



A16-43, NN-R, photographed by Athol Blake on a dull day at Kota Bharu. Compare this view with that of the same aircraft taken on a sunny day, probably immediately after a tropical downpour, reproduced in Appendix Five. This aircraft, usually flown by Flt Lt Geoff Hitchcock, claimed the first enemy aircraft shot down by a RAAF Hudson, believed to be a Navy Type 97 Fighter, a victim of turret gunner Sgt R. "Scotty" Jansen on 8th December 1941 in the vicinity of Kota Bharu. (courtesy Athol Blake)

Whilst AVM Pulford's orders were to pursue and attack the "retreating enemy", as already indicated, finding and attacking the seagoing force under the storm clouds proved almost impossible. Consequently the focus of attention remained Kota Bharu. As No. 60 Squadron's surviving Blenheims left they were replaced by aircraft from Nos. 34 and 62 Squadrons, but these "mopping up operations", as Wing Cdr Davis referred to them, were largely ineffectual, putting crews and aircraft at great risk for little or no return. No. 8 Squadron's operations for the morning, for example, netted only one barge (by FO Stumm) and one aircraft as definitely destroyed, for the loss of one aircraft, another badly damaged at Singapore whilst three of the balance of ten which returned to Kuantan were "seriously holed by small arms fire, necessitating the removal of four cylinders".¹⁶⁰ Injuries sustained by No. 8 Squadron personnel were fortunately minor, second pilots POs David Hersey and John Mercer being slightly wounded.

Whilst Japanese anti-aircraft fire during the Hudson and Blenheim attacks had been unrelenting, the RAAF and RAAF squadrons had at least been operating without opposition from their northern airfields up to that time, but this situation was soon to change. The British official history records:

At about 7.30 a.m. the Japanese air forces began intensive attacks in order to eliminate, in the shortest possible time, all air opposition in northern Malaya. Operating at first from forward airfields specially prepared in southern Indo-China and, later in the day, from the airfields at Singora and Patani, they carried out a series of damaging raids against the British air force. Their aim was to destroy aircraft on the ground and then put the airfields and buildings temporarily out of action so as to deny them to any British aircraft which were already airborne or had escaped the ground attacks. From the outset they met with success . . .¹⁶¹

The first RAF station to come under attack was Sungei Patani, home of No. 21 Squadron RAAF, equipped with Buffaloes, and No. 27 Squadron RAF, equipped with Blenheims. Amazingly, No. 21 Squadron was the only single-engined fighter-equipped squadron outside of Singapore – a good reason for the primary attention paid to the airfield by the Japanese. That first raid, however, failed to find many of No. 27 Squadron's Blenheims present, as eight had been dispatched to take part in the Kota Bharu operations (which they failed to find because of blinding rainstorms). At 1045, with the Blenheims having returned, the Japanese struck again, then raided the