bij dat de Japanners zowel ter zee als in de lucht de sterksten waren; het bombardement van Soerabaja (3 februari) had aangetoond dat zij met hun bommenwerpers alle havens die voor de ontscheping van de twee divisies in aanmerking kwamen, naar willekeur konden teisteren.

Wavell had grote bewondering voor de fighting spirit die in Nederlands-Indië aan de dag werd gelegd, en het was dan ook met een bezwaard hart dat hij op 16 februari, daags na de val van Singapore, de Combined Chiefs of Staff in Washington en het War Office in Londen telegrafisch berichtte dat het naar zijn oordeel geen zin had, het Iste Australische legerkorps bij de verdediging van Java in te zetten. 'Burma and Australia', seinde hij,

'are absolutely vital for war against Japan. Loss of Java, though severe blow from every point of view, would not be fatal. Efforts should not therefore be made to reinforce Java which might compromise defence of Burma and Australia. Immediate problem is destination of Australian Corps. If there seemed good chance of establishing Corps in island and fighting Japanese on favourable terms, I would unhesitatingly recommend risk should be taken... In present instance I must recommend that I consider risk unjustifiable from tactical and strategical point of view. I fully recognize political considerations involved. If Australian Corps is diverted I recommend that at least one division should go Burma and both if they can be administratively received and maintained... It is only theatre in which offensive operations against Japan possible in near future. It should be possible for American troops to provide reinforcement of Australia if required.'

Een dag later, 17 februari, schreef Wavell nog een nota voor het War Office waarin hij zijn voorstellen in een wat breder perspectief plaatste.2

'I realized from the first' (d.w.z. vanaf begin januari toen hij van zijn benoeming als Supreme Commander Abda-Command had gehoord),

'that the whole thing was a race against time, and that the critical theatre was Malaya and Singapore. If we could hold out there long enough to build up a strong air force in the Netherlands East Indies, I felt fairly confident that we could gain the upper hand of the Japanese air force, in which event we could keep his ships and convoys from approaching Java or Sumatra or the other parts of the island barrier from Malaya to Australia, and that after that we could gradually push him back again. I also had to see that our vital flanks in Burma and the part of Australia for which I was responsible would remain secure.

It looks as if we lost the race against time by a month, by the failure of Malaya and Singapore to hold out for at least that much longer. I feel that it ought to have done, and yet the Malayan front seemed to crumble in my hands whatever I could do.'