

## HATS OFF TO THE M.A.F.V.!

"I THINK all of us took our hats off to the Malayan Air Force Volunteers," says the New Zealand Sergeant - Pilot whose story is told on this page. "Most of them were private flyers, the equivalent of the aero club pilot in New Zealand. The only 'planes that could be spared were trainer aircraft, and in these the M.A.F.V. undertook all sorts of dangerous Army co-operation jobs."

(Left): BUFFALOES in tight formation. Here, just as they would have looked to a Japanese bomber pilot if he had stumbled on them in the skies of Malaya, is the squadron of Brewster Buffaloes, of which the central figure in this article was a member

# IN THE SKIES ABOVE MALAYA

*THE sharp tragic battle for Malaya culminated in the siege of Singapore and the last days of Singapore saw many personal adventures and many acts of heroism the full story of which will probably never be told. New Zealanders were there, and the other week a contingent of Air Force men arrived home after a strenuous period of service in Malaya. To a man they were reluctant to talk about the job they did, but here is a representative story told by a Sergeant-Pilot.*

YOU read this and you read that about the fighting in Malaya, but as far as the air operations went, I'll say this: Given something like equality of numbers, and it would have been a very different story. I don't think any of us under-estimated the Japanese, and even when you were at the wrong end of it, you had to admire the technique of their pattern bombing. But individually they're not heroes, and certainly not fanatics. If they had been the death-and-glory flyers some people gave them credit for being, you would have had plenty of cases of Japanese ramming our 'planes. I never heard of one. And we also noticed that if a bomber pilot thought things were getting sticky, he dropped his load and chased home hell for leather.

That's an individual opinion, of course, based on what I saw of the last days of Singapore. Lots of other New Zealanders saw more than I did, but I think they will back me up.

I can remember we cursed our luck when we heard our destination was the Far East. We had been hoping to get to England for advanced training and then a shot at the real stuff. We prophesied to ourselves that we would spend the duration of the war in a temperature of 90 degrees and a humidity of a hundred per cent. plus and never sight anything more exciting than a dose of malaria. But it wasn't long before we learned that we were in a real show, right enough.

### A Jungle Aerodrome

When we arrived in Singapore we were first posted to what they call a transit camp not many miles out of Singapore and right in the middle of rubber plantations. Here we tried to

acclimatise ourselves. The heat was fairly tough, and for a while all we could do at mid-day was lie down on our beds and perspire.

Then, with a group of other fellows I was sent to Kluang, in Johore, for training on Australian made Wirraways. It was a real jungle aerodrome, as picturesque as you could have wished for, and complete with butterflies with a wing span of eleven inches. But we only saw two snakes in the whole of our stay there. After that I was posted back to Singapore to fly Brewster Buffaloes. The Buffaloes were a neat looking job, very manoeuvrable and quite fast.

### "Bogies" And "Bandits"

Then came the attack on Malaya and the first air raid on Singapore, and we were soon stuck into it. It wasn't long before we were going up every day after "bogies" and "bandits." A bogey I should explain, is an unidentified aircraft; when it has been confirmed as hostile it is a bandit. My squadron happened to get the first 'plane shot down over Singapore. It was what we referred to as a "recco kite," and started coming over daily. But Bert Wipiti, a Maori, and Charlie Kronk, two Sergeant Pilots in our outfit, went up and shot him down and shared the credit. They told me the story afterwards. They were up waiting when they got word from control that a confirmed hostile aircraft was coming on such and such a course, and they went to it. They found him at 15,000 feet, and put a burst into the starboard motor, fired it, and then chased him down to about sea level and fired the other engine with what remained of their ammunition. Operations headquarters, who knew that something was doing, but didn't know the result, called

them up on radio telephone with an anxious query, "Did you bring home the bacon?" To which Wipiti and Kronk replied simply, "We have brought home the bacon."

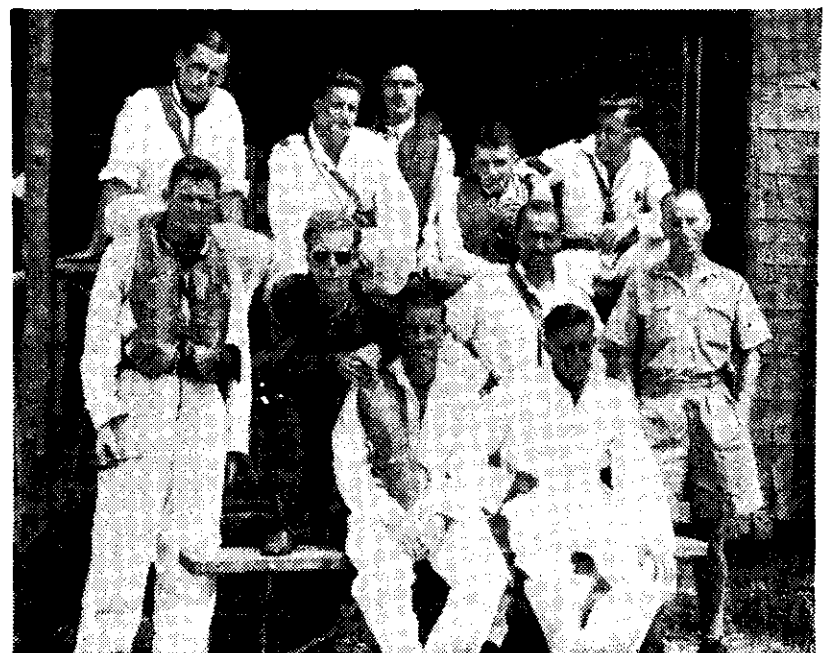
### The First Raid

A few weeks after the fighting started in Malaya we had the first raid on our aerodrome. Twenty-seven came over high up—it must have been close on 15,000 feet. We dived into trenches without standing on dignity. Then we heard the bombs coming — a sort of "swish-swish-swish"; we got down a bit lower, and I don't mind confessing I was scared. That was my first experience of their so-called pattern bombing. Reactions? Well, it's all over so quickly you don't have time to think very much, but it's pretty intense. It is difficult to fight the impression that the next bomb will be a direct hit on your own particular trench, though actually the nearest bomb landed 15 yards away from me.

When the raid was over and we had inspected the craters, we agreed unanimously that a trench was the safest place. Four of our telephone operators were in one that had a "near miss" and were buried in earth, but we dug them out unhurt.

I seemed to strike my fair share of bombing while I was in Singapore. On another occasion a sergeant and myself took a car to an aerodrome on the other side of the island, where we were to pick up and fly back a 'plane. We were on a level stretch of road when the Japanese came over, again very high up. We were out of the car in a flash and dived into a ditch by the side of the road, just before the swishing sound warned us that callers were coming. They were apparently after transport, and one bomb landed square on the road a hundred yards away. We estimated it was exactly where we would have been had we not taken cover.

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MEMBERS of a Flight at Kalang, Singapore