

WORLD WAR II

JAPANESE AERIAL ATTACKS AGAINST CEYLON (1942): UNKNOWN HISTORICAL FACTS

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**Based on research findings of *Sidath Abeywickrame* and *Henrik Melder*,
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Restatement of Known Facts Based on Archival Material and Historical Sources

Had the attack been renewed, it would have been difficult to meet – Lord Louis Mountbatten,
Supreme Allied Commander of the South East Asia Command

What the British Knew

- Knowledge of Japanese plans to attack Ceylon with carriers around the beginning of April known since February/March 1942 and confirmed on March 31, 1942 in “Operation Order 12”
- Awareness of two Japanese aircraft carriers by April 4
- Fairly precise estimate of the timing of the April 5 morning raid by April 4

What the British Did Not Know

- Lack of knowledge of the complete size of the Japanese Naval Task Force and the number of enemy aircraft (April 4 assessment indicated 2 carriers instead of 5)
- Movement of the Japanese Naval Task Force before its detection on April 4 and following the April 5 raid
- That the Japanese attacks would be sequential (Colombo followed by Trincomalee)
- Japanese intentions following the Colombo raid
- Japanese intentions following the Trincomalee raid

What the British Got Right

- Defensive Planning and build-up of forces in Ceylon starting January 1942 including Anti-Aircraft preparations, radar preparations, including movement of a Marine Anti-Aircraft unit
- Accelerated movement of aircraft from Middle East Command to Ceylon in February and March in anticipation of the Japanese raid
- Movement and dispersal of Blenheims and some of the Hurricanes from Ratmalana to Racecourse by end March.

- Splitting up the Hurricane force which allowed those at the Racecourse to focus on Harbor defense while the Hurricanes in Ratmalana focused on defense of the aerodrome.
- Concealing most of the Eastern Fleet's ships in the Addu Atoll in Maldives out of the range of the Japanese carriers' aircraft range
- Getting the timing correct on the April 9 Blenheim bomber raid on the Japanese carriers

What the British Got Wrong

- Moving aircraft from the Middle East to Ceylon, and deploying recently reconstituted RAF units of the former East Asia Command close to the Japanese attack date. The lack of lead time meant no time for the crews to train and become familiar with their new environment, fatigue among personnel, multiple aircraft accidents due to heavy usage, and coordination issues among the newly formed defending units.*
- Failure to deploy torpedo bombers and overestimating the capability of Blenheim medium bombers in their ability to inflict damage on the Japanese fleet
- Overestimating the capability of the small RAF/RN interceptor force to confront the Japanese force that was numerically superior
- Overestimating the capability of the Royal Navy's Fulmars to serve in an interceptor role (Out of the 12 Fulmars scrambled, 10 were lost, and 1 enemy aircraft downed)
- Overestimating the capability of ground-based Anti-Aircraft's ability to safeguard Ceylon and the defending force
- Underestimating the capability of Japanese Fleet's Naval Anti-Aircraft guns, which inflicted lethal damage on Catalina reconnaissance aircraft and on the Blenheim bombers
- Overestimating the capability of the British naval force in their ability to confront the Japanese naval force
- Overestimating the capability of land-based RAF aircraft to provide aircover to the two British cruisers and aircraft carrier
- Failure to share intelligence on the April 5 anticipated Japanese attack equally among frontline RAF units prior to the raid, which lead to different levels of readiness among squadrons.
- Inability of the Air Raid Detection System to detect Japanese aircraft once the attacks were underway and failure to alert the defenders

- **Communication breakdown during and after the Japanese raid**
- **Unsustainable losses among the defending force that would have prevented the defending force from protecting Ceylon had the attacks been renewed**

*Mountbatten states that reinforcement were already underway before the attack but that aircraft numbers could not be materially increased till mid-April, by which time the Japanese attack was already over.

Summary

“This was India’s most dangerous hour; our Eastern fleet was powerless to protect Ceylon or Eastern India; our air strength was negligible; and it was becoming increasingly obvious that our small, tired force in Burma was unlikely to be able to hold the enemy...”

– Lord Louis Mountbatten, Supreme Allied Commander of the South East Asia Command

The Japanese attack on Ceylon in April 1942 needs to be seen through the prism of events in early 1942. The British Empire was teetering after the fall of Singapore in February 1942 when a quarter million Commonwealth force surrendered to the Japanese. Burma was on the brink of falling. RAF personnel who managed to evacuate from Malaya, Singapore and the Netherland East Indies would make up part of the hastily formed defensive force in Ceylon. While the British were aware of the impending Japanese attack in April, there was no way to counter it effectively as there were no air resources to spare in other theaters. The air reinforcements that eventually made their way to Ceylon from the Middle East landed so close to the Japanese attack date that they were immediately rushed into combat. Against overwhelming Japanese numerical superiority, the small RAF force displayed remarkable tenacity but suffered massive losses with 70% of fighters lost. As Mountbatten points out, the remaining RAF force would have been incapable of putting up even a token resistance had the Japanese decided to continue. Fortunately, the Japanese Naval Task Force decided to withdraw after the Trincomalee attack, and the Japanese would never again attack Ceylon with a naval force for the duration of the war. Perhaps the Japanese did not know the extent of British losses in Ceylon or perhaps the Japanese losses in Ceylon were unsustainable, as Japanese too were fighting a multi-front war in the Indian and Pacific oceans.

BRITISH CABINET PAPERS ON PREPARATION OF CEYLON'S DEFENCES PRIOR TO THE JAPANESE ATTACK

Courtesy: Sidath Abeywickrame

Source documents uploaded to

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/12lcTu0cM_9nhfUmwf0GF9pIVf4YBjv6j?usp=sharing

British War Cabinet Paper 41 (422), Chiefs of Staffs Committee dated December 15, 1941

1) Defence of Ceylon

Vice-Admiral Moore said that the defence of Trincomalee was becoming of increasing importance in view of developments elsewhere and of the oil stored there. He was strongly in favor of sending the balloon squadron as originally planned.

The Committee: -

Agreed that the Balloon Squadron for Trincomalee should be loaded in W.S. 15.

British War Cabinet Paper 42 (22), Chiefs of Staffs Committee dated 16 Jan 1942

1) Chief-of-Staffs approved the defence arrangements for Ceylon set out in Annex X, and that for the present purpose (i.e., planning for the defence of Ceylon) to assume that Singapore would fall.

(summary of equipment listed in Annex X to scale up Ceylon defences included Radio Direction Finders, Wireless Observer Units, 2 Squadrons of Balloons, Anti-Aircraft Guns, Anti-Aircraft Search lights, Air Defence Operational Control Facilities, naval and coastal defences, and Establishing an Air Striking Force).

2) Air Marshal Peck suggested that consideration should be given to the provision of an air striking force in Ceylon consisting of bomber and torpedo bomber squadrons.

| ANNEX | |
|--|------|
| TELEGRAM FOR COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, INDIA, CHIEFS OF STAFF (INDIA) No. 20. | |
| 1. Defences for naval and air bases in Ceylon have been under consideration and following scales have been approved: | |
| (a) Air Defences. | |
| R.D.F. Equipment. | |
| A.C.O. of T.R.U. Stations | - 2 |
| C.O.L. Stations. | - 5 |
| G.O.L. Stations. | - 1 |
| M.R.U. Stations. | - 1 |
| R.D.F. Type 371. | - 2 |
| G.L. Stations. | - 16 |
| Wireless Observer Units. | |
| 20 posts with 2 sets of intercepting apparatus. | |
| Anti-Aircraft Guns. | |
| Heavy Anti-Aircraft Guns. | - 64 |
| Light Anti-Aircraft Guns. | - 72 |
| Balloons. | |
| 1 Squadron at 50 I.E. | |
| Anti-Aircraft Searchlights. | |
| 12 | |
| Air Defence Operational Control Facilities. | |
| Wing Operations Room | - 1 |
| Sector Operations Rooms. | - 2 |
| Gun Operations Room. | - 3 |
| Main Ground R/T Stations. | - 2 |
| Forward R/T Stations. | - 3 |
| Homing and Fixer Stations. | - 9 |
| (b) Naval Defences. | |
| As at present. | |
| (c) Coast Defences. | |
| Trincomalee | |
| 3 - 9.2 inch (380) | |
| 5 - 6 inch (155) | |
| 2 - 6 prs. | |
| Colombo | |
| 3 - 9.2 inch (380) | |
| 3 - 6 inch. (450) | |
| 2 - 6 inch. (155) | |
| 4 - 6 prs. | |
| 2. Equipment to bring defences in Ceylon up to scale given in paragraph 1, will be despatched as soon as it can be made available. | |
| 3. Marine A.A. Brigade now en route to Ceylon. Following distribution of its equipments is suggested. | |
| Trincomalee. | |
| Heavy A.A. guns | 16 |
| Light A.A. guns. | 12 |
| G.L. Sets | 3 |
| G.O.R. Organisation. | |
| Colombo. | |
| Heavy A.A. guns. | 8 |
| Light A.A. guns | 4 |
| G.L. sets. | 1 |
| 4. Implications of establishing an air striking force at Ceylon are being considered and a further telegram will be sent to you. | |

British War Cabinet Paper 42 (67), Chiefs of Staffs Committee dated 18 February 1942

1) Ceylon Military Governor

The Committee: -

- a) Were of the opinion that a Military Governor of Ceylon should be appointed as soon as possible.

British War Cabinet Paper 42 (45), Chiefs of Staffs Committee dated February 10, 1942

1) Defence of Ceylon

“The Committee considered a telegram from the Commander-In-Chief, India on the additional reinforcements required for the defence of Ceylon. Sir Allan Brooke informed the Committee about the land and A.A defences in position and about to be installed. A third Brigade was required but could only be provided at the present at the expense of Burma or the Far East. The Committee agreed with the views expressed by the Commander-in-Chief, India that the real defence of Ceylon should depend chiefly on naval and air power with the necessary R.D.F. facilities and protection for aerodromes. Sir Dudley Pound said that it was hoped to provide some air defence for the Island by using the reserve Fulmar aircraft for carriers based in Trincomalee.”

British War Cabinet Paper 42 (73), Chiefs of Staffs Committee dated 5 March 1942

“Sir Dudley Pound read extracts from a personal telegraph he had received from Admiral Leyton giving his impressions on the problems of the air defence of Ceylon, in the light of his experience at Singapore.”

British War Cabinet Paper 42 (81), Chiefs of Staffs Committee dated 12 March 1942

“Reference was made to a telegram from Commander-in-Chief Ceylon, concerning the weakness of air striking forces in Ceylon and requesting torpedo bomber units of Beaufort or similar types with trained crews, torpedoes, and the necessary equipment. He suggested (Sir Charles Portal) that in view of the urgent need for more torpedo bombers in the Mediterranean, the Middle East Command should be built up to strength. Ceylon should therefore train the crews already there, as much assistance as the Middle East could provide in equipment, technical personnel and stores.”

British War Cabinet Paper 42 (43) dated 7 April 1942

“The Chief of the Air Staff was asked to report to the Prime Minister on the following matters:
... (2) He should obtain a report on the previous experience of the Blenheim Squadron at Colombo, which had failed to establish contact with the Japanese ships taking part in the attack on Colombo.”

Observations on British Cabinet Papers Relating to Ceylon:

Starting in December 1941 British leadership became increasingly aware of the precarious situation of Ceylon and approved the scaling up of Ceylon's defences in anticipation of a Japanese attack. The plan for Ceylon's defences was quite ambitious in the context of that time and consisted of Multiple Radio Direction Finders, Wireless Observer Units, 2 Squadrons of Balloons, Anti-Aircraft Guns, Anti-Aircraft Search lights, Air Defence Operational Control Facilities, naval and coastal defences. The most important component under consideration was an air striking force that included bombers and torpedo bombers. The scaling up plan never materialized as envisioned by the time of the Japanese raid due to pressing needs across multiple theaters including Middle East and major setbacks in South East Asia including the fall of Malaya, Singapore and Dutch East Indies (Indonesia). In February, the situation was considered so dire that the War Cabinet suggested the appointment of a Military Governor for Ceylon. The Colonial office pushed back on the idea since Ceylon already had limited self-government under the Soulbury Constitution. Also in February, the British War Cabinet stated that "the real defence of Ceylon should depend chiefly on naval and air power with the necessary R.D.F. facilities and protection for aerodromes." It is clear from this statement that British intended to use naval power to complement air power.

In March, Adm. Leyton, who was appointed as Commander-In-Chief Ceylon, made a desperate plea "requesting torpedo bomber units of Beaufort or similar types with trained crews, torpedoes, and the necessary equipment." Furthermore, Leyton gave his "appreciation" of the short comings of Ceylon's defences. No. 11 Blenheim Squadron that made its way to Ceylon in mid-March from the Middle East barely had time to settle down at the Racecourse before it was rushed into action against the Japanese. Furthermore, the torpedo bomber squadron that was mentioned in the planning document never materialized due to pressing needs in the Mediterranean.

The War Cabinet Memo of April 7 refers to the Blenheim Squadron's inability to find the Japanese fleet on its April 5 bombing mission. The tone of the minutes suggests that Churchill was infuriated and had asked the Chief of the Air Staff to provide him with a report indicating the previous experience of the squadron and why it had failed to establish contact. Little did Churchill or the military leadership know that two days later, on April 9, that the Blenheim Squadron would make contact with the Japanese and would be practically destroyed. Perhaps the outcome of the Battle of Ceylon may have been more favourable to the British had the air defences been augmented with the torpedo bomber squadron or if the Blenheim Squadron had arrived a few weeks earlier.

Mountbatten's postwar account in the 1946 London Gazette has a rather curious assessment of the Japanese threat. He contends that the Japanese did not possess enough power to overrun Ceylon but that their attack was aimed at influencing the outcome of talks between Sir Stafford Cripps and the Indian Congress leaders. Cripps was then on a mission to secure the Indian leaders' support for the war effort. It is uncertain whether this view was widely shared by British leadership.

RAF 222 GROUP: A BRIEF HISTORY



Air Officer Commanding No. 222 Group RAF, Air Vice Marshal J H D'Albiac, was in command during the Japanese raid. Here he is seen greeting his successor, the Air Officer Commanding No. 222 (General Reconnaissance) Group RAF, Air Vice Marshal Alan Lees (left), upon his arrival at Ratmalana, Ceylon. (Photo Credit: Imperial Air Museum)

RAF 222 Group was headquartered in Colombo, Ceylon and had been moved there soon after the fall of Singapore in February 1942. In addition to squadrons in Ceylon, 222 Group had squadrons operating from Madras, Cuttack (Odisha), Akyab (Burma), Rangoon and the Cocos Islands. Its operations area was the largest in WW2 - covering two and a half million square miles of the Indian Ocean. In Ceylon, 222 Group had air stations in China Bay, Ratmalana, Racecourse, Sigiriya, Minneriya, Vavuniya and Koggala. The history of the Air Group is described in this 1945 BBC broadcast just before 222 Group ceased operations. (See link below)

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1oCiVHzTQ9CjyvJ4X7dkN98Y7SeLQoBJW?usp=sharing>



Photo shows a Sunderland GR Mark V, RN293 'J' of 205 Squadron and a Consolidated Catalina Mark III, probably 321 Squadron, moored off Direction Island, Cocos Islands. 321 (Dutch) RAF Squadron was headquartered in China Bay (Photo Credit: Imperial War Museum)

THE ROLE OF INTELLIGENCE AND BIRCHALL IN "DISCOVERING" THE JAPANESE FLEET

RAF Record of March 31 To Indicate That British Were Aware Of An Imminent Japanese

Carrier Borne Attack Around The Beginning Of April Before Birchall's Sighting: No 258's ORB entry for March 31 indicates that a Japanese carrier borne attack was expected on April 1. This was likely due to communication intercepts by Allied intelligence which by this time had broken the Japanese naval cypher code. The fact that Allied intelligence had broken the Japanese Naval code was not known to the Japanese during WW2 and was a closely guarded secret known only known among the highest levels of Allied leadership.

| | | |
|---|-----|--|
| " | 31. | OPERATIONAL ORDER NO. 42 received, stating that JAPANESE were expected to carry out a Carrier-borne air attack on CEYLON on or about 1st April. Night flying test, 25 minutes, 1 aircraft. P/O. I. ADAMSON discharged from Hospital |
| | | <i>Exp. R. Birchall</i> Flight Lieutenant, Commanding, NO. 258 SQUADRON. |

S/L Birchall's and F/L Thomas's Sighting of the Japanese Fleet: 413 Catalina Squadron's ORB entry for April 4 on S/L Birchall's sighting of the Japanese fleet, and the entry for April 8 on F/L R. Thomas's sighting the fleet again helped confirm the location of the Japanese fleet and chart its course. F/L R. Thomas's sighting would have allowed the British to plot the course of 11 Blenheim Squadron's attack on the Japanese fleet on April 9.

| | |
|--------|--|
| 4/4/42 | Aircraft Y on Recco. patrol was recalled shortly after reaching patrol area. Aircraft A. Captain S/L Birchall on search for enemy shipping reported the position course, and speed of a large enemy force. Part of this message was not understood and a continual request for a repeat was not answered. The aircraft did not return and it is presumed that it was shot down. This was the first intimation that Ceylon had that it was about to be attacked and there is no question that work done by S/L Birchall and his crew was the means of saving Ceylon from invasion. When the attack was launched, our defences were prepared and the enemy was beaten off with serious losses. |
| 5/4/42 | Aircraft Y on search for enemy shipping, sighted one motor vessel, which proved to be own shipping. Sighted raft made from petrol drums but no sign of life. Aircraft P left Karachi and arrived Trincomalee. |
| 6/4/42 | Aircraft P left Trincomalee and arrived at Koggala. Aircraft G left Karachi and arrived Koggala. Ground crew arrived at Preetown. |
| 8/4/42 | Aircraft Y on search for enemy shipping reported position, course, and speed of large enemy force. The message was incomplete and further contact could not be made. The aircraft did not return and it is presumed that it was shot down. The Captain, F/L R. Thomas, D.P.C. was one of our best pilots and his loss will be keenly felt by the Squadron. The information given us in his last report was very important and the defences of Ceylon were further prepared. |

Imminent Air Raid Warning and Strength of Japanese Fleet: No 11. Squadron's ORB entry for April 4 indicates that the attack is expected to be imminent and that the Japanese fleet had been spotted 300 miles from Colombo. This is most likely based on Birchall's sighting on April 4. It seems that the British were not aware of the size of the Japanese carrier force, which consisted of 5 aircraft carriers instead of 2 carriers, and may have seriously underestimated the strength of the enemy's aircraft complement.

| | | |
|----------|------|---|
| COLO/30. | 4th. | An enemy convoy is spotted at sea about 300 miles from COLO/30 and steaming our way. Two aircraft carriers are seen. It appears that an air raid is imminent. All Stand-By. One aircraft took off for a photographic purpose. |
|----------|------|---|

RAF Record of 30 Squadron Dated April 4 to Indicate That British Were Expecting A Japanese Attack on Easter Sunday Sometime After Dawn

No 30. Squadron's ORB entry for April 4 (due to a typographical error the date is shown as May 4), indicates that its CO "S/Ldr. Chater attended a conference in Colombo and imparted the main details of an anticipated Japanese attack sometime after dawn on Sunday."

| | | | |
|-----------|--------|--|--|
| RATMALANA | 4/5/42 | | Down Patrol with the exception of one pilot all "B" Flight pilots went up and practised spins and corrections, this was "B" Flight Commander's instructions after yesterday's unfortunate occurrence. "A" Flight Commander had all "A" Flight pilots exercise spins and their correction and every pilot in the squadron did this by 13.00. hours. Yellow warning received at 13.50. hours and five sections patrolled until the all clear at 15.50. No further incidents for the day. S/Ldr. Chater returned from a conference in Colombo, and imparted the main details of an anticipated Japanese air attack sometime after dawn on Sunday. |
|-----------|--------|--|--|

Post-Attack Enemy Sighting: 11 Squadron's ORB for April 15 indicates that two enemy aircraft were fired upon by AA guns. This may have been the first instance of a post-raid Japanese air operation.

| | | |
|----------|-------|--|
| COLOMBO. | 15th. | A "Red" Warning is given at 10.20 hours. Two enemy aircraft fly overhead, very high. No bombs dropped. Ack-Ack open up. No flying. Normal Routine. |
|----------|-------|--|

Observations on Allied Intelligence and on Birchall in "Discovering" the Japanese Fleet

There has been much misunderstanding and hype about the role of Birchall in the Battle of Ceylon as indicated by the reference to him as the Savior of Ceylon. While not diminishing the importance of his historical contribution to the Battle of Ceylon in sighting the Japanese fleet on April 4, and notwithstanding war time British propaganda that lionised him, a proper reassessment of his role is needed that takes into consideration post-WW2 and ORB revelations.

It would be incorrect to say that the British leadership suddenly realized that the Japanese fleet was at the doorsteps of Ceylon on April 4 and came to grips with the reality of an imminent Japanese invasion. In fact, the British had been actively engaged in defensive planning and training in February and in March on the assumption of such a Japanese attack around April. Examples include Vice Admiral Sommerville pre-emptively dispersing most of the British Eastern fleet to the Addu Atoll in the Maldives. On March 21, the RAF undertook a realistic training exercise between Hurricane Squadron 30 and Blenheim Squadron 11 in which the Blenheims simulated the role of invading Japanese bombers on their way to bomb Colombo, and the Hurricanes simulated the role of intercepting aircraft.

The clearest indication of advance British knowledge is provided in No 258's ORB entry for March 31 that refers to an April 1 Japanese carrier borne invasion. The reason for such a high level of precision was due to allied intelligence's ability to read Japanese

communication intercepts. The Japanese Navy General Operation code, known as JN-25, had been broken by Allied cryptologists in 1941.

Squadron Leader Birchall's sighting on April 4 gave the defenders firsthand visual confirmation on the Fleet and its location. Between his sighting on April 4 and the April 5 attack, the defenders had a crucial 16 hours. However, Allied Intelligence or Birchall's sighting did not give the defenders an indication as to the size of the invading force. No. 11's ORB states that the Japanese Fleet was believed to be 2 aircraft carriers whereas the actual Japanese force was 5 aircraft carriers organized into two carrier groups. The error in assessing the enemy's complete naval strength may have caused the British to significantly underestimate the total number of aircraft that the Japanese were capable of deploying on their attacks on Colombo and Trincomalee.

**SPECIAL TOPIC: TACTICS USED BY JAPANESE AS INDICATED IN RAF
OPERATIONS RECORD BOOKS (ORBs)**



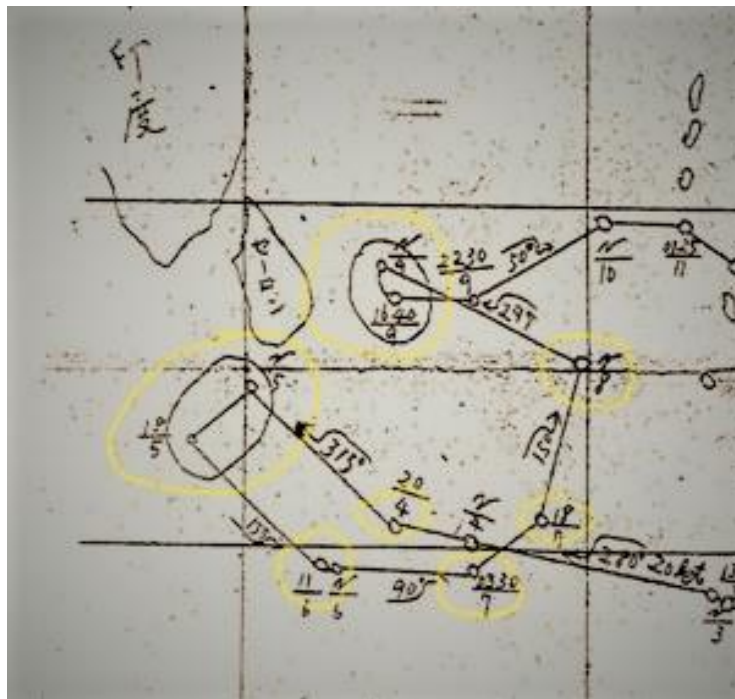
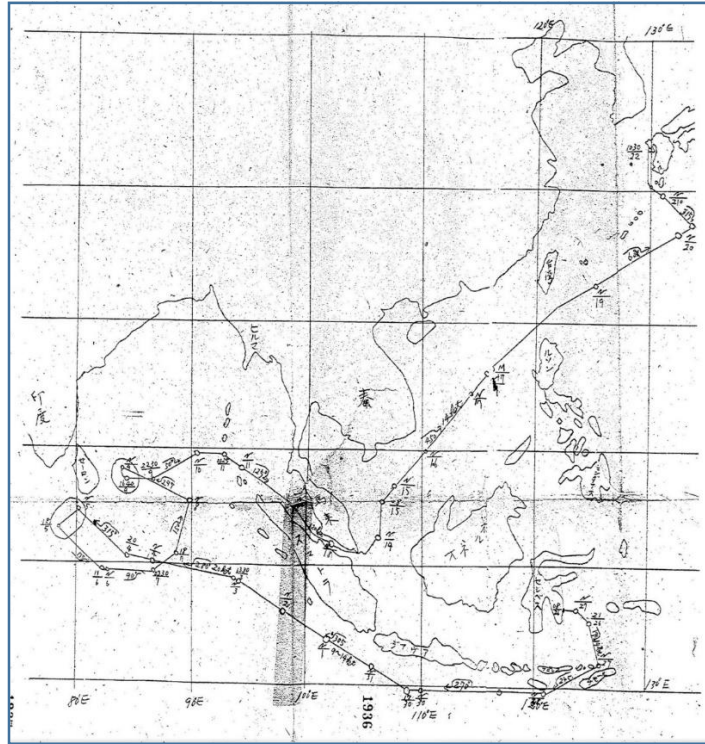
Images are from a 1942 Japanese Wartime Propaganda Film showing the Ceylon attack.

The film can be found here:

https://www2.nhk.or.jp/archives/shogenarchives/jpnews/movie.cgi?das_id=D0001300484_0000&seg_number=002

- 1) Instance of a group of aircraft lining up four astern when attacking the Ratmalana runway
- 2) Aircraft breaking into formations of six bombers with fighters overhead in the bombing of Colombo Harbor
- 3) Instances of single aircraft also dive bombing
- 4) Two formations of twin-engine bombers 2 Vics 7 in line astern, escorted by Navy Zeroes, in the bombing of Trincomalee harbor

JAPANESE ARCHIVAL RECORDS SHOWING THE PATH OF THE NAVAL TASK FORCE THAT ORIGINATED IN CELEBES, INDONESIA AND ITS EVENTUAL RETURN TO JAPAN



Smaller map is an extract of the larger map and shows the location and movement of the Fleet on each day leading up to the attacks on Ceylon. The highlighted circles are for emphasis only. The two larger circles represent the location of the Fleet when it's planes would have attacked Colombo and Trincomalee respectively.

THE BATTLE OF CEYLON (A COMPARISON OF AIRCRAFT STRENGTH)

| Aircraft Complement of Japanese Naval Task Force | |
|---|---------------|
| Carrier Division 5 | Aircraft |
| Akagi | 72 (91 Max) |
| Skokaku | 72 (84 Max) |
| Zuikaku | 72 (84 Max) |
| Total Carrier Division 5 | 216 (259 Max) |
| Carrier Division 2 | Aircraft |
| Soryu | 63 (71 Max) |
| Hiru | 64 (74 Max) |
| Total Carrier Division 2 | 127 (145 Max) |
| Total Japanese Naval Task Force | 343 (404 Max) |
| *Numbers shown are the standard complement and maximum capacity | |
| ** Of the 343 (404 maximum) possible aircraft in the Japanese force, the breakout of bombers vs fighter aircraft is unknown | |
| Source: https://www.hazegray.org/navhist/carriers/ijn_cv.htm#zuik | |

| RAF/RN Fighter Squadrons Scrambled on April 5 | |
|---|----------|
| Colombo Squadrons | Aircraft |
| RAF 30 Sq. Hurricanes (Racecourse) | 21 |
| RAF 258 Sq. Hurricanes (Ratmalana + Racecourse) | 14 |
| RN 803 + RN806 Fulmars (Ratmalana) | 6 |
| Total Colombo | 41 |
| RAF/RN Fighter Squadrons Scrambled on April 9 | |
| Trincomalee Fighter Squadrons | Aircraft |
| RAF 261 Sq. Hurricanes (China Bay) | 17 |
| RN 873 Fulmars | 6 |
| Total Trincomalee | 23 |
| Total Ceylon Fighter Squadrons | 64 |



Images from 1942 Japanese Film on Ceylon attack

April 5 Colombo Harbor Battle

- RAF 258 Squadron's ORB: Approximately 105 Japanese planes (Main body of approximately 75 Japanese planes above Harbor and 35 Navy "O's above them), against which RAF 258 deployed 14 aircraft for the Colombo Harbor battle.

Overall Enemy Aircraft vs RAF Fighters: 7.5:1

April 5 Ratmalana Aerodrome Battle

- RAF 30 Squadron's ORB: Approximately 90 to 100 Japanese bombers and fighters against which RAF 30 scrambled 21 Hurricanes and RN scrambled 6 Fulmars

Overall Enemy Aircraft vs RAF/RN Fighters: 4:1

April 9 Trincomalee Harbor Battle

- RAF 11 Squadron's ORB: Approximately 100 Japanese planes (50 plus Navy 97 bombers and 50 plus Navy 'O' fighters) against which RAF 11 scrambled 17 Hurricanes and RN scrambled 6 Fulmars for the Trincomalee battle.

Overall Enemy Aircraft vs RAF/RN Fighters: 4:1
Enemy Fighters vs RAF/RN Fighters: 2:1

| RAF & RN Fighter Squadrons Scrambled vs Losses | |
|---|----|
| Colombo Fighter Squadrons | |
| Colombo Fighters Scrambled | 41 |
| Colombo Fighter Losses on April 5 | 28 |
| Trincomalee Fighter Squadrons | |
| Trincomalee Fighters Scrambled | 23 |
| Trincomalee Fighter Losses on April 9 | 17 |
| Total Ceylon Fighter Squadrons | |
| Total Ceylon Fighters Scrambled | 64 |
| Total Ceylon Fighter Losses | 45 |
| Scrambled Fighters Remaning | 19 |

Observations on RAF vs Japanese Aircraft Strength

Based on the ORBs, the British were not aware of the existence of three carriers out of the five-carrier Japanese force and may have not anticipated the number of enemy aircraft.

Although the exact number of the Japanese aircraft and the ratio between Japanese fighters and bombers is unknown, based on the standard aircraft complement of the 5 carriers, a force between 343 and 404 Japanese aircraft could have been deployed in the Battle of Ceylon.

In Ratmalana, Colombo and Trincomalee, RAF ORBs describe 100+ enemy aircraft appearing in each of these air battles. From the ORBs it is apparent that the small defending force was vastly outnumbered and faced a numerically superior enemy, perhaps two to four times greater than the defending force.

Overall, in the Battle of Ceylon, 64 RAF and RN fighters were deployed resulting in 45 losses for the defenders or a loss of 70% of the total defending aircraft scrambled on April 5 and on April 9.

THE AIR BATTLE FOR COLOMBO

| Colombo Defences on April 5 1942: RAF and Royal Navy Fighter Squadrons | | | | | |
|---|------------|----------------------|-----------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Category | RAF 30 Sq. | RAF 258 Sq.* | Total RAF | RN 803 Sq. & RN 806 Sq.** | Total RAF + RN (Colombo) |
| Squadron Location | Ratmalana | Ratmalana & Racourse | | Ratmalana | |
| Type of Aircraft | Hurricanes | Hurricanes | | Fulmars | |
| Serviceable Aircraft Start of 5 April 1942 | 22 | 17 | 39 | 6 | 45 |
| Aircraft Scrambled on 5 April 1942 | 21 | *** | 14 | 6 | 41 |
| Aircraft Losses on 5 April 1942 | 15 | 9 | 24 | 4 | 28 |
| % of Aircraft Losses on 5 April 1942 | 71% | 64% | 69% | 67% | 68% |
| Aircraft Remaining End of Day 5 April 1942 | 7 | 8 | 15 | 2 | 17 |
| Pilots Killed 5 April 1942 | 5 | 5 | 10 | 3 | 13 |
| Pilots Injured 5 April 1942 | 2 | 2 | 4 | | 4 |
| Enemy Aircraft Shot Down (Claimed)*** | 11 | 4 | 15 | 1 | 16 |
| Enemy Aircraft Shot Down (Probable)*** | 7 | 1 | 8 | | 8 |
| Enemy Aircraft Damaged*** | 5 | 4 | 9 | | 9 |
| *14 Hurricanes of 258 Squadron RAF were located at Colombo Racetrack and the rest at Ratmalana | | | | | |
| ** Royal Navy Squadrons 803 and 806 were equipped with 12 Fulmar II's but only 6 were serviceable | | | | | |
| *** Enemy losses as indicated in ORB's. | | | | | |

RAF 30 Squadron ORB Highlights

- Squadron was on high level of readiness from April 1 onwards.
- On April 5 at 0750 hours enemy formations totaling 90 to 100 bombers approached Ratmalana aerodrome on a course of 355 degrees at approximately 8000 feet
- Pilots of A and B Flights who were on standby took off immediately with the firing of a red flare from the control tower
- Although it was obvious to ground observers that the formation was hostile, ground AA guns had not fired yet nor had the sirens gone off
- Once the sirens sounded, the ground teams raced to man their stations
- The Japanese formation did not make an immediate attack but proceeded north over the aerodrome where some of the Hurricanes that had been scrambled were engaging them
- Five Japanese dive bombers circled and formed a line astern and dive bombed in an easterly direction
- As the first bombs were dropped at 500 feet, the Bofors AA guns opened up
- In the midst of the bombing of the control tower, 4 Hurricanes were taxiing on the runway but managed to get airborne. Eventually 21 aircraft took off from the runway with the majority taking off while the aerodrome was being bombed
- The Bofors AA guns fired continuously to ensure that the Japanese did not “jump” the Hurricanes that were attempting to get airborne.

- One Hurricane dispersed near the control tower was damaged in the bombing of the control tower and could not get airborne
- Several pilots had no planes and could not get airborne but managed to grab Thompson submachine guns and fired bursts at enemy aircraft coming within range
- Only on two occasions were enemy aircraft able to chase planes taking off. The ORB states that this was due to heavy ground AA fire.
- A Fulmar that was attempting to land was shot by Japanese invaders
- Airmen stationed at the adjacent Blind Institute were subject to low flying enemy planes and bombs and took cover among trees in anticipation of paratroop invaders
- Although the defenders had to get airborne under adverse conditions, low cloud cover helped to conceal the planes
- Within 30 minutes (0800 hours) the attack was almost over with several planes returning to refuel and rearm
- By 0900 hours all remaining planes had landed
- As communication had been cut-off between Ratmalana and the Racecourse, Squadron Leader Chater, the CO of RAF 30, took a plane from the Racecourse to Ratmalana to find out the status of the squadron stationed at Ratmalana.
- Of the 21 aircraft that took off that day, 30 Squadron had only 7 aircraft remaining at the end of the day with 5 pilots killed.

RAF 258 Squadron ORB Highlights

Pre-April 5

- March 14: Squadron given designation 141
- March 16: Squadron transfer from Ratmalana to Racecourse: 4 Sr. NCOs and 40 airmen posted to squadron from ex-far Eastern Command (*Editor's note: By this time, with the fall of Netherlands East Indies, Malaya, and Singapore, the British Far Eastern Command had ceased to exist*)
- March 23: 14 aircraft flew from Ratmalana to Racecourse as part of the Squadron's move to Racecourse
- March 30: Squadron re-designated 258 as it was discovered that most personnel had served in the original 258, which was disbanded in Sumatra
- March 31: "Operational Order 42 received, stating that Japanese were expected to carry out a carrier-borne air attack on Ceylon on or about April 1."
- April 4: Commanding Officer attended a conference at Group Headquarters. Two sections at readiness for night operations

April 5

- 9 Hurricane II's, and 5 Hurricane I's at readiness
- 0710 Hours: Message received that zero hour would be at 0730
- 0730 Hours: Further message received from Fighter Operations if Enemy Aircraft are overhead. Commanding Officer reporting that a formation of 11 aircraft were overhead, and pilots were running to their machines. Fighter Operations then ordered "Scramble"
- 0735 Hours: Main battle over Harbour (Details in Form 541 below)

"The 9 Hurricane II's scrambled as a Squadron and the 5 Hurricane I's as an independent flight. One or two enemy aircraft were encountered but the main body, approximately 75 enemy aircraft were then concentrated over the Harbor, with approximately 35 Navy "O's a few thousand feet above, acting as cover. As 258 Squadron approached the Harbor the enemy bombers were preparing to attack. When the Squadron arrived at the Harbor it was on a level with the enemy Bombers and below the Navy "O's. S/LDR Fletcher attacked the enemy Bombers with the Hurricane II's. He continued to attack for as long a period possible."

- 0736 Hours: Red Air Raid Warning given
- 0736 Hours: Enemy aircraft flew directly across Racecourse without taking offensive action
- 0900 Hours: White warning
- Squadron Losses: 9 destroyed, 5 personnel killed and 2 injured including S/LDR Fletcher. Enemy Losses: 4 destroyed, 1 probable, and 4 damaged

Observations on RAF ORBs concerning the April 5 Air Battle for Colombo:

The ORBs of Squadron 258 and Squadron 30 paint a picture of a hastily assembled smaller defensive force that faced a numerically superior enemy. Despite the odds against them, these airmen fought with tenacity against the enemy engaging them in combat and attempting to disrupt their plans.

258 Squadron received its numerical designation only on March 30 and had been cobbled together in late March from remnants of a RAF squadron that had been destroyed in Sumatra. The Squadron was in the process of moving from Ratmalana to the Racecourse before the attack. Perhaps the move was fortuitous as the enemy was not aware of the existence of the Racecourse RAF facility. There is only one instance recorded in the ORBs of the enemy force damaging a dispersed aircraft on the ground, which happened in Ratmalana when the control tower was being bombed.

258 Squadron's March 31 ORB entry about the anticipated Japanese carrier borne attack on Ceylon is the clearest indication that the British high command was aware of the pending attack. Another remarkable revelation in the 258 Squadron ORB is the 20-minute advance warning received at the Racecourse on the impending attack while 30 Squadron at Ratmalana received no such warning. Personnel of 30 Squadron visually observed enemy aircraft over the Ratmalana aerodrome before scrambling. There was no ground AA fire or sirens to alert them before they sighted the enemy aircraft. The lack of advance warning hampered 30 Squadron as most of the Hurricanes had to scramble in the midst of the Japanese bombing of the airfield and control tower. Fortunately, low cloud cover gave the defenders some respite.

The material and personnel losses of these two RAF squadrons reveal the heavy toll they paid on that fateful day on April 5. 30 Squadron lost 71% of its Hurricanes scrambled (15 down out of 21) and 258 Squadron lost 64% of its Hurricanes scrambled (9 down out of 14).

It should also be noted that the Fleet Air Arm of the Royal Navy suffered significant losses too and lost 4 of the 6 Fulmars scrambled.

Appendix 7 R.A.F. Form 541.

OPERATIONS RECORD BOOK.

DETAIL OF WORK CARRIED OUT

approx 07.35 to approx 08.35
 From / hrs. 5 4 52 to / hrs. 5 4 42 By NO. 258 SQUADRON. No. of pages used for day 1

| Aircraft Type and No. | Crew. | Duty. | Time Up. | Time Down. | Details of Sortie or Flight. | References |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|----------|------------|--|------------|
| HURRICANE II Z.5680 | S/LDR. P.C. FLETCHER | Operations against enemy. | 07.35 | 08.35 | The 9 Hurricanes II's scrambled as a Squadron and the 5 Hurricane I's as an independent flight. One or two enemy A/c were encountered overhead, but the main body, approximately 75 E/Ac. were then concentrated over the HARBOUR, with approx. 35 NAVY 'O's a few thousand feet above, acting as cover. As 258 Squadron approached the HARBOUR the enemy Bombers were preparing to attack. When the Squadron arrived at the Harbour it was on a level with the enemy Bombers and below the NAVY 'O's. S/LDR FLETCHER attacked the enemy Bombers with the Hurricane II's. He continued to attack for as long a period as possible. | |
| " Z.5461 | P/LT. B.E. PERCOCCH-EDWARDS | Do | 07.35 | 08.35 | | |
| " B.D. 701 | P/LT. J. LOCKHART. | Do | 07.35 | - | | |
| " Z.5665 | P/LT. A. McPARDEN. | Do | 07.35 | - | | |
| " Z.5587 | P/O. A. BROWN. | Do | 07.35 | 08.35 | | |
| " Z.5436 | P/O. C.C. WHITE. | Do | 07.35 | 08.35 | | |
| " E.D. 881 | P/O. D.B.P. NICHOLLS | Do | 07.35 | 08.35 | | |
| " B.G. 696 | SGT. MOORHOUSE K. | Do | 07.35 | 08.35 | | |
| " Z.5385 | SGT. THAIN. E.H. | Do | 07.35 | - | | |
| HURRICANE I | | | | | | |
| " Z.4247 | P/LT. D.J.T. SHARP. | Do | 07.35 | 08.35 | | |
| " Z.4378 | P/O. A.H. NILNES | Do | 07.35 | 08.35 | | |
| " Z.4227 | P/O. E.R.T. TREBLETT | Do | 07.35 | - | | |
| " Z.7711 | P/O. R.H. NEILL. | Do | 07.35 | - | | |
| " Z.4783 | SGT. GAVIN L.P. | Do | 07.35 | 08.35 | | |

W.F. R. Dwyer
 Flight Lieutenant,
 Commanding,
 No. 258 Squadron.

- Aircraft showing no time down crashed in combat

Hurricanes in Ceylon During WW2



Photos are from a War Bond Drive held in Colombo during the war.

Air/Sea Rescue in Ceylon



Link to film about the air/sea rescue service in Ceylon can be found here (credit: imperial war museum):

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Wb0bIZZSHyHNKpXzS6lmmu2fWEYPE9jc/view?usp=sharing>

Royal Marines Manning Bofors Anti-Aircraft Guns in Ceylon



Period photograph of Royal Marines in Ceylon next to 40MM Bofors Anti Aircraft guns. Effective Bofors AA fire enabled the Hurricanes to scramble in the midst of the Japanese attack on the Ratmalana aerodrome (Photo credit: Imperial War Museum). It should be noted that the deployment of the Royal Marine Anti-aircraft unit to Ceylon was a direct result of the scaling-up operations mentioned in the British War Cabinet's minutes of early 1942.

Japanese Aircraft Formation Over Colombo



THE AIR BATTLE FOR TRINCOMALEE

Excerpts from 261 Squadron's Operations Record Book

| Trincomalee Air Defences on April 9 1942: RAF and Royal Navy Fighter Squadrons | | |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| Category | RAF 261 Sq. | RN 873 Sq. |
| Squadron Location | Trincomalee | Trincomalee |
| Type of Aircraft | Hurricanes | Fulmars |
| Aircraft Scrambled on 9 April 1942 | 17 | |
| Aircraft Losses on 9 April 1942 | 11 | 6 |
| Serviceable Aircraft Remaining End of Day | 5 | |
| Pilots Killed 9 April 1942** | 2 | |
| Pilots Injured 9 April 1942*** | 4 | |
| * 11 Hurricanes lost = 8 shot down + 2 crashed while landing + 1 destroyed in hanger | | |
| ** In addition to the 2 killed on April 9, F/Lt Edeall died on April 12 due to injuries sustained | | |
| *** Squadron Leader A.G. Lewis was among the wounded | | |

RAF 261 Squadron ORB Highlights

Pre-April 9

- 261 Squadron was in Beirut, Lebanon in mid-January and was on its way by ship to Singapore when Singapore fell. It was then diverted to Ceylon before the Japanese raids. The Squadron arrived in China Bay on March 7, 1942. The Squadron's journey to Ceylon onboard the aircraft carrier HMS Indomitable and several photos of its stay at China Bay can be found in the following online photo gallery:

<http://www.rafcommands.com/galleries/SEAC/Cpl-Kennedy/Ceylon>

Due to a Japanese bomb hitting the Orderly Room, the Squadron's records for March are missing.

- April 1: Dawn Patrol sighted an unidentified aircraft but the "Bogie" turned to the sun and disappeared. F/Lt Quinn who was on patrol returned after 50 minutes with engine trouble.
- April 2: Six aircraft flew on dawn patrol. On landing the tire of a Hurricane II piloted by Pilot/SGT Thompsett burst causing the undercarriage to collapse with damage to the radiator and air screw. It was decided that as I.F.F. was not fitted that no further night flying would be carried out

- April 5: W/O Giffin while taxiing a Hurricane to a dispersal pen ran the the port wheel into a ditch causing damage to the port undercarriage and airscrew.
- April 6: F/SGT Quinn while landing overshot and hit a tree at the end of the landing strip, causing the aircraft to be damaged beyond repair.
- April 7: F/Lt. Anstie, W/O Griffin, and F/SGT Quinn died when a Seal aircraft belonging to 273 Squadron that was piloted by W/O Griffin hit a stationary Swordfish aircraft on the ground and burst into flames.

April 9

- Dawn Patrol (Pilots F/L Fulwood, SGT Walton, and SGT Rawnsley) took off at 0635 hours. Six aircraft were “scrambled” at China Bay at 0710 hours (Pilots F/Lt. Cleaver, F/S Lockwood, F/S Martin, F/O Counter, F/S Bowie, Sgt Pearce). Six aircraft were scrambled at Kokilai at 0715 (Pilots F. L. Marshal, F/O Mayes, P/O Hall, F/S Gauthier, F/S Warnick, Sgt Mann). S/Ldr Lewis took of at 0745 hours.
- Trincomalee Harbor and China Bay Aerodrome were bombed at approximately 0720 hours by 50 plus Navy 97 bombers and 50 plus Navy “O” fighters. Combat reports by pilots are attached.
- In the fighting, 8 Hurricanes were shot down and damaged beyond repair. Two others crashed on landing at China Bay. Two pilots (Sgt. Walton and Sgt. Pearce) were killed. Four others (S/Ldr Lewis, F/S Bowie, F/S Gauthier, and Sgt. Rawnsley) were wounded and admitted to hospital. F/Lt Edsall was seriously wounded by a bullet while helping Sgt Rawnsley, who had crashed on the aerodrome, to leave his aircraft. Two airmen were injured by bomb splinters and admitted to hospital
- The Squadron Orderly room was blown down by a bomb and all office equipment was lost. Many of the files and the airmen’s documents were later salvaged, but some had been damaged by bomb splinters.
- A petrol bowser containing about 700 gallons of petrol was hit by bullets and burst out. One aircraft which was in the hanger and from which the engine and all useful spares had been removed was destroyed.

Observations on 261 Squadron’s ORB concerning the April 9 Air Battle for Trincomalee:

The story of 261 Squadron is similar to other squadrons that the RAF hastily deployed to counter the Japanese attack. The Squadron was rushed from the Middle East to Singapore but then diverted to Ceylon as Singapore had already fallen. Arriving on March 7 at China Bay the Squadron had little time to get organized. Starting April 1 till the Japanese attack on the 9th, the Squadron suffered almost daily accidents causing it to lose valuable planes and pilots that would then not be available to counter the Japanese attack.

By the time Japanese arrived to bomb the China Bay Aerodrome and Trincomalee Harbor at 0720 hours on April 9, the Squadron was already airborne but suffered massive loses. Altogether 11 planes were lost that day but miraculously only 2 pilots were killed. Most of the surviving pilots either crashed into the Bay, parachuted out, pancaked, and in two instances crash landed in the Aerodrome. The Japanese Naval Task Force which was by then getting ready to exit the waters surrounding Ceylon may have deployed a larger force in Trincomalee in contrast to Colombo, where their attacking planes attacked multiple objectives. The RAF Pilot Reports testify to the ferocity of the Air Battle of Trincomalee. Furthermore, the April 9 Japanese attacks caused significant material losses for the defending forces including the loss of the aircraft carrier Hermes (the first aircraft carrier in history to be destroyed by attacking planes) and two cruisers. At the end of the day on April 9, 261 Squadron was left with 5 serviceable aircraft. Squadron's command too changed as its Commanding Officer was among the wounded.

Squadron ORB showing Scrambled Time and Down Time

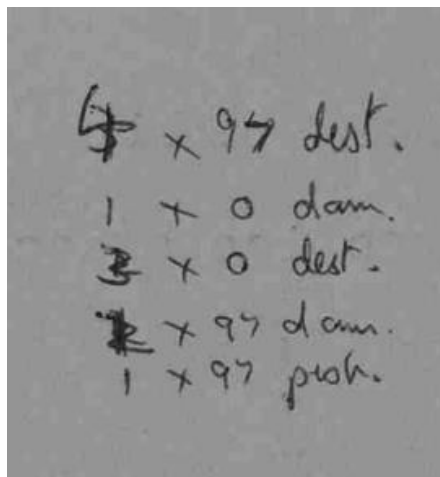
| | | | | | | 130 |
|------------------|---------------|--------------|------------|--------------|----------------------------|--------------|
| <u>Aircraft.</u> | <u>Crew.</u> | <u>Date.</u> | <u>Up.</u> | <u>Down.</u> | <u>Remarks.</u> | <u>Date.</u> |
| BG690 | Sgt. Walton | P. | 0635 | | Down Patrol | 9.4.42. |
| BG786 | Sgt. Ramsley | P. | 0635 | 0800 | " | " |
| Z5146 | P/L. Palford | P. | 0635 | 0815 | " | " |
| BG882 | P/L. O'Leaver | P. | 0710 | 0800 | Scramble. | " |
| BG327 | Sgt. Lockwood | P. | 0710 | | " | " |
| BG670 | P/O. Martin | P. | 0710 | | " | " |
| BG241 | P/O. Counter | P. | 0710 | 0800 | " | " |
| BG533 | Sgt. Pearce | P. | 0710 | | " | " |
| BG676 | P/O. Bowie | P. | 0710 | | " | " |
| BG967 | P/L. Marshall | P. | 0715 | 0825 | " | " |
| BG600 | P/O. Hall | P. | 0715 | 0830 | " | " |
| BG600 | Sgt. Warrick | P. | 0715 | 0830 | " | " |
| BG315 | P/O. Mayon | P. | 0715 | 0830 | " | " |
| BG573 | Sgt. Gauthier | P. | 0715 | | " | " |
| BG909 | Sgt. Mann | P. | 0715 | | " | " |
| BG621 | S/L. Lewis | P. | 0745 | | " | " |
| BG762 | G/C. Howard | P. | 0650 | 0830 | To Satellite L.O. & return | " |

Machines showing no time down crashed in combat.

BG786 and BG241 both crashed on the aerodrome when coming in to land.

| <u>Aircraft.</u> | <u>Crew.</u> | <u>Date.</u> | <u>Up.</u> | <u>Down.</u> | <u>Remarks.</u> | <u>Date.</u> |
|------------------|---------------|--------------|------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|
| BG967 | P/O. Walker | P. | 1110 | 1135 | Scramble. | 9.4.42. |
| BG468 | P/O. Buchan | P. | 1050 | 1140 | " | " |
| BG600 | Sgt. Harrison | P. | 1050 | 1135 | " | " |
| Z5146 | P/L. Palford | P. | 1105 | 1210 | " | " |
| BG326 | P/O. Smith | P. | 1050 | 1215 | " | " |
| BG315 | P/O. Galloway | P. | 1050 | 1135 | " | " |
| BG315 | P/O. Jansop | P. | 1245 | 1355 | Dusk Patrol | " |
| BG553 | Sgt. Gee | P. | 1745 | 1900 | " | " |
| BG670 | P/O. Smith | P. | 0730 | 0730 | Air Test | " |

A Handwritten Note in 261 Squadron's ORB Indicates the Number of Japanese Zeroes and Type 97 Bombers Downed and Destroyed



Extracts of RAF Pilot Reports That Illustrate the Ferocity of the Battle of Trincomalee

| | Name | Outcome |
|----|---------------------|---|
| 1 | Ft/Lt. R B Cleaver | Flew low ruddering violently for 40 miles in an attempt to evade 4 enemy fighters. Managed to land in Base with 20 hits to the fuselage |
| 2 | P/O R. Mayes | Canopy shattered by a .303 or .50 , with pieces entering face and eyes. After clearing blood in the eyes, continued to engage the enemy |
| 3 | Sergt. G. Lockwood | Attack caused loss of rudder control and engine oil leak, leading the engine to cut-off with a large "red glow" in the cockpit bottom. Crash landed in the corner of the lake SW of the Base. |
| 4 | F/O C.F. Counter | Aircraft was hit several times with one hit getting the oil system and filling the cockpit with oil. Attempted to land during a lull but was shot while landing causing the under carriage to collapse. |
| 5 | F/SGT A.T. Warnick | Dived from 18,000 to 12,000 making three separate quarter attacks on enemy aircraft. Engine cut-off (not due to enemy action) and landed. |
| 6 | F/SGT K.A.S. Mann | While taking evasive action, went into a spin that could not be corrected and bailed out into the lake. |
| 7 | P/O R.G. Hall | Hit by a bullet that caused glycol leak. Continued in action till ammunition ran out. |
| 8 | F/SGT J.D. Martin | Enemy attack caused canopy to shatter and oil to fill the cockpit. Forced to land near a small lake. |
| 9 | F/Lt. D. Fulford | Engaged enemy till fuel was nearly exhausted and landed safely at China Bay |
| 10 | F/Lt. J.V. Marshal | Pancaked at China Bay |
| 11 | F/SGT C.J. Gauthier | Attacked from 10,000 feet and blacked out |
| 12 | F/SGT D.D.P. Bowie | Shot down and had to bale out |
| 13 | F/SGT L.T. Rawnsley | Cannon shell exploded close to cockpit filling it with oil. Came in to land at Base with Japanese Navy "O" behind. Under carriage unserviceable. |

* The complete list of original pilot reports can be found here:

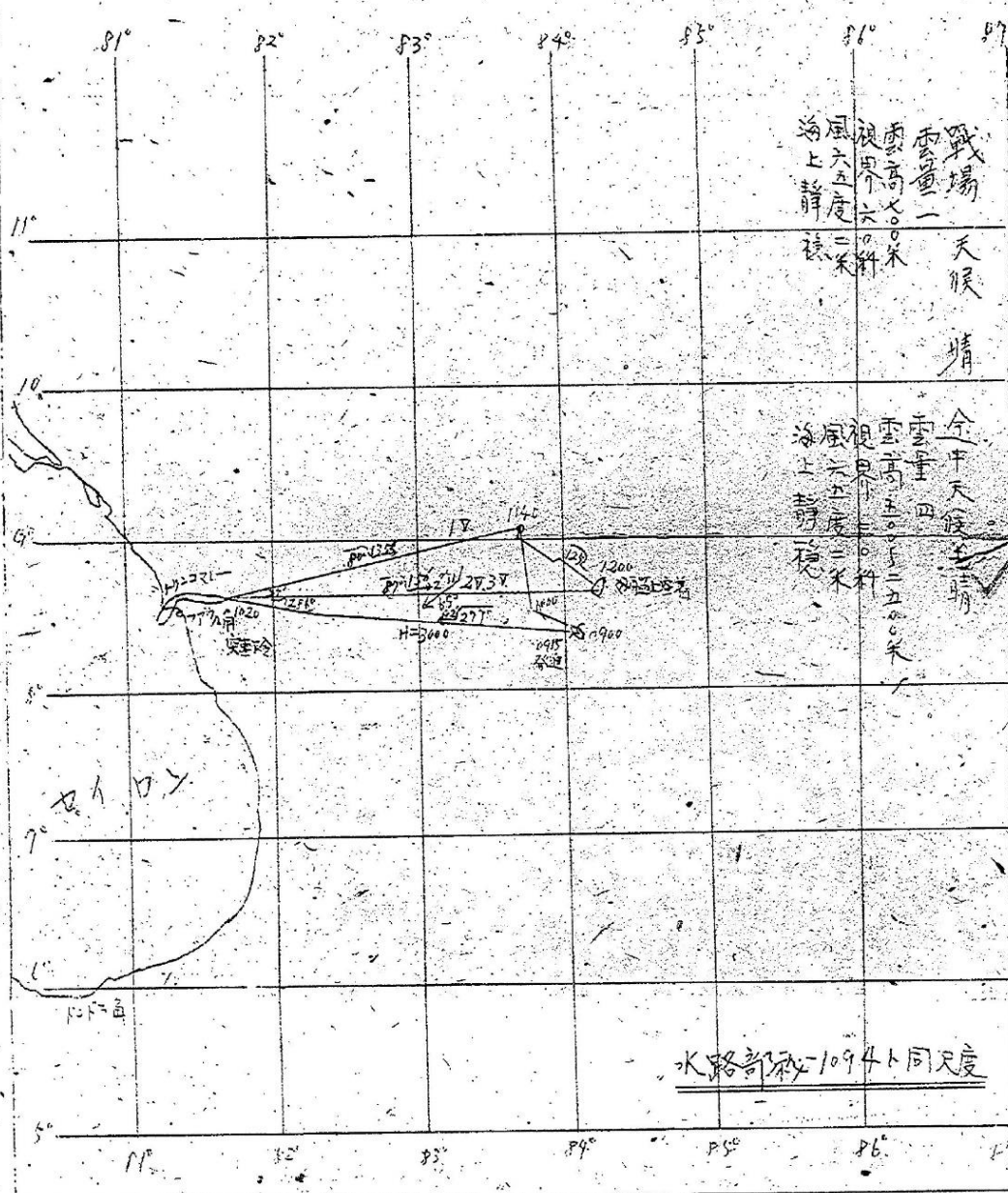
https://drive.google.com/file/d/15lLn0_2tXpliwLyzl8bTUMcKNMZhwDU/view?usp=sharing

Japanese Aircraft View of Trincomalee



Aircraft Carrier Hiruyu's Operations Log Depicting Trincomalee Attack

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|-----|-----|----------|
| 「附表三其五」トリンコマレー攻撃飛行機隊行動圖 17-4-9 | | | |
| 飛行機 | 第四 | 指揮官 | 海軍少佐 楠美正 |
| 方 | 攻撃隊 | | 海軍少佐 楠美正 |



1946

No. 11 Blenheim Squadron's Attack on the Japanese Fleet on April 9, 1942

| Category | RAF 11 Sq. |
|---|------------|
| Squadron Location | Racecourse |
| Type of Aircraft | Blenheims |
| Aircraft Launched on April 9 | 11 |
| Returned Due To Mechanical Issues | 2 |
| Lost to Enemy Japanese AA Fire | 1 |
| Shot Down By Japanese Fighters | 4 |
| Returned To Base | 4 |
| Badly Damaged | 2 |
| Seviceable Aircraft Remaning April 9 | 2 |
| Pilots and Crew Killed | 15 |
| <i>* Per ORB , the following pilots were KIA along with their crews: Squadron Leader Ault, Flight Officer Adcock, Pilot Officer Knight, and Sergeants Stevenson and McLeman</i> | |

RAF 11 Squadron ORB Highlights

April 5 Bombing mission

- “At 0740 hours about 70 Japanese bombers and fighters are seen flying straight for our landing ground (Racecourse). Twele Blenheims were about to take off to bomb the Jap fleet. It is amazing that no warning was given. The sirens actually sound 4 minutes after the personnel have seen the aircraft.”
- “The formation took off to bomb the Japanese fleet, the primary target being an aircraft carrier, position being 04 degrees 08’ North 81 degrees 56’ East. After a short while, one aircraft returned with engine trouble, the remainder continued. On reaching the given pin-point, no sign of the enemy fleet could be seen. A square search was made but of no avail and all aircraft returned to Base with bombs.”

April 9 Bombing mission

- A strke force of 11 Blenheim’s of No. 11 Squadron lead by Squadron Leader Ault was sent on April 9 at 0820 hours to attack the Japanese fleet
- The Japanese fleet’s location is recorded at position 093 degrees Trincomalee 175 Sea miles 180 degrees, 20 – 25 knots
- 2 aircraft return prematurely due to engine trouble
- 9 aircraft encounter the Japanese fleet but were unable to score any hits despite three near misses on one Japanese aircraft carrier.
- One Blenheim was shot down by Japanese naval AA fire

- 29 S.A.P. Bombs were dropped (Semi Armour Piercing Aircraft Bombs)
 - 15 x 500 lbs
 - 14 x 250 lbs
- Upon returning, the 8 remaining Blenheims encountered a Japanese force of 60 fighters returning from an escort mission
- In the ensuing 30 minutes battle, 4 Blenheims were shot down and 4 Japanese fighters were believed to have been shot down
- 4 Blenheims eventually returned to Base of which two had badly damaged undercarriages.
- No 11 Squadron lost 15 personnel on the April 9 mission, including Squadron Leader Ault. Of the 11 aircraft that left that day 5 were shot down and two badly damaged, only two serviceable aircraft remained at the end of the day.

Observations on archival material related to No.11 Blenheim Squadron:

The No. 11 Blenheim Squadron suffered 15 Killed-In-Action and 5 shot down on the April 9 attack on the Japanese fleet. Prior to that incident, on April 5, the Squadron was sent to bomb the Japanese fleet based on the Fleet's known coordinates, but the fleet had moved on by then and could not be detected.

In mid-March the Squadron had been rapidly moved from Middle East to Ceylon with many of its pilots flying via Karachi and other personnel including its CO coming via ship. The Squadron barely had time to settle into their quarters at the Racecourse when they were rushed into combat.

After their failure to detect the Japanese fleet on April 5, criticism of the Squadron's performance came from the highest level. Winston Churchill asked The Chief of the Air Staff to report to him on the previous experience of the Blenheim Squadron and why it had failed to establish contact with the Japanese ships. Mountbatten in his postwar account in the 1946 London Gazette lamented that the Blenheim Squadron sent to attack the Japanese aircraft carriers on April 9 was practically destroyed without accomplishing anything.

British leadership realized that they had missed a golden opportunity to make a dent on the Japanese force. Despite knowing the coordinates of the Japanese fleet on April 9 and mounting what seems to have been a surprise attack while its carrier-based planes were away, the 9 attacking Blenheim bombers could not hit any of the carriers even after dropping 29 bombs.

11 Squadron's situation was not unlike other hastily assembled air units in Ceylon that were rushed to combat after recently being deployed. The Squadron's aircraft suffered serious mechanical issues leading up to their combat operations. In this environment, it is remarkable that the Squadron managed to be operational at such short notice and launch attacks on the Japanese fleet on March 5 (although it could not detect the fleet) and then again on March 9 when it was practically destroyed. On April 16, 1942 Flt/Lt. R. Rechner

and Pilot Officer G.S. Burgan of 11 Squadron were awarded DFCs posthumously for their actions against the Japanese. Squadron's ORB indicates that the Squadron had received four 4 DFCs at that point.



A Bristol Blenheim Mark IV of No. 11 Squadron RAF, takes off from Racecourse airfield (Photo Credit: Imperial War Museum)

Record of Mountbatten's postwar account which appeared as a Supplement to the London Gazette (extract given below)

enemy aircraft, which did little damage on land; but they suffered some losses themselves; and the Blenheim squadron, which was sent to attack the Japanese aircraft-carriers, was practically destroyed without accomplishing anything. Had the attack been renewed it

Record of Commander-In-Chief Ceylon's Request for Torpedo Bombers (Extract from War Cabinet Minutes)

WAR CABINET.

CHIEFS OF STAFF COMMITTEE.

MINUTES of Meeting held on
THURSDAY, 12TH MARCH, 1942, at 10.30 a.m.

1. CEYLON - AIR STRIKING FORCE.

Reference was made to a telegram[†] from the Commander-in-Chief, Ceylon, concerning the weakness of air striking forces in Ceylon and requesting torpedo bomber units of Beaufort or similar type with trained crews, torpedoes and the necessary maintenance equipment.

Entries in 11 Squadron's Operations Record Book for April 9

| Aircraft Type and No. | Crew | Duty | Time Up | Time Down | Details of Sortie or Flight | References |
|-----------------------|--------------------|-------------|---------|-----------|---|---|
| <u>RECORDED IV.</u> | | | | | <u>5th APRIL, 1942.</u> | |
| 7640. | P/O. Matheson. | Operational | 08.17 | 18.15 | | |
| | Sgt. Gilmore. | Bombing. | | | | |
| | Sgt. Winted. | | | | | |
| 7506. | Sgt. Anderson. | | | | | |
| | Sgt. McFadzean. | | | | | |
| | Sgt. Brown. | | | | | |
| 7803. | Sgt. Stevenson. | | | | | |
| | P/O. Donald. | | | | | |
| | Sgt. Bell. | | | | | |
| | | | | | <u>9th APRIL, 1942.</u> | |
| 5992. | S/Ldr. Ault. | Operational | 08.20 | ----- | Twelve aircraft went off to bomb enemy sea forces at position 093° ERMONGALEE 175 sea miles 180°, 20 - 25 | NA. Two aircraft 1714 + 1640 RETURNED To base seen AFTER TAKE OFF - ENGINE TROUBLE. |
| | Sgt. Whalen. | Bombing. | | | shots. The formation found the target and bombs were | |
| 7896. | Sgt. Ekersley. | | 08.15 | ----- | dropped which resulted in three near misses on one aircraft | |
| | P/O. Duggan. | | | | carrier. One of our aircraft was shot down over the | |
| | Sgt. Gray. | | | | target by enemy A.A. and it crashed into the sea. The | |
| 7759. | P/O. H.T.L. Smith. | | 08.25 | 09.15 | formation turned for "home" and then ran into approximately | |
| | W.O. Howe. | | | | 60 JAPANESE fighters who were returning from escorting a | |
| | Sgt. Alderton. | | | | raid on CEYLON. The formation was attacked and a half-hour | |
| 7640 | P/O. Matheson. | | 08.18 | 09.50 | battle ensued. Four of our aircraft were shot down and | |
| | Sgt. Gilmore. | | | | in turn four enemy fighters were seen to fall. The | |
| 9574. | Sgt. Winted. | | 08.15 | ----- | remaining aircraft returned to base of which two were | |
| | P/O. Knight. | | | | badly damaged but the pilots made perfect landings. | |
| | P/O. Evans. | | | | The following aircraft were lost :- 5992, 7896, 9574, | |
| | Sgt. McAuley. | | | | 3911 and 7803. | |
| 5868. | Lt. Girvin. | | 08.20 | 12.45 | Weather:- Fair and moderate | |
| | Sgt. Bonfield. | | | | Bombs dropped:- 15 X 500 lbs S.A.P. 14 X 250 lbs S.A.P. | |
| | Sgt. Chitt. | | | | | |

Appendix "A". R.A.F. Form 541.

OPERATIONS RECORD BOOK.

DETAIL OF WORK CARRIED OUT.

From hrs. / / to hrs. / / By NO. XI SQUADRON, ROYAL AIR FORCE. No. of pages used for day

| Aircraft Type and No. | Crew | Duty | Time Up | Time Down | Details of Sortie or Flight | References |
|-----------------------|-----------------|-------------|---------|-----------|-----------------------------|------------|
| <u>RECORDED IV.</u> | | | | | <u>9th APRIL, 1942.</u> | |
| 7767. | P/O. Anson. | Operational | 08.18 | 13.00 | | |
| | Sgt. Cruise. | Bombing. | | | | |
| | Sgt. Hocking. | | | | | |
| 7506. | Sgt. Anderson. | Operational | 08.20 | 13.10 | | |
| | Sgt. McFadzean. | Bombing. | | | | |
| | Sgt. Brown. | | | | | |
| 6010. | Sgt. Gernham. | | 08.20 | 13.20 | | |
| | Sgt. Beltwood. | | | | | |
| | Sgt. Sutton. | | | | | |
| 3911. | Sgt. McLennan. | | 08.17 | ----- | | |
| | Sgt. Travers. | | | | | |
| | Sgt. Mell. | | | | | |
| 7771. | Sgt. Payne. | | 08.15 | 12.50 | | |
| | Sgt. McGann. | | | | | |
| | Sgt. Cameron. | | | | | |
| 7803. | Sgt. Stevenson. | | 08.20 | ----- | | |
| | P/O. Donald. | | | | | |
| | Sgt. Bell. | | | | | |

- Aircraft showing no time down were lost in combat

Blenheims in Ceylon



WW2 Photograph with caption "British bombers keep ceaseless patrol over Ceylon. A Blenheim aircraft framed by palm trees on the jungle-fringed coastline" (Photo Credit: Imperial War Museum)

JAPANESE AIRCRAFT LOSSES DURING ATTACK ON TRINCOMALEE: ALLIED CLAIMS VS JAPANESE LOSSES REPORTED

| Allied Claims | | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------|------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| Claim Made By | Destroyed | Probable | Damaged | Remarks |
| 261 Squadron | 4 x B5Ns | 1 x B5Ns | 5 x A6Ms | From <i>Bloody Shambles</i> . |
| | 4 x A6Ms | 3 x A6Ms | 1 x A6Ms | |
| AA Gun Formation | | | | |
| B Bty, 1 HAA Regt | 2 x B5N | | | Includes B5N which hit tank 91? |
| D Bty, 1 HAA Regt | 2 x A6M | | | |
| 163 Bty, 55 LAA Regt | 1 x unidentified | | | |
| 22 LAA Bty | 4 x unidentified | | | Includes A6M shot down at China Bay? |
| 990 BB Squadron | 1 x unidentified | 1 x unidentified | | Confirmed from 2 different sides |
| Total | 18 | 5 | 6 | |
| Japanese Losses Reported | | | | |
| Ship | Lost | Damaged | Cause | |
| Zuikaku | 2 x A6M | | Fulford and Rawnsley | |
| Shokaku | 1 x A6M | | 22 LAA Bty? | |
| Hiryu | 2 x B5N | 1 x B5N | Probably all attacked by 261 Sqn, but B Bty, 1 HAA Regt, claimed the B5N which crashed into tank 91 | |
| Shokaku | | 7 x B5N | Majority probably damaged by Hurricanes | |
| Soryu | | 3 x B5N | | |
| Total | 5 | 11 | | |



Nakajima B5N



Mitsubishi A6M Zero

ALLIED AIRCRAFT LOSSES DURING ATTACKS ON TRINCOMALEE

| Allied Aircraft Losses | | | |
|------------------------|--|----------------|---|
| Unit/Service | Lost | Damaged | Cause |
| 413 Squadron | 1 x Catalina | | Shot down by KdB CAP |
| 273 Squadron | 1 x Fulmar | | Crashed in jungle on return from morning search |
| 261 Squadron | 9 x Hurricanes | | 8 lost in aerial combat, 1 lost on ground |
| 261 Squadron | | 3 x Hurricanes | Aerial combat |
| 990 Squadron | 3 x Balloon | 1 Balloon | 3 in fire on ground, 1 balloon damage in air |
| Royal Navy | 3 x Albacore 1 x Walrus | | Lost on Sagaing |
| Royal Navy | 7 x Swordfish 4 x Fulmars 2 x Albacore | | Lost on the ground at China Bay |
| Total | 28 | 3 | |



Catalina



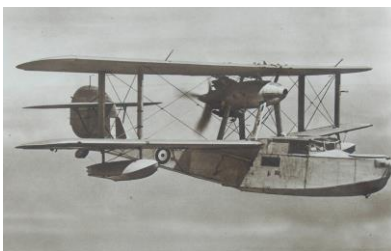
Fairy Fulmar



Hurricane



Fairy Albacore



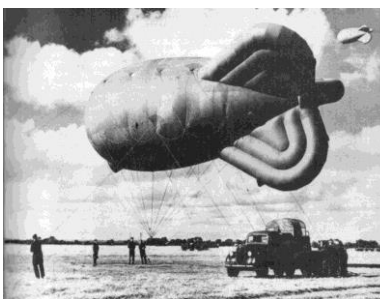
Walrus



Swordfish



Bristol Blenheim



Barrage Balloon

ALLIED AIR CREW LOSSES DURING JAPANESE ATTACK ON TRINCOMALEE

| Date | Aircraft | Tail No. | Pilot/Crew | Unit | Location |
|--|--------------|----------|---|-----------------------|-----------|
| 09 Apr | Hurricane II | BG690 | F Sgt John Wilfred Walton(1177563)† | 261 Sqn | Kokkilai |
| Remarks: Shot down by fighters from IJN at China Bay | | | | | |
| 09 Apr | Fulmar | ?? | P Off Arthur Malcolm Gregg(44524) † Sub Lieutenant Aubrey Louis Mass † | 273 Sqn HMS Hermes | China Bay |
| Remarks: Aircraft sent out on search flight in the early morning before the attack and did not return. Found 2 years later in jungle north of Trincomalee. Crew buried in Colombo | | | | | |
| 09 Apr | Fulmar | ?? | Ty/Sub Lieutenant (A) Paul R Peirano RNVR † | 803 Sqn | Ratmalana |
| Remarks: Shot down over water near Batticaloa during the fight for HMS Hermes. Shot down Jap plane before plane got hit | | | | | |
| 09 Apr | Fulmar | ?? | Ty/Sub Lieutenant (A) Richard F. H Jacob † | 803 Sqn | Ratmalana |
| Remarks: Shot down over water near Batticaloa during the fight for HMS Hermes | | | | | |
| 09 Apr | Hurricane II | Z5533 | Sgt William Ernest Pearce(402825)† | 261 Sqn | Kokkilai |
| Remarks: Shot down by IJN fighters over China Bay | | | | | |
| 09 Apr | Hurricane II | Z4961 | Sqn Ldr Albert Gerald Lewis(41303) | 261 Sqn | Kokkilai |
| Remarks: Shot down by fighters at China Bay. Bailed out and was injured | | | | | |
| 09 Apr | Hurricane II | BG676 | F Sgt David Price Bowie(137299) | 261 Sqn | Kokkilai |
| Remarks: Shot down by fighters at China Bay. Bailed out and was injured | | | | | |
| 09 Apr | Hurricane II | Z2573 | F Sgt Cleophas Joseph Gauthier(J15346) | 261 Sqn | Kokkilai |
| Remarks: Shot down by fighters over China Bay. Also reported as BE227 | | | | | |
| 09 Apr | Hurricane II | BG786 | Sgt Lloyd Thaxter Rawnsley(402753) | 261 Sqn | Kokkilai |
| Remarks: Shot down by IJN fighters at China Bay. Crash landed and was strafed IJN Zero. Undercarriage unserviceable after landing, Aircraft was repaired and flew later in April 1942 | | | | | |
| 09 Apr | Catalina | QL-Y | F/L Rae Thomas(40444) † FO Roderick Kenneth Bourne(100541) † | 413 Sqn | Koggala |

| | | | | | |
|--|---------------------|--------------|--|-----------------------|---------------------|
| | | | FO Robert Gibson Hervey(184930) † Sgt John Kenneth Hooper(1814998) † Sgt Cecil Charles Gurney(747910) † Sgt Derek Laxton Housley(915310) † Sgt John Denzil Marcus Moxham(938960) † Sgt Patrick Bourke(645247) † | | |
| Remarks: Catalina was soon shot down by A6M2 Zero's east of Ceylon | | | | | |
| 09 Apr | Hurricane II | BG909 | Sgt Kenneth Allan Seymour Mann(402377) | 261 Sqn | Kokkilai |
| Remarks: Shot down by IJN fighters at China Bay. Bailed out after aircraft was going into spin | | | | | |
| 09 Apr | Hurricane II | BE241 | F/L Off Cyril Frank Counter(85689) | 261 Sqn | Kokkilai |
| Remarks: Damaged by A6M2s Undercarriage collapsed on landing at China Bay | | | | | |
| 09 Apr | Hurricane II | BG882 | F/L Eric Frank Edsall (81368) † | 261 Sqn | Kokkilai |
| Remarks: Force landed at China Bay after being damaged by Zeros. Edsall was wounded by staffing Japanese while running away to safety from his plane. He died on the Navy Hospital in Trincomalee on the 12 April. | | | | | |
| 09 Apr | B Balloon | ?? | No Crew, But 3 men killed on ground during the attack | 990 Sqn | China Bay |
| Remarks: Barrage balloon cable was hit by IJN Zero and went loose. Landed North of China Bay. 27 th April 1942at the area known as the "Coolie Lines" near Trincomalee Station civilians from the railroad company found the No 4 bomb attached to the balloon, played with it and 3 got killed and others wounded | | | | | |
| 05 Apr | Blenheim IV | R3911 | Sgt Hugh Alexander MacLennan(404107) † Sgt Archibald Richard Travers(408017)† Frederick John Gordon Nell(400120)† | 11 Sqn | Colombo Race Course |
| Remarks: Shot down by Zeros. At 0820 hours 11 Aircraft led by Sqn Ldr K Ault took off to bomb the Jap Aircraft carrier. Two aircraft returned with engines troubles. The formation reached the target and dropped their bombs scoring some near misses. . One of the aircrafts was shot down into the sea by AA. On return the formation ran into 60 Jap fighters returning from escorting a raid on Trincomalee. The formation was attacked and a half hour battle resulted. Four of our aircraft were shot down. The RAF bombers shot down four enemy fighters. Four Aircrafts returned to base, two were badly damaged. The gunner, <u>Sgt Nell, may have shot down the Zero flown by Lt Nono, which was lost in this action.</u> And went down into the sea, about 180 miles from Ceylon. | | | | | |
| 09 Apr | Blenheim IV | V5992 | Sqn Ldr Kenneth Ault(33214)† F Sgt Stanley Dennis Whiles(776023)† Sub/Lt Frank William Bonnell FAAHMS Lanka (?????)† Sergeant George Keith Eckersley(404290)† | 11 Sqn 806 Sqn | Colombo Race Course |
| Remarks: Shot down by Zeros during attack on IJN. Five remaining 11 Squadron aircraft encounter Vals from Shokaku returning from the attack on Hermes, escorted by three Zeros from Hiryu. The latter attack. V5592 | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|--|--------------------|--------------|--|-----------------------|---------------------|
| (S/L Ault) was shot down and crashes on the beach, but in return the Zero of NAP 1/C Makinoda is destroyed. Believed to have crashed into the sea in the Trincomalee area, Ceylon. | | | | | |
| 09 Apr | Blenheim IV | V6010 | Sgt R Garnham Sgt Boltwood Sgt Sutton | 11 Sqn | Colombo Race Course |
| Remarks: Arrive at Racecourse after attack on IJN Fleet and was riddled by bullets. Damaged but repaired. | | | | | |
| 09 Apr | Blenheim IV | Z7506 | Sgt E Anderson Sgt A McFadzean Sgt Brown | 11 Sqn | Colombo Race Course |
| Remarks: Arrived at Racecourse after attack on IJN Fleet and was riddled by bullets. Damaged but repaired. Sgt E. Anderson DFM RAAF, Sgt Mc Fadzean, and Sgt Brown uninjured | | | | | |
| 09 Apr | Blenheim IV | Z7759 | F/O Off H Smith W/O T. W. A. Howe Sgt Alderton | 11 Sqn | Colombo Race Course |
| Remarks: Damaged and crash-landed, undercarriage collapsed, repaired; F/O H. Smith, W/O Howe, and Sgt Alderton slightly injured. | | | | | |
| 09 Apr | Blenheim IV | Z7803 | Sgt Noel Lindsay Stevenson(AUS407083)† F/O Alexander Watt Donald(78989)† Sgt James Charles Alfred Bell(970852) † | 11 Sqn | Colombo Race Course |
| Remarks: Shot down by Zeros during attack on IJN | | | | | |
| 09 Apr | Blenheim IV | Z7896 | Capt. Charles Henry Adcock(102252)† F/O Geoffrey Shuttleworth Burgan(407284)† Sub/Lt Peace FAA806 Sqn. Lanka (?????) † Sergeant Maxwell Clifford Gray(407152)† | 11 Sqn 803 Sqn | Colombo Race Course |
| Remarks: Aircraft was ordered to carry out bombing operations against the Japanese Fleet on the morning of 9-4-1942. Enemy fighters were encountered, and none of the crew of the aircraft has been seen again. | | | | | |
| 09 Apr | Blenheim IV | Z9574 | Lt Frederick George Knight(102349)† F/O David Hugh Evans(406203)† Sergeant Lindsay Edward McCauley(402093)† | 11 Sqn | Colombo Race Course |
| Remarks: Shot down by Zeros during attack on IJN. Neither the aircraft nor crew have been heard of since. | | | | | |

JAPANESE AND ALLIED MILITARY PERSONNEL KILLED AND WOUNDED DURING ATTACK ON TRINCOMALEE

| JAPANESE | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------|-------------|--|
| Ship | Killed | Wounded | Remarks |
| Zuikaku | 2 | | Zero pilots |
| Shokaku | 1 | | Zero pilot |
| Hiryu | 5 | 1 | 1 pilot, 1 observer, 3 gunners killed, 1 observer wounded |
| Total | 8 | 1 | |
| ALLIED | | | |
| Unit/Ship | Killed& DOW | Wounded | Remarks |
| 413 Sqn | 8 | | Crew of Catalina shot down by KdB CAP |
| 273 Sqn | 2 | | Crew of Fulmar lost in pre-raid accident |
| 261 Sqn | 3 | 4 | Includes a pilot killed on the ground by a strafing Zero |
| RAF China Bay Civilians | 16 | 6 | 261 Sqn ORB probably wrong to say that there were 16 dead, but it is the only figure that is registered. It was Construction workers that worked on the 2 Hangars on base. |
| 990 Balloon Sqn | 3 | 2 | Unknown if sustained at China Bay or at balloon sites |
| 43 LAA Regt | 2 | | |
| 55 LAA Regt | 6 | At least 2? | |
| Other Army | 4 | 9 | RE and RAOC. Probably at Fort Frederick |
| HMS Erebus | 14 | 18 | |
| HMS Balta | 1 | | |
| SS Sagaing | 5 | | One DOW on the 12 April. 2 passengers (Mother and son) |
| Marionga D. Thermiotis | | 7 | |
| HMS Lanka | 5 | | HMS Lanka was the RN shore base |
| Dockyard | 17 | 2 | 15 of the fatal casualties were Indian labourers |
| Total | 68 | 41 | |

OPERATIONS RECORDS OF THE RAF FLYING SQUADRONS WHICH WERE INVOLVED IN DEFENDING CEYLON AGAINST JAPANESE CARRIER BORNE ATTACK

Operations records related to RAF / Allied flying squadron are available via the following Google Drive links (Courtesy: Sidath Abeywickrame). In sharing these links Sidath

“There was a 405 RAF Catalina Squadron in Koggala (in addition to the Canadian 413 Catalina Squadron). I was able to find their records (link is below) but unfortunately the records for the important month of April (1942) are missing. Flt Lt Graham from the Squadron provided secondary confirmation of the Japanese fleet but like Birchall's Catalina that plane too was shot down and all crew lost”.

No 11 Blenheim Squadron

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1baG1phY699LgLA4dU83a-QVTR_VfQKMF?usp=sharing

No 258 Hurricane Squadron Racecourse

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1iuqrXqsIMCPBhcUO1XCG3Wi6kUX_VYVD?usp=sharing

No 205 Catalina Squadron Koggala (RAF)

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/19bvKdOtazhdbRRfe70rA9pJWagLEPIGm?usp=sharing>

No 413 Catalina Squadron Koggala (RCAF)

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Fj6Sh2t3fOLHRss7x1lLixurxDAk3CCQ?usp=sharing>

No. 273 Squadron China Bay (Fulmars, Seals, Wildebeests)

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Xw42tHt7QA4ctwxvaH4HvtRoyMF3lctU?usp=sharing>

No 30 Hurricane Squadron Ratmalana

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1MudDiNPnHLSJtuNSb-z6naJACHJTObAy?usp=sharing>

No 261 Hurricane Squadron China Bay

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1odadly_rjqnoHgQM3edtpRBg4YDA-cgr?usp=sharing

REPORTING THE JAPANESE AIR RAID ON CEYLON IN SUPPLEMENT TO THE LONDON GAZETTE, 18TH SEPTEMBER 1946

4664

SUPPLEMENT TO THE LONDON GAZETTE, 18 SEPTEMBER, 1946

Manila; whereas a complete British division in North-East India would have been a most valuable reserve and would have done something to restore shaken public morale.

The War Cabinet ruled, however, that the defence of the naval bases in Ceylon must have priority, and confirmed the diversion thither of the 16th Brigade of the 70th division.

4. The War Cabinet took immediate steps to reinforce India, ordering the 5th and 2nd British Divisions there. The 5th Division arrived in May and the 2nd Division in June. They also arranged to send such aircraft as could be spared; but the position in the Middle East was tense at the time and it was not easy to meet our requirements. In a telegram sent on the 27th March I estimated our air requirements as—

- 9 Fighter squadrons for the defence of Bengal.
 - 3 Fighter squadrons for Madras and the east coast ports.
 - 6 Fighter squadrons for Ceylon.
 - 4 Fighter/Reconnaissance squadrons for support of the army in Burma.
 - 4 Fighter/Bomber squadrons for support of the army in Burma.
 - 11 Light Bomber squadrons.
 - 4 Medium Bomber squadrons.
 - 2 Heavy Bomber squadrons.
 - 7 General Reconnaissance squadrons.
 - 4 Flying-boat squadrons.
 - 6 T.B. squadrons.
 - 4 B.T. squadrons.
- a total of 64 squadrons.

Our actual strength at the time was:—

1 Fighter squadron (Mohawks) at

Calcutta.

- 1 Fighter squadron (Audax)* at Dinjan.
- 1 Fighter squadron (Hurricanes) at Akyab.
- 3 Fighter squadrons (Hurricanes) in Ceylon.
- 1 Light Bomber squadron (Blenheims) in Ceylon.
- 1 G.R. squadron (Hudsons) at Calcutta.
- 2 Flying-boat squadrons (Catalinas) in Ceylon.

There was, on paper, a Light Bomber Squadron at Calcutta, but it had no serviceable aircraft.

There were also four Army Co-operation squadrons in India with obsolete types of aircraft suitable only for North-West Frontier.

Reinforcements of fighter and bomber aircraft in considerable numbers were on their way at this date, but our operational strength could not be materially increased before the middle of April.

There were some American heavy bombers in India which could assist in the defence of India in emergency, but they were birds of passage, intended for use in China and not under my control. I could not reckon on them in any plan of defence.

Thus the only portion of my command which had any scale of air protection at all was Ceylon.

* The Audax was not designed as a fighter and had been obsolete as an Army Co-operation machine before the war; its maximum speed was 150 m.p.h.

JAPANESE NAVAL RAID.

5. It was, as it turned out, fortunate that such defence as was available was mainly in Ceylon, since a Japanese naval raid into Indian waters took place in the early days of April, in the course of which Colombo was attacked by carrier-borne aircraft on the 5th April and Trincomalee on the 9th April. Our defending fighters inflicted considerable losses on the enemy aircraft, which did little damage on land; but they suffered some losses themselves; and the Blenheim squadron, which was sent to attack the Japanese aircraft-carriers, was practically destroyed without accomplishing anything. Had the attack been renewed it would have been difficult to meet. Though little damage had been caused on land, two 8-inch cruisers, Dorsetshire and Cornwall, and aircraft-carrier (Hermes) and some smaller naval vessels had been sunk by Japanese aircraft in the waters around Ceylon.

In the Bay of Bengal Japanese light forces and aircraft, sank just on 100,000 tons of merchant shipping, dropped a few bombs on Vizagapatam—the first on Indian soil, and caused a panic there and elsewhere on the Eastern Coasts of India, which, in the absence of naval and air forces, were practically defenceless.

This was India's most dangerous hour; our Eastern fleet was powerless to protect Ceylon or Eastern India; our air strength was negligible; and it was becoming increasingly obvious that our small tired force in Burma was unlikely to be able to hold the enemy, while the absence of communications between Assam and Upper Burma made it impossible to reinforce it.

Fortunately the enemy naval force withdrew, and no Japanese surface warships have since appeared in Indian waters. It is conceivable that the Japanese raid was made with the object of securing Indian rejection of the proposals brought out by the Cripps Mission, which were then under discussion at Delhi.

6. On the 13th and 14th April I met Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, at Bombay and discussed with him the defence of India. He confirmed that with his present force he could do nothing to prevent the invasion of Southern India or Ceylon, and could not send naval forces into the Bay of Bengal to protect shipping or the east coast of India. He also informed me that practically the whole of the Eastern Fleet would be engaged in operations against Madagascar and would not be available in Indian waters.

An appreciation from the Chiefs of Staff in London was received on the 23rd April. It confirmed my general appreciation of the danger to India, i.e., that an invasion of N.E. India by sea, land and air was the most probable threat, while an attack on Ceylon was possible; it recognised the powerlessness of the Eastern Fleet to offer effective opposition; accepted that the land forces in India were inadequate by at least one Armoured Division, one Army Tank Brigade and four infantry divisions, which deficiencies could not be met till late in 1942; and gave the air squadrons required as 66 (there were in India at this time 15 operational squadrons, rising to a total of 25 by the end of June).

NOTE:

The research findings presented through this document draws to a reasonable conclusion that the Japanese air raid against Ceylon in 1942 was not a surprise attack and that forces defending the country, including air force elements was on the lookout for the Japanese fleet tasked for the attack after being alerted in advance by the higher commands responsible for the defence. However the compliers of this document would like to keep this matter open for further discussion and invite the reader to present any counter arguments supported with relevant documentary evidence via email (kirinde@gmail.com). Also the reader could share any information and material that will add more value to this document as well.

KWK_31-5-2021