

assistance, so the sudden collapse of British defences in Malaya and Singapore hit Batavia like a shockwave. Following a Batavia air-raid on 15 February 1942, the government response was to move itself to prestige hotels in the hills of Bandung, and the end was indeed nigh.

Despite the arrival of not insignificant Allied air, naval and ground reinforcements, the defence of the NEI was beset with numerous difficulties including that of coordinating the disparate forces in the face of a stunningly successful Japanese advance. In addition, many of the Allied troops had been quickly disembarked without plentiful ammunition or other supplies.

On 8 March 1942 the NEI government in Kalidjati, West Java, announced an unconditional surrender without consulting resident British, Australian and US forces. Some had wanted to continue resistance but instead found themselves forced to surrender without warning the following day.

Much has been made of the first Mitsubishi Zero A6M2 captured by the Allies in late 1941, before Pearl Harbor. This was one of two lost to weather during a ferry flight which force-landed on the Luichow Peninsula, China, on 26 November 1941. However, overlooked is the goldmine of Allied aircraft captured by the Japanese following the NEI surrender. The Japanese Air Technical Institute at Andir compiled an inventory dated 15 April 1942 listing seized aircraft, engines, lubricants and stocks of 90 octane fuel. It also tallied other inventories seized from elsewhere in the NEI. The document lists 296 airframes, although most were badly damaged. Nevertheless some 130 were assessed as salvageable or able to be sourced for parts.

Following the surrender of all Allied forces in Java, numerous aircraft types escaped to Australia and even Ceylon. However, there were also reinforcements *en route* from the US aboard ships when Java capitulated. These were diverted to Australia, Ceylon and India. Aircraft were also in the process of being ferried to the NEI from the US via Australia. A case in point were the first B-25Cs which arrived in Australia just before Java's capitulation, where they became stranded. The final B-25C did not arrive in Australia until 7 April 1942. Between March and April 1942, Buffaloes, P-40Es, CW-22B advanced trainers and Lockheed 12 transports destined for the ML-KNIL were unloaded in Australia from five Dutch ships, three of which also transported aircraft for the MLD. As a result, Australia unexpectedly acquired an inventory of 22 DB-7B Bostons in packing cases. A flurry of paperwork and discussion saw them re-allocated to the RAAF. In the end all of these diverted airframes were redeployed, usually with other services. Whilst such aircraft do not feature prominently in this volume, the limited few which do are illustrated in order to offer another perspective into a mightier ML-KNIL air force which might have been.

The vast and entrenched NEI colonial empire saw a rapid collapse which was both spectacular and tragic. Although this loss was quickly overshadowed by the wider Pacific War with its landmark maritime battles, the conquest by Japanese air power of the NEI was truly devastating. Against multiple opponents, both the IJN and JAAF had achieved overwhelming success.

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