 Blenheims, 11 Hurricanes and 3 Tomahawks.
- Vulnerable and useless for immediate combat, all these aircraft were withdrawn—the Tomahawks to Loiwing and the remainder to Akyab.



23rd March 1942

- **Air**
- **Port Moresby**
- Next day (23rd) the Japanese retaliated with their seventeenth raid on Port Moresby. About noon 19 bombers approached at high altitude and, though all available Kittyhawks were flown off to intercept, they were unable to gain sufficient altitude. The bombs fell near the runway causing little damage.
- Four Zeros then made a low-level attack destroying two Kittyhawks which had bogged near the runway as their pilots attempted to get them airborne. A third Kittyhawk was damaged.
- One of the Zeros, which dared a second run over the aerodrome, was caught by machine-gun fire from the ground and crashed into a low hill near the aerodrome.
- Another Zero was damaged by ground fire and probably failed to get back to its base.
- **Wyndham**
- On the 23rd the Wyndham aerodrome was bombed and pitted with about 30 craters.



Sea

The Japanese occupied Port Blair in the Andaman Islands on 23rd March and established a squadron of long range flying boats there.

25th March

- **Sea**
- On 25th March the Admiralty regretted a further delay in sending her (Hermes) "as she has to take part in a special operation".
 - Subsequently, after discussions between the Admiralty and Admirals Leary and Royle, it was agreed that she could be better employed with the Eastern Fleet and should remain in the Indian Ocean.
- Analysis of Japanese signals traffic suggested that MO was the designator for Port Moresby.
- **Air**
- **Port Moresby**
(Raid 19) Heavy cloud but small Japanese force of 3 bombers, 4 fighters came over at 9:30am at extreme height. Our fighters were in the air but could not find the Japs in the clouds. The bombers dropped their bombs hurriedly when the AA opened up and all bombs fell harmlessly in the harbor.
- Several B-26's belonging to the 22nd Group (M) flew the Pacific to land at Archerfield on 25 March, and within a month a total of forty-eight of the Marauders had come in from the United States.



Prewar picture of Hermes

31 March 1942 - Air

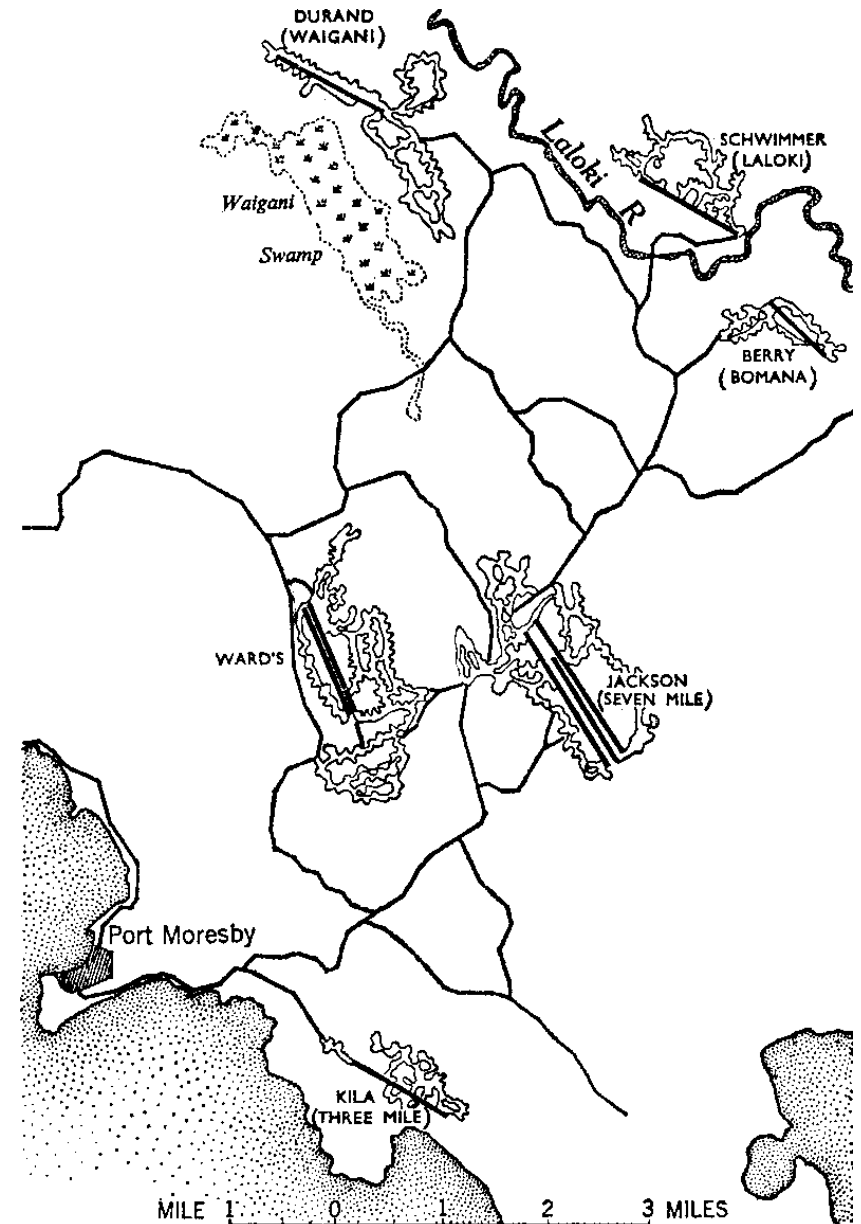
- **Darwin**
- (Raid 9) 7 bombers escorted by 12 or 15 fighters attacked the RAAF airfield at 13.20. P 40s took off to intercept and claimed one fighter destroyed and one bomber possible.
- 9th Pursuit were on CAP with 5 planes when vectored to intercept. One Japanese was claimed destroyed but two P40s lost, both pilots surviving.
- (Raid 10) 3 bombers attacked the RAAF airfield at 22.19.
- **North East Australia**
- By the end of March planes and crews of the 19th Group (H) was in process of reorganization and preparation for combat near Townsville. The second heavy bombardment group committed to Australia was the 43d Group, and its ground echelon had now arrived. But it had no planes yet. AAF plans had called for dispatch of two B-17's a day to Australia after 20 March, to build up and maintain a minimum of forty heavy bombers for each of the two groups.
- The War Department subsequently decided, however, to reconsider allocations to all theatres, and by the end of March only nine of the bombers had reached Australia.
- The new decision at the combined staff level did not alter the earlier commitment to the Southwest Pacific. There would eventually be eighty operational aircraft and forty in reserve, but delivery plans called for the dispatch of only thirty in April and the remainder as soon thereafter as was possible.
- **South East Australia**
- By 31st March 1942 483 Voluntary Air Observers Corps observer posts were in operation on a 24-hour basis. The V.A.O.C. was also established in the Darwin and Port Moresby areas.

4 April 1942 -

- In the twelfth raid on Darwin, at 13.58 on 4th April:
 - the civil aerodrome was strafed by 6 bombers and 6 fighters,
 - a civilian was killed and two servicemen wounded.
 - 14 P40s intercepted and claimed 8 attackers destroyed and 3 damaged.
 - 1 P40 was destroyed and the pilot killed and 2 crash landed.
- No. 18 (NEI) Squadron was formed at RAAF Canberra on 4 April 1942.
 - The Dutch authorities provided No. 18 Squadron's pilots and the aircraft, which had been obtained from the United States via Lend Lease.
 - The majority of the aircrew were Dutchmen who had been evacuated from the Netherlands East Indies, while most of the groundcrew were Australian.
 - On formation there was a total of 242 Dutch and Javanese and 266 Australian personnel;
 - all aircraft were captained by a Dutch officer, while the remaining aircrew positions were a mixture of Dutch and Australian.

13 April - Air

- **New Guinea**
- In the Port Moresby region there were three—Seven Mile, Ten Mile and Three Mile, the last two being little more than emergency fields at this stage. In wet weather the fighters had to move from the Three Mile to the Ten Mile. Four more fields had been planned and were expected to be operational by October.
- By the middle of April General Morris was able to report that airfields had been built or were nearing completion at the Seven Mile, Kila, Bomana, Rorona and Laloki.
- **Burma**
- Bomber reinforcements had reached India on 13th April when No. 215 (Wellington) Squadron, in which a number of Australians were serving, landed at Asansol.



23 April

- **New Guinea**

- On 23rd April a Japanese patrol, about 65 strong accompanied by two Europeans dressed in white, set out from Salamaua along the track to Komiatum.
- One European seemed to be acting as a guide. From their observation posts the NGVR had seen them coming and three of them lay waiting in ambush at Komiatum.
- They reported that they killed five of the Japanese and wounded others before they retreated from Komiatum without loss.
- The Japanese soon returned to Salamaua.

- **Port Moresby**

- The 2/3rd Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was in action at Port Moresby against Japanese aircraft for the first time on 23rd April.

25 April - Air

- **Darwin**

- At 14.00 on 25 April 24 bombers escorted by 9 fighters attack the RAAF airfield. About 50 P40s take off to intercept and claim 8 bombers and 3 fighters destroyed. All the defenders return safe.

- **Port Moresby**

- "Just after 8.00 am, with 41-2641 still stuck, fifteen Japanese Zero fighter aircraft arrived over Port Moresby and four descended on 7-Mile drome, quickly setting a B-26 Marauder on fire and seriously damaging another. 41-2641 appeared to have survived the attack until, 10 minutes later, it suddenly burst into flames and was destroyed.
- The RAAF's No. 75 Squadron had a flight of four P-40s in the air on combat patrol and they immediately attacked the formation of Zeros, causing damage to three aircraft, one of the P-40s receiving superficial damage in return."

2 May - Air

- Port Moresby experienced its thirty-eighth Japanese air raid.
 - Early in the morning seven P39s intercepted nine bombers escorted by zeros after they had bombed 7 Mile.
 - They claimed two probables for no loss.
 - Later in the morning a patrol of 12 Airacobras intercepted a flight of zeros strafing the runway.
 - The P39s dived on the strafers and claimed 4 destroyed for two defenders damaged.
- 2 May Seven US bombers attacked shipping at Rabaul.
 - Hits were scored on buildings and wharves on the waterfront and
 - a direct hit on one transport and three near misses on another.
 - Two fighters were claimed shot down and one damaged.
 - One B26 crash landed on Ouri Island in the Trobriands on return. The two pilots, one of whom was SqnLdr Gurney RAAF, on temporary duty with the Americans, were killed.
 - One cruiser, one destroyer and nineteen transports were observed at Rabaul.

12 May - Air

- **New Guinea**

- The 35th Pursuit Squadron had transferred to the new 12 Mile strip to relieve the crowding at 7 Mile.
- They put up 5 P39s just as about a dozen zeros attacked (raid 46).
 - 2Lt Wilde was seen to shoot down two zeros but was then seen to dive away trailing smoke and plummet into the jungle.
 - He was listed MIA.
- 2 Lt Hawkins' P39 was also badly damaged and he crash landed at Vari Island north west of Moresby, but he returned uninjured two days later.

- **Ambon**

- Nine Australian Hudsons attacked shipping at Amboina on 12 May.
 - A 3,000 ton ship was sunk and direct hits were scored on two others.
 - Near misses were scored on a 5,000 ton ship and
 - fires were started along the waterfront.

- **Burma**

- Heavy Bombers fly their first mission in defence of the air cargo line to China when 4 B17s from Dum Dum A/F heavily damage runways and set fire to several parked aircraft at Myitkyina.
 - Myitkyina, which fell to the Japanese on 8 May, poses a serious fighter threat to the Allied base at Dinjan.

June - Air

- 15 June
- 27 bombers escorted by 15 Zeros attacked Darwin 12:10/15. 6 Zeros claimed destroyed. 2 P40s lost.
- 16 June
- 27 Bombers and 25 fighters attacked Darwin 11:59/16. Two oil tanks destroyed and burning, all fuel lost. Four holed by shrapnel. One Zero claimed. 5 P40s destroyed, two pilots missing. 10 wounded on the ground.
- 28 Zeros attacked Moresby 08:42/16. 30 P39s intercepted. 4 P39s missing.
- 17 June
- Port Moresby had its 61st raid, by 18 bombers and nine fighters, at 09:38 on 17th June.
 - The Australian ship Macdhui (4,561 tons) was hit, while under way in the harbour, the midships section gutted, and three crew members and one member of a military working party were killed, and a number wounded.
 - One enemy bomber and one fighter claimed damaged. Allied losses nil.

June - Air

- 15 June
- Six Hudsons attacked Penfui airfield at Koepang 23:35/15. Two fires were observed. One Hudson force landed.
- Two Catalinas attacked the airfield at Lae 19:45/15.
- Two Catalinas attacked the airfield at Salamaua 20:30 – 22:30/15.
- 16 June
- Nine B25s, ten B26s, and three B17s, escorted by 7 P39s scored hits on runways and buildings at Lae and Salamaua 11:30/16 to 14:15/16. Four Zeros claimed. One P39 lost.

10 & 11 June

- **Air**
- Five B17s bomb aircraft and buildings at Rabaul on 10th.
 - Fighters intercepted.
 - All our aircraft returned.
- 3 B17s attacked Vunakanau airfield at 17:40/11.
 - Results not observed,
 - heavy AA fire encountered but all returned.
- A B17 on photo recce was intercepted over Lae by four Zeros and was damaged.
 - One Zero was shot down.
 - The B17 had already been ineffectively attacked by three Zero fighters between Rabaul and Kavieng.
- A Hudson on recce on 11/6 encountered and shot down a Japanese flying boat south of New Britain.
 - Our aircraft was damaged and rendered unserviceable.
- A Hudson on recce attacked an enemy merchant ship at 17:10/11 approx 33 miles north east of Atamboea.
 - No hits were scored.
 - The vessel returned light AA fire.

The Japanese Air War

- The defenders entirely failed to grasp the nature and extent of the threat posed by the Japanese naval and air forces. As a result command systems to respond to the threat were either not in place or not operational and all the defending air forces were substantially destroyed on day one.
- The Australian Cabinet had been accurately briefed on the Zero's performance in January 1941. Yet combat crews going into action were given an entirely incorrect briefing on the subject. This can only be seen as a deliberate failure of intelligence.
- Low level gun attacks by fighters were by far the most effective way to destroy aircraft on the ground. High altitude level bombers were not very effective against ground or sea targets and (B17s excepted) were vulnerable to fighter attack unless escorted by friendly fighters.
- Reinforcements of more capable aircraft were dribbled into the theatre as quickly as possible but there were never enough to be decisive while the Japanese held the initiative and had a numerical advantage.
- While the ground forces were going backwards there was no opportunity to put together an air base with the radar, control systems, AA, dispersal and maintenance facilities required for defence until they got back to Darwin and Port Moresby.
- The speed with which the Japanese moved their air forces forward as each new airfield was captured throughout the campaign must have required the most extensive planning and the most extraordinary energy in execution. The allies found maintaining reasonable serviceability rates impossible in equivalent conditions.
- When allied modern front line aircraft types arrived in the theatre and the air forces learned to exploit their performance characteristics they were seen to be at least competitive with Japanese types.
- The Air War continues with both sides working to build and capture new airfields and develop the logistics and maintenance facilities to keep them operational.