The Forlorn Ally—The Netherlands East Indies in 1942

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The allied defence of the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) is one of the little known campaigns of the Second World War. Few histories of this campaign have appeared in English, and it is usually mentioned as an adjunct to the fall of Singapore. Because of this lack there has arisen a particular myth, especially in the non-Dutch military histories, that implies that the Dutch conducted an incompetent and half-hearted defence of the NEI. For example, in a book about the Australian 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion that was captured in the NEI in 1942, the view is expressed that the Australians 'had [only] been forced to surrender because the Dutch had surrendered without a fight'.[1] Similarly a British volume on the NEI campaign states that 'the Dutch far from having a conviction of ultimate victory had a conviction of ultimate defeat'.[2] The reality is far different.

For 61 days, from 10 January to 12 March 1942, the Dutch fought a series of confused and desperate actions against the advancing Japanese. Japanese losses were not insubstantial, including 28 ships, most of which were valuable troop transports. Each battle for the Dutch was a rearguard action, while they waited for allied reinforcements to reach the NEI. Thus the NEI campaign is a story of misplaced Dutch faith in British and US promises of support. Dutch faith was displayed through the commitment of some of their best equipped forces to the inept Malayan campaign, and in the provision of Dutch facilities to the US Asiatic Fleet after it fled from the Philippines. Unfortunately this Dutch faith was not repaid in kind, with the result that they found themselves abandoned in their darkest hour by both the US and Britain.

On New Year's Day 1942, the Dutch were in the unusual situation of being at war with the Japanese but the Japanese were not officially at war with the NEI. The Governor-General of the NEI, Jonkheer Tjarda van Starkenborgh Stachouwer, had declared war on Japan as soon as the news of the attacks on Pearl Harbor and northern Malaya had reached his military headquarters at Bandoeng, in Java. Thereafter,

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for the next 36 days, that is from 8 December 1941 to 12 January 1942, the Dutch carried out offensive actions against the advancing Japanese forces, even though those forces were not formally at war with the NEI. This diplomatic limbo had no real effect upon hostilities though, as Dutch submarines sank a Japanese merchantman, plus a tanker and damaged four other merchantmen off Malaya on 12 and 13 December, while the Japanese retaliated with the sinking of the Dutch submarines *O-20* and *K-XVII*. The *O-16* was also lost when it sailed into an unmarked British minefield on 13 December. Similarly, in defending the British territories in northern Borneo, Dutch submarines and bombers sank two Japanese destroyers, a minesweeper, and three transports while damaging two more transports, with the Japanese claiming the Dutch submarine *K-XVI* in return.

The Governor-General of the NEI had used as his pretext for declaring war on Japan the claim that the unexpected attacks on the US and British territories were a grave threat to the NEI. In making such a declaration, he was following a strategy that had been mapped out in conferences in 1941 in which the Dutch tied the defence of the NEI to British assurances of the impregnability of 'fortress Singapore', as well as to the perception that the US would provide massive material aid and reinforcements to the NEI once war broke out. Thus the Singapore Conference held on 22 February 1941 decided upon the British, Australian and Dutch strategic priorities when war came, with the Dutch being responsible for reconnaissance duties 'in the South China Seas, south of the equator in the Java Sea, and south of a line joining the north-east end of Borneo and New Guinea other than the Timor and Arafura Seas'.[3] To fulfil these responsibilities, the Dutch sent their Dornier and Catalina flying boats, Glenn Martin bombers and Buffalo fighters to the airbases at Singkawang I and II (Western Borneo), Samarinda, Tarakan, Balikpapan (Eastern Borneo), Menado, Kema and Makassar (Celebes). As well, the Dutch agreed to reinforce Singapore with two squadrons of 22 Glenn Martin bombers, and a squadron of Buffalo fighters. These arrived promptly at Sembawang airfield in Singapore on 8 December, but the Dutch aircraft were never used properly. The heavy aircraft losses suffered by the British in Malaya between 8 and 10 December had forced the RAF to change over to night bombing, which did not require fighter escort. Unfortunately the Glenn Martins' crews were not trained in night operations, and so one of the bomber squadrons returned to Java. The remaining Glenn Martin squadron was confined to daytime reconnaissance, in which it lost six bombers before being evacuated on 19 January.[4] The Dutch Buffalo squadron assisted in the air defence of Singapore, before it too was withdrawn on 18 January.

Thus, even before the first Japanese attacks upon NEI territory, the Dutch had incurred major losses including four of their 15 submarines, as

well as some of their best aircraft and crews. That these losses were incurred in defending British territory was due to Dutch faith in the British and US promises of assistance in defending the NEI when finally it was attacked. Unfortunately for the Dutch, such faith in their US and British allies was misplaced; neither the material nor personnel reinforcements ever reached the NEI in sufficient numbers to help make a difference against the Japanese.

The first such reinforcements to reach the NEI were the US Asiatic Fleet and the remnants of the US Far East Air Force (US FEAF) which escaped from the Philippines. The US naval units, under the command of Admiral Hart, reached Soerabaja naval base in Java on 26 December, and comprised three cruisers, 14 destroyers, two submarine tenders plus a variable number of submarines, two gunboats and two minesweepers.

All of Hart's crews were finding the servicing of their ships increasingly difficult because of the loss of all their naval stores when the Japanese destroyed the Cavite Naval Base at Manila on 10 December. As well the US destroyers and submarines were discovering that they had faulty torpedoes. The US aircraft sent out to the NEI were a Liberator and 14 Flying Fortress bombers together with 17 Catalina flying boats. All of the aircraft and their crews had taken a pounding from the Japanese before reaching the NEI, and the Dutch soon found the use of these bombers denied to them, as they were usually then sent to northern Australia from where they were to stage through airfields in the southern Philippines in order to support MacArthur's trapped army on Bataan.

The British assistance with the reinforcement of the NEI, in response to Dutch help in defending Malaya, was non-existent, until the last two weeks prior to the fall of Singapore. During December 1941 and January 1942 the British priority in the Far East was the defence of Singapore, or more specifically the naval base there, into which so much money had been poured during the Depression years. There were simply no ships, planes or troops available to divert to the Dutch. The Australians on the other hand held to the Singapore Conference agreement in that, at the outbreak of the war, they sent some of their scarce military resources to defend the eastern outer Indies. Australia forwarded two flights of RAAF Hudsons together with the 2/21st Battalion plus ancillary troops (Gull Force) to Ambon. A flight of RAAF Hudsons, and Sparrow Force, comprising the 2/40th Battalion, the 2/2nd Independent Company plus ancillary units, were sent at the same time to Timor. Both Australian forces were to cooperate with the local Dutch defences, with Gull Force being under the direct orders of the local Dutch commander.

Thus, as 1942 began, the Dutch had already sustained losses in defending non-NEI territory as an act of faith with their major allies, and the NEI had received in return some of the US naval and air force sur-

vivors from the Philippines, nothing from the British, and small but inadequate ground and air forces from the Australians. Not unnaturally, the Dutch were beginning to fear that they were being left in the lurch by their two major allies, both of whom seemed to be preoccupied with their losing campaigns in Malaya and the Philippines. As a response to the deteriorating Far Eastern situation (and also to calm Dutch fears) a joint multinational command for the theatre was created. Named ABDA Command, for American, British, Dutch and Australian (in that deliberate order), it had established its headquarters at Bandoeng on 10 January. ABDA's one and only supreme commander was the British General Archibald Wavell, whose reaction on hearing of this appointment was: 'I've heard of being left holding the baby, but this is quadruplets!'.[5] Clearly Wavell did not possess even initial confidence in his ability to hold the ABDA theatre against the Japanese.

The creation of ABDA did little to mollify Dutch fears over the defence of the NEI. The territorial responsibilities of ABDA Command involved Burma, Malaya/Singapore, the Philippines and the NEI. On 24 January this area of responsibility was extended further to include northwestern Australia, where the ports of Darwin and Broome were being used as aircraft ferry routes into ABDA. The US and Filipino army trapped at Bataan, and their other troops in the southern islands of Samar, Leyte and Mindanao, were under the command of General Douglas MacArthur. Not only were his forces in no position to help Wavell, but MacArthur was hardly of the temperament to accept orders from a British general even if his forces could have been shifted to other parts of ABDA. Thus Wavell left MacArthur's forces to their own devices. In Burma and Malaya/Singapore the strategic situation was as bad as in the Philippines, with northern Malaya lost, central Malaya nearly lost, while Burma possessed only a meagre garrison. Yet here again Wavell chose not to exercise his supreme commander's powers over an operational theatre, but instead left control in the hands of the local commander, General Percival. Wavell's involvement in the Malayan Campaign was confined to a few visits to Singapore to hold discussions with the commanders there. Although at the time of ABDA's creation the Americans had given up trying to push reinforcements through to the Philippines, at the same time the British were able to reinforce Singapore right up until its surrender on 15 February. It remains inexplicable why Wavell chose not to exercise more control over these reinforcements (primarily the British 18th Division), which reached Singapore between 22 January and 5 February, especially as the Dutch could have made use of these troops in those parts of the NEI which, by then, were under attack from the Japanese.

Thus the creation of ABDA really left Wavell in command only of those forces available in the NEI and northern Australia. The Dutch

therefore expected that, as their territory seemed to be ABDA's primary concern and as they, initially at least, possessed the majority of ships, aircraft and troops in the NEI, they would be given most of the major ABDA command positions. This was not to be, because ABDA was the creation of Churchill and Roosevelt, and as a US/British initiative its strategic decisions would be made by officers from those two major powers. Both the Dutch and the Australians resented the fact that the two major western powers ignored their views regarding the defence of their own national territories. The NEI and Australia resented the British claim that on Far Eastern strategy Britain spoke for the Australians and the Dutch. The US readily accepted this position since Roosevelt saw Australia as an appendage of the British Commonwealth while the Netherlands Government-in-Exile, under Dr Gerbrandy, was in London and therefore under the influence of their hosts, the British.

The similarities between the way the ABDA Command was formed in January and the way the South-West Pacific Area (SWPA) Command was formed in March need to be noted. Both were created by Roosevelt and Churchill to suit their own interests. Both ABDA and SWPA had only one senior appointment made from the nationality whose territory was the prime focus of that command, and who provided the majority of defending forces. In the case of ABDA, only the command of the land forces was given to a Dutchman, Lieutenant General Hein ter Poorten of the Royal Netherlands Indies Army (KNIL). In the case of SWPA, the land forces command was given (and only after Roosevelt's intervention) to the Australian, General Thomas Blamey. It seems that nothing was learnt from the ABDA debacle, when SWPA was formed, and Big Power insensitivity continued to override the interests of the lesser allied nations. Thus, when the Australians complained to Roosevelt that none of their own officers had been appointed initially to MacArthur's SWPA command positions (the Dutch had made similar complaints about ABDA), MacArthur excused himself with the claim that there was 'no prospect of obtaining qualified senior staff officers from the Australians', adding that 'there were no qualified Dutch officers present in Australia'.[6]

The other ABDA appointees were General George Brett (USAAF) as Deputy Commander, Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Pownall as Chief of Staff, Admiral Thomas Hart (USN) as ABDA naval (ABDA float) commander, and Major-General Lewis Brereton (USAAF) as ABDA air forces (ABDA air) commander. Both Pownall and Brett were new to the Far East, whereas Hart and Brereton had commanded the US naval and air forces that had been defeated in the Philippines. Subsequent events were to prove that neither Brett, Hart nor Brereton were up to the tasks of controlling the air and naval units that were to be the primary defence of the series of islands that comprised the NEI. Hart, already shaken by his Philippines experiences, asked to be released from his

command on 12 February on the grounds of ill health.[7] Brereton was held personally responsible by MacArthur for the destruction of his air forces in the Philippines on the second day of the Pacific War. Later, on 7 July 1942, when MacArthur commanded the SWPA, he would push for Brett, whom he disliked, to be replaced by General Kenney.[8]

To add to the Dutch woes, they found that their prewar service planning and training was largely ignored by the ABDA air and naval commanders. Brereton took his appointment as ABDA air commander so literally that he took control of all aircraft in the NEI including the Dutch Navy's Dorniers, Fokkers and Catalinas, which were 'the eyes' of the Dutch fleet. Hart followed the US and Royal Navies' tactical doctrine regarding submarines, in that all ABDA submarines were sent out on individual patrols, rather than in groups or wolfpacks as practised by the Royal Netherlands Navy. The Dutch had trained their naval and air units to cooperate in a multi-layered defence of the NEI. First, their long-range naval reconnaissance aircraft were to search for and find the Japanese invasion fleet. Next, the submarine wolfpacks would be guided to the Japanese ships by these planes. After the submarines had finished with the Japanese, the Army's bombers would attack the invaders. This would be followed by a mopping up attack by the small Dutch surface fleet of light cruisers, destroyers and motor torpedo boats. Like a jigsaw, the Dutch plan required all its pieces to have a chance of success, but when Hart removed the submarines and Brereton took away the reconnaissance planes the Dutch lost the advantage that the years of prewar training had given their forces.

Still, and despite these problems, the Dutch nevertheless offered all of their remaining forces to Wavell. The Royal Netherlands Navy was a highly professional force with a proven tradition and it gave Hart a force of three light cruisers, seven destroyers, 13 submarines, nine MTBs, numerous patrol and mine warfare vessels, a marine battalion and an air wing comprising nearly 50 planes, many of which were becoming unserviceable, however, because they were of Dutch or German design.

The KNIL on the other hand was a rapidly expanding but poorly equipped force whose best units were the air wing of the KNIL and its small professional core of military specialists such as the engineers. The KNIL's air wing provided Brereton with about 120 planes mostly of obsolete US design.[9] The KNIL had a peace time strength of 30,000 men scattered in outposts throughout the islands of the NEI. Its organisation was based on the provincial system, with units raised and trained locally to deal with small-scale attacks. In effect the KNIL was an armed police force possessing few heavy weapons, most of which were outdated. Its main artillery piece was the First World War vintage French 75mm, and its main machine-gun was the Lewis Gun of the same era. Its only armoured battalion contained an assortment of prewar designs. After the fall of the Netherlands in May 1940, the KNIL tried to

obtain modern equipment from the Allies, but the British had none to spare while the US lend-lease priorities lay with the British, the Russians and their own domestic rearmament programme. Only Australia seemed able to give priority to the Dutch, and provided them with limited quantities of small arms and ammunition from local industry. The equipment that was obtained from the US was either from projects that were rejected by the American forces, such as the Johnstone rifle and the Marmon-Herrington tanks, or was delivered after the fall of the NEI. Brigadier Elliot Thorpe, the US Lend-Lease Commissioner to the NEI, described the desperate lengths to which the Dutch were prepared to go in order to obtain overseas armaments:

> An emplacement of a coastal defence gun I saw typified the whole matter of materiel. In one of these improvised emplacements was an eight-inch rifle. This gun, taken from an American battleship junked after the Spanish-American War, had lain for years in the yard of a safe manufacturing company in the United States. It was spotted by a Dutch agent in the United States who bought it and sent it out to Java in 1941. There was no fire-control equipment with it. An improvised quadrant for setting elevation was made of a lead weight on a string with a scale marked on a curved piece of bamboo. The barbette mount and recoil system had to be seen to be believed.[10]

Such obsolete weaponry was the mainstay of the KNIL defences, as most NEI ports were garrisoned by a KNIL battalion that had been brought up to strength with local conscripts, supported by coastal guns, minefields and, if available, a few armoured cars. Apart from the expanding KNIL, as ABDA land commander Poorten could call upon local militias, the *Stadswacht* (town guards) or *Landwacht* (country guards). Consisting of over-age reservists and local natives, these militias were largely immobile and even more poorly armed than the KNIL. By the end of the NEI campaign the militia had increased the KNIL strength to 122,600 troops.

Such was the military situation in the NEI on 10 January when, as the ABDA Commanders were holding their first meeting, the Japanese attacked their first NEI objectives—Tarakan (Borneo) and Menado (Celebes). The Japanese followed these attacks with the 'courtesy' of an official declaration of war, two days later. For the next 59 days ABDA was to suffer a series of disastrous defeats that would lead to the loss of the Dutch overseas empire.

Both Tarakan and Menado were captured before any response could be mounted by Wavell. At Tarakan the KNIL defenders destroyed the oil refinery so that it was not able to reach prewar production levels again until 1944, by which time the place was under attack from allied bombers.[11] Balikpapan (Borneo) and Kendari (Celebes) became the next Japanese objectives. This time ABDA did react, and employing, on a much smaller scale, the tactics envisaged for the Dutch air and naval

units, they struck repeatedly at the Japanese off Balikpapan. The submarine *K-XVIII* sank one transport, Glenn Martins sank another, and on 24 January a US surface group consisting of two cruisers and four destroyers sank a patrol boat, three more transports, and damaged two other transports. As an example of the kind of bad luck that would dog ABDA during the NEI campaign, the US cruiser *Boise* hit an uncharted rock, even before reaching Balikpapan, and was sent out to America for repairs. Despite their losses the Japanese pressed their invasion, and for two days the battle for Balikpapan continued until its defenders demolished the refinery and escaped to the Borneo interior. The Japanese had previously dropped pamphlets demanding that the Dutch not carry out a scorched earth policy and, when they found that these had been ignored, the victors retaliated by massacring the entire European civilian population of Balikpapan.

On 27 January, only three days after taking Kendari and Balikpapan, the Japanese attacked eastern Borneo from across the border in Sarawak. The KNIL battalion defending Pemangkat was joined by the survivors of the 2/15th Punjab Battalion which had retreated inland from Sarawak. When Pemangkat became untenable, this combined Dutch/British force retreated to Pontianak, where the Singkawang II airfield was situated. After a two-day battle the Japanese seized this, the last allied airfield in western Borneo, and the KNIL/Punjabi survivors followed the example of their Balikpapan compatriots and took to the jungle. Both groups hoped to reach a port on Borneo's south coast, and so gain evacuation to Java. But as fate would have it the Pontianak survivors reached Banjermasin on 9 March, just in time to learn of Java's surrender. The same fate befell the Balikpapan defenders when they surrendered at Muaramuntai in mid-March.

On 31 January, just two days after securing Singkawang II airfield, the Japanese struck at Ambon. Here the combined KNIL/Australian garrison fought the Japanese for five days, until forced to surrender. Because they had lost two minesweepers on Dutch minefields the Japanese massacred an Australian company after the surrender, but a handful of KNIL and Australian troops managed to escape by boat to either Darwin or Dutch New Guinea. The loss of Ambon on 5 February marked the end of the first month of ABDA's operations. It had seen the loss of most of Borneo and the Celebes plus Ambon, with the only counterattacks coming during the naval Battle of Balikpapan, together with attacks by the Dutch, US and RAAF bombers which achieved little except the gradual attrition of ABDA air's limited resources.

The second and final month of ABDA's existence finally saw the arrival of some British reinforcements, evacuated from Singapore before its surrender. Three cruisers, four destroyers and some miscellaneous vessels were sent to Java, as were two RAN cruisers and seven corvettes. All of these ships had spent January escorting reinforcement convoys

into Singapore, and most of the Dutch fleet had also been distracted by this fruitless effort. This is the reason why so few surface warships were available for the attack against the Japanese at Balikpapan. As well, the British evacuated their remaining aircraft to southern Sumatra. An assortment of Hudson and Blenheim IV bombers, Vildabeeste torpedo-bombers, Catalinas, Buffalo and Hurricane fighters, and one Wirraway shifted down to the P1 and P2 airfields that had been built around the oil refinery at Palembang. Unfortunately, most of these aircraft were in such poor condition that they were sent on to Java, with only the 40 Hurricanes retained in Sumatra. As well, Australia inadvertently reinforced ABDA with some of its forces returning from the Middle East. The advance party of the 1st Australian Corps headed by General John Lavarak reached Java on 26 January. They were followed by 3400 troops of the 7th Division, and a squadron of British light tanks, which reached Sumatra on 12 February. The US also tried helping out by landing in Java an artillery regiment destined for the Philippines. The Americans also provided groups of aircraft that had been assembled in Australia and then hastily dispatched to Java. Such was the inexperience of their pilots, though, that of the 82 Kittyhawk fighters flown out from Darwin, only 38 reached Java; of the 15 Dauntless dive-bombers only seven reached Java, and only three more Flying Fortresses were able to reinforce the 14 bombers that had escaped from the Philippines.[12]

With these less than fresh forces, Wavell prepared to meet the next series of enemy attacks, which began on 8 February when the Japanese invaded Makassar (Celebes). Reconnaissance planes found the Japanese invasion convoy and, on 4 February, a US/Dutch fleet, designated the Combined Striking Force under the command of the Dutch Admiral Karel Doorman, sallied forth into the Makassar Strait. The Japanese met the Combined Striking Force with aircraft based at Kendari, with the result that the US cruiser *Marblehead* was so severely damaged that it was sent to the USA for repair, while the US cruiser *Houston* lost its forward gun turret. Doorman's ships were forced to return to Java, and the only damage inflicted on the enemy was when a US submarine sank an enemy destroyer on 8 February. The KNIL battalion at Makassar held out for two days and then retreated into the jungle, from where it conducted guerrilla warfare until finally exterminated in July 1942. The day after the capture of Makassar, the Japanese invaded Bandjermasin (Borneo) thus completing their conquest of the Celebes and Borneo.

The allied debacle in the Makassar Strait only served further to strain US and Dutch relations in the top echelon of ABDA float. The senior Dutch naval officer in the NEI, Admiral C.E.L. Helfrich, did not approve of having the naval affairs of the NEI placed under the control of the American, Hart. Their relationship was so poisonous that, just prior to the Makassar Strait action, Helfrich had sent his Dutch cruis-

ers and destroyers 'on a wild-goose chase to Karemata Strait between Borneo and Sumatra, where a Japanese surface force was rumoured to be. The rumour was false, as Admiral Hart happened to know, but Helfrich had not asked his opinion before sending the ships out'.[13] Makassar Strait was to be Hart's 'swan song'; on 9 February he asked to be relieved of his duties, and Helfrich replaced him. Hart had apparently felt himself too old for the job, and the appointment to ABDA fleet had never been to his liking anyway.[14]

On 14 February, when Helfrich assumed command of ABDA float, he was confronted with a crisis of confidence. First, a Japanese invasion fleet was spotted sailing towards Palembang in southern Sumatra, and on the next day Singapore surrendered to the Japanese. The morale of all the ABDA forces fell when this latter news was received, but the Dutch particularly were shocked. They had been denied British equipment and reinforcements which had been diverted instead to Singapore. The Dutch had sent some of their best military hardware to help the British, while the ability of the Combined Striking Force to defend the NEI had been hampered by some of its units being withdrawn to be used as convoy escorts into Singapore. With the loss of the supposedly impregnable Singapore, a sense of fatalism began to affect the Dutch, especially the poorly equipped KNIL.

The Japanese had dropped paratroops at Palembang on 14 February but they suffered such severe casualties that by the end of the day their survivors had been driven by the KNIL out of the oil installations and into the jungle. The second wave of attackers landed at the mouth of the Moesi River, and then proceeded upriver by barge towards Palembang. Doorman took the Combined Striking Force to attack the invaders. He suffered an early loss when the destroyer *Van Ghent* struck a reef on Lima Island and had to be scuttled. The next day Japanese aircraft spotted Doorman's force and then subjected them to five hours of heavy air attack, eventually forcing Doorman to retreat. Despite this setback, the Japanese reinforcements on the Moesi were held up by constant air attacks from the RAF and RAAF planes based at P1 and P2 airfields and from allied bombers based in Java. The Japanese lost a transport plus many troop-laden barges to these air attacks, but still they pressed on. At Palembang the British/Dutch defenders were exhausted after three days of continuous battle and, seeing no prospect of outside assistance, they blew up the oilfield and retreated down the road to the port of Oosthaven.

Yet reinforcements were close by to help the defenders of Palembang. The liner *Orcades* had already delivered 'Blackforce' to Oosthaven, consisting of the 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion, 2/22nd Pioneer Battalion, 2/6th Field Company, and their support units of the AIF plus a tank squadron of the 3rd Hussars. Thus Wavell had the equivalent of a brigade of troops available, which he could have sent up by road or

rail the 250 miles to Palembang. He decided inexplicably to abandon Sumatra, and ordered 'Blackforce' to re-embark on the *Orcades* on 15 February. Such was the hastiness of this evacuation and the cautious advance of the Japanese, prompted by their heavy losses, that the corvette HMAS *Ballarat* was able to return to the still unoccupied Oosthaven to collect valuable aircraft spares on 20 February. The capture of southern Sumatra gave the Japanese airfields in range of Java; thus its loss was to be the decisive action that was to doom the Indies. As one of the defending RAF Hurricane pilots commented bitterly:

> Sumatra could have been a nasty thorn in the side of the Japanese, and Java might have held. It was the one possible base for operations on a grand scale granted time to prepare, fought for tenaciously it had the size and terrain to absorb reserves, its southern coast was never for long a Japanese sea.[15]

Yet despite the KNIL/British successes at Palembang, and the RAF/Dutch success on the Moesi River, Sumatra was given up, not by the Dutch but on the orders of their ABDA Commander—Wavell.

Having cut Java off in the west, the next Japanese moves were designed to cut Java off from any reinforcements coming from Australia in the east. The Japanese invaded Bali on 18 February, and once again the Combined Striking Force, comprising three Dutch cruisers, one Dutch and four US destroyers, and the Dutch MTB squadron, sallied forth to meet the enemy. The resultant Battle of Bandoeng Strait left two Japanese destroyers and two merchantmen damaged, with the Dutch cruiser *Tromp* also so badly damaged that it was sent to Sydney for repairs.

While the Combined Striking Force was thus distracted around Bali, the Japanese turned their attention to Timor. As a preliminary move the Japanese launched a carrier strike on Darwin, where the destroyer *Peary* and seven transports were sunk. Contrary to popular misconceptions in Australia, the raid on Darwin, as well as the later raid on Broome, were not the opening Japanese moves against Australia but rather were part of the Japanese campaign for the NEI. Wavell had reinforced the original Timor garrison by sending the British 79th Anti-Aircraft Battery to Koepang on 16 January, and the Australians had sent a further 100 raw recruits to Sparrow Force on 19 January. Another reinforcement attempt had been made on 15 February, when a convoy carrying the 2/4th Pioneer Battalion AIF and a detachment of the US 148th Field Artillery Regiment and escorted by the *Houston*, *Peary* and two RAN sloops, was sent out from Darwin. Japanese planes found the convoy the next day and then subjected it to constant bombing attacks by up to 46 aircraft. Wavell ordered the convoy to return to Darwin where many of the ships were subsequently caught by the raid of 19 February.

On 20 February the Japanese launched simultaneous invasions of Koepang and Dili (Portuguese Timor). The Australian/KNIL garrison at

Koepang fought the Japanese for three days until it was forced to surrender on 24 February, and one wonders what effect the *Houston* convoy's reinforcements might have played in the outcome if they had reached Koepang. Certainly there was a danger to this convoy, but it had already survived heavy air attacks and was within landing distance of Timor, so Wavell could have risked having the convoy continue its mission. As it was, Wavell's decision to turn the convoy around signalled to Sparrow Force that they were on their own, and the transports were to be sunk in the raid on Darwin anyway. At Dili, the Australian Independent Company together with the KNIL company retreated into the hinterland, where they carried out a successful guerrilla campaign until evacuated in December. The Australian/Dutch agony over Timor continued during this guerrilla war. The Australians lost the destroyer *Voyager* in a reinforcement run on 23 September. Then on 1 December, the corvette HMAS *Armidale* and 61 troops of the KNIL were lost in a second reinforcement attempt.

The loss of Timor closed the air reinforcement route between Java and Australia. As a result attempts were made to run into Java only crated aircraft carried on ships. The *Sea Witch* and the seaplane tender USS *Langley* were allocated to this task. But the Langley carrying 32 Kittyhawks was sunk on the way to Java on 27 February while the *Sea Witch* reached the port of Tjilatjap with 27 Kittyhawks; but no experienced groundcrew were available to assemble these fighters, so they were dumped into the sea.

Thus one and a half months after its creation, ABDA was left with only Java to defend. Japanese bombers from Sumatra and Bali subjected all Java's airfields and ports, particularly Soerabaja naval base, to continuous raids. A Dutch destroyer was sunk on 17 February while attempting to evacuate the KNIL garrison from Billiton Island off Sumatra, a Dutch submarine was sunk in an air raid on Soerabaja the next day, while four allied destroyers were so badly damaged during these raids that they were eventually scuttled. These raids also forced Brereton to disperse his dwindling aircraft amongst a series of temporary jungle airstrips, but as these fields possessed only the barest of facilities the rate of aircraft serviceability dropped, with the corresponding effect on the number of allied planes that could be put into the air. For the ABDA ground forces, the bombings not only sapped morale but also directly affected the communications network used by the KNIL. The Dutch radio shortage lead the KNIL to be dependent upon the civilian postal, telephone and telegraphic service, and this service was failing due to the effects of Japanese bombing, the subsequent desertion of the native staff, and the lack of replacement stores.[16]

In the midst of this dismal situation, Wavell dissolved ABDA on 25 February and left for Ceylon. He believed that Java was doomed, and he had cabled London to request the evacuation of all British forces on

the island as early as 20 February. Apparently Wavell 'did not so inform his subordinate commanders of the other nationalities, but it leaked out in ABDA headquarters at Bandoeng on that or the next day'.[17] Brett had left Java on 23 February while Brereton, who had recommended to Washington that all US aircraft be evacuated from Java, had already gone to India on 24 February. Brereton's decision meant that the long-range US Flying Fortresses, Liberators, Dakotas and Catalinas began an evacuation service to Australia from Tjilatjap. Thus once again these planes were denied to the Dutch for, instead of attacking Japanese, they were used to evacuate American personnel. Hence the reason why there was no-one available to assemble the *Sea Witch*'s cargo of fighters. The NEI Governor-General allowed Dutch women and children to be evacuated to Australia, but he also declared that the Dutch forces would stay on Java and fight to the finish. Broome in Western Australia became so congested with these evacuation flights that it became a potential target. On 3 March nine Zeroes struck Broome, and destroyed 23 allied planes, but two Zeroes were shot down by a Dutch pilot, Lieutenant Gus Winckell. Two days later, the Japanese raided Tjilatjap and so closed the long-range air escape route to Australia.

Thus, by the end of February, the Dutch found themselves in command of all the remaining allied forces defending Java. Doorman organised his ships into a Western Striking Force (one Australian, two British cruisers, and two British destroyers) and an Eastern Striking Force (one British, one US, one Australian, two Dutch cruisers; three Dutch, three British, four US destroyers). Between 25 and 27 February both Striking Forces searched for the Japanese invasion fleets that were approaching Java from east and west. The culmination of these sorties was the Battle of the Java Sea in which Doorman lost both his Dutch cruisers, three destroyers and his own life, while the Japanese in return suffered only damage to two of their destroyers and a cruiser. The critical factor in the Japanese victory was their complete knowledge of the movements of Doorman's ships. This information came from their float planes which dropped flares to notify the Japanese fleet of every course change made by Doorman. Doorman's ships though were always blind to the Japanese fleet's movements because no allied aircraft were available to provide reconnaissance. Brereton's policy of concentrating all allied planes in ABDA air came to bitter fruition during the Battle of the Java Sea. At one stage in the battle, ten Kittyhawks and three Dauntless dive-bombers appeared on the scene, but they were searching for enemy transports or a carrier and so left immediately. The three Japanese float planes remained unmolested but had 'the U.S. fighters taken time off to dispose of these spotting aircraft, they could well have influenced the course of the Battle of the Java Sea. But neither

these aircraft nor any others were assigned to Doorman despite his and Helfrich's appeal for air protection'.[18]

After the Battle of the Java Sea, Helfrich tried to use his surviving warships to organise another strike at the Japanese, but his plan was thwarted by Admiral Glassford, USN and Admiral Palliser, RN who wanted instead to save as many of their ships as possible. On 1 March, there occurred this bitter exchange between Helfrich and his allied commanders:

> Palliser: Then I must say to you as the Senior British Naval Officer in this area, that my instructions from the Admiralty are to withdraw His Majesty's ships from Java when resistance will serve no further purpose. That time, in my judgement has come. Therefore I feel it my duty to order His Majesty's ships to India at once, and this I propose to do.
>
> Helfrich: You realize that you are under my orders?
>
> Palliser: I do of course. But in this vital matter I cannot do other than my duty as I see it.
>
> Helfrich: You know that I lent to the British when Malaya was threatened, all of my fighting fleet—my cruisers, my destroyers, my submarines, my air—all of it was placed at your disposal for operation as you saw fit. In doing so we suffered grave losses. Furthermore, you did not hold Malaya. Singapore now is in the hands of the enemy. You failed. I think the wisest course now is to let me continue to handle this situation and save Java.
>
> Palliser: I cannot alter my decision.
>
> Helfrich: Will you delay one hour until I see the Governor-General and inform him of what you intend to do?
>
> Palliser: I cannot delay longer. Every minute counts.
>
> Helfrich: And you, Admiral Glassford, what do you intend to do?
>
> Glassford: My instructions are to report to you for duty. Any order you give will be obeyed at once. I wish to say to you, however, that I concur without reservation in the advice given to you by your Chief of Staff (Palliser). I am to retire on Australia by order of my Commander in Chief if necessary to abandon Java, but that is for you to decide.
>
> Helfrich: Very well then, Admiral Palliser, you may give any orders you wish to His Majesty's ships. Admiral Glassford you will <u>order</u> your ships to Australia.[19]

As this evacuation was being ordered the Japanese moved a carrier force south of Java, and between 27 February and 4 March the Japanese sank three cruisers, six destroyers, a sloop, a gunboat, an oiler, together with 11 merchantmen. The Dutch would point out ruefully that, with the exception of HMAS *Perth* and the USS *Houston*, which stumbled upon the Japanese Western Invasion Force and managed to sink three enemy

transports and a minesweeper before going down, these other ten allied warships were lost while fleeing the NEI rather than in defending it.

The implications of the allied air and naval evacuation were obvious to the troops left behind to defend the island. Many native soldiers affected by the bombing or nationalist propaganda began to desert their units, while many of the European reservists refused to leave their local districts because they were concerned for their families' safety. Poorten only had two weak and immobile KNIL divisions with which to defend East and West Java. His only mobile reserves were the KNIL Experimental Tank Battalion and 'Blackforce' which had been reinforced with the US 131st Artillery Regiment and 165 Australian unfortunates who had managed to escape from Singapore to Java, only to be imprisoned as deserters by the Dutch before finally being drafted into 'Blackforce'.

The Japanese began to land on Java on 28 February and the battle for the island lasted through to 12 March, thus making it a more protracted fight than the eight-day battle for Singapore. Despite the deteriorating situation Poorten endeavoured to counterattack with his tank battalion and 'Blackforce', but Japanese aircraft halted the counter-attack by wiping out the tanks. The Dutch attempted to carry out a scorched earth policy, with all of Java's port facilities being blown up and then blocked with sunken ships. The surviving Dutch naval forces damaged a Japanese tanker and sank another transport before being scuttled or escaping to Ceylon or Fremantle. The increasing Dutch bitterness at being left in the lurch by both their major allies can be seen from a wireless message sent from Bandoeng on 7 March:

> In the Netherlands East Indies there have been some criticism [sic] of the allies in their conduct of the campaign in Malaya ... it is more heartrending for the Dutch people when they recall that a great part of the Dutch airforce was lost in the unavailing defence of Malaya. This policy was one which carried with it the risk of the quick exhaustion of Dutch forces, but the risk was taken in the expectation that reinforcements would soon arrive in the Far East, but these reinforcements never came.[29]

The end came fairly soon after the 4 March counterattack failed. Bandoeng was declared an open city on 8 March, and Poorten ordered the KNIL to lay down its arms. As he had previously told his officers to ignore any such surrender order, confused and sporadic fighting continued through to 12 March, when 'Blackforce' finally surrendered.

Repercussions began almost immediately after the surrender of Java. Helfrich who had escaped to Ceylon on 1 March complained bitterly that US aircraft had been held back for the defence of Australia rather than being sent to help out in Java. The Americans rejected Helfrich's claim and pointed out that they had allotted a total of 160 fighter aircraft to ABDA air from their limited stocks in Australia. For the Dutch

it was not a matter of the number of planes allotted but rather the number that flew above the skies over Java, and it was pointed out to the Americans that only a meagre 38 of the 160 fighters became operational.[21]

The Allies' response to the resentment being expressed by the surviving Dutch officers in Ceylon and Australia was to formulate an official policy designed not only to win over the Dutch, but also to soothe world opinion on this matter. This policy was entitled 'Proposed Measures to Offset Dutch Resentment at Allied Failure to Send Reinforcements'. It stressed allied fears that the Gerbrandy Government might choose to make the 'Dutch merchant navy ... less co-operative', while in the Far East the repercussions might be that the 'remnants of the Dutch Government and forces as reach Australia will retain a certain hostility which may make co-operation difficult'.[22]

The fact that in March 1942 the Dutch still possessed a large merchant fleet, some warships and aircraft and oil and bauxite resources in Surinam and Curacao also weighed heavily on the minds of the allied planners. Thus the following measures were suggested for dealing with the Dutch:

1) Propaganda designed to show why it was impossible to send reinforcements to the N.E.I. ...

2) Co-operation with the Dutch in "Salvage" operations ... (including finding) Dutch officials appropriate positions in Australia, ... and re-equipment of Dutch forces which escape.... Full recognition of their status and worth (especially in the case of native troops) ...

3) Protection of Dutch assets, and assistance eg. grant of loans for equipment etc. secured on assets in N.E.I. as gesture of confidence in restoration of Dutch authority. ...

4) Assistance on organisation of N.E.I. Government.

5) Co-operation in control of shipping evacuating from N.E.I. - as little haggling as possible about conditions of charter etc. Dutch to be asked to share control of shipping in Australian waters eg. by Dutch representatives on the Shipping Board.

6) Co-operation in control of aircraft eg. the use of experienced Dutch officials on development of airlines.[23]

Whether this policy as adopted by the Americans, British and Australians succeeded in placating the Dutch is not within the scope of this article, although MacArthur clearly did not follow the second measure when he allotted command positions within the SWPA. But, in the final analysis and from the Dutch viewpoint, what should be examined is what was actually lost defending the NEI. The Americans lost 13 warships, about 40 planes and a regiment of troops. The British lost nine warships, about 40 planes, and four AA regiments and a tank squadron. Australia with its smaller military resources lost two

warships, about 30 planes and the equivalent of two brigades of troops. The Dutch lost nearly all their navy (52 ships), all their 200 planes and all but a few hundred soldiers of the KNIL. Thus, for the Dutch, only the Australians put in a strong effort to help out in the NEI whereas US and British losses were negligible while the Netherlands had lost nearly everything.

The Japanese, who after all were the winners of the NEI campaign, should be granted the last word on the Dutch in 1942. General Imamura, who lead the Java invasion forces, said:

> The greatest mistake of the Dutch Government ... concerning the defence of the East Indies seemed to be that it transferred supreme command in the Dutch East Indies from the Governor General to General Wavell of Britain who commanded only 10,000 British and Australian forces altogether. In fact, General Wavell fled to India by air, when the Japanese troops began to land and move forward in East and West Java, leaving the Allied forces behind. As a result, the remaining Allied forces did not follow the lead of Commander ter Poorten at all, making it very difficult for him to carry out his strategy. I think it was natural that the commander lost the will to fight. Had the Allied forces in Java been commanded by the Governor-General, the Japanese Army would have had to face a tougher battle.[24]

Perhaps then even the Japanese would agree that in 1942 the Dutch were truly the most forlorn of the Allies they fought against.

Appendix 1
Allied Naval Units Used in the Defence of the NEI
+ indicates sunk or scuttled

Royal Netherlands Navy	
3 light cruisers:	*De Ruyter*+, *Java*+, *Tromp*
7 destroyers:	*Banckert*+, *Evertsen*+, *Kortenaer*+, *Piet Hein*+, *Van Ghent*+, *Van Nes*+, *Witte de With*+
13 submarines:	*O-19*, *K-VII*+, *K-VIII*, *K-IX*, *K-X*+, *K-XI*, *K-XII*, *K-XIII*+, *K-XIV*, *K-XV*, *K-XVI*+, *K-XVII*+, *K-XVIII*+
1 coastal defence ship:	*Soerabaja*+
1 supply vessel:	*Zuiderkruis*
2 seaplane tenders:	*Merel*, *Poolster*+
1 gunboat:	*Soemba*
7 minelayers:	*Prins Van Oranje*+, *Gouden Leeuw*+, *Krakatau*+, *Willem van der Zaan*, *Rigel*+, *Pro Patria*+, *Soemenep*+
8 minesweepers:	*Abraham Crijnssen*, *Jan Van Amstel*+, *Pieter De Bitter*+, *Eland Dubois*+, *A*+, *B*+, *C*+, *D*+
9 motor torpedo boats:	*TM-3*+, *TM-4*+, *TM-5*+, *TM-6*+, *TM-7*+, *TM-8*+, *TM-9*+, *TM-10*+, *TM-11*+
17 patrol vessels:	*Bellatrix*+, *Fazant*+, *Merel*+, *Reiger*+, *Sirius*+, *Wega*+, *Albatross*+, *Canopus*+, *Deneb*+, *Eridanus*+, *Gemma*+, *Arend*+, *Valk*+, *Castor*, *Hydrograff*
United States Navy	
1 heavy cruiser:	*Houston*+
2 light cruisers:	*Boise*, *Marblehead*
12 destroyers:	*Edsall*+, *Pillsbury*+, *Pope*+, *Stewart*+, *Whipple*+, *Peary*+, *Barker*, *Bulmer*, *John D. Edwards*, *John D. Ford*, *Parrott*, *Paul Jones*
23 submarines:	*Shark*+, *Perch*+, *S-36*+, *S-37*, *S-38*, *S-40*, *S-41*, *Salmon*, *Seal*, *Skipjack*, *Snapper*, *Stingray*, *Sturgeon*, *Sargo*, *Saury*, *Spearfish*, *Sailpin*, *Swordfish*, *Seadragon*, *Searaven*, *Seawolf*, *Pike*, *Porpoise*
2 submarine tenders:	*Holland*, *Otus*
2 gunboats:	*Asheville*+, *Tulsa*
2 seaplane tenders:	*Childs*, *Langley*+
1 oiler:	*Pecos*+
2 minesweepers:	*Heron*, *Whippoorwill*

Royal Navy	
1 heavy cruiser:	*Exeter*+
2 light cruisers:	*Dragon, Danae*
6 destroyers:	*Jupiter*+, *Encounter*+, *Electra*+, *Stronghold*+, *Scout, Tenedos*
1 sloop:	*Jumma*
2 oilers:	*Francol*+, *War Sidar*+
3 auxiliary minesweepers:	*Rashman*+, *Gemas*+, *Wo Kwang*
Royal Australian Navy	
2 light cruisers:	*Perth*+, *Hobart*
1 sloop:	*Yarra*+
7 corvettes:	*Bendigo, Ballarat, Burnie, Maryborough, Toowoomba, Goulburn Wollongong*

Appendix 2
Allied Aircraft Allotted to The Defence of the NEI

US Reinforcements

Type	Number: Dispatched	Arrived
B-17 Flying Fortress bombers	17	17
A-24 Dauntless dive-bombers	15 [a]	7
P-40 Kittyhawk fighters	136	38[b]
TOTAL	168	62

[a] A further 37 Dauntless in 16th and 17th Bombardment Squadrons could not reach Java after the loss of Timor.

[b] 55 crated Kittyhawks delivered on the *Sea Witch* but destroyed at Tjilatjap as no US service personnel available to put them together.

British Reinforcements[c]

Hudson bombers	10	10
Blenheim I night fighters	8	8
Blenheim IV bombers	20	20
Hurricane fighters	33	28
Buffalo fighters	2	2
Catalina flying boats	2	2
TOTAL	75	70

[c] All RAF aircraft committed to defence of Singapore before NEI up until 8 February 1942.

Australian Reinforcements

Hudson bombers	32[d]	32

[d] Only ten of these operated independently of RAF Malayan Command, six Hudsons at Ambon and four Hudsons at Timor.

Appendix 3
Dutch Aircraft Strength in the NEI on 7 December 1941

The Royal Netherlands Naval Air Service (The *MLD*)
30 Dornier 24-K flying boats
6 (to be built up to 30) Catalina flying boats
13 obsolete Fokker floatplanes

The Air Service of The Royal Netherlands Indies Army (The *MLKNIL*)
82 Glenn Martin B-10 bombers
50 Buffalo fighters
20 Curtiss-Wright interceptors (fighters)
17 Curtiss Hawk 75A fighters
some obsolete Fokker reconnaissance planes

The Royal Netherlands Indies Airlines (*KNILM*)
4 Douglas DC-2 transport planes
18 Lockheed Lodestar transport planes

Appendix 4
Allied Army Defences in the NEI

West Borneo	
Singkawang II airfield	a KNIL Battalion the survivors of 2/15 Punjab Battalion who had retreated from British Sarawak
East Borneo	
Tarakan	a KNIL battalion a coastal defence battery
Balikpapan	a KNIL battalion
Celebes	
Menado	a KNIL battalion
Kendari	a KNIL battalion
Ambon	a KNIL regiment 2 coastal defence batteries Gull Force (2/21 Battalion AIF, a troop of 18th Anti-Tank Battery, a section of 2/11th Field Company plus detachments)
Timor	
Koepang	a KNIL battalion a coastal defence battery 4 armoured cars

Koepang	Sparrow Force (2/40 Battalion AIF, 2/1 Heavy Battery, 2/1 Fortress Engineers, a troop of 18th Anti-Tank Battery, a section of 2/11th Field Company, 79th British light AA Battery plus detachments)
Dili	a KNIL company 2/2 Independent Company AIF
Sumatra	
Palembang	2 KNIL battalion plus fixed artillery 6 Heavy AA British Regiment 2 armoured cars
Elsewhere in Northern Sumatra	5 KNIL battalions each defending towns and ports
Java	
East Java	an incomplete KNIL division plus a marine battalion, an artillery regiment and a mountain artillery regiment
Central Java	an incomplete KNIL brigade plus 2 cavalry squadrons
West Java	an incomplete KNIL division plus an artillery regiment, a cavalry company and the KNIL Experimental Tank Battalion 'Blackforce' (2/3 Machine-Gun Battalion, 2/2 Pioneer Battalion, 2/6 Field Company plus detachments) 131st US Artillery Regiment a squadron of the 3rd Hussars Tank Regiment, 2 RAF defence regiments 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiments (including 77th Heavy AA and 21st Light AA)

Appendix 5

Japanese Shipping Losses in the NEI Campaign

Date	Loss	Place
8 December 1941	*Nanyo Maru*	Timor
18 December 1941	*Shinome* (destroyer)	Borneo
	Hei Maru	
	Katori Maru	
19 December 1941	*Sagiri* (destroyer)	Borneo
24 December 1941	*Hiyoshi Maru*	Borneo
25 December 1941	*Unyo Maru*	Borneo
	W-6 (minesweeper)	

Date	Loss	Place
11 January 1942	*W-13* (minesweeper)	Tarakan
	W-14 (minesweeper)	
21 January 1942	*I-124* (submarine)	Arafura Sea
23 January 1942	*Nana Maru*	Balikpapan
24 January 1942	*I-160* (submarine)	Sunda Strait
	Patrol Boat Number 37	Balikpapan
	Tsuruga Maru	
	Sumanoura Maru	
	Tatsukami Maru	
	Kuretake Maru	
31 January 1942	Number 9 (minesweeper)	Ambon
	Number 10 (minesweeper)	
8 February 1942	*Natsushio* (destroyer)	Makassar
14 February 1942	*Inabasan Maru*	Sumatra
28 February 1942	*Sakura Maru*	Sunda Strait
	Horai Maru	
	Ryujo Maru	
	Number 2 (minesweeper)	
1 March 1942	*Tsurumi* (naval tanker)	Java
	Kangogawa Maru	Bali

TOTAL 3 destroyers, 2 submarines, 1 patrol vessel, 5 minesweepers, 1 naval tanker, 15 transports. Also, Dutch submarines sank off Malaya *Toru Maru* (tanker) and *Taisui Maru*.

Frank Cass

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13 April 1994.

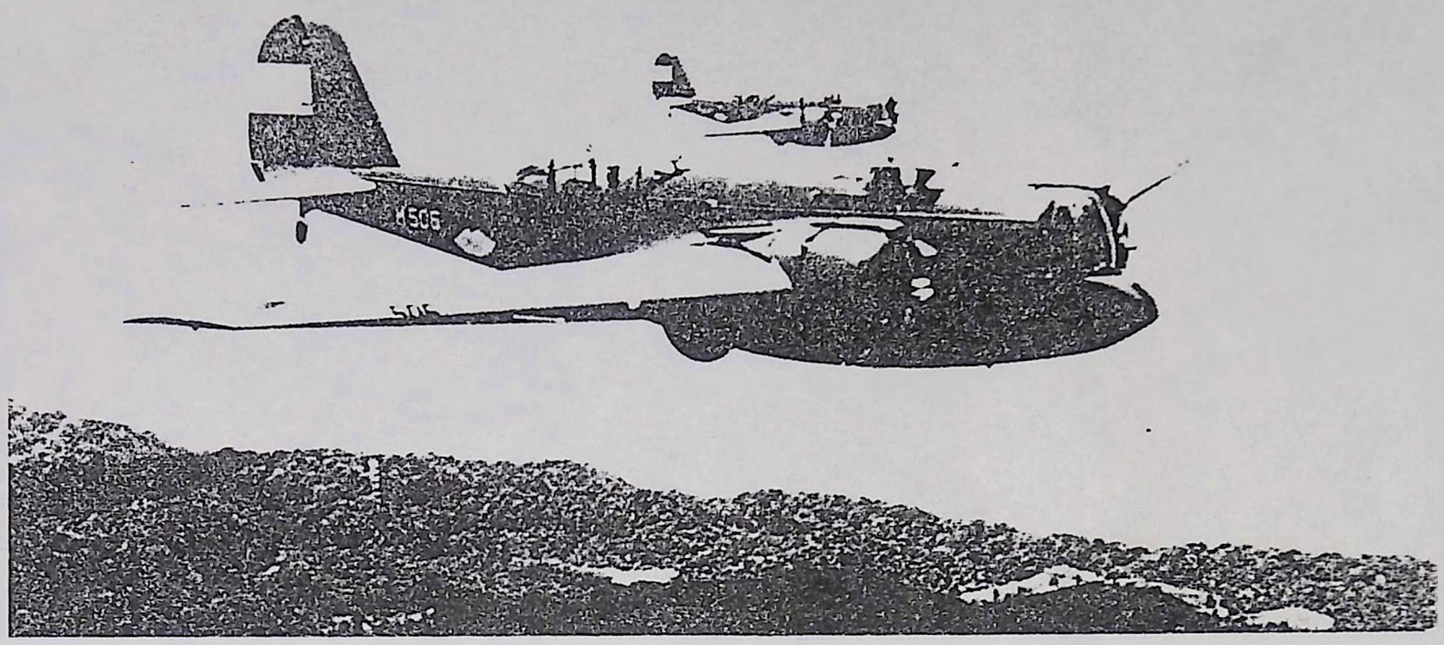
Dear Bill,

Please find enclosed the items that I promised to send to you. You will see that I did not have a full copy of Ed Drea's paper, only a synopsis but I've given you his address. My article in 'War and Society' will be ammended for my thesis by the inclusion of the 5 B-24 bombers belonging to the 7th Bombardment Group. I hope you find my article interesting as it was written from the Dutch point of view. I have also enclosed Jean Schilfgaarde's address.

Regards J M Ford
JACK FORD

Air Enthusiast (22) / 1983

BATAVIA'S BIG STICKS



BOMBERS BEFORE FIGHTERS: such was the choice that the Netherlands government made in 1936 for the defence of the East Indies colonies. The defence principles had for many years been studied by defence commissions appointed to find the best way to ensure the security of the mineral-rich Dutch possessions in Asia. The Netherlands were officially non-aligned, but defence doctrine assumed that Great Britain would never allow the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) to be occupied by a potential aggressor (ie, Japan). Thus the task was seen to be limited to internal security provided by the Royal Netherlands Indies Army (KNIL) — basically a police-army with a small tactical air element — and external maintenance of neutrality, provided by a small Navy that also operated reconnaissance flying boats. Aerial defence of the Navy base at Surabaja was provided by a squadron of Curtiss P-6 Hawks of the Army Air Service.

During the 'thirties, however, budget cuts had caused the defence forces to deteriorate to a point where it seemed — as was written later on — that a rich man had left his treasures to be guarded by a boy with a sling-shot. In 1935, yet another defence commission recommended that the only quick way to strengthen the NEI's defences was by acquiring a strong force of land-based bombers. Such a force could be concentrated at short notice against an invading Naval force; but, to provide the necessary funds, Navy expenditure would have to be curtailed, and replacement of the obsolete Curtiss fighters would be cancelled. The Dutch government accepted the recommendations.

There was, at best, a degree of wishful thinking in the arguments for buying bombers only: unescorted bombers, of whatever type, would almost certainly be easy meat for carrier-based fighters. For the Army, the prospect of finally getting modern equipment seemed almost too good to be true, but the Navy raised strong objections. Land-based bombers, it was argued, required bases on the periphery of the Indonesian archipelago, bases that could easily be captured by invading enemy forces, unless protected by fighters and ground defences — and these were not to be provided. Navy flying boats, on the contrary, could operate from unprepared bays and lakes, the Navy argued.

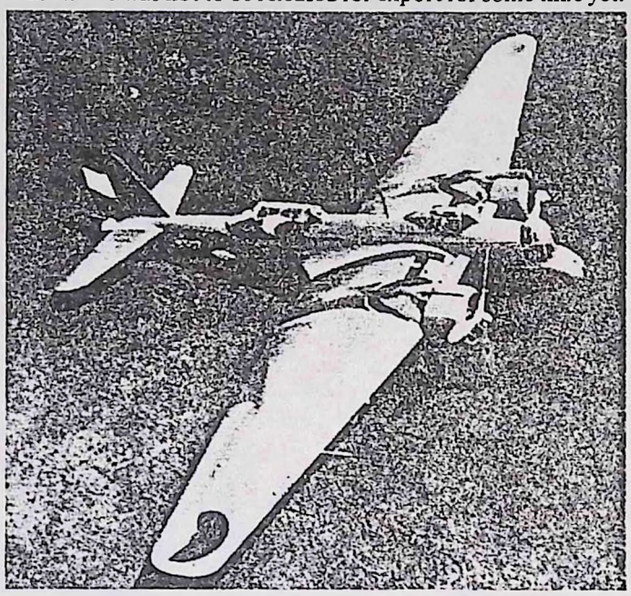
The issue was decided, nevertheless, in favour of expanding the Army air element with bombers only. At that time the KNIL had one squadron of P-6 fighters and two of Fokker C V reconnaissance biplanes, with replacement Fokker C Xs on order for one of the recce units. KNIL commander General Boerstra, a member of the defence commission that had recommended the land-based bomber solution, conveniently received in October 1935 an offer from the Glenn L Martin company in the USA for the supply of nine Model 139 bombers which he recommended for purchase. The Ministry of Colonial Affairs was not pleased with the General's suggestion, for economic circumstances made it a political necessity to order aircraft in Holland. The Fokker company was working on the design of the T V twin-engined bomber and the Ministry was ready to order a prototype, but the KNIL was very much opposed to this proposal, believing that Fokker's wood-and-fabric bomber would be unsuitable for extended operations from remote bases without hangarage, and having in mind the very protracted efforts of Fokker to

When Japanese naval, air and land forces launched their all-out offensive in the Pacific on 7/8 December 1941, the oil- and mineral-rich Netherlands East Indies was among the prime objectives. Among the defensive forces available were three Groups of Martin 139 twin-engined bombers, 120 of which had been delivered between the end of 1936 and early 1940. In common with other Allied units throughout the area, the Martin Groups put up a spirited and, eventually, desperate fight to stem the Japanese invasion — a fight that was predestined to fail in view of the enemy's massive numerical superiority. Gerard Casius here tells in detail the story of the Dutch Martins and the courageous fight by their crews against impossible odds.

deliver the C X biplanes, which were delayed by more than a year. The Martin 139, on the contrary, was of all-metal construction and already in production. An inevitable compromise was worked out, whereby seven Martin 139 WH-1s (Wright motor, Holland) would be ordered from Martin, followed by six built under licence in the Netherlands. The contract (No 48.096) was placed with Martin on 27 February 1936, and Anthony Fokker promptly contacted Martin to acquire the licence rights for the improved Martin 146.

The 13 Martin 139s were intended to be used to re-equip a Fokker C V squadron, with a strength of nine in first line and four in reserve. Further planning foresaw two more Martin squadrons to be acquired in 1938-40, making a total of 39 bombers, but licence production in Holland presented considerable problems. Only the Aviolanda company was equipped for all-metal construction, with a limited output; Fokker lacked these facilities almost completely. Increased political tension in the Pacific helped the government decide to order six more Martins from Baltimore in order to have one complete *Afdeling* (Squadron) of Martins as soon as possible. This second contract (No 48.121) was concluded on 11 May 1936, raising the total cost to $1·5 million.

Licence production of the remaining 27 planned bombers now became even more problematic, because the tooling-up costs had to be spread over fewer aeroplanes. Moreover, the Martin 146 was not to be released for export for some time yet.



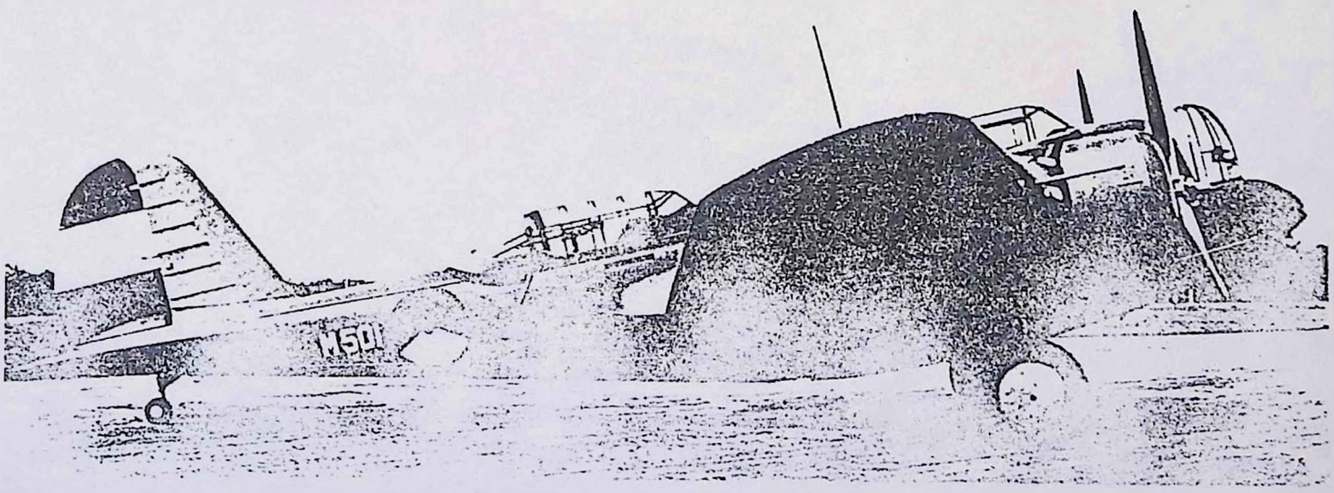
Under pressure from the Council of the Netherlands East Indies, which cited increased international tension in Asia to urge quick expansion of the KNIL air service, the Dutch government, therefore, proposed to order more Martins in the USA, rather than wait the estimated 2½ years for Dutch production to materialise. Defending the increased expenditure before Parliament on 15 December 1936, Prime Minister Dr Colijn stated that only one method was available to effectively defend the Indies against an aggressor, and that "was a massive attack with a large number of bombers". On 11 March 1937, a new contract (No 49.190) was signed with the Martin company for 26 Model 139 WH-2 bombers.

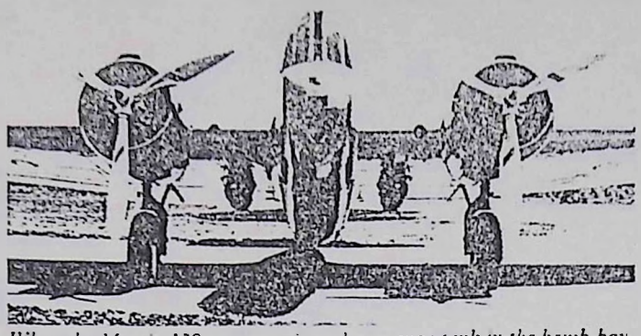
First deliveries

Production of the first 13 Model 139 WH-1 bombers for the KNIL proceeded quickly at Baltimore, and on 2 September 1936, a Dutch commission accepted the first aeroplane (c/n 656, serial M-501). On 17 December 1936, the first two Martins arrived by ship in the NEI, where the Technical Department at Andir field (Bandung) assembled M-502 within a week. This aircraft was test flown on 19 January 1937, by Martin's pilot Bill Rowland. The aircraft proved easy to fly and, in April 1937, the 2e *Vliegtuigafdeling* (2-VA, or 2nd Aircraft Squadron) relinquished its Fokker C Vs to become the first Martin *afdeling*. Between 20 and 23 April 1937, this unit made the first long-range flight to Borneo with six aeroplanes. More long flights, to Sumatra, Timor and Ambon, followed in the same year and 2-VA flew over 2,300 hours in 1937, without serious problems, proving the Martin 139 a very reliable aeroplane. Also in 1937, the first bomb-aiming trials were made on moving Navy ships. Although the KNIL had selected the excellent Austrian Goertz-R bombsight as standard equipment, the first Martins were still fitted with the rather crude US-made Estoppey bombsight in order to get the aeroplanes into service as quickly as possible.

The 26 bombers built on the third contract incorporated several improvements. The more powerful Wright Cyclone G-3 engines of 875 hp drove Curtiss Electric constant-speed propellers rather than the two-position Hamilton Standards of the WH-1. A much cleaned-up engine cowling with controllable cooling gills was fitted to improve tropical cooling. The Dutch-built NSF VR-34B shortwave wireless set became standard equipment, as well as a radio direction finder. Another important improvement was the addition of an autopilot. Performance was much improved, the max speed having increased from 217 mph to 242 mph (349 to 389 km/h). The higher fuel consumption of the G-3 engines was more than compensated by the more efficient constant-speed propellers,

(Below) The first of the Dutch Martins: the WH-1 M-501 in September 1936, while undergoing acceptance tests at Baltimore. (Above left) M-507 newly delivered and photographed from the control tower at Andir.





When the Martin 139 was carrying a long-range tank in the bomb-bay, two 630-lb (285-kg) bombs could be carried externally under the wing centre-section.

and the max range increased from 1,243 mls to 1,367 mls (2 000 to 2 200 km). Bomb load increased from 2,200 lb to 2,646 lb (1 000 to 1 200 kg).

New squadrons organised

As already mentioned, 2-VA became the first Martin squadron, equipped with the WH-1 version. Delivery of the first of 26 WH-2s took place early 1938, after acceptance trials in Baltimore of M-514 (c/n 717) in November and December 1937. This permitted conversion of two more *afdelingen*, the first being 3-VA which relinquished its Fokker C X biplanes, and started to work up in the new North Hangar at Andir.

Andir was, at that time, the only airfield used by the *Luchtvaart Afdeling* (Aviation Division) of the Royal Neth East Indies Army, since its training base Kali Djati (both bases on Java) had been closed in 1931 as a result of budget cuts. The Andir base became very much overloaded with the combined activities of the flying school, the first of the Martin units and technical training; Kali Djati field had therefore been re-opened on 1 December 1936, and the Curtiss P-6 fighter squadron (1-VA) had been transferred there. In April 1938, 3-VA with its Martins was also stationed at Kali Djati; a few months later the Curtiss squadron was disbanded and 1-VA reformed as a Martin *afdeling* at Kali Djati. On 1 October 1938, both *afdelingen* at Kali Djati were organised into *Vliegtuig Groep* II (VLG II, or Aircraft Group II) under command of Capt Waltmann. Although the planned strength of a Group comprised three *afdelingen* of 13 bombers each (nine first-line, two in reserve manned with staff personnel and two in depot repair), 2-VA remained at Andir as a depot unit for flying and technical training duties.

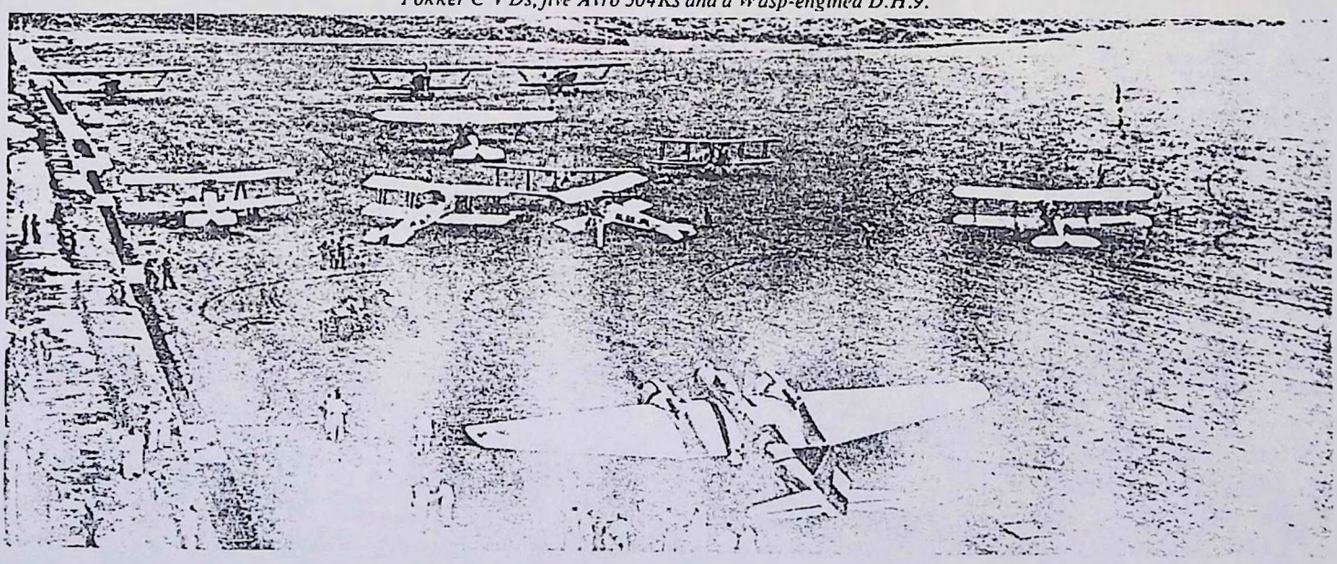
Martin meanwhile had continued development of the basic Model 139. A continuous "hot-house" perspex cockpit enclosure was introduced, the forward fuselage cross-section was increased to accommodate a larger bomb load of 4,410 lb (2 000 kg), and the wing was given more sweepback. Powered by Wright GR1820-G5 engines of 1,100 hp each, this new version was designated Model 166, although this was changed to Model 139 WH-3 later on, probably to benefit from the export clearance already given for the 139, and the NEI placed further orders for this model.

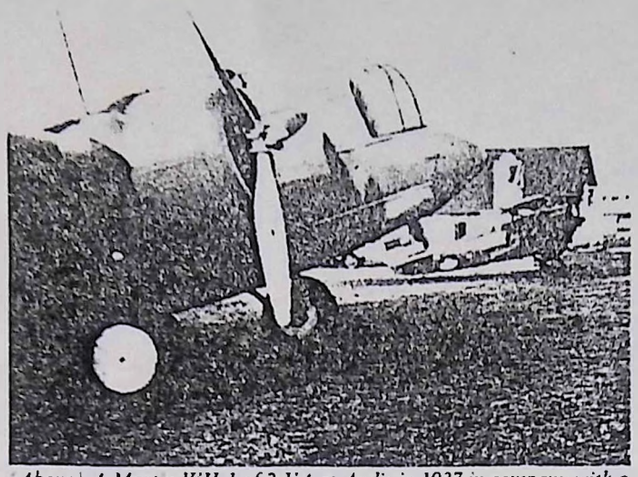
On 27 December 1937, contract No 50.014 was signed for the supply of 39 Martin 139 WH-3s, at a cost of approximately $4·5 million. Acceptance of the first machine on this order (c/n 775, M-540) took place, again at Baltimore, in May 1938. These aeroplanes were intended to equip another full *Groep* of bombers, and in the 1939 budget the acquisition of bombers for a third group was planned. The contract for these additional aircraft involved a further development, designated 139 WH-3A, similar to the WH-3 but powered by 1,200 hp GR1820-G102 engines. This final version had a top speed of 241 mph (388 km/h) and a range of 1,250 mls (2 010 km). Both the WH-3 and WH-3A could be equipped with a 360-US gal (1 360-l) bomb-bay tank which extended the range by 684 mls (1 100 km), and two external bomb racks were fitted under the wing centre section. Normal bomb load was 4,410 lb (2 000 kg).

In the WH-3A version, 40 aeroplanes were contracted on 17 November 1938 (No 51.111), one having been added to the normal complement of 39 per group to replace a crashed WH-2. This order provoked serious criticism from the Dutch Navy, which considered the need for new fighters for the protection of the Surabaja naval base now to be more urgent, in view of the experiences in the conflicts in China and Spain, where anti-aircraft artillery alone had proved incapable of defending targets against bombers. The Army found such conclusions premature; it was interested in a twin-engined escort fighter, suitable for operations over sea areas, but such a fighter was not yet available. Nevertheless, under pressure from the Navy, the decision was taken in September 1939 to order 20 Curtiss H75A-7 Hawk single-engined fighters to defend Surabaja.

Construction of the WH-3As must have started before the contract was signed, because acceptance trials took place in Baltimore in December 1938 (c/n 837, M-579) and the order was completed in May 1939. During shipment of the WH-3As, two aeroplanes were lost — reportedly damaged when they fell out of a crane during loading — and two replacements were ordered on 29 July 1939 (contract No 51.768). These were delivered in February and March 1940, bringing Martin 139 production to a close, with a total of 120 delivered to the

The first Martin WH-1 assembled at Andir (Bandung), M-502, ready for its first flight there on 19 January 1937. Also in this photograph can be seen four Fokker C VDs, five Avro 504Ks and a Wasp-engined D.H.9.





(Above) A Martin WH-1 of 2-VA at Andir in 1937 in company with a Curtiss P-6. Lack of modern fighters to defend the Martins was to contribute to the heavy combat losses they suffered four years later. (Below) The second WH-2, M-515.

Dutch. The NEI orders for Martin 139 bombers had represented an important boost for the US aircraft industry and for Glenn L Martin in particular; during 1938, the NEI was the second largest US export customer with purchases to a value of $8,495,288, topped only by Japan(!) with $11,062,477.

The new WH-3 bombers began to arrive in the NEI in the third quarter of 1938, followed by the WH-3As during January-August 1939, permitting the activation of the two new Martin groups in 1939. On 1 March 1939, the Depot unit at Andir was expanded to form the nucleus of the new *Vliegtuig Groep* I (VLG I) under command of Capt Waltmann, this also comprising two *afdelingen* (1- and 2-VLG I) equipped with WH-3 bombers.

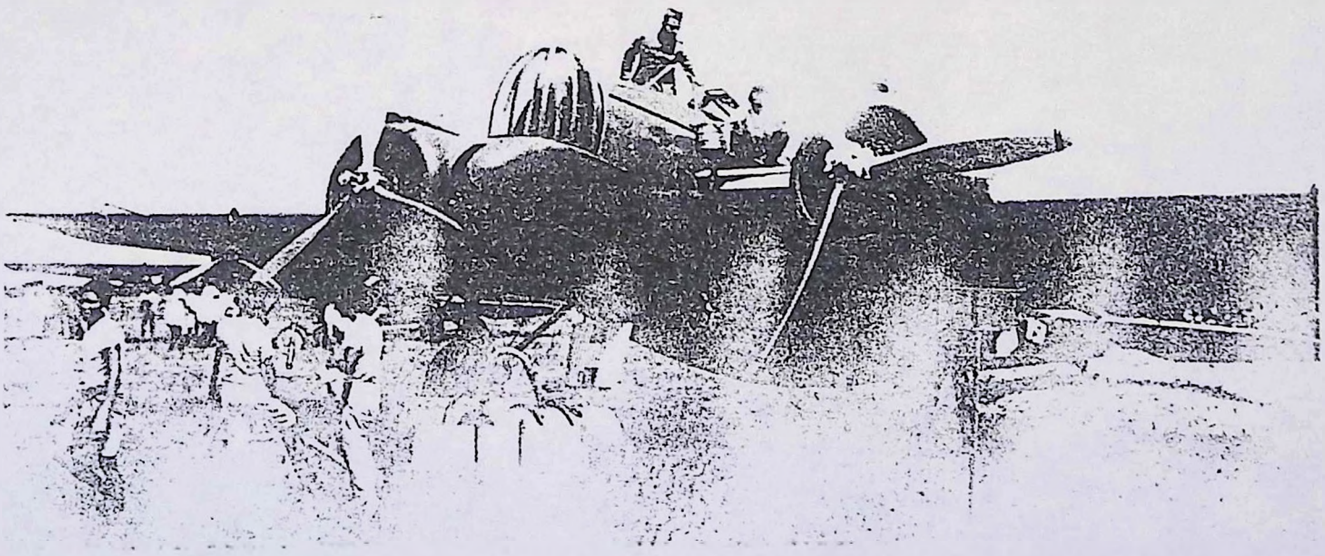
On 1 April 1939, the third and final Martin bomber group was established as VLG III at the old civilian airfield of Batavia, Tjililitan, which had been taken over by the Army on 1 March. The CO was Capt E J Roelofs and the group consisted of *afdelingen* 1-VLG III and 2-VLG III. For the time being, the ML-KNIL *(Militaire Luchtvaart)** could not raise group strength to more than two *afdelingen*, as training requirements absorbed much of the strength in the 1938-41 period. The Martins of the Depot unit at Andir were organised as the Martin *Vliegschool* (Flight School), under command of Capt Boot in May 1940; this school operated some 13 of the more modern WH-3 and 3A versions for OTU duties, as well as nine WH-1s and seven WH-2s, some of which were used as instructional airframes at the Technical Training School at Andir. Losses through accidents had been considerable, seven Martins having been lost by the end of 1939 (two WH-1s, two WH-2s and three WH-3s). Two of these accidents occurred on night flights during black-out exercises; others were attributed to undisciplined flying. The ML-KNIL did not put great emphasis on instrument flying in those days and this, combined with a strong tradition of "daring flying exploits", cost several aeroplanes. A fair share of training accidents was also caused by the impossibility of supervising student pilots in the front cockpit. The instructor in the rear position could communicate with his pupil only by intercom and while he had basic flight and engine controls, he could not read the fuel gauges or switch fuel tanks, lower the undercarriage or actuate the flaps.

A chain of air bases

The new concept of defence of the NEI by land-based bombers called for a string of forward air bases where the force would be concentrated to attack an invader on the periphery of the island territory. Two concentric rings of air bases were therefore constructed on the outlying islands, the outer ring consisting of (from east to west): Laha (Ambon), Kendari II (Celebes), Tarakan (NE Borneo), Samarinda II (East Borneo), Singkawang II (West Borneo), Pakanbaru (Central Sumatra) and Sabang (North Sumatra). The inner ring comprised Penfui (Timor), Den Passar (Bali), Makassar (Celebes), Balikpapan, Bandjarmasin and Kotawaringin (Borneo), and Palembang (Sumatra). Several airfields on Java were expanded, or new fields constructed, to serve as home bases for the new groups, including Tjililitan (Batavia), Kali Djati, Andir (Bandung) and Singosari (Malang).

**On 30 March 1939, the status of the "Luchtvaart Afdeling" or Aviation Division had been raised to equal that of the Artillery, Infantry, etc, under the title "Militaire Luchtvaart" (ML) or Military Aviation.*

At most of the outlying airfields in the East Indies, ground facilities were minimal. This pre-war photo shows WH-1 M-511 being refuelled by means of a handpump from drums. Even during the war, fuel bowsers were lacking almost everywhere outside Java.



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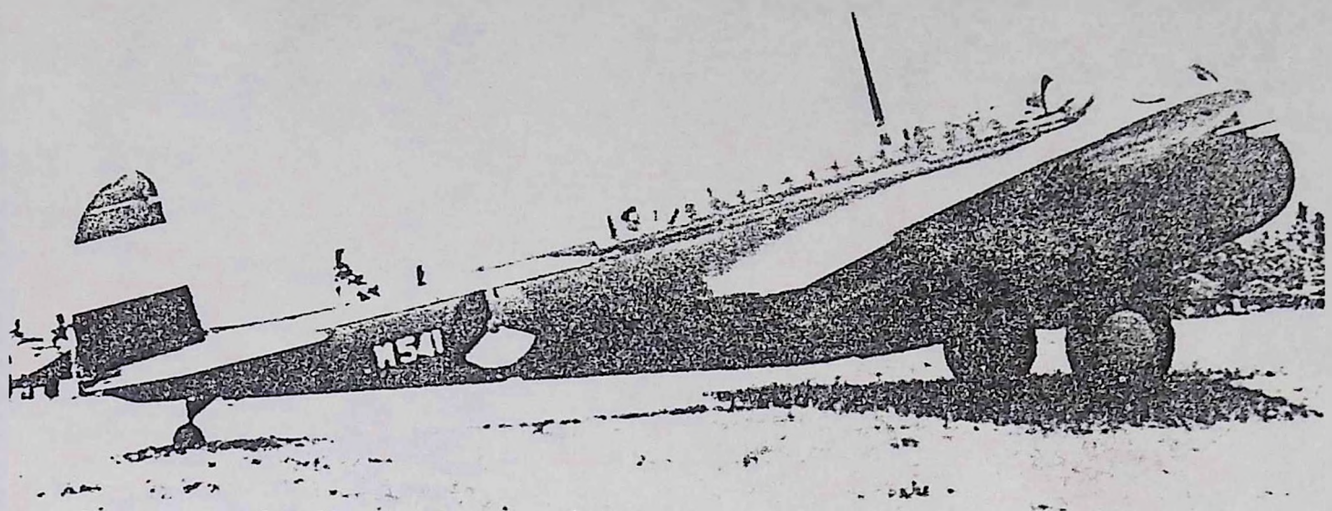


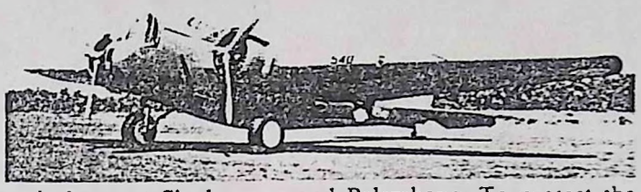
The Martin WH-3/3A variants, which began to arrive in the NEI in 1938, were distinguished externally by the long, continuous canopy over the front and dorsal cockpits. The first WH-3, M-540, is shown below right and the second aircraft, M-541, above.

Some of these fields were deliberately mismarked on maps, and in fact consisted of two or three separate airfields, to confuse the potential enemy, although only Samarinda II (code name: *Scheveningen*), in the middle of the jungle of Borneo, remained hidden from the Japanese for any length of time. Maintaining this secrecy required that only minimal ground facilities be provided at these bases; they were indeed little more than grass strips, with dispersals and a stock of bombs and fuel. Some possessed an Adcock radio beacon, but these were switched off in wartime to keep the fields hidden. Refuelling facilities were also minimal; mostly hand-pumps were used to pump petrol straight out of the drums. Loading bombs likewise was largely a matter of a strong back. The severe lack of ground defences meant that the bases, once their position was known, were very vulnerable to enemy air attack.

Singosari airfield near Malang (East Java) became the home base of VLG II and, in May and July 1940, the two *afdelingen* of VLG II were moved in from Kali Djati. On 1 August 1940, a new Martin unit was officially formed at Malang as the 7e *Afdeling Horizontale Bommenwerpers* (7th Squadron Horizontal Bombers). This unit was to be mobilised in wartime from Depot material, using the facilities of VLG II. Extra Martins and instructors were assigned for it at Malang, but in the event it never really achieved true operational status. In February 1941, the Glenn Martin *Vliegschool* was also transferred from Andir to Malang and merged with the 7e *Afdeling*, which thereafter existed only on paper until the war broke out.

Preparation for war

The outbreak of war in Europe in August 1939 had some immediate consequences for the ML-KNIL. The Netherlands still remained neutral in the conflict, but there was the possibility of naval activities by the British and French, as well as German commerce raiders, in the NEI area. Although the outlying airfields were still far from completion, the three *Vliegtuiggroepen* of Martin bombers were assigned mobilisation destinations. In turn, flights of three Martins, or complete squadrons, were detached to their assigned areas for 3-4 week periods of familiarisation, patrol flights, etc. VLG I (home base Andir) was assigned the area East Borneo, centred on the airfields of Balikpapan, Tarakan and, later, Samarinda II. VLG II (home base Kali Djati; after July 1940, Malang) operated in the Eastern area of the Celebes, Ambon, Timor and New Guinea, centred at Kendari airfield, where bombing and gunnery practice was held. Finally, VLG III (home base Tjibiltan) operated from Western Borneo and Sumatra, with



main bases at Singkawang and Palembang. To protect the Borneo oil installations, the two *afdelingen* of VLG I were moved to Samarinda II in May 1940, this detachment lasting until September. Routine patrols were at times intensified following reports of German raiders in the area, such as the German battleship *Graf Spee*. The Martins, in co-operation with Dutch Navy flying boats, frequently shadowed German merchantmen which, with unusually large crews, were thought possibly to be trying to establish supply bases on the remote islands of the Indies.

Training programmes, meanwhile, were pursued with great urgency. The shortage of pilots necessitated the use of airgunners and wireless operators as "second pilots", many of them becoming quite proficient at keeping the Martin straight and level from the rear cockpit in order to give the pilot a break. The ML-KNIL also trained a group of private pilots (reservists) to become "second pilot-airgunners". Every three months, the *afdelingen* called up these reserve personnel for a 3-4 week training period, which was mostly spent on a detachment to the mobilisation base.

After the German occupation of the Netherlands in May 1940, the NEI officially became Allied territory. Nevertheless, the Dutch government decided to maintain a neutral posture in Far East affairs and there was no open co-operation with the British or American forces in the area. Unofficially, a series of low-key conferences of British, American, Dutch and Australian officers was held, resulting in understandings of mutual aid to be rendered in case of war with Japan; these were known as PLENAPS plans. In the event of an attack on Malaya, the Dutch agreed to move a bomber group and a fighter squadron to Singapore, and VLG III was therefore expanded by attaching to it *afdeling* 2-VLG II under Lt A B Wolff, becoming 3-VLG III on 1 September 1941. VLG II thus now consisted of only one *afdeling* (1-VLG II), but this was reinforced with one extra flight of three Martins to a first-line strength of 12, with three in reserve. All other *afdelingen* had nine first line aircraft, plus two manned reserves.

More open contacts with the British and Americans resulted

in a series of visits to neighbouring countries in order to familiarise with local circumstances. In May 1941, for instance, a flight of Martins visited Darwin and RAAF Hudsons visited Ambon and Timor. 1-VLG III visited Jolo in the Philippines and, in September 1941, the same *afdeling* paid an eight-day visit to Sembawang (Singapore), supported by two Lodestar transports. Stocks of Dutch bombs and ammunition were stored in Singapore. The *afdeling* commanders toured Malayan air bases and received short courses in RAF operational procedures.

Without reinforcements in the form of new purchases, the strength of VLG I and II could no longer be raised to the statutory level of three *afdelingen*. The old WH-1 bombers could no longer be considered fit for operations, and peacetime losses up to November 1941 amounted (as far as can be determined) to 16 aircraft, nine more having been lost in 1940 and 1941.

On 30 November 1941, as the local situation deteriorated, the NEI High Command ordered the mobilisation of the ML-KNIL and the Martins — some 80 operational and 20 used on training duty — began to take up their war stations. The Flight Schools at Kali Djati and Malang were closed and the instructors and advanced students used to crew two more Martin bomber units: the 7e *Afdeling* was re-formed at Andir with aircraft from the Martin Flight School at Malang, and a small Maritime Patrol Flight was formed with four old WH-1s. This latter unit is generally known as the "WH-1 Patrol" and was administratively attached to VLG II, but under operational control of the NEI Navy. The organisational structure is shown in an accompanying chart.

ORGANISATION OF THE MARTIN UNITS, NOVEMBER 1941

VLG I (Andir)	1-VLG I	9 WH-3/3A plus 2 reserve
	2-VLG I	9 WH-3/3A plus 2 reserve
VLG II (Singosari)	1-VLG II	3 WH-2, 9 WH-3/3A plus 3 reserve (1 crashed, not yet replaced)
VLG III (Tjilitan)	1-VLG III	9 WH-3/3A plus 2 reserve
	2-VLG III	9 WH-2 plus 2 reserve
	3-VLG III	9 WH-3/3A plus 2 reserve
7e Afdeling (Kali Djati)		1 WH-2, 2 WH-3, 6 WH-3A (Organised from Flight School equipment and personnel 15 Dec 1941)
WH-1 Patrouille (Kali Djati)		3 WH-1 plus 1 reserve. (Organised from Flight School equipment and personnel 10 Dec 1941)

Non-operational reserves consisted of approximately four WH-1, six WH-2, two WH-3 and three WH-3A, partially in depot maintenance, used as instructional airframes, or at the Flight School. Most WH-2, 3 and 3As were issued as replacements during the war.

Dispersal of the Martin units

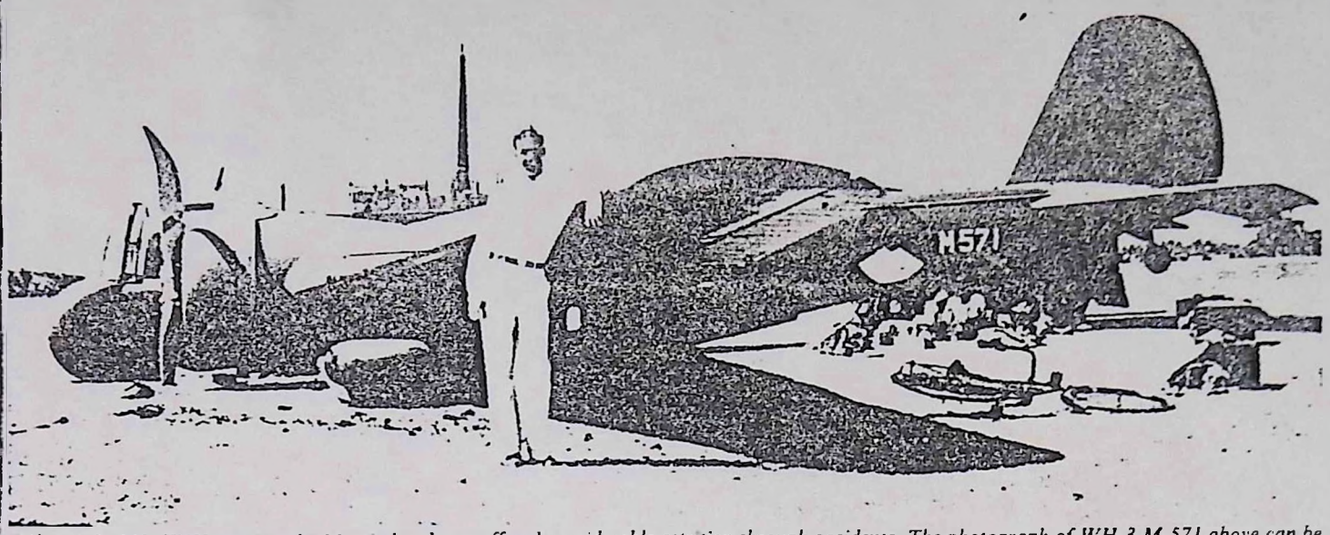
On 30 November 1941, two flights *(patrouilles)* of Martins were already on a routine detachment to Borneo. *Patrouille Cooke* (2-VLG I) was at Samarinda II and *Patrouille Butner* (1-VLG I) was at Tarakan*. On 2 December, the *afdelin* VLG I flew to its war destination at Singkawang II, whe was joined by the flight of Lt Cooke; on 5 December, 1-VI under Capt van Rantwijk flew to Samarinda II, where it joined by the flight under Lt Butner. Three days late December at Hawaii, 8 December in the Far East) Ja attacked, Malaya being amongst the first targets. assistance agreements with the British were put into act one of the steps being that 2-VLG I at Singkawang, as well flight of Buffalo fighters at the same base, were put u operational command of the British Far Eastern Comm (FEC), Singkawang having previously been stocked by RAF. To the surprise (and delight, no doubt) of the crews,

** The flights were named, for convenience, after the flight commar for any particular assignment.*

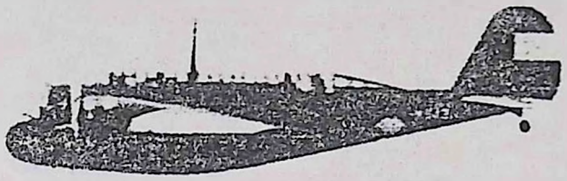
MARTIN 139 TECHNICAL DATA
(Based on Dutch Acceptance Test Reports)

	Model 139 WH-1	Model 139 WH-2	Model 139 WH-3	Model 139 WH-3A
Construction numbers	665-677	727-752	775-813	837-876 (plus two)
ML-KNIL serial numbers*	M-501 — M-513	M-514 — M-539	M-540 — M-578	M-579 — M-620
Power Plant	Cyclone GR-1820-F53	Cyclone GR-1820-G3	Cyclone GR-1820-G5	Cyclone GR-1820-G-1
Max take-off	770 hp at 2,200 rpm	875 hp at 2,200 rpm	1,100 hp at 2,350 rpm	1,200 hp at 2,500 rp
Max cruise power	730 hp at 2,100 rpm	840 hp at 2,100 rpm	900 hp at 2,300 rpm	1,000 hp at 2,300 rp
Altitude for max cruise power	9,515 ft (2 900 m)	8,700 ft (2 650 m)	6,560 ft (2 000 m)	6,890 ft (2 100 m)
Maximum speed at 9,850 ft (3 000 m)	216 mph (347 km/h)	242 mph (389 km/h)	236 mph (380 km/h)	241 mph (388 km/h
Cruising speed	160 mph (257 km/h)	168 mph (270 km/h)	180 mph (290 km/h)	186 mph (300 km/h
Time to 9,850 ft (3 000 m)	8 min	8·4 min	—	4·9 min
Practical ceiling	24,000 ft (7 315 m)	—	25,200 ft (7 680 m)	28,215 ft (8 600 m)
Endurance, normal fuel, no reserves (at 170 mph/274 km/h)	7·37 hrs at 10,335 ft (3 150 m)	8·2 hrs at 10,000 ft (3 050 m)	9·55 hrs at 11,500 ft (3 505 m)	9·36 hrs at 11,500 ft (3 505 m)
Endurance with bomb-bay tank (at 200 mph/322 km/h)	4·55 hrs at 10,000 ft (3 050 m)	6·14 hrs at 10,000 ft (3 050 m)	6·31 hrs at 11,500 ft (3 505 m)	7·13 hrs at 11,500 ft (3 505 m)
Empty weight	9,205 lb (4 175 kg)	10,000 lb (4 532 kg)	10,342 lb (4 691 kg)	10,322 lb (4 682 kg)
Normal gross weight	14,470 lb (6 563 kg)	14,860 lb (6 740 kg)	15,350 lb (6 963 kg)	15,624 lb (7 087 kg)
Max overload weight	15,666 lb (7 106 kg)	16,320 lb (7 402 kg)	18,660 lb (8 465 kg)	18,825 lb (8 539 kg)
Typical bomb-load/fuel	3 × 660-lb (300-kg)/300 US gal (1 130 l)	2 × 1,100-lb (500-kg)/226 US gal (856 l)	2 × 1,100-lb (500-kg)/226 US gal (856 l)	2 × 1,100-lb (500-kg)/ US gal (1 809 l)
Max bomb-load/fuel	2 × 440-lb (200-kg)/452 US gal (1 712 l)	2 × 1,100-lb (500-kg)/452 US gal (1 712 l)	1 × 630-lb (285-kg)/766 US gal (2 900 l)	2 × 630-lb (285-kg)/7- US gal (2 822 l)
	1 × 1,100-lb (500-kg)/655 US gal (2 480 l)	1 × 660-lb (300-kg)/675 US gal (2 556 l)	4 × 1,100-lb (500-kg)†/ 326 US gal (1 235 l)	4 × 1,100-lb (500-kg) 296 US gal (1 119 l)
Standard fuel capacity	452 US gal (1 712 l)	452 US gal (1 712 l)	516 US gal (1 954 l)	512 US gal (1 938 l)
Aux bomb-bay fuel capacity	250 US gal (946 l)	250 US gal (946 l)	250 US gal (946 l)	250 or 356 US gal (946 1 348 l)
Span	70 ft 10½ in (21,60 m)	70 ft 10½ in (21,60 m)	70 ft 10½ in (21,60 m)	70 ft 10½ in (21,60 m
Length	44 ft 9 in (13,64 m)	44 ft 9 in (13,64 m)	44 ft 9 in (13,64 m)	44 ft 9 in (13,64 m)
Height	11 ft 5 in (3,48 m)	11 ft 5 in (3,48 m)	11 ft 6 in (3,53 m)	11 ft 6 in (3,53 m)
Wing area	678 sq ft (63,0 m²)	678 sq ft (63,0 m²)	682·5 sq ft (63,40 m²)	682·5 sq ft (63,40 m²
Armament: Front turret	One 0·30-in (7,62-mm), 600 rounds	One 0·30-in (7,62-mm), 600 rounds	One 0·30-in (7,62-mm), 600 rounds	One 0·30-in (7,62-mm 600 rounds
Aft top	One 0·30-in (7,62-mm), 600 rounds	One 0·30-in (7,62-mm), 600 rounds	One 0·30-in (7,62-mm), 600 rounds	One 0·30-in (7,62-mm 600 rounds
Aft lower	One 0·30-in (7,62-mm), 300 rounds	One 0·30-in (7,62-mm), 300 rounds	One 0·30-in (7,62-mm), 600 rounds	One 0·30-in (7,62-mm 600 rounds

** Serial numbers changed in August 1940, when M-600 to M-620 became M5-100 to M5-120. † Two internal, two external.*



(Above) In ML-KNIL service, the Martin bombers suffered considerable attrition through accidents. The photograph of WH-3 M-571 above can be dated, by the absence of rudder markings, between January and September 1939. (Below) A pre-1939 photograph of M-543.

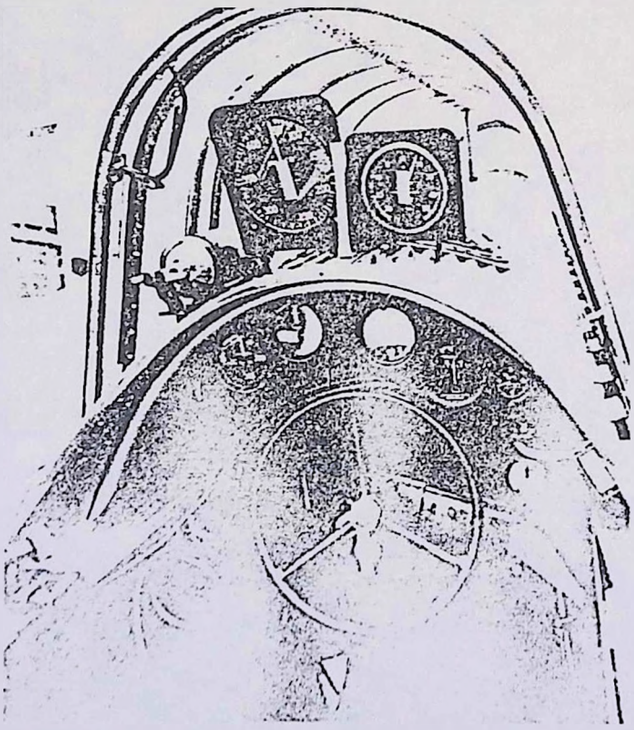


of the more prominent supplies was found to consist of a large quantity of rum!

Immediately after war had broken out on 8 December, VLG III under Maj van Gulik was ordered to Sembawang (Singapore). Several of the Group's Martins were unserviceable and only 22 arrived in Singapore. Despite the earlier familiarisation visits, the move showed that co-ordination was still sorely lacking. One of the crew members recalls that he was positioned in the nose of his aircraft with an electric torch to signal to the ground, but the Martins were nevertheless greeted by British A-A fire while approaching Sembawang!

The single squadron of VLG II at Malang was also sent outside Java. VLG II normally covered the Eastern part of the Indies, but the PLENAPS agreements provided for RAAF Hudsons to be moved into Ambon and Timor in case of an attack on Malaya, allowing Dutch units to be moved west. The direction of the Japanese thrust was still unknown when the ML-KNIL mobilised, and in order to provide the necessary reconnaissance in the Eastern area, three Martins under Lt Uitzetter moved to Ambon on 30 November, flying sea reconnaissance between Ambon and Kendari. On 5 December another *patrouille* under Lt Samson also flew to Ambon; the remainder of 1-VLG II stayed at Singosari (Malang) for the time being.

The rear cockpit of the first WH-3, M-540, photographed before the aircraft had been delivered from Baltimore. The large instruments mounted on the coaming above the panel are for flight test purposes only.



The dormant 7e *Afdeling* was activated on 15 December 1941 at Kali Djati, under the command of Lt Asjes. The first pilots and senior observers/bombardiers were instructors, the balance of the crews being made up with advanced students and mechanics. Nine Martins were obtained from the Flight School and flown to Andir to be fitted with operational equipment, whereupon the 7e *Afdeling* moved to Kemajoran (Batavia) for a brief training period, at the same time flying maritime patrols.

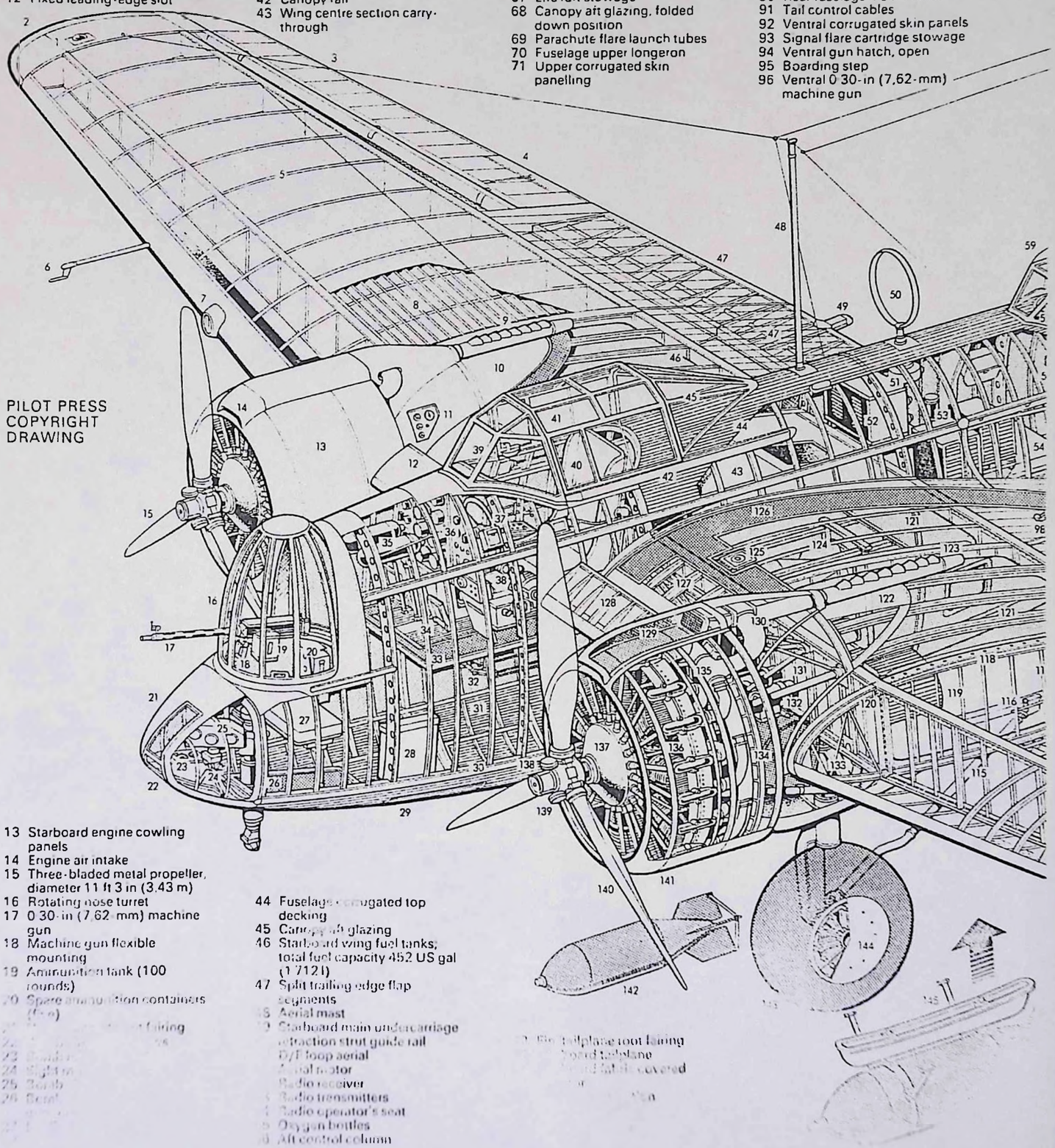
Finally, the small maritime patrol flight, WH-1 *Patrouille*, was formed on 10 December with four old Martin WH-1s, crewed by Flight School instructors and students, as well as two Dutch Navy officers. It started operations from Palembang I on or about 15 December, under command of Lt L J Janssen. With these initial movements of the Martin units, the peacetime organisation in Groups was largely abandoned. The Martins now operated more or less as independent squadrons and flights which were moved about as conditions dictated, and for operational purposes these were placed under tactical command of a so-called Commandant *Luchtstrijdkrachten* (CL, or Commander of Air Forces) in a certain area. Such CLs were appointed at Pakanbaru, Singapore, Sembawang, Samarinda and Ambon; the CO of VLG III, Maj van Gulik, became CL at Singapore, where there was also an ML-KNIL liaison officer, Lt Col Zomer.

First blows

The Japanese attack in the Indies area took place along two main axes: one into Northern Malaya and thence south towards Singapore and Sumatra, the other through the

Martin Model 139 Cutaway Drawing Key

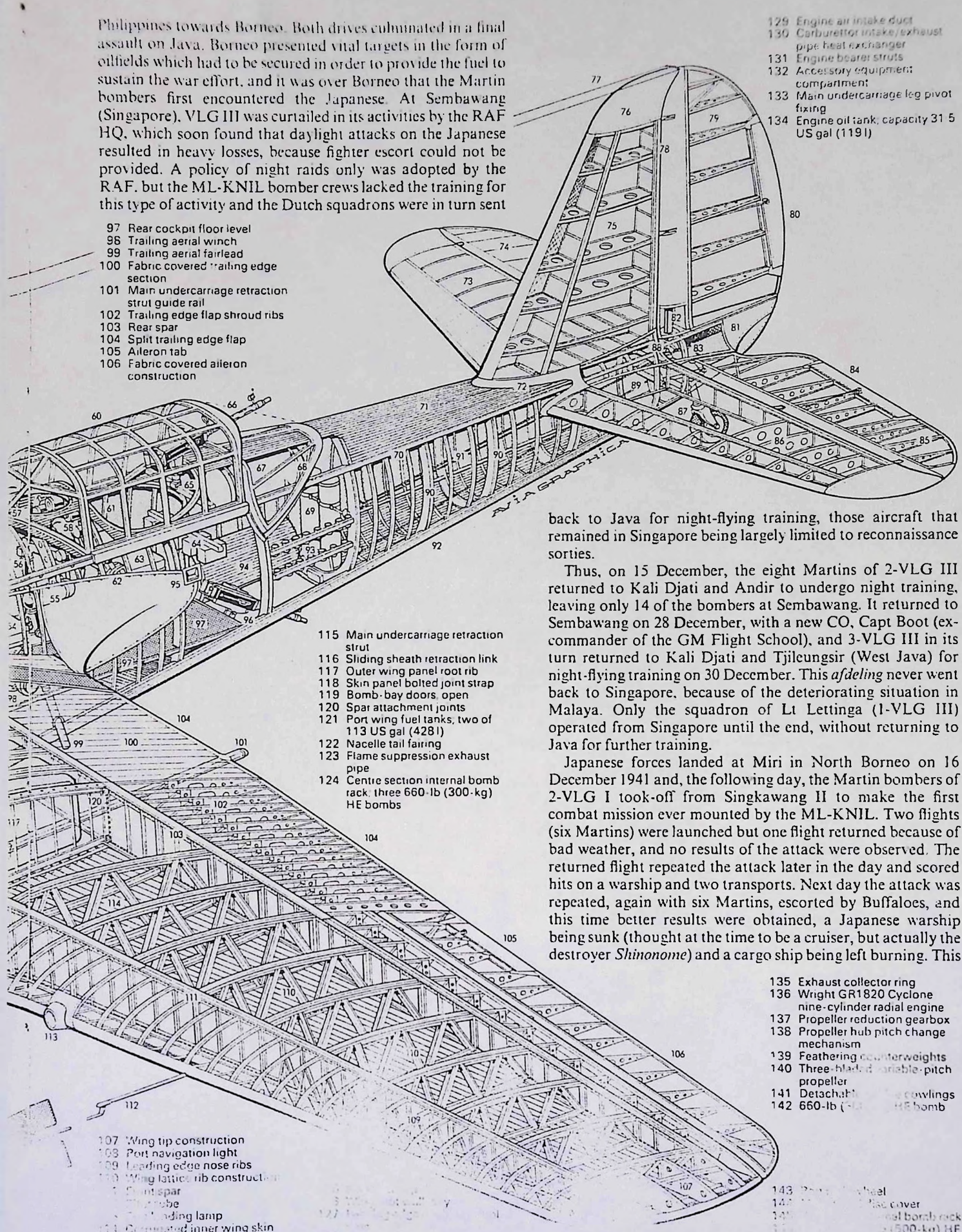
1 Starboard navigation light
2 Wing tip fairing
3 Starboard fabric covered aileron
4 Aileron tab
5 Wing outer skin panelling
6 Pitot tube
7 Landing lamp
8 Wing inner corrugated skin panel
9 Flame suppression exhaust pipe
10 Nacelle tail fairing
11 Nacelle mounted engine instruments
12 Fixed leading-edge slot
13 Starboard engine cowling panels
14 Engine air intake
15 Three-bladed metal propeller, diameter 11 ft 3 in (3,43 m)
16 Rotating nose turret
17 0·30-in (7,62-mm) machine gun
18 Machine gun flexible mounting
19 Ammunition tank (100 rounds)
20 Spare ammunition containers (5-o)
21 [illegible] fairing
22 [illegible]
23 [illegible]
24 Sight [illegible]
25 Bomb [illegible]
26 Bomb [illegible]
27 [illegible]
28 [illegible]
29 Ventral access hatch
30 Fuselage lower longeron
31 Ventral section corrugated skin panels
32 Underfloor control runs
33 Pilot's floor level
34 Rudder pedals
35 Oxygen bottles
36 Instrument panel
37 Control column handwheel
38 Engine throttle levers
39 Windscreen panels
40 Pilot's seat
41 Rearward sliding cockpit canopy cover
42 Canopy rail
43 Wing centre section carry-through
44 Fuselage corrugated top decking
45 Canopy aft glazing
46 Starboard wing fuel tanks; total fuel capacity 452 US gal (1 712 l)
47 Split trailing edge flap segments
48 Aerial mast
49 Starboard main undercarriage retraction strut guide rail
D/F loop aerial
Aerial motor
Radio receiver
Radio transmitters
Radio operator's seat
Oxygen bottles
Aft control column
57 Radio operator's observation hatch
58 Relief pilot's instrument panel
59 Rear windscreen panels
60 Forward sliding rear cockpit enclosure
61 Relief pilot/rear gunner's cockpit
62 Engine throttle levers
63 Relief pilot's seat
64 Spare ammunition containers
65 Machine gun flexible mounting
66 0·30-in (7,62-mm) machine gun
67 Life raft stowage
68 Canopy aft glazing, folded down position
69 Parachute flare launch tubes
70 Fuselage upper longeron
71 Upper corrugated skin panelling
79 Fabric covered rudder construction
80 Rudder tab
81 Tailcone fairing
82 Rudder torque shaft
83 Tailwheel shock absorber
84 Elevator tab
85 Fabric covered elevator construction
86 Port tailplane construction
87 Fixed tailwheel
88 Rudder and elevator hinge controls
89 Fin, tailplane spar attachment frame
90 Rear fuselage main frames
91 Tail control cables
92 Ventral corrugated skin panels
93 Signal flare cartridge stowage
94 Ventral gun hatch, open
95 Boarding step
96 Ventral 0·30-in (7,62-mm) machine gun
[illegible] Fin, tailplane root fairing
[illegible] Tapered tailplane
[illegible] Fabric covered [illegible]



Philippines towards Borneo. Both drives culminated in a final assault on Java. Borneo presented vital targets in the form of oilfields which had to be secured in order to provide the fuel to sustain the war effort, and it was over Borneo that the Martin bombers first encountered the Japanese. At Sembawang (Singapore), VLG III was curtailed in its activities by the RAF HQ, which soon found that daylight attacks on the Japanese resulted in heavy losses, because fighter escort could not be provided. A policy of night raids only was adopted by the RAF, but the ML-KNIL bomber crews lacked the training for this type of activity and the Dutch squadrons were in turn sent back to Java for night-flying training, those aircraft that remained in Singapore being largely limited to reconnaissance sorties.

Thus, on 15 December, the eight Martins of 2-VLG III returned to Kali Djati and Andir to undergo night training, leaving only 14 of the bombers at Sembawang. It returned to Sembawang on 28 December, with a new CO, Capt Boot (ex-commander of the GM Flight School), and 3-VLG III in its turn returned to Kali Djati and Tjileungsir (West Java) for night-flying training on 30 December. This *afdeling* never went back to Singapore, because of the deteriorating situation in Malaya. Only the squadron of Lt Lettinga (1-VLG III) operated from Singapore until the end, without returning to Java for further training.

Japanese forces landed at Miri in North Borneo on 16 December 1941 and, the following day, the Martin bombers of 2-VLG I took-off from Singkawang II to make the first combat mission ever mounted by the ML-KNIL. Two flights (six Martins) were launched but one flight returned because of bad weather, and no results of the attack were observed. The returned flight repeated the attack later in the day and scored hits on a warship and two transports. Next day the attack was repeated, again with six Martins, escorted by Buffaloes, and this time better results were obtained, a Japanese warship being sunk (thought at the time to be a cruiser, but actually the destroyer *Shinonome*) and a cargo ship being left burning. This



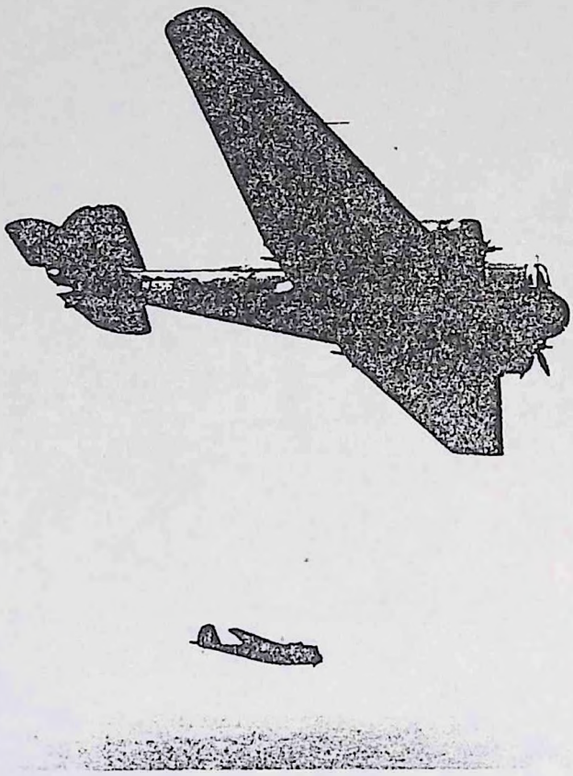
raid also brought the first ML-KNIL casualties: one Martin was shot down with the loss of its crew.

On 20 December, a Japanese formation bombed the unoccupied satellite field called Singkawang III. Apparently the mistake was discovered at the last minute and one last stray bomb was dropped on the main airfield at Singkawang II. It was now only a matter of time before the latter would be given the full treatment: it came three days later. A reconnaissance sortie by a Martin in the early hours of 23 December located a Japanese fleet heading for Kuching, 100 miles (160 km) north-east of Singkawang. Orders were given to bomb up all available Martins, but before they could take-off, 27 Japanese bombers hit their home airfield. The Martins were well dispersed, but one was burned and another damaged beyond repair by bomb fragments. Several were damaged but repairable; only one escaped completely unharmed. The runway was severely damaged, preventing take-offs with a full bomb load, and all hands were put to work on its repair. On 24 December another raid on Miri was mounted from Sinkawang II, but while this was underway, the Japanese again heavily bombed the home airfield, destroying one Martin on the ground. The Singkawang base was declared untenable after this attack and at 7.00 am on Christmas day, seven of the nine remaining Martins flew out to Palembang (Sumatra). Two aircraft were still under repair (one was being fitted with a wingtip made of bamboo and linen) and these were flown out a few hours later: they were attacked by Japanese fighters en route, however, and it is believed that one (M-555) was shot down, as it never arrived.

The loss of Miri caused great concern to the Dutch General staff. Immediately after the landings, it proposed to move the Martin Group at Singapore (VLG III) to Singkawang to keep Miri under attack, in order to deny full use of the airfield there to the Japanese; but Far Eastern Command (FEC) did not approve of this move, so the Dutch had to use other means. The Martin squadron at Samarinda (1-VLG I) under Capt van Rantwijk put up all nine of its serviceable aircraft on 17 December to attack Japanese ships at Lutong, near Miri. Anti-aircraft fire was heavy, but no losses were suffered, and one ship was hit. Next morning, six Martins attacked again, scoring several hits; escort was provided by five Brewster Buffaloes. The attacks were repeated for several days, despite intensive A-A fire and attacks by Mitsubishi F1M2 ("Pete") floatplanes. On the 19th, the ships were hidden under clouds and the bombs were dropped on oil installations without any apparent result. These sorties involved 850-mile (1 360-km) round trips over dense jungle and two major 7,000-ft (2 135-m) mountain ranges, but the Miri raids at first suffered no casualties.

Things were very different when the Japanese forces appeared off Kuching in West Borneo. The trip to this oil port from Samarinda involved an even longer 950-mile (1 530-km) round trip, leaving little room for navigational error. On 24 December 1941, 1-VLG I was ordered to attack Kuching, but the one *patrouille* launched had to return for lack of fuel. The next attack produced better results — a direct hit blew a cargo ship, apparently loaded with ammunition, sky-high. On at least two occasions, the Martins went in low to make strafing attacks on landing craft steaming up the river towards Kuching. During an attack on Kuching on 28 December, Martin M-5115 was shot down, only the radio-operator baling out safely, and another Martin had to ditch on Borneo's east coast, having run out of fuel on the return flight. The flight leader returned with a heavily damaged aircraft, with more than 300 bullet holes and some 20-mm cannon hits showing.

On 29 December, Martins from Samarinda made their final raid on Miri; it is estimated that about 45 sorties were flown in all by 1-VLG I against Miri and Kuching. While FEC disapproved the proposed move of VLG III to Singkawang, this Group also attacked North Borneo. Exact dates and missions are hard to determine, but reports show that both Miri and Kuching were targets of 1-VLG III and 3-VLG III. The flight to Miri from Singapore involved a 1,600-mile (2 575-km) round trip, at the extreme range of the Martin: the official acceptance flights of the WH-3 in the USA had shown a theoretical endurance of 10-12 hours at a true airspeed of 170 mph (274 km/h). It is no wonder, then, that only bachelors and volunteers were allowed to go on these missions. How many were flown to Miri from Singapore is not known — probably only one — but Kuching was the target several times,



(Above) WH-3s in flight during 1941 and (below) WH-3As visiting the RAAF base at Darwin, Australia, in May 1941. By this time, the orange/black triangle insignia was standard, but the orange rudder, outlined in black, that had been introduced when the triangle was adopted, had already been discarded.

including one attack with a flight of three Martins of 1-VLG III. Another attack by 3-VLG III succeeded in sinking a troopship — the crew saw many Japanese soldiers in the water.

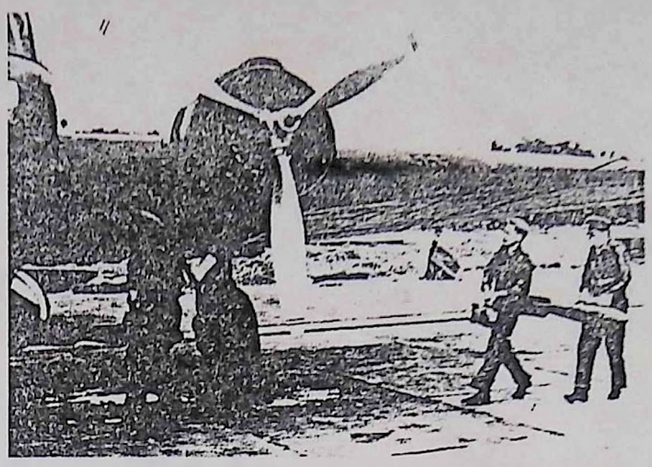
Action over Malaya

As stated earlier, the Martins of VLG III at Sembawang (Singapore) were at first used only on reconnaissance missions, usually going up the west coast of Malaya to Penang, across the peninsula, then southward along the east coast and back to Singapore, a round trip of 800 mls (1 287 km) that took about five hours. After a week or so, the patrols were extended to cover the Natuna Islands on the inbound leg. In the period 13-17 December, the Martins flew six sorties daily over the South China Sea. Usually two flights (one from each of the two *afdelingen*, total six aircraft) were on operations, two flights were on standby and two flights were off duty. These patrols constituted nearly all the activity of the *afdelingen* then operating in Malaya, and both Martin squadrons escaped combat losses in the initial period. For some reason, Sembawang airfield was spared heavy bombing attacks, but one Martin of 1-VLG III was destroyed on the evening of 9 December, just after the Group's arrival, when an RAF Buffalo stalled on landing and hit the parked bomber.

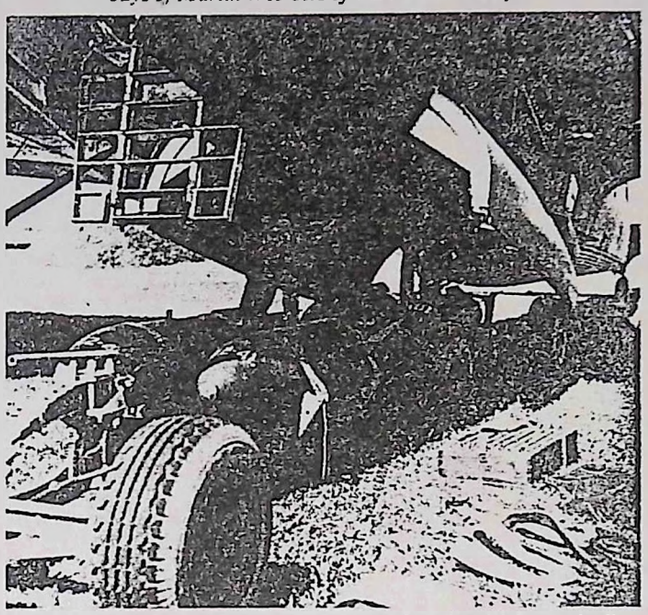
The morale of the crews of VLG III suffered considerably from the secondary rôle forced upon them. The Dutch personnel had difficulty getting adjusted to the day-to-day goings on at an RAF base. For instance, when the mission schedule required an early morning take-off, the NCO mess would still be closed and no breakfast could be obtained, so that the crews had to make do with Cadbury chocolate bars — hardly a good start to the day. In addition, the *afdeling* commanders were at first forbidden to go on operations — this was a general rule in the ML-KNIL, which had a serious lack of experienced officers, but it made it much harder for the commanders to share the hardships of the men and to achieve good discipline. On 24 December, the Far East Command lifted the ban on unescorted bombing raids and the Dutch Group commander also allowed squadron COs to go on operations. The strength of VLG III at Sembawang was reported to be 15 Martins at this time.

When the Japanese started to infiltrate behind the British lines with barges along Malaya's west coast, ML-KNIL Martins and RAF Blenheims flew daily armed reconnaissances with four to six aircraft. Since the Japanese were using commandeered indigenous proas and schooners, the bombers had to fly at low level to establish their identity, a dangerous business because the Japanese would stay under cover until the last second, when they would suddenly throw aside a sail and open up with machine guns. On 1 January 1942, the first Martin losses were suffered in combat, when two 1-VLG III aircraft out of three were shot down over Penang island; eight crewmen were reported missing.

On 8 January, three Martins of 1-VLG III were to make a night raid on Japanese troop concentrations. During take-off, the flight commander swerved off the runway and hit a parked Blenheim; two crew were killed. The same day, some Martins and four Hudsons successfully bombed a Japanese ship anchored in the South China Sea, thought to be used as a navigational aid for Japanese aircraft. Next day, nine Martins attacked landing barges in the harbour of Kuantan. Besides flying bombing missions, the Dutch bombers shared with Lockheed Hudsons a daily reconnaissance duty along the east coast of Malaya from Endau to beyond Trengganu, and from 30 December onwards, at least six Martins were occupied with these duties. Combat losses were at first surprisingly light: on 9 January two Martins of 1-VLG III were destroyed on the ground, on the 10th [illegible] crew member was [illegible] in combat, but [illegible] aircraft survived. RAF reports [illegible] operation of six Martins [illegible] Hudsons and three [illegible] escorted by 12 [illegible] in an [illegible] barges steaming up



(Above and below) Bombs of varying size being loaded into the bomb-bays of Martin WH-3As of VLG III in Malaya.



the Linggi river, with good success. On the 16th, a similar attack was made by six Martins, nine Blenheims and four Buffaloes on barges on the Muar river.

Also on 16 January, six Martins of 1-VLG III, escorted by Buffaloes, attacked Japanese road convoys between Gemas and Tampin. The previous night, a successful ambush had blocked the road and a long line of buses and lorries formed behind it. Immediately, 12 Buffaloes of the RAAF went in to strafe, causing heavy casualties. Later in the day, the Martins followed up, finding the transport still there, although the troops were now well hidden. Despite being fired upon by Australian A-A on the way in, causing some damage to the Martins, the attack went well and all aircraft returned safely. Immediately after they had cleared the target, the Buffaloes left them to return for more strafing of the convoy.

On 19 January, VLG III suffered its heaviest losses. Early in the morning, three Martins (RAF reports say four) and five Wirraways of the RAAF (trainers pressed into service as tactical aircraft) took-off to attack Japanese troops landing near Muar; escort was provided by eight Buffaloes. The Wirraways strafed barges which were being towed up the Muar river while the Martins bombed troop concentrations and a Japanese HQ area ashore. Immediately after the attack, the Allied aircraft were jumped by Japanese fighters. After a running battle of about 10 minutes, one Martin was seen to [illegible] to the sea with both engines on fire, none of the crew [illegible]ing. Five minutes later, another aircraft caught fire and [illegible] in a rubber plantation, two of the crew being [illegible] and [illegible]en prisoner. A little later, the last Mar[illegible]

forced down into the rubber trees. The observer in the nose was killed, but three men escaped unharmed and made it back to Sembawang. It is interesting to note that the co-pilots in these Martins were all sports pilots who had volunteered as reservists, as already described.

By mid-January, all air units in Malaya had been taken back to Singapore, causing great congestion on the airfields. To ease this situation, both *afdelingen* 1- and 2-VLG III evacuated to Palembang on 22 January, and subsequently moved to Java. The first-mentioned squadron had been in Singapore from 9 December and had suffered the most losses (six Martins); 2-VLG III had returned from its night training at Java on 30 December and had not lost any aeroplanes, although some were undoubtedly damaged. 2-VLG III returned with approximately five Martins from Singapore, all of the old WH-2 version, and was disbanded on 31 January, the remaining crews and aeroplanes being distributed over the 1st and 3rd *afdelingen*. No combat losses are recorded for this unit except for one Martin destroyed on the ground at Sembawang. During its stay in Singapore from 30 December to 22 January, *afdeling* 2-VLG III flew mostly armed reconnaissance missions.

At least one of the Martins of VLG III was evacuated from Singapore on board the Dutch freighter *Phrontis* on 10 February. This ship already had four aircraft on the deck (probably fighters) and two more undamaged Martins were on the dock. Room was found for one of these: the ship arrived safely at Batavia on the 12th.

East Borneo

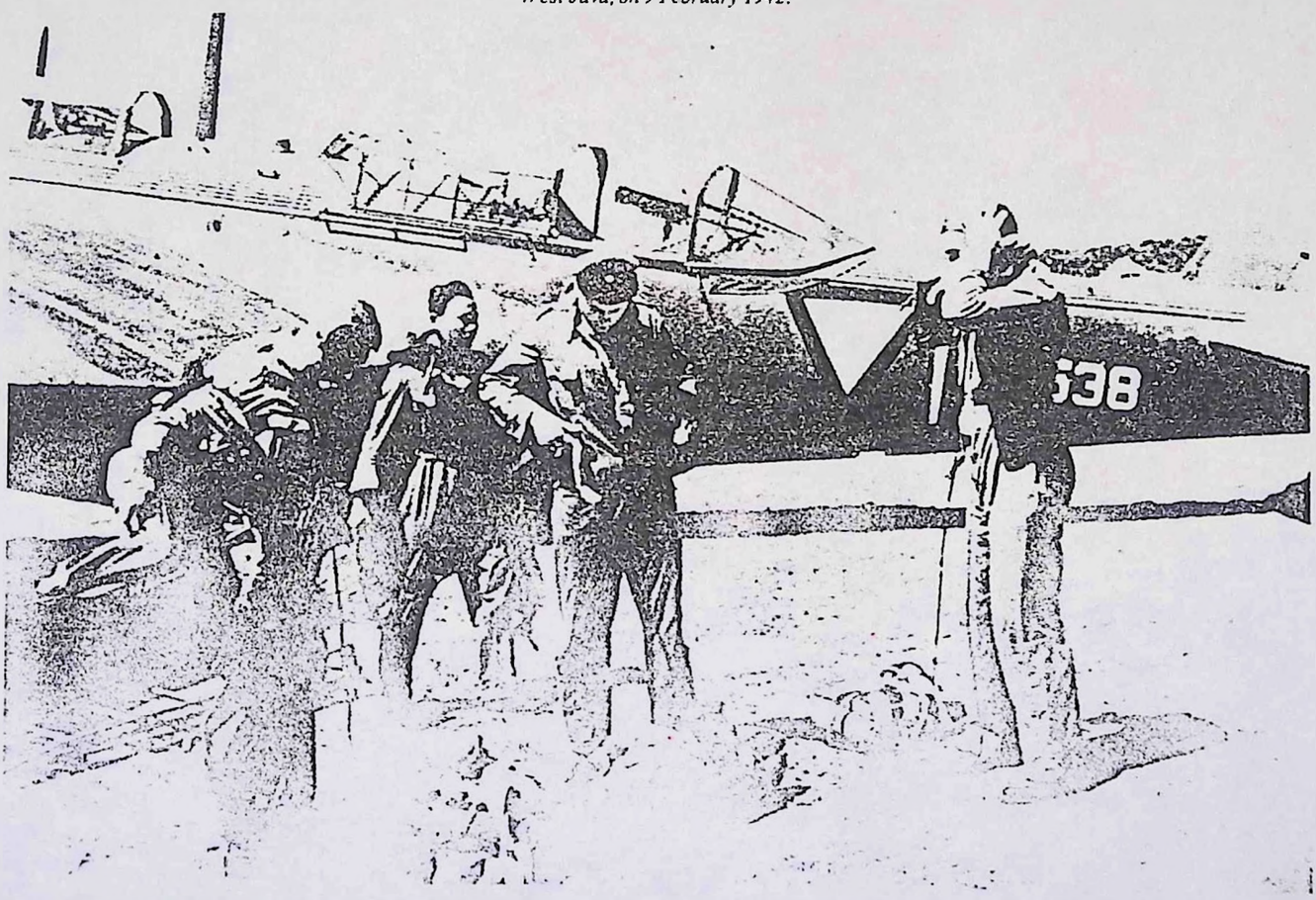
With the Japanese well established at Miri and Jolo (in the Sulu Islands), the next step was to be the capture of Tarakan, a small swampy island off the coast of NE Borneo, where a very high grade oil was produced. Tarakan was bombed on 25 and 26 December 1941. Its airfield housed a small number of Buffalo fighters and the 2nd *patrouille* (four Martins) of 1-VLG I under Lt Butner. The field was very muddy and the bombardment of the 26th rendered it largely useless — the Martins could not take-off with a bomb load and on 30 December the Dutch aeroplanes were withdrawn to Samarinda II.

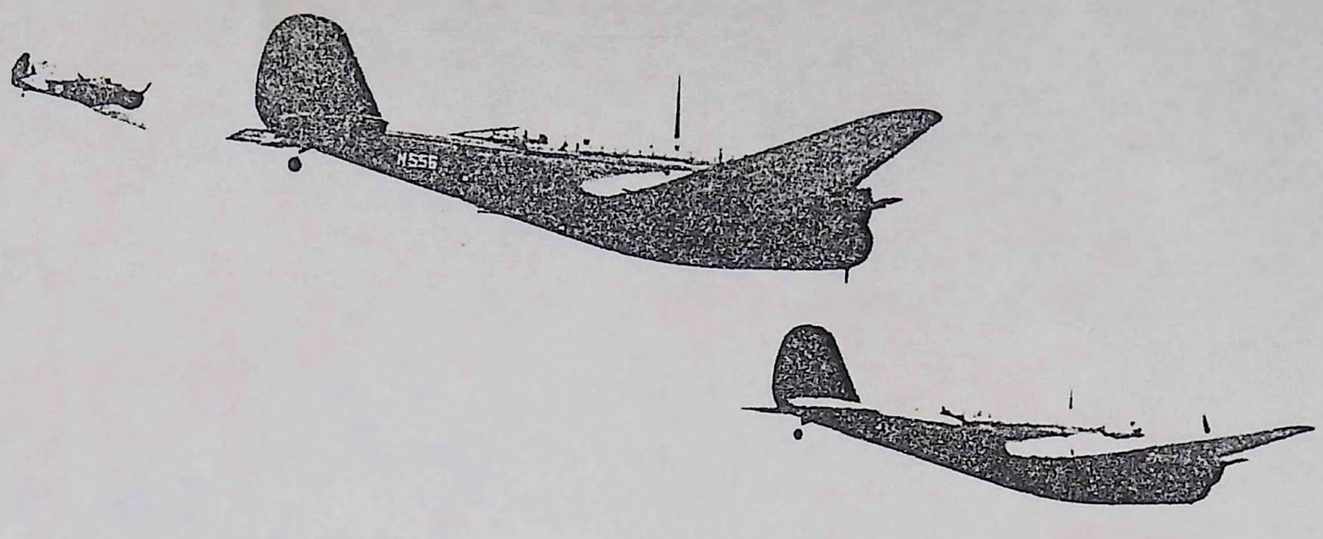
For a short period after 29 December there was a lull in the fighting and, apart from making regular reconnaissance flights, 1-VLG I took a rest and concentrated on much-needed aircraft maintenance. On 10 January, a Japanese landing force was discovered 10 miles (16 km) from the island by a Dutch Navy Dornier Do 24 flying boat, reports of the sighting reaching Navy HQ in Batavia during a conference attended by the top Allied Commanders. It was immediately decided to send air reinforcements to Borneo, and two flights of 1-VLG II based at Palembang were released from the control of Far East Command and ordered to Samarinda II airfield. Furthermore, the 7e *Afdeling* which, as described earlier, had been formed from Flight School aeroplanes and personnel, was sent to the same airfield.

Early in January, the 7e *Afdeling* had flown a unique mission to Saigon. The NEI Command, very concerned about the Japanese advance in Borneo, had conceived a plan to bomb Saigon, in the rather naive expectation that this would force the Japanese to tie up part of their air forces in Indo-China. Two volunteer crews were selected and the Martins were equipped with bomb-bay tanks to allow them to cover the distance of some 1,400 miles (2 250 km), with two 660-lb (300-kg) bombs carried on wing racks.

The two Martins staged through Singapore. Take-off for the attack was to be on 3 January, early in the morning, in order to arrive over Saigon at daybreak. All manner of problems combined to delay the take-off, but the crews decided to press on. Close to the target, a solid cloud cover was encountered; one crew stated that it bombed on dead reckoning through the

Crew members of 2-VLG III prepare for a mission in Malaya. This WH-2, M-538, the penultimate Martin of this variant, was shot down near Bekasi, West Java, on 9 February 1942.





The WH-3s M-551 and M-556 serving with VLG III over Malaya in December 1941. Escort is provided by a Wirraway serving with No 75 Squadron, RAAF.

clouds, but other reports suggest that the aircraft returned before reaching the target. On the return flight, a Japanese formation of nine Zeros was spotted, but these did not react and, after 10½ hours in the air, the Martins made a safe landing in Singapore, with about 30 minutes' fuel remaining.

Because of extremely bad weather, 1-VLG II and the 7e *Afdeling* had considerable trouble reaching Samarinda II; one Martin of the latter unit ran out of fuel and crash landed, but the other aircraft reached the secret airfield on 12 January. In the meantime, all available Martins of 1-VLG I had already attacked the Japanese fleet near Tarakan in the afternoon of the 10th, encountering heavy A-A fire and Japanese float-planes on patrol. One Martin was heavily damaged and made a belly landing at Tarakan airfield — the second crash in 13 days for this crew; they managed to sail across to the Borneo mainland but were later captured after wandering through the forest for many weeks.

At 16.00 hours on the 10th, the destruction of the oil wells and facilities at Tarakan was ordered, and when Japanese troops landed in the early morning of 11 January the scene was one of enormous fires and black smoke. That morning, three Martins of 1-VLG I took-off for an attack on the fleet near Tarakan in atrocious weather. One aborted the mission immediately after take-off, a second circled over the lakes near Samarinda for two hours and then also returned, while the third climbed through the clouds to 16,500 ft (5 000 m) and continued alone to Tarakan. Near the target, the aircraft descended to search for the enemy through the dense rain squalls. Glimpsing a few ships, the pilot dropped his bombs on "his best guess". The return landing was made at Balikpapan.

Around mid-day on 12 January the reinforcements of the 7e *Afdeling* and 1-VLG II arrived and a flight of the former was immediately ordered to attack the Japanese fleet. There was considerable concern among the crews about the late take-off, necessitating a night flight back to Samarinda airfield, which was very difficult to find even in daylight; also, strict radio silence had to be maintained. To achieve some surprise, the flight bypassed Tarakan to the west, then made a wide arc across the coast to make the final run in from the north-east. Broken cloud cover helped conceal the aircraft. [illegible] two ships were hit by the bomb pattern, but a Martin [illegible] apparently damaged by ground fire because it was seen [illegible] straight into the cloud; nobody baled out and no trace [illegible] ever found of the crew.

[illegible] plan for operations [illegible] day consisted of sending [illegible] flights of three [illegible] over the target at [illegible] of 1½ hours. This was [illegible] devised on the [illegible] the principle had been worked out before the war during exercises "on the map" for the defence of Tarakan. Whether the flight commanders protested at the plan is not known, but no doubt there was strong apprehension amongst those crews who had already developed ample respect for the capabilities of the Japanese. With the Japanese troops now already safely ashore at Tarakan, there were only empty ships to be struck, and the fighter opposition was quite different from the earlier generation of carrier 'planes that the pre-war plans had assumed. Nevertheless, the plan went ahead, with disastrous results, and controversy about this black day for the ML-KNIL continues to this day.

The first flight of three Martins of 1-VLG I took-off for Tarakan at 6 am. It found the target under a perfectly clear sky and the flight leader, who had flown several missions against Miri and Kuching, decided to turn back as he felt it would be suicidal to continue without any cloud cover to evade Japanese fighters. A flight of 1-VLG II left 1½ hours later; it was never heard of again. The third to depart was a flight of the 7e *Afdeling*, making its first combat sortie. It reached the target and made the bomb-run with the sun at its back, from 16,500 ft (5 000 m), then diving quickly for cover of the ground. The Martins were bounced by Zero fighters, which shot down both wingmen. The flight leader escaped death by a miracle: as he leaned forward to watch his colleagues go down in flames, a bullet grazed his head. This last Martin suffered heavy damage and the pilot decided to break radio silence by sending a plain-language message to the flight succeeding him: "Beware of land-based fighters!"

Apprehensive about the non-return of the second flight, the fourth group of three Martins, also of the 7e *Afdeling* (which had flown the last mission the previous day), delayed its departure to await a report from earlier missions. When no-one returned, it finally went on its way, followed by another flight (7e *Afdeling*) 30 minutes later. The latter was about 30 minutes into the mission when it heard the radio warning of fighters over the target, and the flight commander decided to cancel the mission. The flight ahead of him was now very near the target; its leader stated later that he [illegible] heard the radio message, although another report says that the radio operator ignored it. This formation pushed on and found that ample cumulus cloud had now built up over the target. The Japanese ships had moved out of the area and the Martins switched their attention to Tarakan airfield, diving to drop a bomb pattern on a [illegible] of Zero fighters. [illegible] or ground fire, [illegible] recall/back messag[illegible] of the

bombers had been shot down, 21 or 22 men killed (only 19 names are known) and only two baled out. One of the latter also had to undergo the ordeal of being machine-gunned while descending on his parachute.

Next day (14 January) two *patrouilles* of Martins were readied for another mission, and engines were already running when orders came from Bandung to halt operations against Tarakan because of the heavy losses. The 7e *Afdeling* was disbanded and some of its crews and aircraft were assigned to 1-VLG I. The remainder flew back to Palembang with some old WH-2s (probably one of the 7e *Afdeling* and three of the *patrouille* Van Leyden of 1-VLG II).

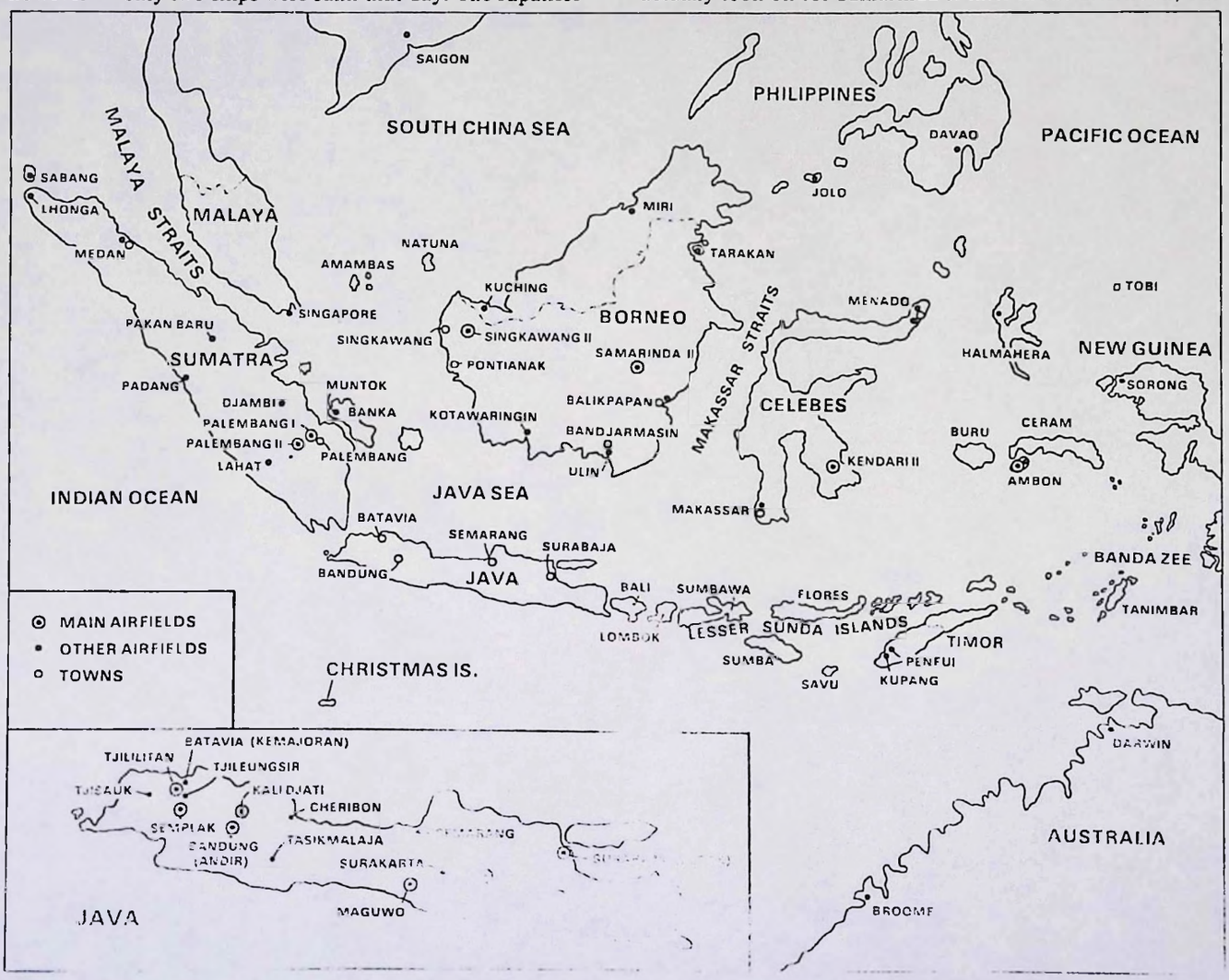
Balikpapan

On 21 January, the Japanese landing fleet left Tarakan again, heading down the east coast of Borneo for Balikpapan. The main landing force was located by a flight of Martins on 23 January and was attacked immediately, but no results were obtained, because of a communication failure with the lead observer. All available Martins repeated the attack in three flights. The orders were to land at Makassar (Celebes), again in order not to reveal the location of Samarinda airfield. Buffalo fighters from Samarinda also took-off to dive-bomb the Japanese fleet, which consisted of 16 transports, one light cruiser, 10 destroyers, covered by Mitsubishi F1M2 "Pete" floatplanes from the seaplane mother ships *Sanuki Maru* and *Sanyo Maru*. The ensuing attack was successful, 12 hits on eight ships being claimed in one report; another version claimed three ships sunk by the Martins and two by Buffaloes. These reports were subsequently shown to be highly exaggerated, however — only two ships were sunk that day. The Japanese landed at Balikpapan on the night of 23-24 January.

The following day, 24 January, the Japanese finally managed to find the location of Samarinda II airfield, after having searched in vain for several days. The tip-off was provided by a DC-3 of NEI Airlines (KNILM) which was landing at Samarinda II with supplies and was spotted by two Zeros, which promptly shot it down. The Japanese fighters came back over the field, one was shot down but the other escaped. It was now only a matter of time before the Japanese would return in force. The Martin missions continued, but the Buffalo fighters were assigned to air defence of the base, so that no escort was available. The first attack came early in the afternoon of the same day, when five Zeros strafed the field, just as a reinforcement flight of three Martins of 1-VLG II was landing; all three were destroyed. Fortunately, the operational Martins were away making yet another raid on Balikpapan, and were warned by radio of the Japanese attack. Neutralising Samarinda II was now undoubtedly a top priority of the Japanese.

Very early in the morning of 25 January, the 11 Martins remaining at Samarinda II set out again to bomb the Japanese fleet, without fighter escort; in bad weather, the formation drifted apart and each flight attacked individually. During the bomb-run it was noticed that there was very little ack-ack fire, and the reason soon became apparent, for after turning away from the target, the Martins were jumped by a large number of Zero fighters.

Three Martins made emergency landings at Ulin, and one was shot down in flames; another landed at Bandjermassin and five were directed to Makassar. The five flyable aircraft actually took off for Samarinda II later in the afternoon, but



when approaching the field it was being bombed again and the formation returned to Ulin.

Shortly after the Martins had landed at Ulin, Japanese fighters overflew the field but did not see the well-camouflaged bombers. There were 10 aircraft in total at Ulin, of which eight were serviceable. Since Samarinda II was now constantly watched by the Japanese, return to the home base was impossible, and next morning (26 January) orders were received to proceed to Makassar, as Ulin had no supplies of bombs. At Makassar, the Martin crews found considerable disorder, with no fuel bowsers or bomb trolleys, and a constant threat of air attack. They decided, without waiting for further orders, to refuel as rapidly as possible and then to fly, singly, to Surabaya, in Java.

With the return of these few battle-weary Martins from Borneo, it was decided to send another *afdeling* over right away. This was 3-VLG III, which had returned from Singapore a few weeks earlier and had had some time to recuperate. The target of the squadron was to be the mysterious aircraft carrier reported to have been seen by one of the flight commanders off Balikpapan on 25 January, and on the morning of 27 January six Martins took off from Kali Djati for Ulin in Southern Borneo, loaded with three 300-lb (136-kg) bombs each. Further orders were to be issued at Ulin, where the aircraft were to refuel, but aircraft in the formation lost contact in bad weather, and one went into a spin from which it recovered at zero altitude over the sea after both canopies were torn off, it landed safely at Ulin.

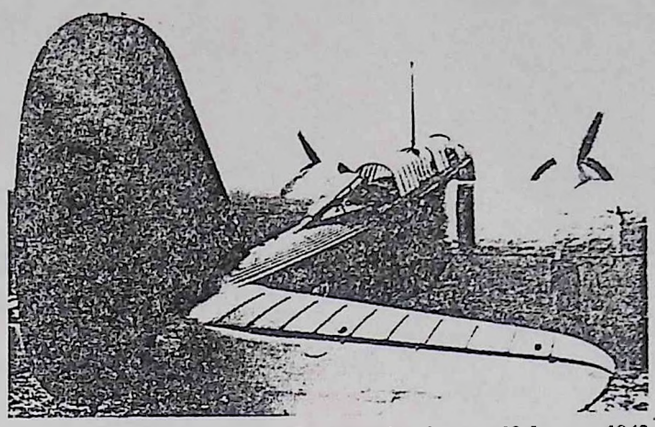
Whilst on the ground at Ulin and awaiting final orders for the raid, the Martins were struck by a group of Zero fighters, and all were destroyed. One Zero was also shot down. The crews of 3-VLG III were picked up by two Lodestars the next morning and taken back to Andir. The "Battle of Makassar Straits", as the air actions near Balikpapan became known, was over. A few more raids were flown by B-17s of the USAAF non-stop from Java, and evacuation flights to Samarinda II airfield continued until early March, but no more attacks were made by Martin bombers.

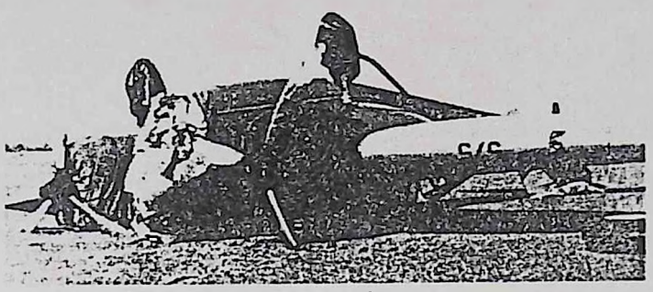
Sumatra

To review events in Sumatra, it is necessary to go back to the beginning of the war with Japan. Martin operations in Sumatra were initially restricted to reconnaissance and maritime patrol duties, but it will be recalled that under ABDA agreements, VLG II was to move to the west, after first operating for a few days from Ambon and Kendari, east of Borneo. On or about 10 December, a *patrouille* of VLG II went from Kendari back to Singosari (Malang), where the squadron commander Lt Otten took over command of the flight, to proceed to the airfield of Talang Betutu in Sumatra, more commonly known as Palembang I (P-I) — to distinguish it from the new military airfield Palembang II (P-II), which was not yet completed. On 14 December, two *patrouilles* (six Martins) of 1-VLG II went to Pakan Baru. Another flight had returned from Kendari on 13 December, but for the time being stayed in Malang for rest and maintenance.

The two *patrouilles* at Pakan Baru made regular reconnaissance flights from their Sumatra base northwards to Sabang, on the very tip of the island, and back over the Malaya Straits. The plan called for one flight to make the recce and the other to be on standby for action, alternating each day, with the objective of detecting Japanese crossings into Sumatra.

At Palembang I, the flight under Lt Otten (three Martins) was also placed under British control in FEC. Also at Palembang I was the "WH-1 *Patrouille*", a flight of three old WH-1 bombers which had been formed from Flight [illegible] and personnel and was attached to 1-VLG[illegible] of the Dutch Navy HQ, its duty was [illegible] reconnaissance, for which purpose two naval officers were attached to the [illegible] and it started operations in [illegible] from Palembang I on or about 15 December.





(Above) WH-3 M-572 of 1-VLG III was shot down on 19 January 1942 on a mission to Muar, Malaya, when flown by Lt Schaftlein. (Below) WH-3 M-575 suffered serious damage on 5 May 1939 in an accident at Kali Djati.

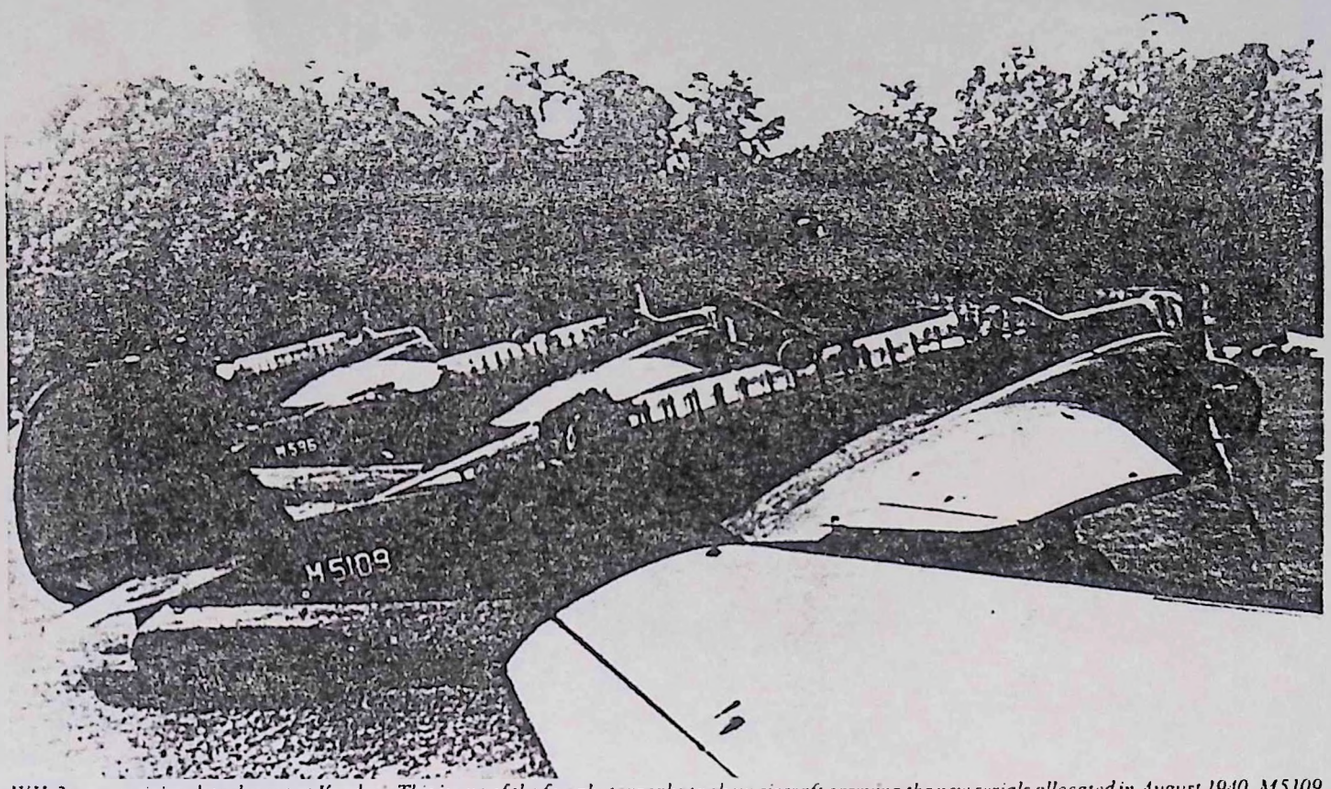
On 25 December 1941, the Martins of 2-VLG I from Singkawang in Borneo withdrew to Palembang I, causing severe congestion at the field, a situation aggravated after 29 December by the periodic detachment of additional fighters and bombers to Palembang for protection of convoys which sailed towards Singapore. To accommodate the large number of aircraft, it was decided to station the bombers at the new field Palembang II and the fighters at Palembang I.

During the period that these convoys (six between 3 January and 5 February) were under Dutch protection, no ships were lost, aircraft losses were also minimal, only one Martin (M-504 of the WH-1 patrol) being lost in a ditching near the north coast of Billiton Island on 25 January. The WH-1 *Patrouille* was withdrawn to Kali Djati and disbanded on 3 February. The Martins of 2-VLG I, under Lt De Senerpont Domis, were employed flying armed reconnaissance flights; of the nine aircraft available, two were flown to Java for urgent repairs. Little is known about these sorties, but one crew member recalls making five or six flights from Palembang I, dropping bombs "in the vicinity of Singapore".

Without seeing much hostile action, the Dutch Martin units were gradually withdrawn from Sumatra, to make room for RAF squadrons moving in from Malaya as the Japanese advanced. On 10 January, as already described, the Japanese attack on Tarakan necessitated further withdrawals from Sumatra, with transfer of two flights of 1-VLG II to Borneo and their subsequent decimation. As a result, the third *patrouille* of 1-VLG II, which had only old WH-2s as equipment, returned to Kali Djati on the 14th to exchange its aircraft for WH-3As.

A bri[illegible]spite

Tow[illegible] the end of January 1942, all remaining Martins had been [illegible]gressively withdrawn to Java. It was a motley collection of understrength units that gathered there, with about 45 aircraft, mostly in dire need of maintenance. Dutch efforts to speed up [illegible] of military aircraft ordered in the USA, had resulted on [illegible] January 1942 in the [illegible] to divert to the NEI 60 North American B-25C bombers from a



WH-3s on a training detachment at Kendari. This is one of the few photographs to show aircraft carrying the new serials allocated in August 1940, M5109 having previously been M-609; notice, however, that the second aircraft is still M-596 in the earlier series. The orange-and-black rudder marking would soon disappear; the triangle insignia on the upper wing surfaces have already been deleted.

USAAF contract. It was expected that these aircraft would be arriving by mid-February in Australia and India, where NEI crews would pick them up. With this prospect of new equipment, it was decided to retain the organisation of six bomber squadrons in order to phase-in the B-25s as smoothly as possible. The *afdelingen* at Java were reduced to two instead of three flights each, while 2-VLG III was temporarily disbanded to free personnel for the B-25s. A summary of the status of the *afdelingen* after the withdrawal to Java appears on page 18.

A view inside the "glasshouse" canopy, looking aft. Messages were often transferred by "clothes line" as an alternative to the intercom.

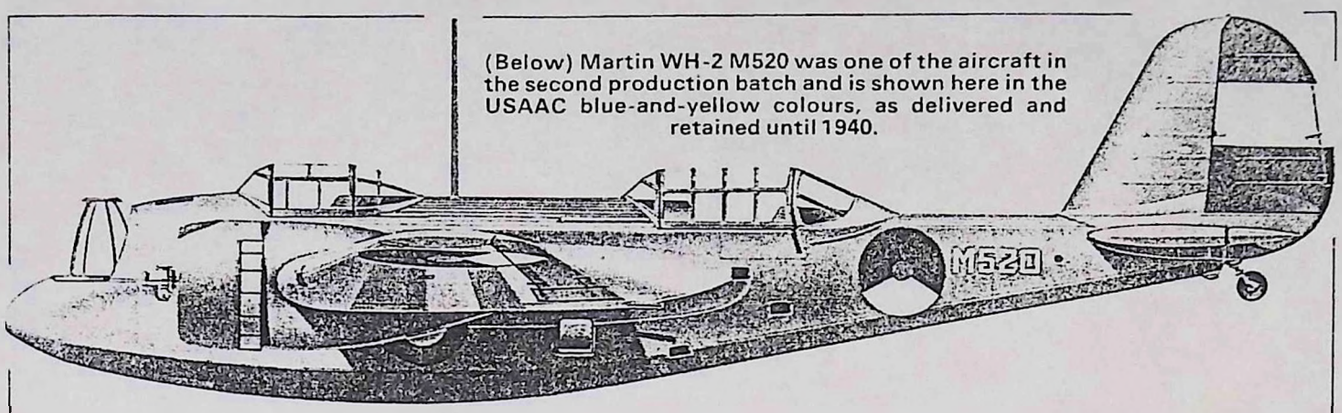
The last week of January was a period of relative quiet around Java, with the Japanese consolidating their forces in Borneo and the Celebes for the final assault. It would have been an opportune moment to attack and keep the Japanese off balance, but the Dutch units were in need of repair and recuperation. To minimise exposure to air attack, the Martins were dispersed over a number of small airfields. This hampered badly-needed maintenance, since the dispersal bases had no permanent facilities at all. Operational sorties usually required that the bombers flew to the main airfield in the early morning or late afternoon to be readied for a mission, returning directly to the dispersal field after completion of a sortie.

On 3 February, the Japanese Navy started heavy air attacks on East Java, raiding Surabaya, Malang, Madiun and other targets. 1-VLG II was the first Martin unit to feel the consequences. After return from Borneo, the crews of this squadron had re-assembled at Kali Djati where they received six old WH-2 bombers from the Flight School. These were flown to Madiun on or about 28 January and employed on reconnaissance flights to the south and south-east of Java, as an enemy drive into the Lesser Sunda Islands was thought likely. Following the Japanese air raid the squadron received orders to move to the airstrip at Pasirian, on the tip of East Java. This field had been constructed in drained rice fields and had a very soft surface in the monsoon season. The first three Martins landing at Pasirian cut deep tracks in the soft turf. The second flight came in shortly afterwards but could not be warned, the result being that all three bombers rolled into the ruts and ended up standing on their noses at the edge of the field. A few days later, a Japanese reconnaissance plane was seen over the field and the three serviceable Martins moved [illegible] Malang, and soon there [illegible] were transferred to Kali [illegible] participate in the air a[illegible] [illegible]st Palembang and [illegible]its.

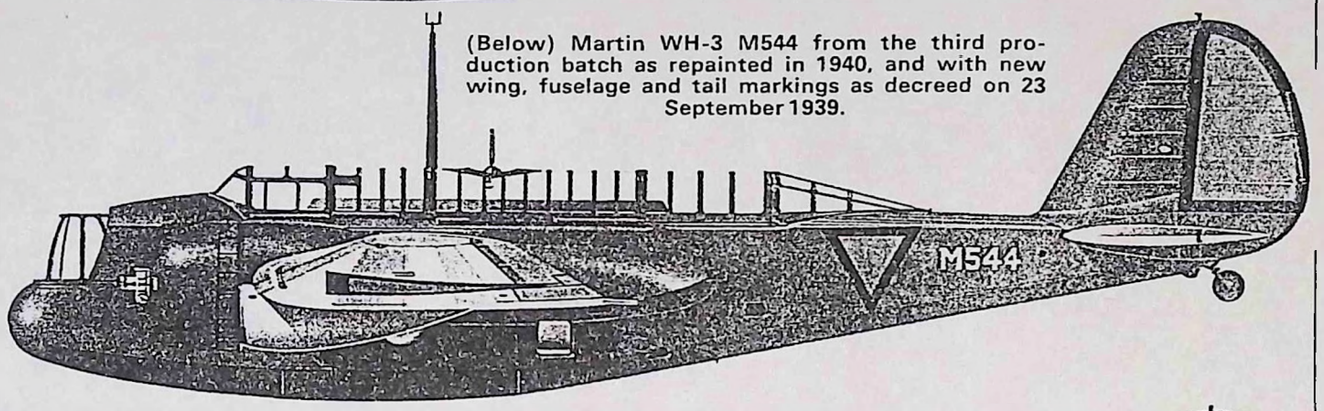
[illegible] 19 February, the Japa[illegible] [illegible] sweeps also struck

West Java, beginning a campaign to establish absolute air superiority. The Japanese had captured Palembang, in southern Sumatra, on 15 February (more about this later), and with their Army Air Force, now established in South Sumatra, resumed the offensive on 19 February with a devastating series of attacks on air bases and other targets in West Java. Thereafter, the air raids took place on a daily basis, hitting all the main airfields on Java; many of the secondary airstrips, however, where most of the Martins were stationed, escaped Japanese attention. Relatively few of the bombers were lost on the ground, but even these small losses were serious as no more replacements were available.

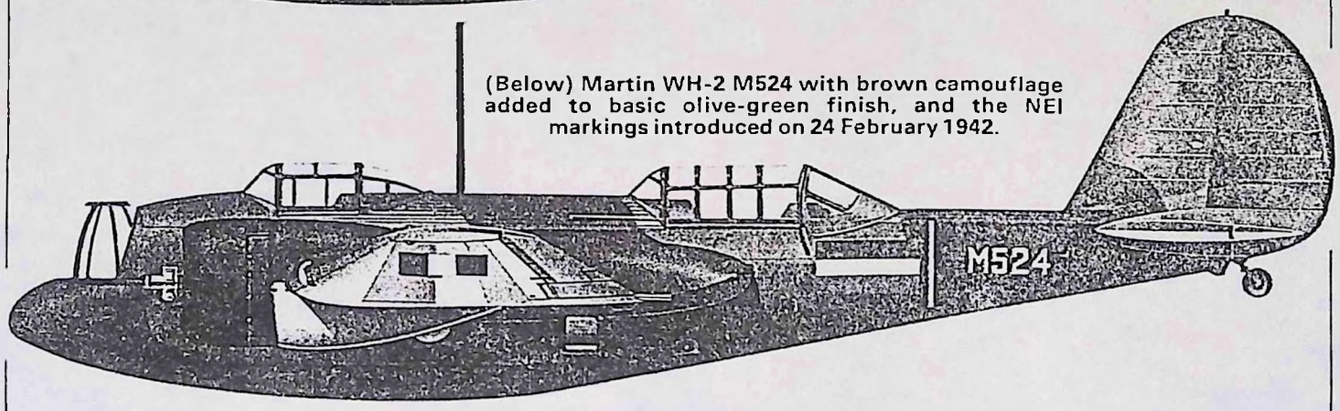
During the 9 February attack on the airfields near Batavia, two Martins were shot down by Japanese fighters. One was an old WH-2 (M-538), all five crew being killed in the ensuing crash near Bekasi. The other had just completed a reconnaissance mission to tiny Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean, 200 mls (350 km) south of Java. While approaching the



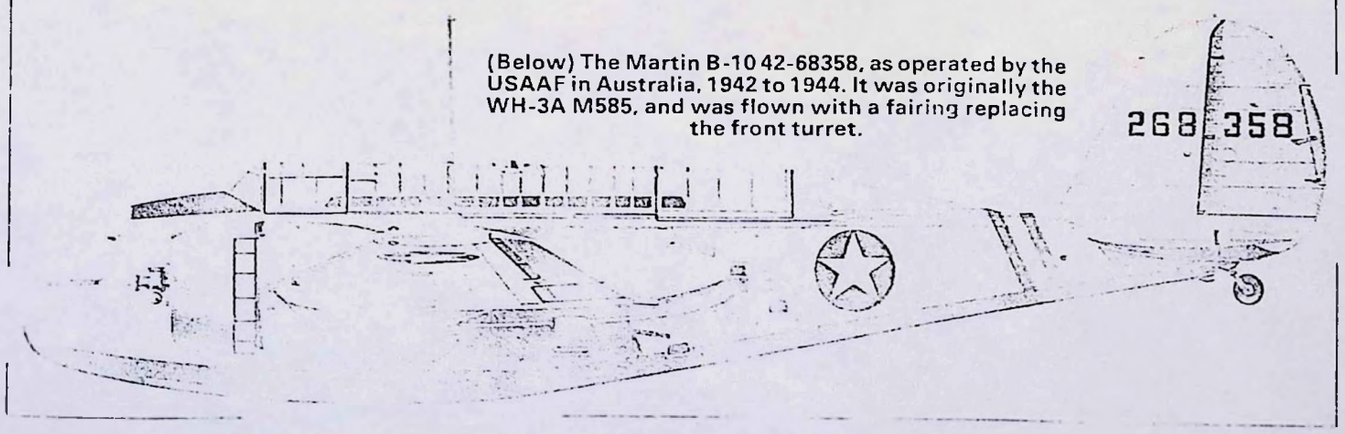
(Below) Martin WH-2 M520 was one of the aircraft in the second production batch and is shown here in the USAAC blue-and-yellow colours, as delivered and retained until 1940.



(Below) Martin WH-3 M544 from the third production batch as repainted in 1940, and with new wing, fuselage and tail markings as decreed on 23 September 1939.



(Below) Martin WH-2 M524 with brown camouflage added to basic olive-green finish, and the NEI markings introduced on 24 February 1942.



(Below) The Martin B-10 42-68358, as operated by the USAAF in Australia, 1942 to 1944. It was originally the WH-3A M585, and was flown with a fairing replacing the front turret.

STATUS OF MARTIN UNITS AFTER WITHDRAWAL TO JAVA	
1-VLG I	26-30 January 1941 withdrawn from Samarinda II to Andir. 17 February to Kali Djati.
2-VLG I	26 January from Palembang to Semplak, detachment *circa* 10 February to Wirasaba. 15 February to Kali Djati
1-VLG II	26 January from Samarinda II to Kali Djati. Re-equipped, then to Madiun (28 January), to Pasirian (3 February), to Malang (5 February), *circa* 13 February to Kali Djati and Tasik Malaja.
1-VLG III	22 January withdrawn from Singapore to Tjililitan. *Circa* 1 February to Tjisauk. Disbanded about 27 February
2-VLG III	22 January withdrawn from Singapore to Tjililitan. 1 February temporarily disbanded. Several crews to Australia; equipment and some crews to 1-VLG III.
3-VLG III	Aircraft destroyed at Ulin 27 January. Re-organised at Andir and based at Tjileungsir. Operations flown from Andir.
7e Afdeling	Disbanded 14 January at Samarinda II. Some crews and aircraft to 1-VLG I.
WH-1 Patrouille	Disbanded at Tjililitan 3 February

airfield of Tjililitan, it was caught by Zero fighters and crash-landed near Tangerang.

On 20 February, aircraft of the Japanese Army from Palembang raided Kali Djati airfield; two Martins were completely destroyed and three damaged, representing about 18 per cent of the total available strength. The next day, the Japanese returned and shot up three more Martins which had just been refuelled and bombed-up for a mission against Palembang. Their exploding bombs completed the work of the Japanese Oscars.

Actions over south Sumatra

Palembang, in south Sumatra, was an important target for the Japanese, being the third of the major oil producing centres in the NEI. Having found only charred remains of the oil wells at Tarakan and Balikpapan, they decided to use paratroopers in a surprise attack on Palembang, to prevent destruction of the refineries at Sungei Gerong and Pladju. A move against Palembang was, of course, anticipated and the southern part of the South China Sea, between Malaya and Borneo, was patrolled constantly by British bombers based at Palembang. On 6 February, however, a halt was ordered to the reconnaissance to preserve the bomber force, with the patrols to be taken over by the Reconnaissance Group from Java, under direct orders from ABDA command. Unfortunately, the lack of communication and co-ordination inherent in the hastily-organised ABDA command caused serious delays in transmission of accurate reports, and while the Japanese landing force was assembling, the bomber force at Sumatra sat idly by, having lost its own "eyes". On 13 February, the British HQ at Palembang decided to take action and sent out a Hudson, which located Japanese fleet concentrations just north of Banka.

Early on the morning of 14 February, the Japanese made their surprise attack on the oil installations at Pladju and Sungei Gerong, and the airfield Palembang I. The paratroopers were carried in licence-built Lockheed 14 transports (Kawasaki Ki-56) which were actually sighted by RAF Hurricanes but were taken for friendly Lockheed Hudsons. At the airfield and at Pladju the paratroopers achieved their goals and occupied the targets after a brief fight; at Sungei Gerong they landed on the refinery area, which gave the Dutch Army enough time to destroy the facilities. Pladju refinery was captured largely intact and for the next two weeks the actions by the surviving Martins were largely aimed at destroying this vital target.

The sorties now mounted against Banka and Palembang were extremely difficult: fighter escort was, of course, again completely lacking and the weather continued to be very bad, although the Martin crews regarded this more as a blessing than a handicap — at least the huge thunderclouds afforded a chance to hide from the Japanese fighters. The NEI airmen were now operating with a fatalistic drive, hardly encouraged by the operational directives that were being issued with peace-time detail, by staff officers without combat experience.

The number of crews by now far exceeded the available aircraft but there appears to have been no organised system of rotating the crews for these difficult missions. Some crew members report having flown as many as five missions, others only one or two, some none. Most likely, those who still had the courage to face the impossible odds went out most often, without making much of an issue of it, although all were keenly aware of the futility of their effort.

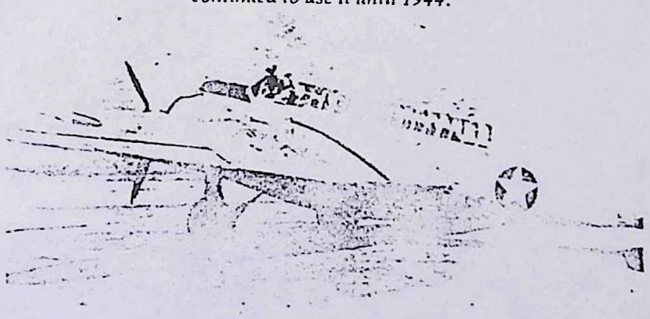
A bombardier with 3-VLG III who flew five sorties, describes one of the earliest missions as follows: "Five aircraft from Andir were ordered to bomb the oil refineries at Palembang. The weather was bad and nobody had any desire to go. The reason was that, besides the bad weather, everyone had sort of given up, because of the run of events in the last two months and, moreover, there were rumours that over Palembang concentrations of Zeros had been observed, and you couldn't do much against these in a slow WH-2 with 0·303-in (7,7-mm) guns. Finally it was decided that we would fly the mission. One aircraft aborted at take-off. The remaining four lost contact with each other immediately. My aircraft arrived over Palembang all by itself and was immediately attacked by a floatplane, while all ships on the Musi river opened up on us. I did not see Zeros. During the first bomb-run our bomb release malfunctioned, so that we made a second run, using the emergency system. We released four bombs, but the fifth hung up. I went into the bomb-bay and started to dance on the bomb, bracing myself against the sides of the plane, and kicked it loose. The bomb-bay doors did not close right away, and while the plane slowly turned away from the target, I could follow the bomb all the way down. It made a direct hit on a ship — pure coincidence in my opinion."

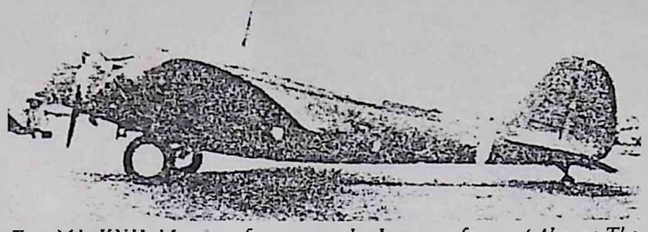
It is difficult to piece together a reasonable chronology of the bomber sorties against the Palembang area in this period of desperate fighting, but it is known that on 16 February all hands were lost in one Martin shot down over the Palembang airfield, and another returned with two crew members dead; next day, two out of three Martins were lost, but on 19 February all three returned from a successful attack on the storage tanks at Pladju. In continuing raids, a Martin was lost on 21 February, another on 24th and a third on the 26th, the last day on which Palembang was attacked.

Final days at Java

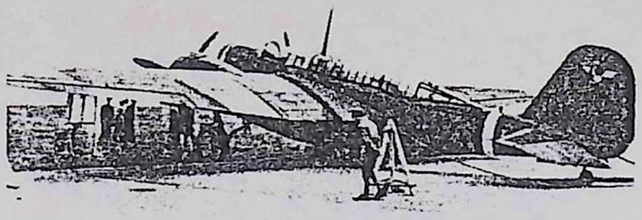
On 26 February, the Japanese invasion fleets heading for Java had been located. The situation was desperate, before even one Japanese soldier had set a foot ashore. The NEI bomber units were in sad shape, replacements in the form of B-25Cs did not

A poor but rare photograph of the WH-3A, originally M-585, after it had escaped to Australia and had been acquired by the USAAF, which continued to use it until 1944.





Two ML-KNIL Martins after capture by Japanese forces. (Above) The serial "542" is retained on the fuselage of this aircraft. (Below) A WH-3A marked only "2" and with the TDAA test unit insignia on the tail. three Martins were tested by this unit at Haneda, Tokyo.



materialise, and by the end of February further losses of Martin bombers necessitated the de-activation of the 1-VLG III. Thereafter, crews flew missions on the few Martins pooled by all units, the effort being largely determined by the ability to "squeeze" a few more flight hours out of the overworked aeroplanes. On 15 February, it had been reported that 20 Martins were serviceable. Confirmed losses in the period 15 February-28 February amount to 15-16 aircraft, but strength by 1 March was estimated at 16, indicating a strong effort to salvage aircraft; but the serviceability rate averaged only 50 per cent.

After the disastrous attempt by an Allied fleet to intercept the Japanese invasion forces in the Java Sea on 27 February, the ML-KNIL crews were again in action on the 28th, as the Japanese forces split to approach Java from two directions. All available aircraft at Kali Djati, including RAF and RAAF Blenheims and Hudsons, were thrown into the attack; taking off in the dark, the Martins of 1-VLG I had to land back at Andir, because night landings at Kali Djati were impossible. Apparently the Hudsons and Blenheims did get back to Kali Djati, however, for 21 aircraft of these two types had to be abandoned there next day when the airfield was overrun a bare nine hours after the first Japanese landings. Five Hudsons managed to fly out as the airfield fell.

As confusion grew, all available Martin bombers at Andir (six or seven) mounted another mission on 1 March, attacking Japanese troopships with limited success. Two others from 3-VLG III operated out of Tjileungsir at the same time, scoring hits on shipping, as did a third aircraft from the same unit a little later. Andir now became the major base for the remaining Dutch, British and Australian aircraft, and became a target for regular Japanese attacks, while Kali Djati in turn became a target for the Allied bombers.

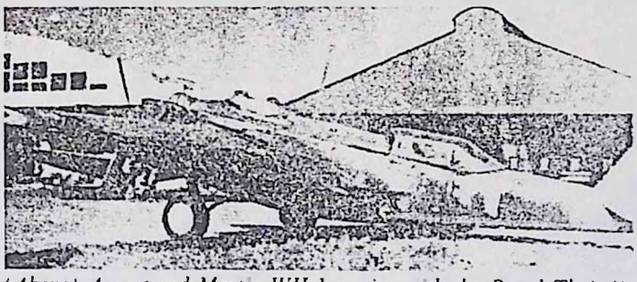
By the end of 1 March, a dispatch by the NEI HQ listed the remaining strength of the Martin units as ten to twelve aircraft. A good indication of their condition is given by the CO of 3-VLG III, who reported that "... The *Afdeling* consisted of nine crews and four aircraft, of which only one was operational ... All crews assailed the enemy with this one aircraft for two days (Indramaju, Kali Djati area, etc), until it was destroyed in an air attack at Andir."

During the day of 2 March 1942, the Japanese had penetrated so far into the interior of West Java, that the airfields outside the plateau of Bandung [illegible] abandoned. This meant that the [illegible]ments of VL[illegible] withdrew from Tjisauk to Andir. The [illegible]ts of VLG [illegible] II at Andir were further [illegible]nated by [illegible] of three Martins near [illegible]ati on 2 March and the [illegible]ing two or [illegible] on [illegible]al aircraft were flown to Tasik Malaja. As noted earlier, VLG III had three unserviceable Martins and one operational, which was destroyed at Andir on 3 March. The crews were now sitting around idly, but soon plans were made to escape to Australia with the few machines that could be persuaded to fly. Lt Wolff, the CO of 3-VLG III, ordered his three non-operational aeroplanes, which all had non-functioning electrical systems, to Tasik Malaja on 6 March and shipped along three bomb-bay tanks needed to provide the necessary range. He requested permission to fly to Australia with as many aircrew as possible, but before this was approved by HQ, a bombing raid on 7 March destroyed his Martins at Tasik Malaja. However, another Martin was found in a hangar at Andir, with newly installed engines but otherwise full of bullet holes. A quick run-up showed that it was in basically good flying condition and it was decided to install an extra tank to make a last attempt to get out. Plumbing and fittings to fit the tank were cannibalised off damaged Brewster Buffaloes.

On 7 March, Bandung had been declared an open city and the arrival of Japanese forces was imminent, but the groundcrews worked feverishly to get this last Martin (M-585) ready. With the advice of a NEI Airlines pilot and using the only available map, torn from a school atlas, a flight plan was made. After a harrowing evening, during which a demolition party had to be dissuaded by force of arms from blowing up the runway, the Martin took off at 00.50 hours on 8 March. There were 14 persons on board, including two officers who were high on the Japanese "most-wanted" list. After a flight of some nine hours, during which the occupants were numbed by the cold wind blowing through the bullet holes, the Martin landed at Broome, on Australia's NW coast, with 30 minutes of petrol to spare. It turned out that the journey had benefited from a 30-knot (56-km/h) tailwind, without which a ditching in the ocean would have been inevitable.

Not quite the end

The exiled men of the ML-KNIL in Australia would have liked to keep old M-585. Apparently, some thought was given to taking the Martin to the USA to make a War Bond promotion tour with a Dutch crew, but the shortage of aircraft and spare parts in Australia was so serious that its fate was decided otherwise. The NEI had evacuated its Lodestar transport squadron to Australia and through some none-too-subtle pressure, was forced to sell these 11 aircraft to the USAAF, which needed transport aircraft very urgently and did not want to leave these Lodestars under Dutch control.



(Above) A captured Martin WH-1 serving with the Royal Thai Air Force, which had received it from Japan. (Below) Another ex-Dutch WH-3A in Thai service, with an unusual nose transparency.

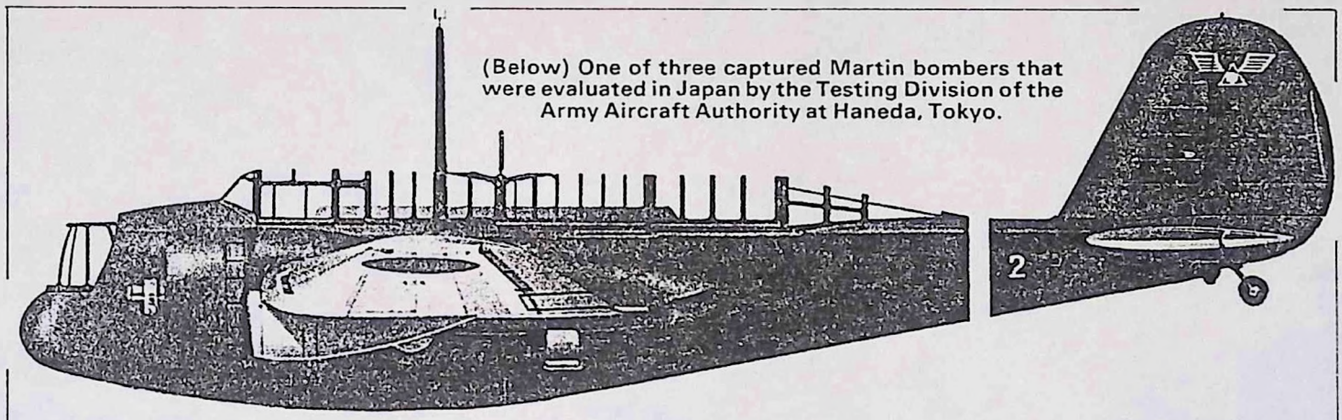
The price of the Lodestars was set at $1,028,962 for the lot. The USAAF was also interested in the Martin because its Cyclone engines were interchangeable with those of the Lodestars: therefore, the bomber was thrown into the deal for $1,038 to make up a dozen aircraft, rounding off the total price to $1,030,000. *Sic transit gloria!* It was further agreed that all these aircraft would be delivered to the USAAF during the week of 15-21 March; actual delivery was completed on 8 April 1942.

Despite the intended use of the Martin for spare parts, the USAAF had second thoughts; old M-585 was flown again and even assigned a USAAF serial number (42-68358) under an official USAAF acquisition contract approved on 8 October 1942. It was classified as a B-10 and soldiered on with an unknown USAAF unit in Australia, baptised with the disrespectful name of *"Miss Latrine of 1930"*. It was at last condemned to be salvaged in June 1944, and written off on 31 August 1944.

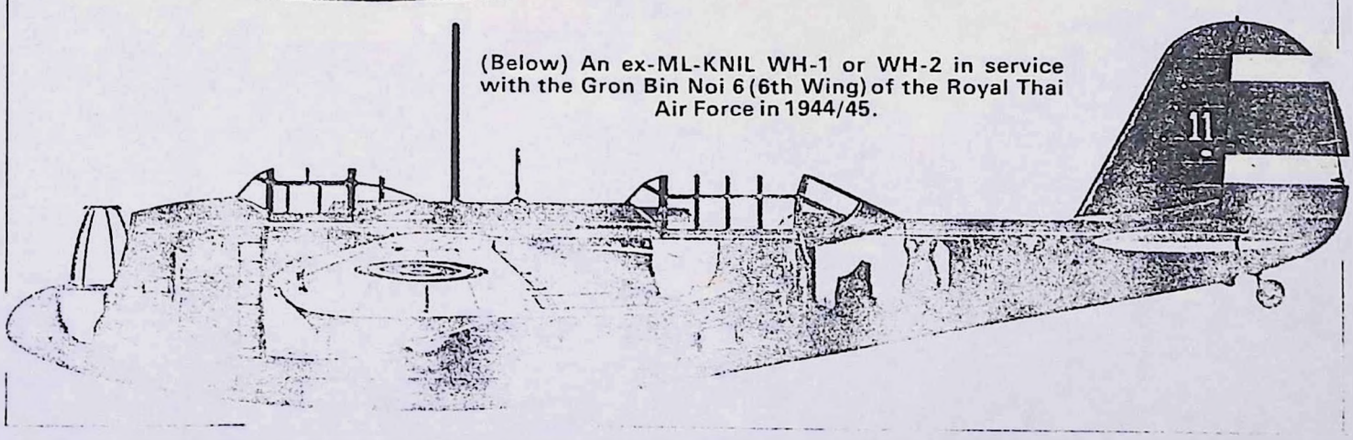
Yet the Dutch Martins still had not disappeared completely. When Java fell, there were still several unserviceable aircraft sitting around. The ML's Deputy CO wrote in his report that on 9 March four flyable, though not combat-worthy, Martins remained; there must have been others totally unairworthy at that time. With the aid of Indonesian technicians of the Dutch workshops at Andir, a number of aircraft were repaired; at least one European engineer of (neutral) Swiss nationality assisted the Japanese. Indonesian language newspapers at Java reported shortly after the capitulation that one Martin was flown to Tokyo, and from reports in the Japanese press it may be concluded that at least three examples were evaluated by the Testing Division, Army Aircraft Authority, at Haneda (Tokyo), numbered 2, 3 and 4. In an analysis published in *Koku-Shonen*, August 1942, No 2 is identified as a Martin 166 WC, but it was a WH-3A with G-105A Cyclone engines. Other sources indicate that as many as 18 Martins fell into Japanese hands, of which 15 could be made flyable.

The Japanese gave a number of these ex-Dutch Martin bombers to the Royal Thai Air Force, which had itself bought a series of six Martin 139s in 1937. The Thais received three Dutch Model 139s and six Model 166s (139 WH-3s), which were picked up by Thai personnel in the early summer of 1942. Three of these had been found and repaired at Singapore and flown from there to Thailand, the other six coming from Java. The ex-Dutch machines joined service with the 6th Wing *(Grong Bin Noi 6)*, which consisted of one squadron equipped with Nakajima bombers and one (No 61) with the six original Thai 139s; during the war a third squadron (No 63) was organised, also equipped with Martins, presumably the ML-KNIL machines. During 1944 and 1945, several of these bombers were lost in strafing attacks by the RAF and USAAF; Thai sources indicate that nine Martins were lost in March 1944, and one crashed in 1944 or early 1945. Thus, assuming the numbers given above are correct, five Martins survived in Thailand after the end of World War II. Two of the ex-Dutch 139 WH-1s (including No 11) and a 166 (No 12) were photographed at Don Muang airfield in Bangkok in November 1946. No 11 still vaguely showed the Dutch markings and was otherwise painted dark green overall; No 12 was light and dark green. One of the photographs of a Thai 166 shows a bubble-shaped transparent nose enclosure which was not the original. The last few Thai Martins were used until 1949. The circumstances in which the Martin bombers had to be operated in those brief weeks in 1941-1942 in the NEI were such that they could make little difference to the outcome of the land battle. They displayed, nevertheless, a remarkable ability to absorb battle damage and to keep flying with minimal ground support in conditions that might have grounded many another type. Outnumbered and outgunned, the ML-KNIL's Martin bombers never failed the courageous crews who manned them. □

The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance given by Mr Otto Ward of the RNethAF in making available a series of reports and questionnaires completed by former ML-KNIL personnel, from which much of the material in this article was derived. Also thanks for the assistance rendered by Mr C R Patist, Peter Boer and many others, including Edward Young for the material on the Thai Martins. Published material used for reference includes Vol IV of "Nederlands Indië Contra Japan", "De Militaire Luchtvaart KNIL in de Oorlog met Japan" and "Onze Vliegers in Indië".



(Below) One of three captured Martin bombers that were evaluated in Japan by the Testing Division of the Army Aircraft Authority at Haneda, Tokyo.



(Below) An ex-ML-KNIL WH-1 or WH-2 in service with the Gron Bin Noi 6 (6th Wing) of the Royal Thai Air Force in 1944/45.

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February, 1945

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