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# **PALEMBANG AND BANGKA ISLAND OPERATIONS RECORD**

**PREPARED BY  
MILITARY HISTORY SECTION  
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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY**

## FOREWORD

This monograph was compiled by Lt. Col. Minoru Miyako, staff officer of the 3d Air Group, Colonel Yoshimitsu Ake, Chief of Staff of the 38th Division, and Colonel Seiichi Kume, Commanding Officer of the 1st Parachute Brigade. Due to the lack of official documents this record is based upon the memories and/or personal papers of the above-named individuals.

Additional monographs covering the operations of Japanese forces in Sumatra are as follows:

Mono No. 101 - Netherlands East Indies Naval Invasion Operations, Jan 42 - Mar 42.

Mono No. 185 - Sumatra Operations Record, 25th Army.

28 April 1953

## Preface

Through Instructions No. 126 to the Japanese Government, 12 October 1945, subject: Institution for War Records Investigation, steps were initiated to exploit military historical records and official reports of the Japanese War Ministry and Japanese General Staff. Upon dissolution of the War Ministry and the Japanese General Staff, and the transfer of their former functions to the Demobilization Bureau, research and compilation continued and developed into a series of historical monographs.

The paucity of original orders, plans and unit journals, which are normally essential in the preparation of this type of record, most of which were lost or destroyed during field operations or bombing raids, rendered the task of compilation most difficult; particularly distressing has been the complete lack of official strength reports, normal in AG or G3 records. However, while many of the important orders, plans and estimates have been reconstructed from memory and, therefore, are not textually identical with the originals, they are believed to be generally accurate and reliable.

Under the supervision of the Demobilization Bureau, the basic material contained in this monograph was compiled and written in Japanese by former officers, on duty in command and staff units within major units during the period of operations. Translation was effected through the facilities of Military Intelligence Service Group, G2, Headquarters, Far East Command.

This Japanese Operational Monograph was rewritten in English by the Japanese Research Division, Military History Section, Headquarters, Army Forces Far East and is based on the translation of the Japanese original.



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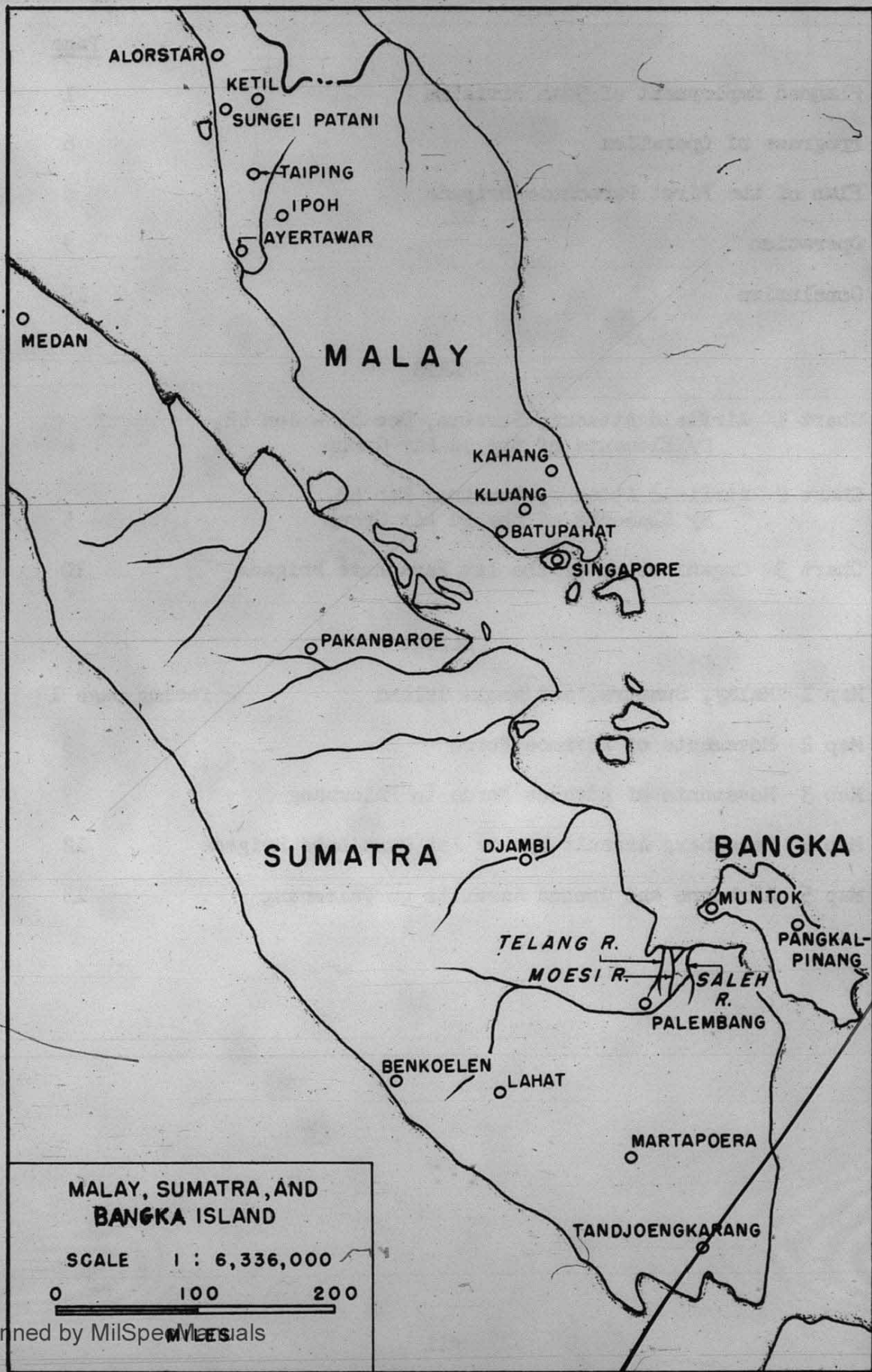
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### Planned Employment of 38th Division

On 4 January 1942, the 38th Division, commanded by Lt. Gen. Tadayoshi Sano, and stationed in Hongkong, was transferred to the Southern Army and assigned to 16th Army.<sup>1</sup> Almost immediately orders were received by the division to prepare for a landing at Palembang, Sumatra, with the mission of securing the oil and airfields in that area.

Units of the division slated for participation in the Palembang operation consisted of the division headquarters, the 229th Infantry Regiment, one battalion of the 230th Infantry Regiment, five batteries of the 38th Mountain Artillery Regiment, one company of the division Engineer Regiment, two companies of the Transportation Regiment, and the division field hospital and other medical elements.<sup>2</sup>

Attached units included one Anchorage Headquarters, one Independent Motor Transportation Battalion, one Shipping Engineer Regiment, one Sea Transportation Unit, one Oil Refining Unit, one Railway Platoon, and one Land Duty Company (service company).

The division left Hongkong on 20 January 1942 and advanced to Camranh Bay, French Indo-China, where it assembled its attached forces.

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1. At the outbreak of hostilities the 38th Division was assigned to the 23d Army in South China, and as a part of that force captured Hongkong on 25 Dec 41.

2. The 228th Infantry Regiment, as the Eastern Detachment, was preparing for the invasion of Ambon and Timor. Two battalions of the 230th, known as the Shoji Detachment, were placed under direct command of the 16th Army and began preparations for the Java invasion.



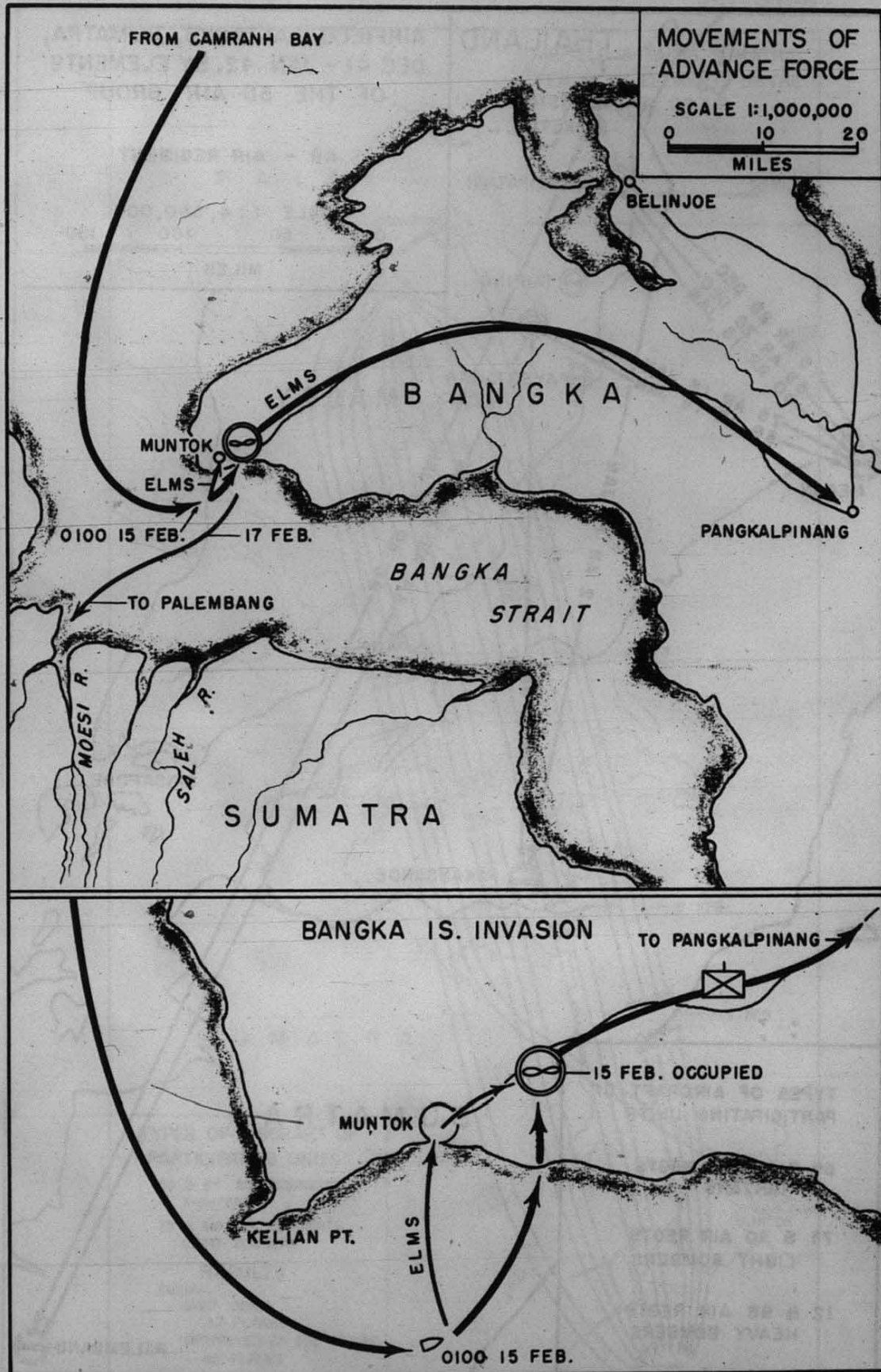
The operation plans called for close Army-Navy cooperation.<sup>3</sup>

The first step was the neutralization of enemy air power in the areas of Malay, eastern Sumatra, and Java. Participating units, staging fields, and targets of pre-invasion raids on Sumatra airfields are shown on Charts 1 and 2. The invasion itself included the dropping on X-1 day of the 1st Parachute Brigade on the Palembang airfield and near the oil refinery to secure these strategic points as rapidly as possible. On X day elements of the 38th were to land first on Bangka Island then cross the channel to Sumatra.

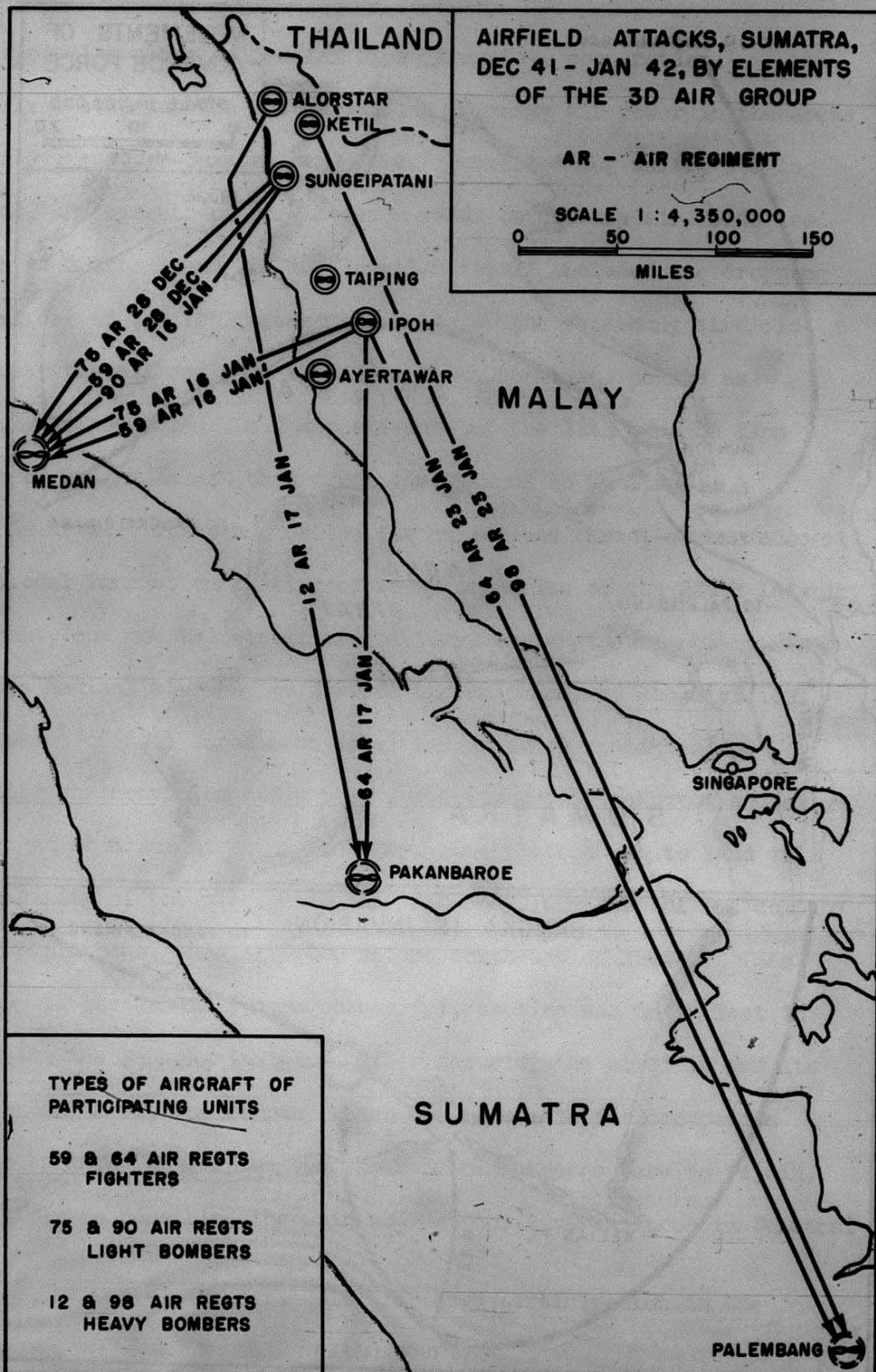
In detail, the plans called for an Advance Force, commanded by Colonel Tanaka, consisting of seven companies of the 229th Infantry Regiment, one mountain artillery battery, one engineer company, as well as medical elements to precede the main body of the division. An element of this force made up of two infantry companies and shipping engineer elements was to force its way into Muntok anchorage on Bangka at midnight prior to X day. One platoon was to land in the vicinity of the pier, with the main body, composed of one company and two platoons, landing 2,000 meters southeast of Muntok. (See Map 2) If the landings were successful, no time was to be lost in occupying the Muntok airfield. After securing the airfield and its surrounding area, one company which was to remain for occupation was to capture Pangkalpinang. The remaining troops were to rejoin, as rapidly as possible, the main body of the Advance Force in Sumatra.

3. See Chapter VI, Monograph 101, for Navy participation in the operation.

# MAP 2





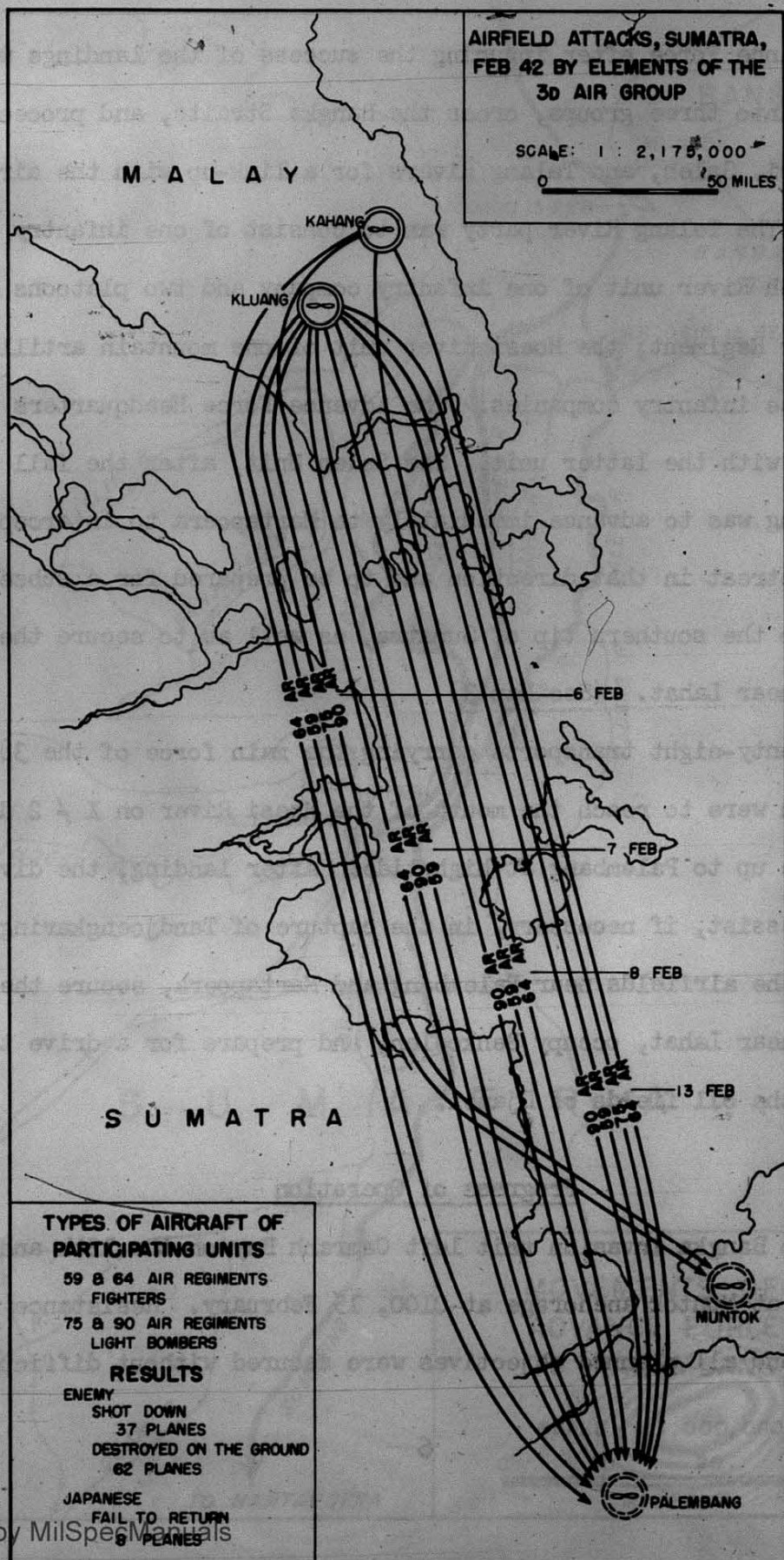


# CHART 2

## AIRFIELD ATTACKS, SUMATRA, FEB 42 BY ELEMENTS OF THE 3d AIR GROUP

SCALE: 1 : 2,175,000

0 50 MILES





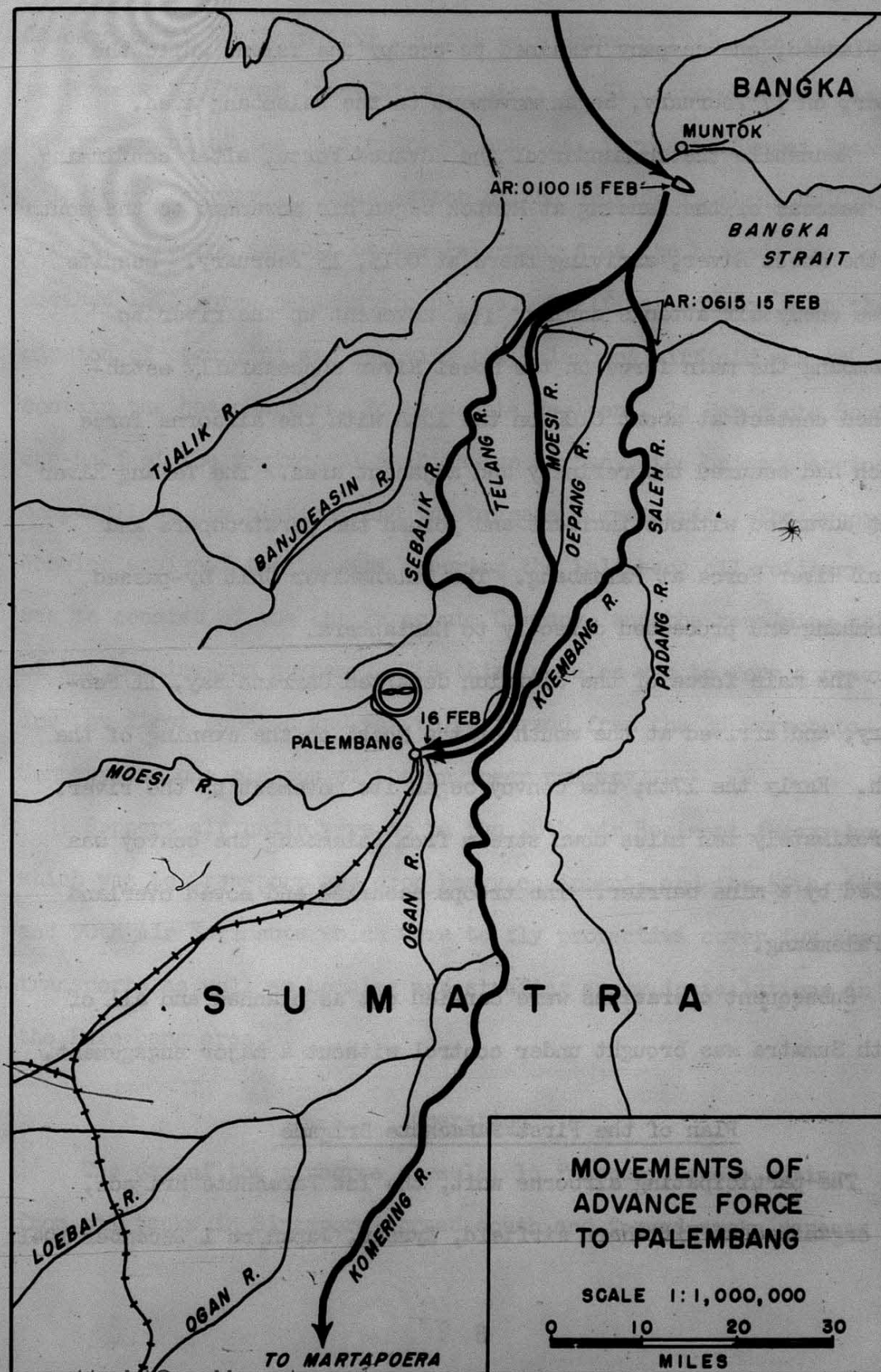
The Advance Force after insuring the success of the landings was to divide into three groups, cross the Bangka Straits, and proceed up the Moesi, Saleh, and Telang Rivers for a link-up with the airborne force. The Telang River party was to consist of one infantry company; the Saleh River unit of one infantry company and two platoons of the Engineer Regiment; the Moesi River unit of one mountain artillery and three infantry companies. The Advance Force Headquarters was to move with the latter unit. The Saleh Unit, after the fall of Palembang was to advance immediately to Martapoera to intercept any enemy retreat in that direction and to be prepared for a subsequent drive to the southern tip of Sumatra, as well as to secure the oil fields near Lahat. (See Map 3)

Twenty-eight transports carrying the main force of the 38th Division were to reach the mouth of the Moesi River on X / 2 day and move up to Palembang at high tide. After landing, the division was to assist, if necessary, in the capture of Tandjoengkaring, repair the airfields near Palembang and Martapoera, secure the oil fields near Lahat, occupy Benkoelen, and prepare for a drive to secure the oil fields of Djambi.

#### Progress of Operation

The Bangka invasion unit left Camranh Bay on the 12th and arrived at Muntok anchorage at 0100, 15 February. Resistance was slight and all planned objectives were secured without difficulty.





As planned, one company remained to occupy the island while the other, on 17 February, began movement to the Palembang area.

Meanwhile the commander of the Advance Force, after confirming the success of the landing at Muntok began his movement to the mouth of the Moesi River, arriving there at 0615, 15 February. Despite three enemy air attacks during its movement up the river to Palembang the main force on the Moesi River successfully established contact at about 0100 on the 16th with the airborne force which had secured the refinery and adjacent area. The Telang River Unit advanced without incident and joined the paratroopers and Moesi River Force at Palembang. The Saleh River Unit by-passed Palembang and proceeded directly to Martapoera.

The main force of the division departed Camranh Bay, 11 February, and arrived at the mouth of the Moesi on the evening of the 16th. Early the 17th, the convoy began its movement up the river. Approximately ten miles down stream from Palembang the convoy was halted by a mine barrier. The troops debarked and moved overland to Palembang.

Subsequent operations were carried out as planned and all of South Sumatra was brought under control without a major engagement.

#### Plan of the First Parachute Brigade

The participating airborne unit, the 1st Parachute Brigade, was organized at Nittabaru Airfield, Kyushu, Japan, on 1 December 1941.



It came under Southern Army control on 8 January 1942 with its transfer to Phnompenh, French Indo-China. Later, on 31 January it was placed under command of the 3d Air Group, and transferred to Sungei Patani, Malay on 9 February. Organization of the brigade is shown on Chart 3. For its airborne assault on the Palembang area the brigade was to be divided into three parachute echelons. The first echelon with the mission of occupying and securing the Palembang airfield was to contain the headquarters, 2d Parachute Regiment, 2d Parachute Company, one-half of the regimental machine-gun company, the brigade engineer company less one platoon, and the brigade signal unit. The second echelon assigned the task of securing the Palembang oil refinery was to consist of the 1st Parachute Company, and the remaining half of the machine-gun company. The third echelon was to form a reserve for the first echelon and was to be formed from the 3d Parachute Company and one platoon of the engineer company.

Support air units were to be the 98th Air Regiment (heavy bomber) which was to transport and drop heavy equipment, and the 59th, 64th, and 90th Air Regiments which were to fly protective cover for the transports as well as bombing and strafing enemy installations in the Palembang area.

#### Operation

The day of the airborne assault, 14 February, smoke rising from oil tanks in Singapore spread south and formed smoke screens



Organization of the 1st Parachute Brigade

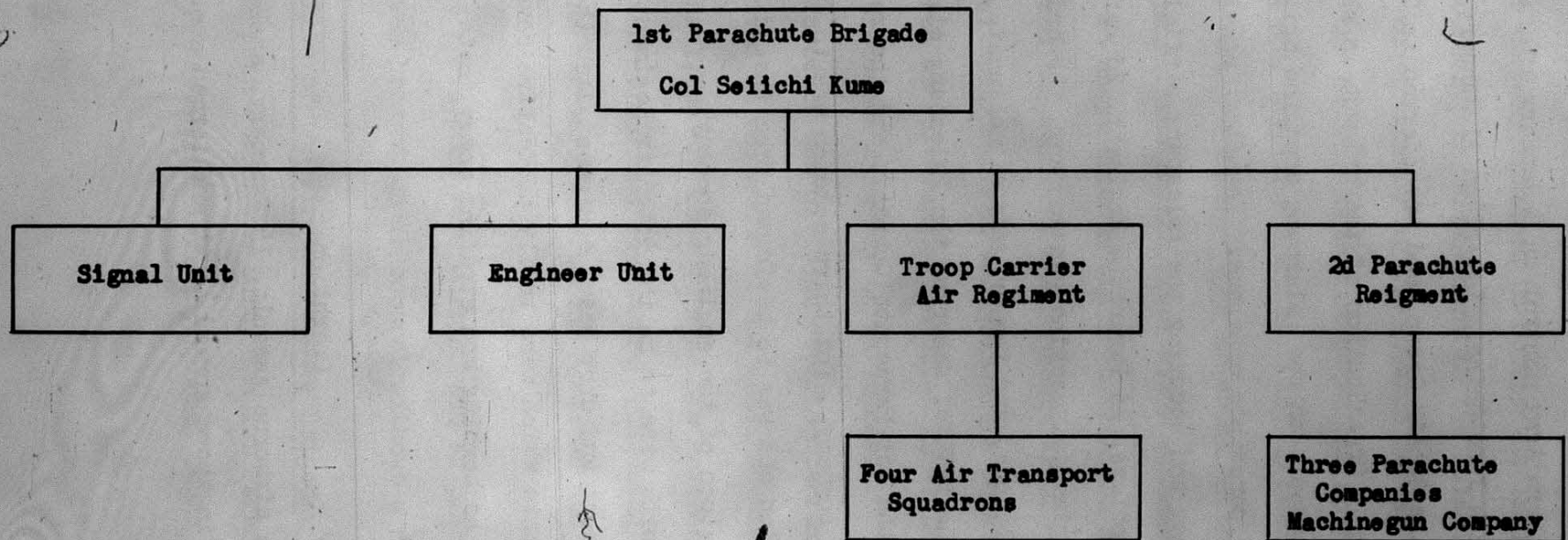


CHART 3

over Sumatra making it difficult for the crews of the troop-carrying transports to observe the ground. Just prior to reaching the Moesi River area dense fog and clouds were encountered making it necessary to descend to locate the mouth of the river. Having located this check point they continued their course up the river. Visibility over the target areas was good. Prior to reaching Palembang, the unit divided - the first echelon for the airfield - the second for the refinery. Staging fields in Malay and times of departure of all echelons are shown on Map 4.

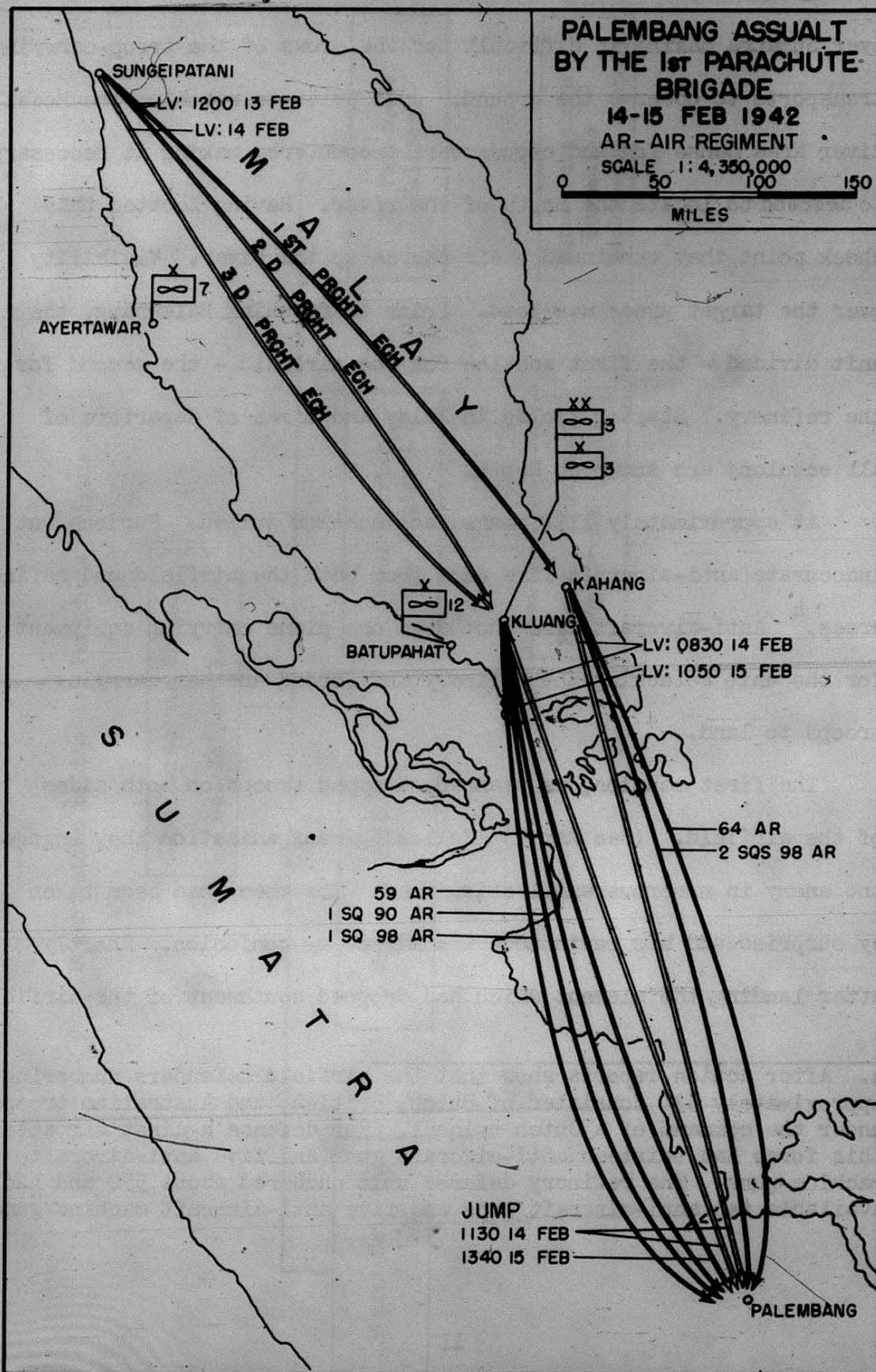
At approximately 1130 hours each echelon jumped. Furious but inaccurate anti-aircraft fire came from both the airfield and refinery areas.<sup>4</sup> Anti-aircraft fire shot down one plane carrying equipment for the unit attacking the refinery and forced another carrying troops to land.

The first echelon, as planned, dropped troops on both sides of the airfield. (See Map 5) Following reorganization they engaged the enemy in numerous small skirmishes. The enemy had been taken by surprise and his resistance was marked by confusion. Shortly after landing, the element which had dropped southwest of the airfield

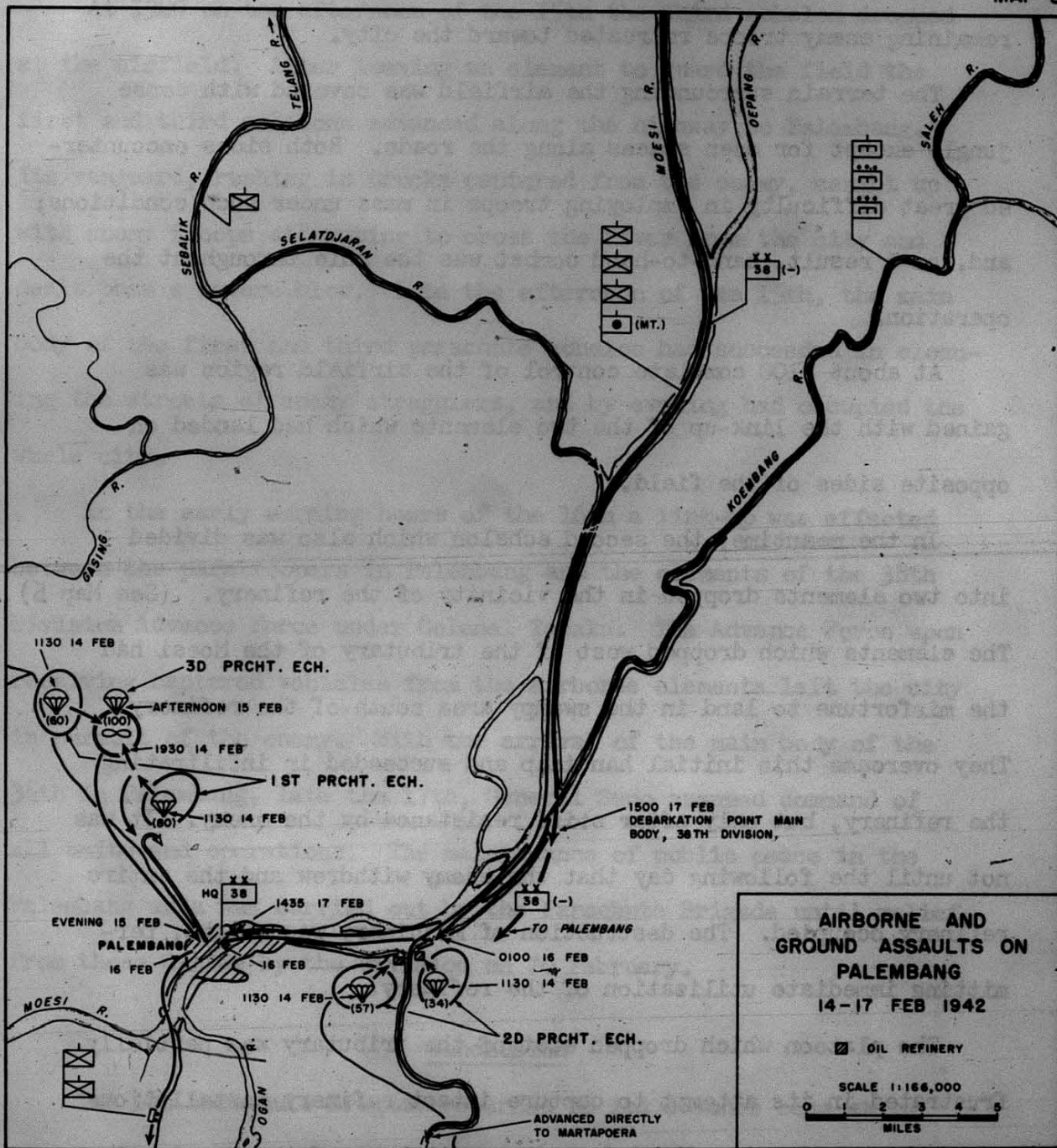
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4. After action reports show that the airfield defenders numbering approximately 530 consisted of Dutch, British, and Australian troops under the command of a Dutch colonel. For defense against air attack this force had thirteen anti-aircraft guns and five anti-aircraft machine-guns. The refinery defense unit numbered about 550 and had available ten anti-aircraft guns and five anti-aircraft machine-guns.









attacked enemy reinforcements moving along the highway from Palembang. The lead automobile in this convoy was overturned and the remaining enemy troops retreated toward the city.

The terrain surrounding the airfield was covered with dense jungle except for open spaces along the roads. Both sides encountered great difficulty in employing troops in mass under such conditions; and, as a result, hand-to-hand combat was the rule throughout the operation.

At about 2100 complete control of the airfield region was gained with the link-up of the two elements which had landed on opposite sides of the field.

In the meantime, the second echelon which also was divided into two elements dropped in the vicinity of the refinery. (See Map 5) The elements which dropped west of the tributary of the Moesi had the misfortune to land in the swampy area south of the refinery. They overcame this initial handicap and succeeded in infiltrating the refinery, but only after stiff resistance by the enemy. It was not until the following day that the enemy withdrew and the entire refinery occupied. The destruction of machinery was slight, permitting immediate utilization of the refinery.

The platoon which dropped east of the tributary was partially frustrated in its attempt to capture intact refinery installations as enemy incendiaries fired from the north bank of the Moesi set



the installations afire. Later investigation proved the damage only superficial and the main equipment repairable.

At 1340 on the afternoon of the 15th the third echelon dropped at the airfield. After leaving an element to guard the field the first and third echelons advanced along the highway to Palembang. Its vanguard, rushing in trucks captured from the enemy, caught up with enemy troops attempting to cross the river from the city and dealt them a severe blow. Late the afternoon of the 15th, the main body of the first and third parachute echelon had succeeded in cleaning the streets of enemy stragglers, and by evening had occupied the whole city.

In the early morning hours of the 16th a link-up was effected between the paratroopers in Palembang and the elements of the 38th Division Advance Force under Colonel Tanaka. The Advance Force upon receiving captured vehicles from the airborne elements left the city in pursuit of the enemy. With the arrival of the main body of the 38th in Palembang, late the 17th, General Sano assumed command of all units and operations. The maintenance of public peace in the Palembang area was carried out by the Parachute Brigade until relief from those duties by the division on 20 February.

#### Conclusion

The 1st Parachute Brigade returned to its advance base at Sungei Patani on the Malay Peninsula around 20 February.



The 38th Division remained on occupation duty until September 1942, at which time it was transferred to 17th Army with station at Rabaul. The newly formed 15th and 16th Independent Guard Forces replaced the 38th as the garrison force for Sumatra.<sup>6</sup>

6. Strength of Independent Guard Force approximated an infantry regiment.