

JAVA AIRDROMES PROVED USELESS

Allies Were Forced to Surrender Excellent and Well Hidden Fields Because of Lack of Planes And Anti-Aircraft Guns.

(This is the fourth of George Weller's series on the Java campaign.)

By GEORGE WELLER

SOMEWHERE IN AUSTRALIA, April 7.—When approximately a dozen various groups of Jap convoys, consisting of from six to 10 freighters, were gathered by their cruiser-based seaplanes into three large convoys escorted by warships, their attack was directed at three points along the northern Java coast. These points were Rembang, in the east-central part of the island; at Indramayu, in the west-central, and at Bantam, at the extreme west near Sunda straits.



Mr. Weller

Although the Dutch officially admitted only 26 transports having landed at Rembang, 12 at Indramayu, and 14 at Bantam, this was a description of only the earliest phase of the invasion.

A naval officer, who participated in a subchaser attack close in shore upon the Rembang group, told me that he saw 34 transports in line there. Furthermore, after the allied fleet left, the transports landed at Samarang, almost exactly in Java's center.

Japan's secret fleet of freighters, which had been lying up quietly in closely guarded inlets of the Japanese and Chinese coasts, made possible this heavy armada of which perhaps one-tenth were sunk by American and British bombers when landing. Allied ship losses in evacuating civilians from Singapore were certainly appreciably heavier due to Jap domination of the air than Jap losses in invading Java.

Old Story: No Planes

Such was the chance lost by the united nations through having meager, out-dated, bomber and fighter groups upon Java. Excellent airdromes were there in abundance—both tiny fighter fields so well hidden that even American pilots often could not find their way home after battles, and oil and bomb depots.

All was lost through lack of planes able to compete with Japan's highly maneuverable and speedy Zero-fighters and through lack of anti-aircraft guns able to hit Jap bombers above 20,000 feet.

Jap troops, landing by moonlight upon Java, found themselves with a far easier problem than when they landed upon the eastern coast of Malaya.

In Java the Japs landed upon the flats, with the nearest mountains 20 miles away and virtually no jungle to hide the defenders. The invaders' exposure in the moonlight was fully compensated by the fact that the defenders were equally pitifully revealed, but in much smaller numbers. Only meadows of sea hay and rice fields were visible, but no jungle.

Will to Fight, That's All

Traveling by day and night, I made an 800-mile automobile journey over the entire length of the island from Batoewang, opposite Bali, to Batavia on the two days and nights preceding the invasion. Everywhere the stern Dutch resolution to fight the Japs was paired with means which were woefully inadequate.

When they landed upon the shore, which somewhat resembles the coastline of Long Island or the southern shores of Lake Michigan, the Japs would almost immediately be in possession of the main east-west highway which runs the length of the island, as well as of the railroad connecting with Batavia.

After landing and disposing thin coastal forces, they severed Soerabaja from these arteries by cutting

the telephone lines upon which the Dutch mistakenly depended.

The Jap commanders treated big Javanese cities, in general, as obstacles to be circumvented rather than prizes for capture. In modern mobile warfare, cities are taken only when they contain something that is wanted.

The first prize that the Jap army always aims for is an airdrome, for it was learned in Malaya that an army task is three-quarters done if the air arm has completed the softening-up process first. Every airdrome captured means approximately 10,000 less casualties for the army.

Furthermore, in Java's case, getting one airdrome meant getting other peripheral ones soon after and reducing the army's burden in geometric, rather than arithmetic, progression. An extra Jap force, consisting of a small body of transports, which landed at Toeban, east of Rembang, was delegated to hold off any attempt by the Dutch to send land forces from Soerabaja and attack the landing from the rear.

Raid Defense Impossible

The Dutch, not possessing such forces, remained quiet along the whole eastern sector. When the last train left carrying Soerabaja's demolition party to Tjilatjap on the south coast for evacuation aboard the same last freighter, which rescued me, that ended lengthwise communications across the island.

The rapidity and success of the Jap landings at Rembang and Samarang were what destroyed the original plan of the Dutch commander-in-chief, Lieut. Gen. Hein ter Poorten.

Gen. ter Poorten had intended to carry on guerrilla warfare at both ends simultaneously and, from the highlands, harass the Japs in the lowland plain.

Defense Impossible

But the plan was compromised, first, when the Japs, by taking Bali, put themselves within easy fighter range of Malang. Although the Malang airdrome there was so well hidden that (as your correspondent saw) a plane containing high air officers was unable to find the field when the weather was murky, it was from the first impossible to defend against raids by Jap navy Zeros.

The buildings were big, well-camouflaged and modern but anti-aircraft was lacking. Finally, some British anti-aircraft, fresh from the battle of Britain, arrived. But en route by train from Soerabaja to Malang, the train pitched off the track and approximately 30 officers and gunners were killed. The derailed, smashed cars still lay in a gully when your correspondent passed.

Use Fortress Guns

Then American artillerymen were given 50-caliber machine guns which had been demounted from flying fortresses smashed upon the ground by early Jap raids, and asked to provide an aerial barrage for the invaluable giant bombers.

But their range was only moderate. Malang was the base from which the fortresses accomplished, without having fighter escort of any kind, some of their most audacious raids upon Jap convoys and whence army dive-bombers took off for their historic first raid upon the Jap fleet at Bali.

But never, from the beginning of the war, did Malang possess fighter protection based upon the field itself. When the Americans were unable longer to hold Malang, the Dutch being unable to provide them fighters and the British having lost most of their fighters in similar Zero raids upon Palembang, it became necessary for Gen. ter Poorten to abandon the eastern half of Java and concentrate upon the western end of the island.

TOMORROW: The Japs land campaign.

Fears Seizure



Natalie Edmonds, 22, employee of the war department, faces the possibility of internment in a concentration camp despite the fact that her maternal ancestry goes back to colonial days. She has not seen her Japanese father, Riechiro Kawashima, since he deserted her mother in New York in 1920, two years after their marriage. She is fearful of internment because of the senate bill, which authorizes seizure of any person considered by laws of a foreign nation to be a citizen of that government.

BRITISH SCORCH EARTH IN BURMA

Forced to Take Up New Positions in Defense Of Oil Fields.

NEW DELHI, India, April 7 (U. P.).—British troops defending the western Burma flank have been forced to take up new positions in the Irrawaddy valley less than 60 miles below the rich central Burma oil fields, an India-Burma command communiqué revealed today.

It said the imperials now have withdrawn north of Thayetmyo, 37 miles north of Prome, while three Japanese columns are pressing northward.

The communiqué emphasized the plight of the British defenders in disclosing that the retreating forces had applied "scorched earth" policy, destroying oil and cement installations at Thayetmyo and near by Allamyo before they withdrew.

The latest information regarding enemy movements, the communiqué said, placed one Japanese column on the west bank of the Irrawaddy river north of Kama, 17 miles north of Prome, and another on the east bank in vicinity of Nyaungbinzel, about 15 miles north of Prome.

Other Japanese elements, the communiqué added, were moving northeastward along the Sinjok valley, apparently in an attempt to outflank the British.

A Chinese military spokesman at Chungking revealed, meanwhile, that China's fifth and sixth armies were engaged in an artillery duel with strong Japanese forces a few miles north of Toungoo on the eastern allied flank.

ADMIRAL IS LOST AT SEA DURING CRUISE

WASHINGTON, April 7 (U. P.).—

In a brief and undetailed communiqué, the navy announced last night that Rear Admiral J. W. Wilcox Jr., 60, was lost overboard in heavy weather during normal cruising operations. The date and location of the tragedy were not revealed.

Wilcox, a native of Atlanta, Ga., became the second American admiral to lose his life in the war. Rear Admiral Isaac Kidd was killed during the Pearl Harbor attack.

Surviving Wilcox are his widow, the former Miss Caroline Manigault, of Charleston, S. C., and two children, Arthur M. Wilcox, 21, and Mary Manigault Wilcox, 11.

RAILWAYS EMPLOYEE WOUNDED BY BANDIT

A bandit who shot Fred H. Beckom, 1736 Union st., in a holdup attempt last night was hunted today by police.

The shooting occurred near Iowa and Meridian sts., where Mr. Beckom, an employee of the Indianapolis Railways, had left a trackless trolley. He was carrying a black bag containing his money changer and trolley receipts when the bandit stepped out of an alley and pointed a pistol at him.

Mr. Beckom swung the bag at him, and the bandit fired. Mr. Beckom received a slight flesh wound on the right shoulder.

RAFTERY APPOINTED DEPUTY PROSECUTOR

John F. Raftery, Indianapolis attorney and Republican precinct committeeman, was appointed a deputy prosecutor to serve in municipal court today by Prosecutor Sherwood Blue.

Mr. Raftery will succeed John Tindler who has enlisted in the army air corps for flying cadet training. Mr. Raftery has been active in Republican politics since 1914. He lives at 133 S. Gladstone ave., is married, and has three children.

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