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## OPERATIONS IN THE FAR EAST, FROM 17TH OCTOBER 1940 TO 27TH DECEMBER 1941

*The following Despatch was submitted to the British Chiefs of Staff on 28th May, 1942, by AIR CHIEF MARSHAL SIR ROBERT BROOKE-POPHAM, G.C.V.O., K.C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., A.F.C., Commander-in-Chief in the Far East.*

### I.—FORMATION OF GENERAL HEADQUARTERS, FAR EAST.

1. This despatch covers the period from the date of my appointment as Commander-in-Chief, Far East, the 17th October, 1940, to the date on which I handed over to Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Pownall, the 27th December, 1941.

My original staff consisted of seven, exclusive of my personal assistant. Of these seven, the Chief of Staff, Major-General Dewing, the Senior Royal Air Force Staff Officer, Group-Captain Darvall, as well as my personal assistant, travelled out with me.

The Naval Liaison Officer, Captain Back, met me on my arrival at Singapore, and the Army G.S.O.1, Colonel Fawcett, met me in Burma.

Before leaving England I saw the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Chief of the Air Staff and Major-General Ismay individually, but did not meet the Chiefs of Staff collectively at one of their meetings.

2. I left London on Sunday, the 27th October, and started by air from Plymouth on the 28th October. I spent two clear days in Cairo, three in Delhi and three in Rangoon, arriving at Singapore on Thursday, the 14th November. General Headquarters, Far East, started to operate on Monday, the 18th November, 1940.

During the journey I was able to see the working of the Headquarters of both the Army and Air Force in Cairo, and to consult with the

Commander-in-Chief, Sir Archibald Wavell, on the methods of operating his headquarters, and especially why he found such a big expansion from his original staff necessary.

At Delhi I stayed with the Viceroy, and established contact with the Commander-in-Chief, the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, and their respective staffs, and with certain civil officials.

At Rangoon I stayed with the Governor, Sir Archibald Cochrane, and reached agreement over the constitutional problems raised by the appointment of a Commander-in-Chief, Far East. I met the General Officer Commanding, Major-General (now Lieutenant-General) Sir K. McLeod, visited various establishments, including the oil refinery at Syriam, and established contact with many of the civil officials.

### *Instructions and General Policy.*

3. My Directive is given in Appendix A.

On my arrival in Singapore it was agreed that, should I become a casualty, the Commander-in-Chief, China Station, should take my place until my successor was appointed.

With reference to paragraph 2 of my Directive, the meaning of the term "operational control" was explained as being higher direction and control as distinct from detailed operational control.

In addition to this Directive, I had two main guides for action: first, that it was the policy of His Majesty's Government to avoid war with Japan, and, secondly, that, until a fleet was available, our policy in the Far East should be to rely primarily on air power in conjunction with such naval forces as could be made available. The first was confirmed during 1941 in many telegrams, e.g., in March, "Avoidance of war with Japan is basis of Far East policy and provocation must be rigidly avoided," and again in September, "Our policy in the

Far East is still to avoid war with Japan." The second was laid down by the Chiefs of Staff in August, 1940.

4. It was pointed out to me that the requirements of Home Defence, the Battle of the Atlantic, and the Middle East, must take precedence over those of the Far East; at a later date Russia also took precedence, and, at one time, Iraq and Iran. Realising this, it was obviously our duty to be content with the essential minimum, to consider what we could do without rather than what we would like to have, and to make the fullest use of local resources. But we always regarded the strength of 336 aeroplanes as an irreducible minimum. (See para. 79 below.) In January, 1941, we were cautioned against over-estimate of the Japanese forces.

I was also informed that the defence organisation in Malaya was apparently not working smoothly or efficiently, and that this would necessitate early investigation and action.

5. To carry out the directions outlined above, it was evident that the following steps were necessary:—

(a) To avoid any action that might be deemed provocative by Japan, but at the same time to try and convince her that our strength was too great to be challenged successfully;

(b) To strengthen our defences in the Far East, and especially to build up our air forces, not only by obtaining new aircraft but also by making all preparations to ensure mutual reinforcement in the Far East area;

(c) To ensure effective co-operation in Malaya, not only between the Royal Navy, the Army and the Air Force but also between them and the civil services;

(d) To stiffen the Chinese so that they could contain the maximum Japanese effort (see paras. 70 and 71 below); and

(e) To establish as close co-operation as possible with the Dutch and Americans, as well as with Australia and New Zealand, the main object being to ensure that, should an attack be made on any part of the Far East area, all the nations concerned would simultaneously enter the war against Japan, thus avoiding the risk of defeat in detail, as had happened in Europe.

6. A very brief study of the area comprised in the Far East Command shows that the defence of the whole area is essentially one single problem. Burma, Siam, Indo-China, Malaya, the Philippines, the Dutch East Indies, Australia and, to a lesser extent, New Zealand, all inter-connect and operations or preparations in any one of these areas affect all the others. In view of the above, I regarded it as one of my principal duties to make personal contacts in these places. During 1941 I visited Australia twice, in February and October, Manila three times and the Netherlands East Indies five times. I also visited Hong Kong in December, 1940, and April, 1941; and Burma in June and September, 1941.

Another point that stands out is that the problem is fundamentally a naval one, and that, although the Army and Air Force in combination may defend areas of land and repel an enemy, his definite defeat cannot be brought about unless control of sea communications is obtained. This control will necessitate air superiority.

The Far East is usually examined on a small-scale map, so people are rather apt to get a false idea of distances. From Singapore to Alor Star at the North End of Malaya is a good deal further than from London to Aberdeen. Rangoon to Singapore direct by air is about 1,100 miles; Singapore to Hong Kong, via Manila, is 2,000 miles, about the distance from Gibraltar to Alexandria; and from Singapore to Melbourne about 4,100, which is only slightly less than the distance from London to Aden, via Malta and Cairo.

#### *Size of General Headquarters Staff.*

7. Although it was obvious that Singapore was a key position, and therefore that the defence of Malaya was of the greatest importance, it was evident that, apart from my Directive, the size of my Staff rendered it quite impossible to exercise any form of direct operational control, except in the widest sense. I therefore decided that, although the fact of my headquarters happening to be situated at Singapore would naturally involve my dealing with more details in Malaya than elsewhere, the Commands of Hong Kong, Malaya and Burma must be regarded as of equal status. Each General Officer Commanding would have to control the operations in his own area, and the initiative of the Air Officer Commanding, Far East, must not be cramped; the operational control of my headquarters would be limited mainly to the movement of reinforcements, principally air, within my command and to the issue of directives.

The staff of General Headquarters, Far East, was very small for the work it had to carry out, and immediately on its formation in Singapore it was found necessary to add three duty officers of junior rank in order to ensure keeping a twenty-four-hour watch in the office. Requests for an increase in staff at General Headquarters were made on more than one occasion, and finally it was agreed by the Chiefs of Staff, in August, 1941, that the total establishment should be raised to the following:—

Commander-in-Chief: 1.

Chief of Staff: 1.

Staff Officer, 1st Grade: Navy 1; Army 2; R.A.F. 2.

Staff Officer, 2nd Grade: Navy 1; Army 3; R.A.F. 3.

Staff Officer, 3rd Grade: Navy 1.

Total, 15.

In addition to this, there were:—

Personal Assistant: 1.

Cipher Officers: 2.

Signal Officer: 1.

Chief Clerk: 1.

Making a total in all of 20. This establishment was not completed by the time war broke out.

The result of the smallness of the Staff was that individuals were overworked, and this, in conjunction with the Malayan climate, led to sickness. The most serious case was that of my Chief of Staff, Major-General Dewing, who went into hospital on the 8th April, and remained there until he started for England in May. General Playfair arrived to take his place on the 21st June, but for a period of some ten and a half weeks I was without a Chief of Staff.

This sickness was largely attributed by the medical authorities to the effects of overwork. In addition, Wing-Commander Yarde had to be sent away sick, other officers were in hospital for shorter periods, and when war with Japan broke out Colonel Scott, who had taken Colonel Fawcett's place as the Army G.S.O.4, was in India on sick leave, having been sent there from hospital.

#### *Intelligence.*

8. For intelligence I relied almost entirely on the Far Eastern Combined Bureau, known for short as F.E.C.B. This consisted of branches of Naval, Army and Air Force intelligence, and was under the administrative control of the Admiralty, the officer in charge of the Naval Section acting as head of the Bureau. At the date of the formation of my headquarters, F.E.C.B. was somewhat unbalanced in that attention was mostly concentrated on Naval intelligence, while Army and Air intelligence took a minor place, the latter especially being quite inadequate. This, however, was steadily corrected, and I consider that F.E.C.B. fulfilled its functions and showed that a combined intelligence staff of the three Services is a workable proposition. What was needed, however, was a real chief of F.E.C.B., and not merely one whose main duty was acting as head of his own branch. The difficulty was in finding a really suitable individual, and this we had not succeeded in doing at the time war with Japan broke out.

#### *Attachments to General Headquarters Staff.*

9. A branch of the Ministry of Economic Warfare known as the O.M. Section, was started on the arrival of Mr. Killery at Singapore in May, 1941. He and his staff were keen and capable, but they had no experience and very little knowledge of how to set about their work. Further, as in the case of intelligence, this is work that requires a great deal of preparation. In consequence of this, but through no fault of Mr. Killery or his staff, the O.M. activities really never got functioning properly by the time that war with Japan broke out. There was also a curious reluctance on the part of many people to have anything to do with these activities, or to help on the work. This was particularly noticeable in the case of intended activities in Siam.

10. Colonel Warren arrived in Singapore early in 1941 to assist in starting Independent Companies. The obvious disadvantage of these Companies is that they form a drain on infantry units, which were already depleted of many of their best non-commissioned officers and officers owing to the expansion and demands of other organisations. As a result, it was finally decided to limit these Independent Companies to two—one for Burma and one for Malaya.

#### II.—FACTORS AFFECTING THE DEFENCE OF MALAYA AND BORNEO.

11. Air Vice-Marshal Pulford became Air Officer Commanding, Far East, *vice* Air Vice-Marshal Babington on the 26th April, 1941, and Lieutenant-General Percival took over the duties of General Officer Commanding, Malaya, from Lieutenant-General Bond on the 16th May, 1941.

The strength of the Army and of the Air Force in Malaya in November, 1940, is given in Appendices D and I respectively.

In Malaya, as in Burma and Hong Kong, there was a War Committee, which sat under the Governor.

The main reason for the defence of Malaya was to preserve the facilities of the Naval Base at Singapore. The port and rubber and tin production were also important, but on a different plane from the Naval Base. It was, of course, not sufficient to have a close defence of the area round the Naval Base itself. It was of great importance to keep enemy aircraft as far away from the Base as possible, on account of the danger of bombing; this meant extending the defence right up to the Northern end of Malaya. It may be noted that this was not dependent upon the policy of defending Malaya by means of air power. Had the policy been to defend Malaya by means of Army forces, the dispositions might have been different, but it would still have been essential to hold the greater part of Malaya in order to deny aerodromes or their possible sites to the enemy. Singapore Island was to be provisioned for 180 days.

#### *Communications.*

12. The main roads in Malaya are well-metalled, and the railways are single-track metre-gauge. Down the centre of Malaya runs a range of hills rising to some 7,000 feet, and there are no east-to-west communications north of latitude 4, *i.e.*, about the latitude of Kuantan. The central backbone of hills dies away soon after crossing the frontier with Siam, and good lateral communications were available in the neighbourhood of Singora, where, also, there were suitable sites for aerodromes. Generally speaking, communications in the west are good and on the east poor.

The defence of the east coast was simplified by the lack of communications, since it was only necessary to hold those places from which roads ran into the interior. This meant that the key points to hold were Mersing and Kuantan. Kota Bharu in Kelantan was held because of the aerodrome at that place and two others a few miles further south, these being necessary in order to enable us to strike, with aircraft, as far as possible into the Gulf of Siam and into Indo China. (See para. 52 below.)

The only existing land communication between Kelantan and the rest of Malaya is the railway, there being no through road. Attempts were made to use the railway for motor transport, but as the rails were spiked and no chairs were available the damage caused to tyres was so excessive that the project was given up as impracticable. This meant that communications with any force at Kota Bharu were precarious, since everything had to move by the single line of railway, which in many parts was highly vulnerable to bombing. I laid down that the road policy in Kelantan should be not to develop any road on or near the coast, but as soon as practicable to construct an internal road running north and south, following more or less the line of the railway.

The only communication overland with Kuantan was a single road, also very vulnerable in places to air bombing.

#### *Co-operation between the services and with the civil authorities.*

13. For some time before November, 1940, the relations between the Army and the Air Force were not happy; there was some jealousy

between them, co-operation left a great deal to be desired, and it was some months before this could be considered satisfactory. Every operation should have been looked upon as a combined operation of two, or very often the three, services; for a long time there was a tendency for one of the services to work out a plan on its own and then see how one or both the other services could come in.

A great step in advance was made by getting the headquarters of the Army and Air Force on the same site. This entailed a good deal of building, but before war started there was a single combined Operations Room functioning and the whole of the Army General Staff were located on the same site as Royal Air Force Headquarters. A naval section joined the Operations Room at the start of the war as planned previously.

14. The local tradition of inter-service jealousy had some effect for the first few months on the working of General Headquarters. Personal relations with Army Headquarters were good, but my staff had to be scrupulously careful in dealing with matters that touched on the province of the General Officer Commanding.

Co-operation between the Navy and Air Force was good, and it continually improved between the Navy and the Army, for instance, on such matters as getting advice from naval officers as to the probable sites of landings from the naval point of view.

15. Relations between the Commander-in-Chief, China Station, and myself were close and friendly throughout. Our offices were adjoining after the move of my headquarters to the Naval Base and I had luncheon with him in his house nearly every day.

Relations between the commanders in Malaya and the Governor were good. I always found the Governor ready to help, and our personal relations were very friendly.

As regards the Colonial Service generally, our relations in most cases were satisfactory, and much help was received from many Departments, especially the Survey and the Government Posts and Telegraphs. But, partly owing to the complicated system of government, delays sometimes occurred and on certain matters it was difficult to get full and accurate information. I feel it would be of great value to the Colonial Service if its officers could attend some college on the lines of the Military Staff Colleges at some time in their career.

There was an interchange of liaison officers with the Dutch, first Navy and Air and later Army as well. Observers from the American Army and Navy were also posted to Singapore.

#### *Borneo.*

16. Unless we obtained command of the sea, it was impossible to defend British Borneo as a whole with the forces available. But through communications in the island were practically non-existent; consequently, any defence could be limited to holding the important points. The only place which it was decided to hold was Kuching, the reason for this being not only that there was an aerodrome at that place, but that its occupation by the enemy might give access to the aerodromes in Dutch Borneo at the North-Western end of the island, these aerodromes being only some 350 miles from Singapore, i.e., much nearer than any in South Indo-China.

I informed the Governor of North Borneo that his territory could not be defended, and that the volunteers and police at his disposal were to be utilised for purposes of internal security. No attempt was made to defend Labuan, though it was a cable and wireless station.

The State of Brunei was of some importance owing to the oilfield at Seria in the South, which, in addition to Miri, supplied crude oil to the refineries at Lutong in Sarawak. Although one company of the 2nd/15th Punjab Regiment less one platoon to Kuching, had been moved to Lutong in December, 1940, and two 6-inch guns had been mounted there, it was finally decided that it was useless to attempt to defend the refinery or either of the oilfields. Consequently, a partial denial scheme was carried out before war broke out, whereby the oil output was reduced by some 70 per cent., and only a small number of items were left to complete the denial scheme when war broke out. According to reports, the work was completed satisfactorily.

The 2nd/15th Punjab Regiment, less the one company referred to above, left Singapore for Kuching on the 10th and 11th May, 1941. Steps were also taken to develop local forces, i.e., volunteers and a body of native troops known as the Sarawak Rangers.

### III.—FACTORS AFFECTING THE DEFENCE OF BURMA.

#### *Authorities.*

17. Sir Reginald Dorman Smith replaced the Hon. Sir Archibald Cochrane as Governor of Burma on the 6th May, 1941, and Lieut.-General Hutton took over the duties of General Officer Commanding from Lieut.-General McLeod at midnight the 28th-29th December, 1941.

The War Committee in Burma included Burmese Ministers as well as the two British Counsellors and the General Officer Commanding. The Governor was President and the Premier of Burma Vice-President.

Sir R. Dorman Smith established a military liaison officer on his personal staff. There were obvious advantages in this, and it would doubtless have worked well had the facts and figures always been obtained from the responsible authorities. As it was, information was sometimes sought through other channels, with the result that at times inaccurate or incomplete information was given to the Governor, leading to misunderstandings.

#### *Communications.*

18. The main factor affecting the defence of Burma was that of communications. The total length of frontier facing Japanese-occupied territory in December, 1941, was nearly 800 miles. There were good roads, as well as railways, running north and south up the valleys of the Sittang and Irrawaddy. Roads in the Tenasserim Peninsula were bad.

Working north from the southern end of the Tenasserim Peninsula, there were only mountain tracks leading eastwards from Siam until reaching the road from Raheng through Mesod towards Moulmein, which crossed the Burma frontier at Myawadi. Even this road was not continuous, and there was a section of fifty miles reported to be not much better than a pack track. From the Japanese point of view, it had the disadvantages that we should be able to operate from close to our railhead at Martaban, and that, so long as we

held command of the sea, advance beyond Moulmein by the Japanese would be open to a British flank attack.

Continuing north, there were again only tracks until reaching the road leading from the Bangkok-Chiang Mai railway, through Chiang Rai and thence via Kentung to Taunggyi. On the Siamese side of the frontier this road was good; on our side it was fair-weather only for part of the way.

There were only tracks leading from Burma into Northern Indo-China, and these involved the crossing of the River Mekong. Into China itself there was a fair track from Kentung to Puerhfu, and, secondly, the main road from Lashio to Kunming. A road from Bhamo joined the latter near the frontier.

Westwards, a start had been made on a road communication with India, but this was by no means complete when war broke out.

Landing grounds had been established in the Tenasserim Peninsula with the object of facilitating the movement of aircraft between Burma and Malaya; the main ones were at Tavoy, Mergui and Victoria Point. The last was very isolated, and it was realised that it probably could not be held for long if war with Japan broke out.

19. It was estimated that the total force which the Japanese could bring against Burma, using land communications only, would be about two divisions, of which one division would be on the road running through Chiang Rai. The Chiefs of Staff considered in January 1941 that, although four enemy divisions could be maintained at railhead on the Bangkok-Chiang Mai railway, it was unlikely that even one division could be maintained on the Burma side of the frontier, owing to the limited road communications. The situation would, however, be completely altered should the Japanese get control of sea communications in the Bay of Bengal. In that case, their capture of Mergui, and possibly Tavoy, would only be a question of time. They would be able to outflank our positions at Moulmein, and our line of communication thence with Rangoon; and, should Singapore fall or be invested, would be able to bring by sea against Burma a force much greater than two divisions.

20. Turning to the Chiang Rai line of advance, owing to the indifferent road on our side of the frontier and the shortage of Mechanical Transport, it was impracticable to maintain a big force east of the Salween. The policy, therefore, was to fight delaying actions as far forward as possible, and to make the Salween the main line of defence.

Owing to the heavy growth of trees along the Japanese lines of advance, conditions were not generally favourable for air reconnaissance. On the other hand, there were certain open defiles against which air bombing would probably have been very effective, and it was hoped that sufficient air force would be available to deter the Japanese advance to a great extent. For this purpose aerodromes were constructed with the object of being able to concentrate either on Central or South Burma, and against either the Mesod road or the Chiang Rai road.

Demolitions were prepared along the enemy lines of advance, especially on the Chiang Rai road.

### *Engineering Programme.*

21. There was a great shortage of engineers, both civil and military. In planning the engineering programme, priority was given first to aerodrome construction and accommodation for the Royal Air Force; secondly, to road construction for strategical and tactical purposes, including ferries; and then accommodation for troops and stores, including ammunition.

In the time available there was no opportunity to complete elaborate concrete defence lines; all that could be done was to construct field defences on the probable lines of approach. There were limitations even to this: first, the difficulty of working and the prevalence of malaria in the rainy season; secondly, the number of troops available; and thirdly, the lack of Mechanical Transport, until the Autumn of 1941, which severely limited the number of men that could be maintained near, and east of, the Salween River.

### *Strength of Forces.*

22. The composition of the military forces in Burma when war broke out is shown in Appendix G, and the situation regarding Anti-Aircraft guns in Appendix F.

As will be seen, the organisation was somewhat complicated from the desire to make every possible use of local resources. Originally, the Burma Frontier Force had been independent of the General Officer Commanding in peace, and only came under him in time of war. His Excellency Sir Reginald Dorman Smith decided to put the Burma Frontier Force under the General Officer Commanding's control in peace as well, thus simplifying the organisation. The change was effected on the 10th November, 1941.

The Independent Company was abolished before war with Japan broke out, the British portion being used mainly for additional squads for Chinese guerrillas, and the Burmese returning to their original units.

23. In the Singapore Conference of October 1940 it was recommended that as regards the Army, the force immediately required for the defence of Burma was as follows:—

- 5 infantry brigades and two additional battalions;
- 1 field regiment and 1 battery;
- 2 mountain batteries;
- 1 anti-tank battery;
- 1 heavy A.A. regiment (24 guns);
- 1 light A.A. battery, non-mobile (16 guns);
- 1 light A.A. battery, mobile; and
- 1 company light tanks.

This was exclusive of the Burma Frontier Force and of the Territorial and Auxiliary forces allotted to internal security duties. It was also stated that an additional requirement for the long-term problem was: one Division, less certain units, which made the fighting portion of this Division as follows:—

- 2 infantry brigades, each of 3 battalions;
- 1 reconnaissance unit;
- 1 field regiment (24 guns);
- 1 medium regiment (16 guns);
- 1 light A.A. regiment (48 guns);
- 1 anti-tank battery; and
- 1 machine gun battalion.

In their comments of January 1941, on the Conference, the Chiefs of Staff stated that they considered both the threat of attack, and the demands for land forces, had been overstated.

Comparing the Conference recommendations with the total Army strength available in Burma in December 1941 (*see Appendix G*), and omitting the Burma Frontier Force and the Territorial and Auxiliary forces, the shortages were approximately—

- 3 field batteries;
- 1 anti-tank battery; and
- 1 company light tanks

out of the immediate requirements, and the whole of the additional requirement.

Apart from this, up to the outbreak of the war with Japan, Burma remained short of:—

- Rifles;
- Mechanical transport vehicles;
- Officers for the General Officer Commanding's staff and services; and
- Medical personnel.

24. A Burma Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve under the command of Commander K. S. Lyle, R.N., had been raised in 1940. It had two or three patrol boats operating off the Tenasserim Peninsula, and was also responsible for mine-sweeping the Rangoon approaches and for examination services. There were several other craft building at Rangoon, but these had been help up mainly owing to the delay in obtaining engines and fittings from England. The force was under the Commander-in-Chief, China, for operations, and under the Governor of Burma for administration. It was not under the General Officer Commanding, though co-operation was very satisfactory.

25. In November 1940, air strength in Burma was practically non-existent. The Singapore Conference had recommended the following:—

- 1 general reconnaissance squadron;
- 2 bomber squadrons; and
- 1 fighter squadron.

No. 60 Squadron, equipped with Blenheim bombers, arrived from India in February 1941; in August 1941, one flight was reorganised as a fighter flight and equipped with Brewster Buffaloes. Later, a complete Buffalo squadron, No. 67, was sent from Malaya in November 1941, and the whole of No. 60 Squadron reverted to bombers. There was a Burma Volunteer Air Unit, but this had not got further than a small training organisation. This merely gave Burma two squadrons, which was admittedly very weak, and, actually, when war broke out, most of the Blenheim squadron, No. 60, was in Malaya for bombing practice.

On the other hand, the American Volunteer Group of the International Air Force started to train in Burma in August 1941, and there was an understanding, amounting practically to an agreement, with General Chiang Kai-shek that, if Burma was attacked, part, or the whole, of this American Volunteer Group would be detailed for the defence of Burma. Actually, two of the American Volunteer Group squadrons were sent to Kunming when war with Japan broke out, and one to Mingaladon, near Rangoon.

It was my opinion that the defence of Burma depended largely upon holding Malaya, and that the defence of the latter must have priority. I also considered it unlikely that the Japanese would attack Burma solely in order to cut the Burma Road to China. They knew that this must involve war with Great Britain, and in all probability with the Dutch and perhaps also the United States. If they were

going to face this, they would be much more likely to start attacking Singapore than Burma. Admittedly, we were working on probabilities and not certainties, but, in view of the weakness of our air forces, it was essential to concentrate the maximum effort and not try to be equally strong in two places.

#### *The American Volunteer Group.*

26. The American Volunteer Group consisted of three single-seater fighter squadrons which were equipped with Tomahawks up to the time I handed over command.

Doubtless the United States will not forget the help that was freely given to the American Volunteer Group by the Burma Government and by the Royal Air Force. They were given the sole use of the Royal Air Force aerodrome at Toungoo, allowed to use Mingaladon aerodrome, near Rangoon, for testing Tomahawks after erection, and were offered the use of further aerodromes if required. Permission from London was given on the 22nd August, 1941, for the American Volunteer Group to carry out operational training in Burma, and they were given assistance in many other directions.

On the 31st October, 1941, the British Ambassador, Chungking, represented to the Foreign Office that the situation in China was very serious. We were asked what we could do to help, and suggested that we might form a British fighter squadron with volunteers from the Royal Air Force to form part of the International Air Force, and possibly a bomber squadron as well. It was pointed out that this proposal would mean a reduction in our own effective fighting and bombing strength. The suggestion was approved by the Chiefs of Staff, provided I was satisfied they would be able to operate effectively as part of the International Air Force and that I could accept the detachment from the Malaya defences. These squadrons would have been largely dependent on the American Volunteer Group organisation for their maintenance. Pending a detailed examination of the maintenance arrangements in China, volunteers for these squadrons were not called for and actually they were never formed, but many preliminary steps were taken, including the movement of vehicles, spares and bombs. A telegram to the British liaison mission in Washington, and a personal telegram from me to General MacArthur in Manila, resulted in a very fair stock of spares being received by the American Volunteer Group before war broke out. But for this, it is very doubtful if they could have gone on working for more than two or three weeks.

I found that the pilots of the American Volunteer Group were not satisfied with their Tomahawks when I visited them in September 1941. This was largely corrected before war broke out, partly by giving details of the successes of the Tomahawks in the Middle East, and partly by a test carried out between a Buffalo and a Tomahawk, which showed the latter to be considerably superior in speed, climb and in manoeuvrability over some 10,000 feet.

#### *Aircraft Warning System.*

27. There was an air observation corps under General Officer Commanding, organised in five groups, each under an ex-inspector of police, the observers being local Burmans and Anglo-Burmans. This Observer Corps did good work, and, according to later reports, warnings of the attacks on Rangoon were received in time



for the fighters to take off and get up. An R.D.F. set at Moulmein was just starting to operate in December 1941.

With regard to A.R.P., the original policy in Rangoon had been evacuation. Sir Reginald Dorman Smith decided to change this, and to construct air raid shelters. There had been no time to complete these shelters before war broke out.

#### *Political Factors.*

28. The internal situation in Burma gave rise to much anxiety, and it was realised that in time of war it might become necessary to reinforce the police with military units. There were doubtless many reasons for this potential unrest, but two were particularly evident. The first was the influence of the Buddhist priesthood, especially from Mandalay. In Burma itself, the priesthood was numerous and powerful; it had been brought largely under the influence of the anti-British political party, and consequently preached the doctrine of Burma for the Burmese and complete independence. Many efforts were being made to counteract this, and were partially successful. Apparently, in the Shan States, the native rulers had kept a tighter control over the Buddhist priests than we did in Burma proper, and had limited their numbers.

The second reason was the anti-Indian feeling. The Indians in Burma were much more clever than the Burmese in business transactions, and, amongst other things, lent money out on mortgage, with the result that they owned a large proportion—about one-half—of the best agricultural land in Burma. We were looked upon to some extent as protectors of the Indians, and consequently attracted to ourselves part of the hatred that was felt by the Burmese for the Indians over this land problem.

#### *Transfer of Command to Commander-in-Chief, India.*

29. On the 12th December a telegram was received from the Chiefs of Staff stating that the defence of Burma was to be transferred from Commander-in-Chief, Far East, to Commander-in-Chief, India, including all relations with China. The transfer was effected as from 0630 hours on the 15th December, 1941.

### IV.—FACTORS AFFECTING THE DEFENCE OF HONG KONG.

#### *Authorities.*

30. In November 1940, General Norton was Acting Governor of Hong Kong. Sir Geoffrey Northcote resumed his post as Governor on the 13th March, 1941, and handed over to his successor, Sir Mark Young, on the 10th September, 1941. Major General Maltby took over the duties of General Officer Commanding from Major-General Grasett on the 19th July, 1941.

#### *General Policy.*

31. Hong Kong was regarded officially as an undesirable military commitment, or else as an outpost to be held as long as possible. It must, however, be considered in relation to the whole defence of the Far East, especially China and the Philippines. The withdrawal of our troops from Peking, Tientsin and Shanghai in the summer of 1941 after the collapse of France was recognised by General Chiang Kai-shek and the Chinese as being an inevitable and wise move, but the Chinese interest in the defence of

Hong Kong grew as their war developed and their difficulties increased. Hong Kong was very valuable to China as a port of access and had they not been convinced of our determination to stand and fight for its defence, and been taken into our confidence and given opportunities to inspect the defences and discuss plans for defence, the effect on their war effort would in all probability have been serious. A withdrawal of the troops in Hong Kong coinciding with the closing of the Burma Road might have had a marked effect on Chinese determination to fight on. Our policy for the defence of Hong Kong, therefore, in all probability played an important part at a critical period in China's war effort.

As regards the Philippines, according to information available in Singapore, it was doubtful, at any rate up to the middle of 1941, whether the Americans intended to defend the islands, or whether they did not. It is therefore possible, that had we demilitarised Hong Kong, or announced our intention of not defending it, the Americans might have adopted a similar policy with regard to the Philippines. In this case, they might have ceased to take direct interest in the Far East, and confined themselves to the Eastern half of the Pacific. Should this supposition be correct, then the attempted defence of Hong Kong was justified for this reason alone, even though it did ultimately lead to the loss of six battalions and other troops.

#### *Strength of Defences.*

32. The strength of the Hong Kong garrison is given in Appendix H. The official period for which Hong Kong was to be provisioned, both in military stores and food reserves, was 130 days.

The main defence of Hong Kong was on the Island. Whilst the enemy were to be delayed as long as possible in any advance over the leased territory on the mainland, the troops had orders to retire if attacked in force, as they were required for the defence of the Island itself. The Gin Drinkers line was naturally a strong one, and much work had been done on it, but it would have required two divisions or more to hold properly.

Two Canadian battalions arrived in Hong Kong on the 16th November, 1941. This extra force was of greater value than the figures would indicate. Whilst there were only four battalions in Hong Kong, only one could be spared for the Gin Drinkers line, which practically meant merely a thin outpost line. As this battalion was also essential for the defence of Hong Kong Island, it would not have been able to put up any resistance, but would have had to retire before the advance of even a weak force, since heavy casualties would prejudice the defence of the Island, and could not be faced. With the arrival of these two Canadian battalions, three could be put into the Gin Drinkers line, and a far stronger resistance could be put up, not merely because of the increased strength, but because casualties would not cripple the subsequent defence of Hong Kong Island. Even a few days' delay in the occupation of the mainland by the enemy was of great value, enabling steps to be completed which it was impracticable to take before the outbreak of war, for instance, the movement of the fishing fleet and waterborne population out of Hong Kong waters.

33. A great deal of work had been done in preparing the island for defence, and the construction and concealment of pill-boxes and obstacles showed much originality and initiative. Preparations were also made for offensive operations against islands near Hong Kong, should the Japanese seize them, and for "left-behind" parties on the mainland. Every advantage was taken of any local resources available for defence.

34. There were two Walrus amphibians and four Vildebeeste aeroplanes at Hong Kong, located at Kai Tak aerodrome on the mainland. The former might have been of some value for reconnaissance; in war it had been intended to operate them from Aberdeen Harbour, on the South side of Hong Kong Island, but this was apparently found impracticable. The latter would have had to remain at Kai Tak since no possible site for an aerodrome could be found on the Island itself. It was realised that these aeroplanes could not last for long in time of war, and that the Kai Tak aerodrome would, in fact, be quite unusable unless the Gin Drinkers line could be held.

#### *Civil Population Factors.*

35. One of the main problems in the defence of Hong Kong was the large Chinese population. This had nearly doubled during the three years previous to December 1941, owing to the influx from China. The population in April 1941 was—

Hong Kong ... ..	709,000
Kowloon ... ..	581,000
Water population ... ..	154,000

Total ... .. 1,444,000

This is exclusive of the population of what is known as the New Territories on the mainland.

The great increase above the normal population led to many problems, e.g., civil hospital accommodation and medical staff, police control, supply of water, food and firewood. In addition, this increase, combined with the constant movement taking place between the Island and the mainland, rendered it very difficult to keep complete control of the Chinese, and made it easy for the Japanese to acquire information.

36. The reservoirs on Hong Kong Island were partly filled by rain water and partly by a supply from the mainland. It was, of course, realised that this latter supply might be cut, calculations showed that the rain, added to the capacity of the reservoirs, was normally sufficient to meet the essential requirements of Hong Kong Island, so long as the whole Island remained in our hands. If there was a dry spell during the winter, the supply might have been short in February and March, and there might not have been sufficient to supply water to deal with outbreaks of fire. Although fire engines could draw on sea water, the higher levels of the town of Victoria could not be reached in one lift. This difficulty was largely overcome, however, by the installation of service tanks at medium levels, which it was intended to keep filled with sea water by separate pumps.

37. As regards food, rice was a constant anxiety, since most of it had to be imported from Siam or Burma. In addition, what was known as the rice supplement was a problem, since fish would not be available in case of war, and storage of alternatives over a period

of months was difficult. In December 1941 the stocks of food were not much short of that required for the period laid down, i.e., 130 days. The local supply of firewood was insufficient, and some was being imported from North Borneo.

38. The A.R.P. organisation in Hong Kong was good, and some 12,000 A.R.P. workers of one sort or another had been enrolled before war broke out. In addition, tunnels were made into the granite hills behind the town of Victoria; these provided admirable shelters which should have been proof against any type of bomb. The limitation here was the number of pneumatic drills that could be obtained to enable the necessary blasting to be carried out. It was a slow process but by the time war broke out there was shelter accommodation in the tunnels, concrete splinter-proof shelters and strengthened houses for about 300,000. Provision was made for the movement of the balance to huts outside the town.

39. Most of the European women and children had been moved away from Hong Kong by July 1941, the total leaving being approximately 1,680 women and children belonging to the Navy, Army or Air Force, and 1,824 civilian. This left about 918 European women and girls in Hong Kong. Of these, 595 were nurses and medical staff, 60 held key duties in A.R.P. and the majority of the remaining 263 were employed in clerical and other duties. The Governor's order for the movement of women and children away from Hong Kong had been disputed, but was upheld in a test case in the courts.

#### V.—PROBLEMS AND WORK OF GENERAL HEADQUARTERS, FAR EAST.

##### *Site of General Headquarters.*

40. General Headquarters started to function at 0800 hours on Monday, the 18th November. The order issued to the three General Officers Commanding and the Air Officer Commanding outlining their relations to General Headquarters is given in Appendix B.

One of the first problems I had to decide was the site of my Headquarters. The Army Headquarters was at Fort Canning and the Air Force Headquarters was in newly-built huts about five miles away. The Governor and other civil authorities were in Singapore town. The Naval Commander-in-Chief had his Headquarters at the Naval Base, which was some 35 minutes by road from Singapore. It was important for my Headquarters to keep in touch with all these. I hoped at one time that the Commander-in-Chief, China, would move to Singapore, but he felt very strongly that he had to remain in the Naval Base, where the F.E.C.B. was also located. A compromise might have been possible but would have entailed dividing F.E.C.B. After much consideration, I decided that the dominant factors were to ensure close touch with the Commander-in-Chief, China, and to keep the F.E.C.B. intact. Accordingly, my Headquarters moved to the Naval Base in January, 1941, but I continued to reside in Singapore, which enabled me to have interviews with the General Officer Commanding, Air Officer Commanding and the Governor, either before I went to the office or on my return. This was not a perfect solution, but it was the best one in all the circumstances.



Another factor which influenced me in coming to this decision was the danger of my Headquarters becoming intimately involved in the defence of Malaya if I remained at Singapore, to the neglect of the wider problems of the defence of the Far East.

#### *Relations with Commander-in-Chief, China Station.*

41. From about June 1941 onwards an intelligence conference was held at ten o'clock every morning, and was attended by the Commander-in-Chief, China, and myself, and our senior staff officers. Generally speaking, the division of responsibilities was clear, and in other cases they were divided up without any difficulty. The Commander-in-Chief, China, had been dealing with Free French problems, and continued to do so after my Headquarters was formed. As our relations with French Indo-China were largely concerned with economics and shipping, he dealt with most of the problems of that country, whilst my Headquarters dealt mainly with Siam. He also agreed to take over responsibility for control of the Press and continued to do so up to the beginning of December, when Sir Tom Phillips arrived and I took over this responsibility.

Other questions, such as food supplies, we dealt with together. In this case also shipping was largely involved, and as the Commander-in-Chief, China, had a representative on the Food Committee, he generally represented our combined views at meetings of the War Committee.

The Commander-in-Chief, China, took over from me the control of the Miri oil denial scheme. This was found more convenient since the problems of oil supply were more closely connected with the Navy than with the Army or Air Force, and the evacuation of both material and personnel from Miri was essentially a Naval matter.

Agreement was reached in regard to surface sea patrols near the coast, and it was decided that the Naval authorities would be responsible for patrolling in the open sea and the Army would be responsible for similar work on the rivers. One or two estuaries were dealt with as special cases, but generally came under the Naval authorities.

#### *Conferences at Singapore.*

42. Many conferences were held in Singapore both before and after the formation of General Headquarters, Far East. These were as follows:—

(a) The Franco-British Conference held in June 1939. The report of this conference contained some useful observations on the general problems, but the basic assumption of active French collaboration from Indo-China vanished with the collapse of France.

(b) The Singapore Conference of October, 1940, with which should be included the Tactical Appreciation dated the 16th October, 1940, prepared by the Commander-in-Chief, China Station, the General Officer Commanding, Malaya, and the Air Officer Commanding, Far East. (See paras. 79 and 90 below.)

(c) The conversations with the Dutch in December 1940, the principal object being to obtain information and agreement on certain matters raised in Appendix A of the Report of the Singapore Conference.

(d) The Conference between British, Dutch and Australian representatives, with United

States observers in attendance, held in Singapore in February 1941, resulting in what is known as the A.D.A. agreement. This agreement included plans for mutual reinforcements, principally of air forces and submarines. (See para. 44 below.)

(e) The Conference between the Americans, Dutch and British, including Australia and New Zealand, together with representatives of India and the East Indies Station. This was held at Singapore in April 1941, and resulted in what is known as the A.D.B. agreement. (See para. 45 below.) It was followed by a shorter agreement between the British and the Dutch, which dealt almost entirely with Naval matters, and was really a modification of the agreement reached in A.D.A., bringing the latter into line with A.D.B. It was known as B.D.

(f) Arising out of A.D.B., a detailed plan for naval and air operations, known as Plenaps was drawn up.

No political commitment was involved by these agreements, and A.D.A. and A.D.B. remained subject to ratification by the respective Governments.

43. In the case of the conference leading to the A.D.A. and A.D.B. agreements, I felt that the representation was somewhat unbalanced. In the former, the Naval representation of the Dominions was weak since the Chief of the Naval Staff in Australia, Admiral Colvin, was unable to come, and New Zealand was represented by Australia. In the A.D.B. Conference, the Naval representation was strong but that of the Dominion Army and Air Force was comparatively weak. Further, in A.D.B. the United States representatives were somewhat junior, and there was no representative of the Pacific Fleet, but only of the Asiatic.

44. In A.D.A. the necessity for collective action was emphasised, it being pointed out that Japanese aggression against any one country would be of vital importance to the others. Agreement was reached on the particular actions by Japan which would necessitate the Naval and Military authorities concerned advising their respective Governments to take active military counter-action. A suggestion was made that Commanders-in-Chief on the spot might be allowed to take measures in such circumstances without prior reference to London.

The principle of mutual reinforcement was agreed, the Dutch undertaking to provide submarines for operation in the South China Sea, as well as one Fighter and three bomber squadrons to reinforce Malaya; whilst it was estimated that four Bomber squadrons would be available from Malaya to reinforce the Netherlands East Indies. Australia was prepared to assist by the provision of Army units, and of an air striking force at Darwin to reinforce Ambon and Koepang. The necessary administrative arrangements to prepare for these land and air reinforcements were to be undertaken at once, and progress reports were to be rendered monthly to G.H.Q., Far East. The principles on which sea communications would be defended were outlined, and emphasis was laid on the importance of making the passage of the Northern line of the Dutch possessions as difficult as possible for the Japanese.

The A.D.A. report was approved generally by the Chiefs of Staff, the main exception being that there could be no prior definition of an act

of war and automatic reaction without reference to London.

45. In the A.D.B. report it was stressed that the Atlantic and Europe were the decisive theatres of war, so that the forces employed in other theatres must be reduced to a minimum. Our main strategy in the Far East for the time must, therefore, be defensive, but it was recommended that preparations should be made for air operations against Japanese-occupied territory and against Japan herself, both from China and from Luzon.

The necessity for collective action was reaffirmed as well as the particular actions by Japan which would necessitate the Commanders concerned advising their respective Governments to take active military counter-action. The importance of Luzon, especially from the offensive point of view, was emphasised, and a recommendation made that its defence should be strengthened. It was suggested in this connection that Hong Kong might be of value as a subsidiary base. It was also recommended that the British and U.S.A. should support the Chinese Army, especially with finance and equipment, should assist the guerilla operations in China, and organise subversive activity in Japan and Japanese-occupied territories.

It was recommended that the Commander-in-Chief, China Station, should exercise strategical direction over all Naval forces, excluding those employed solely on local defence or operating under Commander-in-Chief, United States Asiatic Fleet. Similarly, it was recommended that the Commander-in-Chief, Far East, should exercise strategical direction of the air forces in the Far East. The areas of responsibility were defined. The basis of a plan for Naval and air co-operation, both as regards reinforcements and reconnaissance, was laid down. This included the movement of surface vessels of the United States Asiatic Fleet from Manila to Singapore if the former were attacked, and the despatch of two or more Dutch submarines to the South China Sea, all operating under the Commander-in-Chief, China.

For purposes of planning, the air forces available for mutual reinforcement were assumed to be:—

From Malaya: 4 bomber squadrons;

From Netherlands East Indies: 3 bomber and 1 fighter squadrons;

From Philippines: all available, but in case of evacuation only; and

From Australia: 2 bomber squadrons for the Ambon-Timor Area.

In telegraphic comments by the Commanders-in-Chief, Far East and China, two points were specially stressed: first, the great importance to the defence of the Far East of offensive operations by the United States Pacific Fleet, a point that was deliberately omitted from the report; and, secondly, the importance of strengthening the defences of Luzon.

The A.D.B. report was, with one or two exceptions, approved by the Chiefs of Staff in London. The exceptions were that, whilst they would welcome any strengthening of the Philippines which could be effected otherwise than at the expense of the United States effort in the Atlantic, they were not prepared to press the point in the United States: and that Hong Kong was unlikely to be of much value as an advanced base for operations by United States submarines and naval aircraft against the Japanese sea communications.

But, although signed by the representatives of the United States, the report was objected to in Washington, mainly on the ground that certain political matters had been introduced. An amended A.D.B. agreement, known as A.D.B. 2, was therefore drawn up in London in August 1941, leaving all the main features of A.D.B. practically unchanged, but putting the political matters into an appendix. This, however, did not entirely satisfy the United States authorities in Washington, and eventually it was decided that a further conference should be held in the Far East to draw up a modified A.D.B. This information was conveyed to me on the 25th November, 1941, but was received too late for any action to be taken before war started.

In spite of this, A.D.B. and Plenaps remained the basis on which we were able to work before, and immediately after, the outbreak of war with Japan, both with the Netherlands East Indies and, to a lesser degree, with the Philippines. (*But see para. III below.*)

#### *Information from London.*

46. I found on arrival in the Far East that there was considerable ignorance of modern war conditions, both in the Army and the Air Force. This could not, of course, be made good entirely by documents; personal experience was essential.

For some months after the formation of my General Headquarters there seemed to be considerable delay in getting information from England with regard to the lessons of recent operations and developments in tactical ideas, both as regards the Army and the Air Force, though A.R.P. pamphlets seemed to arrive regularly soon after issue. The situation improved about July, 1941, but we were always uncertain whether we were being kept up to date. This feeling of being neglected was naturally intensified by the distance of London from Singapore, and the whole position in this respect would have been greatly improved if visits by liaison officers from the War Office and Air Ministry had been made from time to time. This was actually started in the case of the War Office, and the first liaison officer arrived in Singapore in November, 1941. I believe it was intended to do the same in the case of the Air Ministry. It would have been a great help had this been done twelve months earlier.

#### *Training.*

47. As regards training, steps were taken to ensure that troops were thoroughly acquainted with the nature of the country in which they would have to operate. This was simple in the case of Hong Kong, where units knew exactly the ground over which they were going to fight. It was more difficult in the case of Malaya, as the nature of the country varied considerably, but here special attention was paid to movements through jungle and the acquisition of jungle lore, and many units reached a high stage of proficiency in this. The Volunteers in Malaya were called up for training during February and March 1941.

Apart from minor Staff Exercises, two were carried out under General Headquarters: the first in December, 1940, to test out communications and co-operation between the Army and the Royal Air Force; and the second, a more ambitious one, in March, 1941, to test out all the stages of a change-over from peace to war for the civil authorities as well as for the three Services. This brought out many useful lessons.

A very successful exercise based on this second one was held in Burma in July, 1941, and Hong Kong carried out two or three on similar lines.

#### *Defensive Preparations.*

48. The question of the best method of defending the important sectors of the East Coast of Malaya gave rise to much discussion. One school of thought argued that, as there were insufficient numbers to defend any great length of beach, the enemy would be able to land outside the defended portion, thus out-flanking the defenders and possibly cutting them off. The best course of action was, therefore, to fight on a prepared position in rear where the road leading into the interior could be defended. This school also argued that attempts to hold the beaches would result in a purely linear defence with insufficient troops in hand for counter-attack.

The view of General Headquarters, Far East, was that it was essential to hold the beaches, because it was during the period of landing that the enemy would be most vulnerable, and if the beaches were given up he would be fighting on equality with us. Again, it was during this process of landing that our most effective co-operation between the Army and Air, and possibly the Navy as well, could be effected. Admittedly there was a danger of having a purely linear defence, but this was primarily a question of adjustment between the forces retained in reserve and those detailed for holding the beaches themselves.

Another point was that of all-round defence. It was difficult with the forces available to have units in a group of perimeter posts and at the same time to protect an adequate length of beach. Further, the defenders must be prepared to hold on for a period to be reckoned by weeks rather than by days, even if surrounded by the enemy and cut off. There was but little object in this unless adequate reserves were available in rear to attack the enemy and restore the situation. The 22nd Australian Brigade at Mersing found a satisfactory solution to the problem in that they had perimeter defences for units, mutually supporting each other and primarily defending the beaches. But in their case the 27th Australian Brigade was available in Johore for counter-attack on a large scale. The problem was more difficult at Kuantan and Kota Bharu for the reasons indicated above. (See para. 12.)

Although it was my policy to allow the General Officers-in-Command as much freedom as possible, I found it necessary in the case of Malaya to issue orders that the first line of our defence was to be the beaches. Previously, except on Singapore Island and Penang, beaches were going to be occupied only by watching posts, and the first lines of defence were sited inland. This change involved a considerable amount of work and preparation of obstacles and defence posts at Mersing, Kuantan and Kota Bharu.

It was found at one period that the work of preparing positions and putting up obstacles was taking up so much time that the training of the troops was being hampered and, in addition, the wire generally required renewing after about six months. Also, I was always on guard against too much reliance upon water obstacles, barbed wire and pill-boxes, in case this should lead to a Maginot Line complex to the detriment of the offensive spirit. Consequently, a division of

available hours was drawn up, allowing a proportion for training, a proportion for renewals, and the balance for new work. As far as practicable, troops constructed the actual defences in which they would normally fight. New works carried out included not only defensive preparations, but facilities for making counter-attacks, e.g., preparation of hidden paths fit for Bren Carriers.

Looking back in the light of what actually happened, it is easy to point out that a lot of the preparation was wasted, and that the energy so taken up should have been expended elsewhere; for instance, a great deal of time was spent on the Mersing area, which was never heavily attacked. Mersing, however, was a very important place, and, had the Japanese established themselves here instead of at Kota Bharu, they would have been at once within a short distance of Singapore; and it is possible that, had these defences been less strong, they might have attacked the Mersing area at an early stage in the operations. I feel, however, that steps should have been taken before war broke out to strengthen the defences on the Northern and North-Western sides of Singapore Island.

49. We also had to be prepared for the possibility of a break-through in the Mersing area, which would have isolated Southern and Northern Malaya from Singapore, and this consideration affected the siting of depots for stores and ammunition. Therefore, preparations were made to enable a force to be supplied, if necessary, by a line of communication running through Kuala Lumpur to Penang, so that they would be able to operate quite independently of Singapore.

Another possibility that had to be considered was that of a sudden descent without warning on a part of Singapore Island with the object either of destroying some important place, such as the main wireless station, or of establishing a footing, awaiting subsequent reinforcements. This possibility was met by having a portion of the Singapore garrison ready to come into action and move at very short notice.

#### *Operation "Matador."*

50. The importance of the Southern end of the Kra Isthmus, especially the neighbourhood of Singora, has already been referred to (see paragraph 12 above). The possibility of an advance into this Isthmus, in order to hold a position North of Haad Yai Junction, was considered soon after the formation of General Headquarters, Far East. Detailed plans for carrying out this operation were prepared, and the code word "Matador" was eventually given to it. It was from the start realised that the essential feature of this operation was forestalling the Japanese on a position near Singora; see, for instance my telegram to the Chiefs of Staff through the War Office, in which it is stated: "The success of this plan would depend on rapidity of execution in order to forestall the Japanese on the Songhla line"; also my telegram from which the following is an extract: "I wish to emphasise the fact that the forestalling of the Japanese in Singora area is essential to the success of 'Matador.'"

This necessitated at least twenty-four hours' start before the Japanese landed, and rapid movement of our force once the order was given. It was realised all along that, if these conditions could not be fulfilled, then the Matador operation would be impracticable. The psychological

value of offensive movement at the start of the war and the possibility of thereby upsetting the Japanese plans were fully realised, but had to be weighed against the fact that we should be leaving prepared ground with which the troops were familiar, and that, unless we forestalled the enemy, the fighting would be in the nature of an encounter battle, quite possibly against superior numbers. Further, the attitude of the Siamese was uncertain, and questions of secrecy precluded any attempt to get prior agreement from Bangkok. Orders were issued that, should Matador be ordered, any opposition from the Siamese was to be overcome at once, but we could never be certain in advance how much delay might be caused to our movements by obstacles, destruction of bridges or active resistance. A margin of time was necessary.

A total of thirty officers, two or three at a time, were sent over as visitors to the area in plain clothes in order to collect information, especially on the topography of the country, and to have some individuals familiar with it.

The preparations were completed before the Autumn of 1941 as far as could be foreseen, including maps, arrangements for the distribution of rice to the population, the collection of a quantity of Siamese money, and writing, ready for translation and printing, pamphlets of three varieties to suit the different attitudes which might be adopted by the Siamese Government. For reasons of secrecy, knowledge of the plans was confined to a minimum number of individuals, and for the same reason certain steps could not be taken in advance. For instance, it was considered dangerous to translate or print the pamphlets before the operation was ordered.

51. Up to the 5th December, Matador was not to be carried out without reference to the War Cabinet, but on that date a telegram was sent to the effect that I could order it without reference to London in either of the following contingencies:—

- (a) If I had information that the Japanese expedition was advancing with the apparent intention of landing on the Kra Isthmus; or
- (b) If the Japanese violated any other part of Thailand (Siam).

A few days earlier it had been impressed on me that carrying out Matador if the Japanese intended to make a landing in Southern Siam would almost certainly mean war with Japan, and in view of this I considered it my duty to be scrupulously careful in acting on the telegram of the 5th December.

#### *Aerodrome Policy.*

52. The number and location of aerodromes in Malaya was based on the principle of relying mainly on air power for defence. This also applied, though in a somewhat smaller degree to Burma.

It meant, first having a sufficient number of aerodromes to make use of the mobility of aircraft for concentrating a large proportion of our squadrons in any given area; and, secondly, choosing sites as far forward as practicable so as to enable us to reach out the maximum distance both for reconnaissance and for offensive operations. This was particularly important in the case of attacks on Japanese convoys in order to ensure having sufficient time to carry out more than one attack before they reached our coast.

The total number of aerodromes prepared was based on the figure of 336 Initial Equipment aircraft, and since this figure was never reached we had in some areas more aerodromes than we were able to use, the surplus being a liability rather than an asset. The forecasts of development of our air strength were admittedly uncertain, but in view of the long time taken to construct an aerodrome in Malaya we could not afford to wait until we knew definitely that more aircraft were coming. The Army dispositions were largely influenced by the necessity for protecting Royal Air Force aerodromes. As events turned out, owing to the weakness of the Royal Air Force at the time war started, the defence of Malaya devolved largely upon the Army, which meant that sites for aerodromes were not always the most suitable for operations as they were actually carried out. But it was impossible to have foreseen this, since no one could have known in advance when the Japanese would start the war.

In the autumn of 1941, orders were issued that four of the aerodromes in Malaya and two in Burma were to be extended so as to be suitable for the operation of heavy bombers up to the Boeing Fortress type. This meant runways of 2,000 yards with a surface sufficiently strong to bear the weight of these aircraft fully loaded.

Sufficient attention was not always given to the tactical siting of aerodromes from the point of view of their defence. There was rather a tendency at one time to site them solely with reference to their suitability for flying operations; and in one or two cases they were located too near the coast where they were a definite danger so long as the Japanese had command of the sea. This, however, was corrected, and it was laid down that no aerodrome was to be selected or planned except in conjunction with the staff officer of the Army organisation concerned, a principle also applied to the siting of buildings and aircraft pens. The buildings on some of the original aerodromes in Malaya had been laid out entirely on a peace basis, for they were not dispersed and were in straight lines; this was noticeably the case at Alor Star.

53. We learned a lesson from the Dutch as regards the siting of aerodromes. In Borneo, the communications of which were undeveloped, they worked on the principle of locating aerodromes 25 to 50 miles from the coast in jungle country with only one line of access, generally a road, but sometimes a river. This, of course, considerably simplified the problem of defence against overland attacks. It was practicable only to a limited extent in Malaya, but it was laid down that any future aerodromes required in Sarawak and other parts of British Borneo would be sited on this principle.

#### *Aircraft Warning System.*

54. There was no air observation system in Malaya when I arrived, and its organisation entailed a large amount of work. The responsibility was at first placed upon the G.O.C. and was later transferred to the A.O.C. Some R.D.F. sets were received during 1941, and before war broke out an air observation system was working well as regards Southern Malaya and Singapore; it was not good up North, partly owing to the lack of depth from the frontier and partly because we had not sufficient R.D.F. sets to install any in the North. Communications were difficult the whole time,

as we were short generally of signalling equipment, especially material for the construction of land lines; but the Government Post and Telegraph Service was most helpful, and war experience proved that so long as the Japanese were kept out of Southern Malaya, Singapore could always rely on half an hour's warning of hostile aircraft. This was, of course, reduced after the Japanese advance had forced us to leave certain R.D.F. stations."

#### *Other Matters that Required Action.*

55. Some special camouflage officers having been sent out from England in the late summer of 1941, a Camouflage Committee was set up in Malaya and camouflage classes formed in Malaya for the Far East. Priority in camouflage work was given to the Naval Base and aerodromes, but work was also being done for civilian establishments which were important to the war effort. All this involved a period of years rather than months and was by no means complete when war broke out.

The formation of Army Labour Units in Malaya was a matter that was delayed for various reasons. Finally, however, it was decided to recruit Chinese in Hong Kong, which had the advantage not only of getting labour, but also of reducing the Chinese population of Hong Kong, but, unfortunately, the project was not executed before war broke out.

Arrangements were made for successive variations in the route to be followed by civil aircraft between Australia and India in the event of war with Japan.

56. In December, 1940, there was a serious deficiency in ammunition, especially for the 4.5 and 3.7 A.A. guns, and in reserves for ordnance stores which were only sufficient for 90 days instead of 180. Anti-tank weapons and mines, 3-inch mortars and ammunition were also short.

Aircraft bombs at this time were also quite insufficient to allow for the expected expansion, and up to the autumn of 1941, .5 ammunition for the Buffaloes was difficult to obtain in adequate quantity.

By December, 1941, some of these deficiencies had been made good. (*See paragraph 92 below.*)

57. Although the Government Post and Telegraph Service was responsible for the communications on the mainland of Malaya, the lines on Singapore Island were mainly in the hands of a private company known as O.T.E.C. This caused some difficulties, e.g., as regards maintenance of stocks of spares. But it was decided that the situation in 1941 was not suitable for making the big changes that would have been involved had the Government taken over this company.

58. I found the Malayan War Committee was not on a satisfactory basis; though the proceedings were recorded in the relevant files, there were no formal minutes, so it was often difficult at a meeting to find out quickly what had been decided previously or who was responsible for taking action. This was corrected, a new Secretary for Defence was appointed, and three civilians were brought into the War Committee with good results. The Commander-in-Chief, China, and I were not members of this War Committee, but had a permanent invitation from the Governor to attend meetings.

#### *Press Relations.*

59. It was realised in the Spring of 1941 that some organisation to deal with the Press would be necessary when war broke out, and, further, that it would be important before war during periods of strained relations with Japan. As a result of a conference attended by all concerned, an organisation was worked out and brought into operation in the middle of May, 1941. The essential feature of it was that the Press relations of all three Services were grouped under one head. As has been stated above (in paragraph 41), Commander-in-Chief, China, agreed to be responsible for Press relations, and a Commander, R.N., who was called up from the Reserve, was put at the head of the Services Press Bureau. I was, and still am, of the opinion that this organisation was workable. Unfortunately, there were some discordant personalities, and, finally, after war broke out, a somewhat different organisation was adopted, with Sir George Sansom at the head.

I always found the Press ready to help when they were asked (*see, for instance, paragraph 110 below*) and on many occasions we got good value from them. On the other hand, some representatives of the Press of other countries were difficult and required very tactful handling; and we were undoubtedly hampered in the Far East through lack of officers experienced in dealing with the Press.

Complaints reached the Ministry of Information in London that Press correspondents were not being properly treated; in my reply to one that was passed on to Singapore I stated: "Should be most grateful for any assistance you can give to assure that we get out here officers who have knowledge of the work and can be trusted to work loyally as a team and not for their own individual benefit." I feel that in this matter we should have had more help from England, principally in the way of suitable and experienced personnel from the beginning.

I was reluctant to give Press interviews, but the importance of doing so from time to time was frequently intimated to me. There was one stock question I was frequently asked: "Was I satisfied with the strength of the defences of Malaya or the Far East generally?" I always gave the same reply, that I was never going to be satisfied because defensive preparations could always be improved, and, so far as I could, I was not going to allow any of my subordinates to be satisfied either.

60. One of the steps taken to discourage the Japanese from starting war was to emphasise the growing strength of our defences in Malaya. (*See paragraph 5 (a) above.*) The Chiefs of Staff stated in May, 1941, that they saw no objection to this policy and we were aided by directions from the Ministry of Information in London to their representative in Singapore. The method adopted did not consist merely in extensive advertising of any reinforcements; sometimes when these were obvious they were given only a small notice in the papers or broadcast. On the other hand, when reinforcements of Royal Air Force personnel arrived they were merely referred to as Royal Air Force and no mention was made of the fact that no aeroplanes were with them. It is doubtful if the effect was great, but it was probably not negligible.

In interviews with Press correspondents whom I could trust, I made no secret of the fact that the shortage of aeroplanes caused me great anxiety, but warned them that they were on no account to mention it in their papers. A similar attitude was adopted with regard to tanks, of which we had none when war broke out.

#### *Meeting with British Far East Representatives.*

61. At the end of September 1941, Sir Earle Page from Australia, the British Ambassador in Chungking Sir A. Clark Kerr, and the British Minister in Bangkok Sir J. Crosby, were all in Singapore. The opportunity was taken to have a combined meeting together with Mr. Duff Cooper and the Governor of Malaya in order that the two Commanders-in-Chief might discuss with them all the situation in the Far East. A report was sent to the Chiefs of Staff.

The meeting agreed generally with the views expressed by the Commander-in-Chief, China, and myself, that Japan's principal asset in the Far East was her foothold in Indo-China, which might be developed as a springboard from which to attack Malaya. Further, that Japan must be anxious to avoid war in the South for the next few months so the time was opportune for bringing pressure to bear on her to withdraw from Indo-China.

The meeting emphasised that, in the absence of a British fleet based at Singapore, there was little doubt that Japan could strike at her selected moment and stressed the propaganda value of even one or two battleships at Singapore. Various steps were recommended, including the following:—

The issue of a co-ordinated announcement by the British, United States and Dutch Governments that they had a combined plan for action in the event of a Japanese move against any of their interests in the Far East;

Urging the United States to reinforce the Philippines, especially with submarines and air forces;

Development of our aid to, and plans for operations in, China; and

Liaison with Russian forces in the Far East.

#### VI.—CIVIL DEFENCE PROBLEMS IN MALAYA.

##### *Food and Water.*

62. On my arrival in Singapore I found a large number of Civil Defence matters requiring attention. As regards food supplies, a six-months' supply for the whole population, as well as for the Navy, Army and Air Force, had been laid down as the minimum requirement. Rice was a constant source of anxiety. The yield of rice in Malaya was insufficient for the whole population, and so some had to be imported mainly from Burma, and this again was naturally dependent on shipping. As soon as the year's crop was gathered, stocks were plentiful, but the consumption was large and required constant watching. There was difficulty over the storage of rice for more than six months, but this had been solved by the introduction of the method of mixing a small proportion of lime with the rice, which, so far as tests went, preserved it for two years without deterioration. There was also the problem of the distribution of rice, some of the States producing an excess of their own requirements.

The custom had been to store this surplus on the spot, and at one time there was some 50,000 tons of rice stored as far North as Alor Star. By the time war broke out, however, distribution was satisfactory.

On two occasions, the War Committee decided that a scheme of food rationing in time of war must be prepared. Committees were formed to carry this out, but on both occasions reported that the difficulties were so great that food rationing was impracticable; and, on one occasion, that if it was necessary from the military point of view, it was up to the military to prepare a scheme. The position was certainly complicated, but I did not believe that the difficulties were insurmountable.

The main source of supply for the water reservoirs on Singapore Island was from the mainland of Johore. It was realised that this might be cut, and the matter was investigated on my arrival. The result of this investigation showed that the rainfall was sufficient, with certain additional water mains, to supply enough water to meet the requirements of the whole of the anticipated population of the island, except that water-borne sanitation would have to be stopped. The necessary steps were taken. A sea-water fire service already existed for part of Singapore City.

##### *Air Raid Precautions.*

63. A.R.P. in Singapore had started, and before war broke out I was satisfied that the organisation, as regards fire precautions, demolition squads, rescue parties and first aid, was good. Up to the time I handed over command, A.R.P. functioned well, with one exception. (See para. 99 below.) Up-country, progress was somewhat slower.

Black-out in Malaya was difficult. Owing to the construction of most of the houses, complete black-out meant shutting off most of the ventilation, which was extremely disagreeable in Malayan climate. Consequently, when black-out was enforced it meant most people living either in darkness or in physical discomfort. In consequence, a system was introduced of having a "brown-out," a black-out being enforced as soon as warning was received of the actual approach of hostile aircraft. The brown-out allowed a certain amount of light, sufficient with care to read by without closing up the room. In my opinion, this worked satisfactorily.

64. The provision of air raid shelters in Singapore was insufficient for the total population, but the construction of these was not a simple matter. The water-level was near the surface, so that in most places the digging of trenches was not only useless, but dangerous because they soon became filled with water and formed breeding places for mosquitoes. Many of the streets were narrow, and there was little room for the building of shelters. Quite apart from the blocking of traffic, the medical authorities definitely advised against the building of shelters in streets, on the ground that the circulation of air would thereby be stopped, thus leading to epidemics.

On the other hand, many of the streets of Singapore had footpaths covered over by the first floors of the buildings, which were supported by pillars from the outside. Provided the houses were of fairly solid construction, filling up the spaces between the pillars with stone or bricks afforded a good type of air-raid



shelter. Where none could be constructed, the policy was to provide accommodation in open spaces outside the town, where it was expected that the population would move as soon as bombing started. Compulsory evacuation was not enforced.

#### *Denial Schemes and Evacuation.*

65. A denial scheme was prepared early in 1941 for the event of an invasion of Malaya, and necessary instructions issued. This scheme was directed principally to the destruction or removal of everything that might facilitate the movement of invading forces. It included such things as the removal of food stocks, or their dispersal amongst the villages, the destruction of any form of repair workshop, as well as the demolition of bridges and the removal or destruction of all forms of vehicle or boat. The plan did not envisage a complete "scorched earth" policy. (*See para. 119 below.*) For instance, in the case of tin mines it was only laid down that essential parts of the machinery of dredges were to be removed and brought away. A plan for the denial of British-owned tin mines in the Kra Isthmus was also worked out by the O.M. Section of the Ministry of Economic Warfare, including arrangements with Commander-in-Chief, China, for the evacuation of British personnel by sea after the denial scheme had been carried out.

66. Originally, civil officials were ordered to remain at their posts in the event of invasion. This, however, was modified in December 1941, enabling those who were suitable, physically and otherwise, for service with military units to be withdrawn, so that they could be used for defence. This also applied to a proportion of the civil medical staff.

67. The problem of British families in Singapore and Malaya generally was somewhat involved. In the case of the Navy, families were permitted for those stationed ashore, *i.e.*, officers in the light cruisers were not allowed to bring their families out to Singapore. In the Army and Air Force, families were allowed in those units which were considered to be the permanent garrison in Singapore, which in practice meant the units existing before September 1939. Units which arrived since that date were counted as reinforcements, and families were not allowed in their case. This gave rise to anomalies, because some of the units, *e.g.*, Headquarters, Malaya Command, and the Royal Air Force Depot at Seletar, had expanded very considerably since September 1939, although they were still counted as part of the permanent garrison. In the case of the families of civil officials and civilians there were no restrictions. Apart from 50 W.R.N.S. at the Naval Wireless Station and a number of nurses, many women were employed in the different services for clerical, cipher and other duties, including intelligence work in F.E.C.B. Had all these been sent away, it would have meant a large increase in the number of men absorbed. As it was, we were short of women to fill suitable posts and thus relieve men for the fighting units.

On the other hand, the presence of large numbers of women and children led, in January 1942, to hurried evacuation, with consequent loss of personal belongings and discomfort, and, later, to casualties. (*See para. 121 below.*)

#### *Service and Civilian Communities.*

68. Relations between the Services and civilian communities were better up-country than in Singapore.

The view held in the Colonial Office was that rubber and tin output was of greater importance than the training of the local forces; for instance, a telegram, dated the 31st December, 1940, to the Governor, states: "The ultimate criterion for exemption should be not what the General Officer Commanding considers practicable, but what you consider essential to maintain the necessary production and efficient labour management."

#### *Attitude of Non-British Population.*

69. With regard to the other races in Malaya, the most numerous were the Chinese. Many of them had no particular roots in Malaya. There was difficulty in filling the Chinese companies of the Volunteers up to establishment, nor could we get a sufficient number of Chinese motor drivers. This may have been partly the fault of the British, and there was not sufficient contact between the British and the leading men of the Chinese community. My experience of the Chinese under air bombing was that they were calm, and with no tendency to panic.

There were several thousand Indian labourers in Malaya, mostly Tamils, who worked on the rubber estates. So long as they were kept free from agitators, these Tamils were a law-abiding community.

Some probable fifth columnists were marked down at Kuala Lumpur and rounded up at the start of the war, but there was very little fifth column work or treachery. There was no difficulty in recruiting for the two battalions of the Malay Regiment, and young Malays who had been specially trained in technical schools worked well in the aircraft maintenance unit on Singapore Island, and were not unduly worried by bombing.

### VII.—NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES.

#### *China.*

70. The late Major-General Dennys was appointed Military Attaché in Chungking shortly after my arrival in Singapore, with the intention that, when war with Japan broke out, he would become head of the British Military Mission with the Chinese, this being known as 204 Mission. Chiefly owing to his work, seconded by Wing-Commander Warburton and backed by the Ambassador, Sir A. Clark Kerr, our relations with the Chinese were very satisfactory, and considerable progress was made in plans for co-operation, and, to some degree, in their execution.

Co-operation as regards air consisted mainly in the preparation of aerodrome sites and the dispatch to China of stocks of aviation petrol and, finally, bombs, all for British squadrons which it was hoped to send up later. (*See para. 26 above.*) The aerodrome sites were in three groups: the first in the area north and west of Kunming, the object of which was largely to protect the Burma Road; the second, an area north of Hong Kong, from which it was hoped to assist in the defence of that place; and the third, an area further east, from which it was hoped that one day it might be possible to deliver air attacks on Japan. It was only in the first group that these preparations could be called complete when war broke out. Transport was one of the main difficulties, and it

was not until the 13th November, 1941, that permission was given to send up bombs. The petrol and bombs were consigned to the Chinese, who took charge of them.

71. The second form of assistance to China was with their guerillas. It was agreed that fifteen special Chinese guerilla companies should be formed initially, and that each should have a squad of fifteen British and Indian personnel attached to it. These squads would be specially trained in the use of explosives and in carrying out demolitions, and would be kept supplied by us with the necessary material. It was proposed eventually to double the number of guerilla companies, and consequently of the squads. These squads went through a thorough training in Burma, including living under the conditions they would experience when operating with the Chinese guerillas.

72. The whole organisation for the supply to the aerodromes and to the guerilla squads was based on Burma. It was known first as Chi Base and later as Tulip. Lieutenant-Colonel McFeat was in charge; his own headquarters were at Rangoon, the training of guerilla squads was carried out at Maymyo, and stores of all sorts were sent up to Lashio and to Bhamo. A mechanical transport organisation for forwarding stores and supplies was in progress, but by no means complete in vehicles by the 7th December. Signalling and medical facilities were deficient for most of the guerilla squads. Tulip was directly under my headquarters till war with Japan broke out, when it was transferred, as planned, to General Officer Commanding, Burma.

73. On their part, the Chinese promised not only to help in the defence of Burma with the American Volunteer Group (*see para. 25 above*), but also to send troops to Burma if required, and to threaten the Japanese northern flank should they advance against Burma via Chiang Rai. They also promised to help in the defence of Hong Kong by an advance towards Canton.

They kept their promises.

74. A Chinese Military Mission visited Burma and Singapore in April and May, 1941, and various Chinese officers also paid visits individually, including General Mow, of the Chinese Air Force, who was in Singapore from the 19th to the 25th June, 1941, and stayed in my house. Certain members of my staff visited Chungking.

#### *Siam and Indo-China.*

75. The dominating factor influencing the actions of the Siamese authorities was fear. Our attitude towards the Siamese was governed by the desire to keep on as friendly terms as possible, and to encourage them to resist any encroachment by Japan. The latter was somewhat difficult because it was quite impracticable for us to take any effective military action to prevent Japanese penetration of Siam. Further, as the Siamese quite rightly pointed out, they were very short of equipment, especially aircraft and anti-aircraft, tank and anti-tank, so that, if they could not get help from us or the United States, there was little they could do but to comply with Japanese demands. Definite proposals were made in October, 1941, for giving the Siamese a few weapons, but nothing was actually sent.

It was suggested in March, 1941, that we should adopt a strong line with the Siamese. It is, however, at least doubtful whether, if we had done so, the Siamese would have been willing or able to render any effective aid when the Japanese attacked their country. As events turned out, in spite of statements by the Siamese Prime Minister, the resistance offered by the Siamese for us lasted only a few hours at Battambang on the frontier east of Bangkok, whereas British troops advancing into Southern Siam were opposed by the Siamese after the Japanese had landed.

76. At the time of my arrival in Singapore, the Japanese had troops in Tongking, at the northern end of Indo-China. This in itself was no direct threat to Burma or Malaya. To some extent it was a threat to the Chinese section of the road from Burma to China, but there seemed some reason to believe that the original purpose for which these troops were sent there was to extricate Japanese forces in Kwangsi, who were malaria-ridden and in a difficult position.

77. In the latter part of 1940, Siamese Ministers, possibly encouraged by the Japanese, had stimulated their country to demand the return to Siam of certain areas that had been taken by the French some years before. This eventually led to a mild form of hostilities between the two countries concerned. Endeavours were made at Singapore by the Governor, Commander-in-Chief, China, and myself to bring about a settlement without posing as official mediators, but these endeavours were unsuccessful. By the end of January, 1941, the Japanese had been recognised as the mediators, and thus scored a diplomatic success.

78. We had concluded an economic agreement with the Vichy French authorities in Indo-China, and they professed themselves anxious to develop friendly relations. In spite of this an agreement between them and the Japanese was announced on the 24th July, 1941. Its terms allowed the Japanese to maintain forces in the South of Indo-China. A Japanese convoy began to arrive at Saigon on the 26th, and by the end of July the Japanese were well established in that town. More important still, this movement gave the Japanese complete control of Camranh Harbour, and they quickly started to make or improve aerodromes to the South and West of Saigon. As was expected, the Japanese did not limit themselves for long to the terms of the agreement, and the French authorities made practically no effort to oppose either the original terms or the successive encroachments. The effect of this expansion on the defence of the Far East is indicated below (*paras. 93 et seq.*).

#### VIII.—DEVELOPMENT OF THE BRITISH AIR FORCES IN THE FAR EAST.

##### *General Position.*

79. In their paper of the 15th August, 1940, the Chiefs of Staff estimated the air strength necessary for the Far East as 336 first-line aircraft, to which, of course, had to be added reserves.

In the Singapore Conference of October, 1940, the final strength of the Royal Air Force recommended for the Far East was 582 aircraft, an increase of sixteen over that given in the appreciation dated the 16th October,

1940 (*see para. 42 (b) above*). The Chiefs of Staff agreed that 582 aircraft was an ideal, but considered that 336 should give a very fair degree of security. The figure of 566 aircraft given in the appreciation was stated by the Air Ministry to be far beyond the bounds of practical possibility in the light of total resources and vital requirements in active theatres at home and in the Middle East.

The strength of the Air Forces in Malaya in November, 1940, is as shown in Appendix I, that in Hong Kong and Ceylon was negligible. Of the total of 88 first-line aircraft, only 48, i.e., the Blenheims and Hudsons, could be counted as modern, and the former suffered from lack of range. The Vildebeestes which we had at the beginning of the war with Japan were considered by the Chiefs of Staff in August, 1940, as having become an obsolete type.

The replacement for the Vildebeeste was to be the Beaufort. Manufacture of these had started in Australia and we were to get the first 90. Much of the raw material and certain complete parts of these aeroplanes had to come from England and from the United States, and there was considerable delay in supplying many of the items. The urgency of the matter was represented several times from Australia, and particularly at the beginning of August, when the Prime Minister of Australia sent a special telegram to the Australian High Commissioner in London. In spite, however, of every effort on the part of Australia, Vildebeestes were still in use in December, 1941 (*see para. 86 below*).

The flying boats were not only obsolete, but badly in need of complete overhaul, and the Wirraways could only be considered as training aircraft.

But the great weaknesses were the absence of any fighters and the small size of the reserves. This latter even necessitated restrictions on the number of flying hours in squadrons towards the end of 1940, and the first months of 1941. The importance of remedying these weaknesses was emphasised very shortly after my arrival at Singapore, and the aircraft situation was elaborated in a telegram three months later. In this latter telegram I estimated that, at the end of 1941, we should be able to reckon, as an absolute maximum, on a total of only 215 aircraft, including anticipated reinforcements of 39 Dutch aircraft, or 176 exclusive of the Dutch.

80. The general deficiencies in aircraft were also emphasised in many other telegrams.

The following are extracts:—

“This means bluntly that at present not only is our ability to attack shipping deplorably weak, but we have not the staying-power to sustain even what we could now do. As our air effort dwindles (as it would if war came now) so will the enemy's chance of landing increase”;

and:—

“Nor do I know whether troops or aircraft will be the easier to provide but I have no doubt what our first requirement here is. We want to increase our hitting power against ships, and our capacity to go on hitting.”

The need for more aircraft for the attack of shipping had also been emphasised in a previous telegram of the 23rd July, 1941.

81. The Chiefs of Staff fully appreciated my anxiety about the smallness of the air forces at my disposal, but pointed out that they had had to face disappointments in production, had to reinforce the Middle East still further to meet the probable scale of attack in the Spring, and that the necessity for supporting Russia was likely to impose a further strain on British and American resources. Further, that in these circumstances it was clear that neither could the target programme for the Far East be completed, nor, indeed, could any substantial reinforcements be sent before the end of 1941.

82. This Chiefs of Staff's figure of 336 first line aircraft referred to in para. 79 above, was based on the assumption that Borneo would be defended, but took no account of the defence of Burma. Whilst the latter was a greater commitment than the former, I accepted the figure of 336 as the target at which to aim in view of two telegrams from the Chiefs of Staff, in both of which the figure of 336 was confirmed.

#### Fighters.

83. Single-seater fighter aircraft, known as the Brewster Buffalo, began to arrive in Singapore in cases from the United States in February, 1941, and permission was given by the Air Ministry to form two squadrons in the first instance. These were formed mainly with pilots taken from existing squadrons, who had a good deal of flying experience, and so got up to the operational standard much quicker than the two new squadrons formed later; though not up to establishment, the first two squadrons would have been able to fight by the middle of April, 1941. A total of 167 Buffaloes in all were received in Singapore, and on the 30th May, 1941, permission was given by the Air Ministry to form two further fighter squadrons.

These new squadrons took a long time to become operationally efficient. The majority of the pilots had to be brought from Australia and New Zealand. They all came straight from the Flying Training Schools, and some from New Zealand had never flown anything beyond a Hart, and had no experience of retractable undercarriages, variable-pitch propellers, or flaps. Under these conditions it took over four months from the time that the pilots arrived in Malaya before the squadrons could be considered fit for operations; in fact, they had not been passed as fit when war with Japan broke out. It would have helped a great deal if we could have formed a proper operational training unit in Malaya, but I was informed that neither personnel nor aircraft could be spared for the purpose, and that all the training of pilots would have to be done in the squadrons. As this would have seriously hindered the operational training of squadrons, the nucleus of an O.T.U. was formed from our own resources.

After the formation of the third and fourth Buffalo squadrons had been started, it was found that the re-equipment of the R.A.A.F. Wirraway Squadron was going to be delayed indefinitely, and I was requested by Australia to take any possible steps I could to ensure that this Australian squadron was re-equipped with some form of more modern machine than the Wirraway. The only possible course of action was to re-equip it with Buffaloes. This

was sanctioned by the Air Ministry and carried out, but five squadrons were definitely too many for the total number of Buffaloes available, and overstrained the reserves.

84. The Buffalo proved disappointing, at any rate when up against the Japanese Zero fighter. This was due partly to technical reasons and partly to incomplete training of pilots. With regard to the former the performance of the Buffaloes at heights of 10,000 feet and over were relatively poor. (*See Appendix "L"*). Whilst it had been realised that the Buffalo lacked speed, it had been hoped that, with good warning system and the comparatively small area of important objectives, e.g., the Naval Base, it would be able to reach the height necessary before the arrival of enemy aircraft, and that its better armament would enable our squadrons to give a good account of themselves. Whether deliberately or not, the Japanese appear to have sacrificed armour and armament in their Zero fighters in order to save weight, thereby obtaining the advantage of rate of climb and manoeuvrability at heights. In the case of these two particular types, the technical advantage certainly lay with the Japanese. Attempts were made to improve the performance of the Buffalo by substituting .303 for the .5. In addition some trouble was experienced with the valve gear of the Cyclone engine in the Buffalo, and with the interrupter gear of the two fuselage guns. The Buffalo was unsuitable for night flying owing to the exhaust flames, flame dampers would have been essential for night flying but were not available. Actually this was not serious as I had laid down that the Buffalo was to be used for day work only, and that, by night, reliance was to be placed on the A.A. guns assisted by Blenheim fighters.

Pilots have been referred to in paragraph 83 above. What the R.A.F. lacked in Malaya was a good proportion of pilots with practical war experience. Apart from forming a leaven when operations started, they could have taught the new pilots those niceties of manoeuvre and aiming which just make the difference between missing the enemy and bringing him down, the type of training that can only be given as a result of experience. Again all the Buffalo squadrons were formed in Malaya and there was no squadron with practical war experience to set a standard, and it is possible that in some respects ours was not sufficiently high for modern conditions.

85. Apart from the fighter squadron in Burma, we had in Malaya in December, 1941, a total of four Buffalo squadrons, one Dutch fighter squadron, which arrived on the 9th December, and one Blenheim squadron, the last principally for night fighting. This total was considered adequate both by the Chiefs of Staff and by my own General Headquarters, but results showed that more fighter squadrons were required, largely because the scope of a fighter's duties has widened. One Buffalo squadron was specially trained for Army co-operation, and we really wanted two. I had also agreed with the Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, that one squadron, which ought to have been a Buffalo, should be trained in the duties of fighter protection for ships. Fighter squadrons are also the most efficient type with which to attack enemy aerodromes. To carry out these functions at all adequately, as well as the normal duties of a fighter, at least seven fighter

squadrons were needed in Malaya alone, without allowing for night fighters.

#### *Long-Range Bombers.*

86. The need for long-range bombers had been constantly pressed from the time I was first appointed Commander-in-Chief, Far East. At that time I had merely felt that they would be wanted without having any concrete proposals, but as the Japanese advanced into Southern Indo-China, the object for which they would be used became clear and definite. The targets which we wished to reach in Southern Indo-China were just within reach of Blenheim IV's from the Northern end of Malaya, and of Hudsons, but we had too few of the former and the latter were required for overseas reconnaissance.

Six Beauforts were flown from Australia a few days before the war started, but as these aircraft were not operational, and as the crews required considerable operational training in their use, the Air Officer Commanding, with my concurrence, sent all bar one, which was retained in the hope of using it for photographic work, back to Australia in order that they might continue their training under suitable conditions.

#### *Other Requirements.*

87. Other requirements which were realised too late were special aircraft for photographic reconnaissance and transport aircraft for facilitating the rapid movement of squadrons. Photographic aircraft were first asked for in August, 1941, after the visit of a special photographic officer. The Dutch were ready to help us in the second requirement, but once war had started were making full use of their transport aircraft for their own purposes, and we felt the lack of having a few of our own available at very short notice.

It was also suggested at one time that a balloon barrage would be valuable for the protection of Singapore, especially the Naval Base. Experiments, however, proved that the climate and meteorology of Malaya were quite unsuitable for the use of kite balloons.

88. The strength and location of the Royal Air Force in the Far East on the 7th December, 1941, are given in Appendix J and a summary of serviceable aircraft in Malaya on different dates in December in Appendix K.

Our most serious deficiency at that time was in reserves, partly of pilots, but principally aircraft. It was not only a stock of reserve aeroplanes we wanted, but also a continuous flow of new aircraft to replace wastage, for aeroplanes must be regarded as expendable material, and there must be a regular, continuous channel of supply. Without these it was impossible to keep the squadrons up to their first-line establishment. Apart from the material weakness, failure to keep up what is commonly known as "a full breakfast table" always has an adverse effect on squadrons' morale.

89. There were several civil flying clubs in Malaya, and the Air Officer Commanding had organised for these an Auxiliary Air Force, which did useful work in communication and assistance to the Army in certain aspects of training.

#### IX.—ARMY STRENGTH AND REQUIREMENTS, MALAYA.

90. In the appreciation of the situation drawn up by the Commanders in Malaya previous to the Singapore Defence Conference of October,

1940, an estimate was made of the total armed forces required on the supposition that 582 aircraft would be available for the defence of the Far East. The estimate was as follows:—

- 26 infantry battalions, including 3 for Borneo.
- 5 field regiments.
- 3 light tank companies.

In addition anti-tank units, troops for local defence of aerodromes, volunteer units and ancillary troops. This figure of 26 battalions was agreed to by the Chiefs of Staff in January, 1941.

On his arrival, General Percival went thoroughly into the question of the strength of the Army and, in August, 1941, sent his estimate of the strength required, which he summarised as:—

- 48 Infantry Battalions.
- 4 Indian Reconnaissance Units.
- 9 Forward Artillery Regiments.
- 4 Light A.A. Regiments.
- 2 Tank Regiments.
- 3 Anti-Tank Regiments.
- 2 Mountain Artillery Regiments.
- 12 Field Companies.

This was based on my forecast of the strength which our Air Forces would reach by December, 1941, namely 186 first-line aircraft as against the accepted figure of 336. I was asked for observations and my general conclusion was that no drastic reduction in General Percival's estimate was acceptable until the strength of the Royal Air Force was materially increased not only in numbers but in quality of aircraft and in reserves of air crews and aircraft. Also that before General Percival's new target was reached in Malaya, the question of increasing forces in other areas of my command, especially Burma, would have to be considered. The Chiefs of Staff commented: "We accept estimate by General Officer Commanding, Malaya, as reasonable figure for land forces required in present circumstances. Nevertheless, this target cannot be fulfilled in foreseeable future."

91. In December, 1941, while the actual strength of the Royal Air Force (*see Appendix J*) approached very closely to my forecast, the Army strength (*see Appendix E*) fell far short of the figure which it had been agreed was required to compensate for the deficiency in aircraft. The main deficiencies were:—

- 17 Battalions;
- 4 Light A.A. Regiments; and
- 2 Tank Regiments.

The strength in A.A. weapons in the Far East on the 7th December, 1941, is given in Appendix F.

92. The fact that we were entirely without tanks in Malaya was a serious handicap to any offensive land operations, whether on a small or a large scale. There were also very few armoured cars. Many efforts were made to obtain both tanks and armoured cars from various sources. On the 14th August the War Office offered forty light tanks from the Middle East. These tanks were at the time being employed for aerodrome defence, and they were offered to the Far East on the condition that they would be employed in an operational role, and that we could man them from local resources. Some delay occurred at Singapore in finding the best method of meeting the latter

condition. Eventually Australia agreed to provide the necessary men and to train them up to a reasonable standard in Australia, this training to be completed by the 1st January, 1942. On the 13th November, 1941, however, Middle East reported to the War Office that they could not provide forty tanks for the Far East except at the expense of operational requirements. After war had broken out, War Office ordered Middle East to send fifty light tanks to India, their subsequent destination to be decided later.

With regard to armoured cars, a model of an armoured vehicle mounted on an American chassis was obtained from the Dutch and six were made in Singapore, chiefly at the Naval Base; drawings were also made and sent to Burma. No more, however, could be made owing to a shortage of boiler plate, which was used for the armouring. By the 24th November, 1941, a total of 84 Marmon-Harrington armoured cars had been shipped from South Africa for Singapore. Some of these arrived a few days before war broke out, and the drivers had not become accustomed to them before they had to go to the front.

The number of anti-tank weapons had improved considerably by the time war broke out, but there was still a shortage of the 0.5 anti-tank rifle in infantry units.

The lack of mobile A.A. weapons was serious, especially in view of the shortage of fighters. A constant anxiety to the General Officer Commanding, also, was the continual drain on the Army for men to protect aerodromes. Indian State troops were brought over to assist, but it would have been a great help if we had had more armoured cars or even tanks of an obsolete pattern for this duty. This would have enabled us to have a mobile defence and to substitute mechanical vehicles for a large proportion of the men required. The reserve of small-arms ammunition was well below the authorised figure. In November, 1941, General Headquarters informed the War Office that, with releases in sight, we should be short of our authorised holding of 150 million rounds by 57 million on the 1st January, 1942. Australia, who were already sending us 3 million rounds per month, agreed to increase this to 8 million.

#### X.—EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE WAR.

##### *The Problem of Japanese Intentions.*

93. As the Japanese spread South into Cambodia and Cochin China, the potential danger to Burma, Malaya, the South China Sea, and even the Philippines, increased; this danger had been realised from the start, and was referred to in a telegram in December, 1940. But it was difficult to judge whether this movement signified definite plans for an offensive against us in the near future, whether it was merely the acquisition of a strategic asset to be used in negotiation, or whether it was the first step towards occupation of Siam. This applied even to the construction of aerodromes, of which we were kept fairly well informed; what we were particularly on the look-out for was any indication of movements of long-distance bombers, or of the Zero-type fighters fitted with detachable petrol tanks. These, of course, could be concentrated on the aerodromes at short notice.

94. Another difficulty in getting any long warning of the Japanese intention was due to the restriction on exports to, and imports from,

Japan. So long as Japanese merchant shipping was being employed on its normal work, F.E.C.B. could keep track of every vessel, and should it be found that an unusual number was being kept in home ports for no good reason, it would indicate the possibility, or even probability, that the Japanese were refitting these ships as transports prior to an overseas expedition. The effect of the embargo, however, was to drive all Japanese shipping off the seas for purely economic reasons, and once in Japanese ports they could be altered as required without our being any the wiser. This applied especially to the fast vessels, *i.e.*, round about 18 knots.

In spite of the preparations going on in Southern Indo-China there were some indications—at any rate up to the end of November—that the Japanese did not intend immediate hostilities. The first was a general one, namely, that if the Japanese intended to attack Malaya, they would have been more likely to have done so in 1940, when our forces were far weaker than they were at the end of 1941. Then the winter months, December to February, were less favourable for an expedition against the East coast of Malaya and the Kra Isthmus than other periods of the year owing to the North-East monsoon. (*See also para. 134 below.*) Finally, there was the visit of Kurusu to Washington. It seems now probable that Kurusu, though possibly innocent himself, was sent to Washington with the deliberate object of misleading the United States and ourselves as to the Japanese intentions, and keeping us quiet until their own preparations had been finally completed. But at the time it seemed to us in Singapore that this was a genuine attempt on the part of the Japanese to get relaxation of the restrictions that had been imposed, and possibly to drive a wedge between Britain and the United States. I believe the same view was held in England.

95. In the latter part of November information accumulated to show that the Japanese were probably intending an offensive at an early date. Four Mogami class cruisers with a few destroyers had been despatched from the Japanese Combined Fleet to the South China Sea. Two squadrons of long-range Zero fighters arrived in South Indo-China. The number of aircraft in Indo-China rose from a total of 74 at the end of October to 245 at the end of November. The 5th Japanese Division, which was highly trained in landing operations, was reported by the Chinese to have moved to South Indo-China. There were large movements of motor landing craft from Central China, though there was no definite information as to where they had gone. In addition, a telegram was received from the War Office to the effect that the United States Army commanders in the Far East had been informed from Washington that the Kurusu negotiations might break down at any time and offensive operations be started by Japan against Siam, the Netherlands East Indies or the Philippines; up to the receipt of this telegram we had remained completely in the dark on this matter except for Press reports.

Aeroplanes, almost certainly Japanese, occasionally flew over parts of Malaya in the latter part of November and early December, in all probability carrying out photographic reconnaissance, but owing to the speed and height at

which they operated we were never able to make contact and obtain definite identification.

In view of the continued Japanese developments in Southern Indo-China, which gave them the facilities needed to attack Malaya, precautionary steps were taken on the 22nd November, and orders were issued for vulnerable points to be guarded, and on the 1st December the Volunteers were mobilised. Certain movements of air forces were carried out, and reconnaissances over the China Sea were instituted.

During this time we felt great need of aircraft capable of doing high-altitude photographic reconnaissance. This applied not only to the aerodromes in Southern Indo-China, but particularly to Camranh Harbour, on which we got no information whatever. We had no aircraft suitable for the purpose since, though a Catalina could have flown the distance, it had neither the speed nor the necessary ceiling. It seemed highly undesirable to aggravate a strained situation by sending over an aeroplane which would in all probability have been intercepted and definitely identified as British. I asked General MacArthur to carry out a photographic reconnaissance from Manila with one of his Boeing Fortresses, which had the necessary speed and ceiling, but he replied that orders from Washington prevented him from carrying out my request.

96. Near the opposite end of the prospective theatre of operations, the island of Timor was important as being a definite link in the air communications between Australia and the Netherlands East Indies. Its occupation by the Japanese would also be a serious threat to Australia. The importance of Timor was noted in the A.D.A. agreement, and it was referred to in A.D.B. Roughly half the island was Dutch territory and half Portuguese; it was the latter half which gave no small anxiety. The Japanese had a consulate in Dilli, the capital of Portuguese Timor, and by November, 1941, had received permission to run a regular flying-boat service to Dilli, and were gradually getting an economic hold on Portuguese Timor. In November, 1941, a small nucleus of Australian troops was sent to Koepang in Dutch Timor, where there was an aerodrome and a flying-boat base. On the 12th December one infantry battalion, one independent company and a few coast defence troops reached Koepang from Australia. A combined Australian and Dutch force occupied Dilli in the middle of December, 1941. About the 7th December, in accordance with the A.D.A. and A.D.B. agreements, two flights of Hudsons of the Royal Australian Air Force moved to Ambon in the Netherlands East Indies. These were followed later by an infantry battalion.

#### *Order of the Day.*

97. The Commander-in-Chief, China, and I had agreed as far back as May, 1941, that it was desirable to prepare an Order of the Day before the war broke out, so that it could reach Burma and Hong Kong in time to be translated into the different languages spoken by the troops in the Far East and be ready for issue on the first day of war. Drafting this Order presented difficulty because it had to appeal to men of varying races and religions, *e.g.*, British sailors and Burmese troops. The main object that I had in view when preparing it was to make an effective appeal to the Indian



troops, as I considered it would be necessary to stimulate them rather than the British. Through information that has reached me subsequent to the outbreak of war I believe it had the effect it was meant to. The order is given in Appendix M.

#### *Approach of the First Enemy Expedition.*

98. About 1400 hours on the 6th December I received information that an air reconnaissance had sighted two Japanese convoys escorted by warships about 80 miles East-South-East of Pulo Obi, an island off the Southern point of Indo-China, steaming West. One convoy consisted of 22 10,000-ton merchant vessels escorted by one battleship, probably the *Kongoo*, five cruisers and seven destroyers; the other of 21 merchant ships escorted by two cruisers and ten destroyers. Further West, one Japanese cruiser and three 10,000-ton merchant ships had been sighted steering North-West. I consulted with Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton and Admiral Palliser, Sir Tom Phillips' Chief of Staff, and we concluded that the probability was that the convoy would not continue its course due West, which would have brought it on to the Kra Isthmus, but that it would follow the first four vessels and round Cambodia Point. It was pointed out that there was a good anchorage on the West Coast of Indo-China at Koh Tron, which they might be making for as the next step towards Siam.

Bearing in mind the policy of avoiding war with Japan if possible—a policy which had been reaffirmed by the Chiefs of Staff as recently as the 29th November—and the situation in the United States with the Kurusu talks still going on in Washington, I decided that I would not be justified in ordering "Matador" on this information, but orders were issued to bring all forces to the first, i.e., the highest, degree of readiness. I also impressed upon the Air Officer Commanding the urgent necessity for maintaining contact with the convoy, a point which he had already realised.

The location of these forces by Hudsons of No. 1 Royal Australian Air Force Squadron, based on Kota Bharu, was a particularly good piece of work in view of their being at the limit of their patrolling range, over 300 miles from the Malayan Coast. This same factor of distance, however, made it impossible for them to remain in contact until relieved, but a Catalina Flying-boat was despatched to shadow the convoy during the night. The Air Officer Commanding also ordered a reconnaissance by Hudsons starting early on the 7th December, fanning out from Kota Bharu on to the last known bearings of the convoy. No signal was received from the Catalina, and, from information received later, it is almost certain it was shot down. A second Catalina failed to make contact with the convoy. On the morning of the 7th December, visibility East and North-East from Kota Bharu was good. The reconnaissance found no ships in the area between Kota Bharu and the Southern end of Indo-China, thus confirming the supposition that the convoy had rounded Cambodia Point, and had followed the four leading ships North-North-West into the Gulf of Siam. In this Gulf the visibility was very bad and no positive information was received from this area until the evening, when a report was received that a Hudson had seen, through low clouds, three

small Japanese ships which were then passing Singora and heading south. This information reached me about 2100 hours. I met General Percival and we proceeded together to the Naval Base; I decided not to order "Matador"; the main reason being that at least 24 hours start was required before the anticipated time of a Japanese landing and this was most unlikely to be available, should the 3 ships seen turn out to be part of a Japanese expedition. Further, the conditions for reconnaissance were bad, on the information then available there could be no certainty that the Japanese were about to open hostilities, and on more than one occasion the British Minister to Thailand had stressed the serious consequences that would ensue should we be the first to break Thai neutrality. (See also paragraph 51 above.)

It is pertinent to record that, until the Japanese had committed some definite act of hostility against the United States, the Dutch or ourselves, permission had not been given to attack a Japanese expedition at sea.

#### XI.—THE START OF HOSTILITIES.

##### *The Opening Day.*

99. Clear evidence that the Japanese had, in fact, taken the plunge into hostilities was soon forthcoming when, at 0130 hours on Monday, the 8th December, the Japanese started to land from about ten ships at Kota Bharu. I received this news at about 0200 hours in my office at the Naval Base, Singapore, and the necessary steps were at once taken to put everything on a war footing, including the internment of Japanese. Later on, reports were received that the Japanese were landing large forces at Singora and Patani in the Southern part of the Kra Isthmus.

At 0300 hours on the 8th December Singapore was attacked by Japanese bombers, which, in all probability, came from Southern Indo-China. In one case, at any rate, they came over in a formation of nine at a height of between 12,000 and 14,000 feet, without dropping any bombs, apparently with the object of drawing the searchlights and A.A. guns away from a few other aircraft which, flying at 4,000 to 5,000 feet, attacked objectives on Singapore Island, mainly aerodromes, with practically no results. An attack was also made on the Eastern part of Singapore Harbour, possibly in mistake for the aerodrome at Kallang; this attack caused a number of casualties, killing about sixty, mostly Chinese.

The observation system worked satisfactorily, and thirty minutes' warning of the approach of Japanese aircraft was received at my headquarters. For some reason that I never ascertained, the Headquarters of the A.R.P. organisation had not been manned, and it was only a few minutes before bombs were dropping on Singapore that contact was made by Fighter Group Headquarters and the sirens sounded giving the warning for black-out. In my opinion, the absence of black-out had but little effect, since there was a bright full moon, and the coastline and most of Singapore must have shown up very clearly.

Apart from this failure in Civil A.R.P., there was no tactical surprise, since as has been stated above, the troops were all in readiness, and the black-out was carried out at all Naval, Army and Air Force establishments.

100. In the morning of the 8th December the weather was clear over the land and close to the coast, but out to sea there were clouds down to 500 feet. No. 1 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force, at Kota Bharu, aided by the Vildebeestes of Nos. 36 and 100 Squadrons, carried out a vigorous offensive against the Japanese vessels and landing craft. Reports showed that these attacks had a considerable measure of success, many landing craft in the Kota Bharu River being sunk, and a ship reported to have contained tanks being sent to the bottom.

No. 62 Squadron from Alor Star also went out to attack the same target, but, owing probably to being ordered too far from the coast, failed to locate the enemy ships near Kota Bharu and proceeded to the neighbourhood of Patani on the Kra Isthmus. Here it was met by a greatly superior force of Japanese Zero fighters, and though Japanese ships were located there and bombs dropped on them, the attack was probably ineffective.

On the Western side in Kedah reconnaissance forces of the 11th Division crossed the Siam frontier in the afternoon of the 8th December and made contact with the enemy, who were already employing 10 A.F.Vs. After inflicting casualties, our forces withdrew in the afternoon, demolishing bridges on their way to the frontier. Further South a force known as Krohcol also crossed the frontier beyond Kroh in order to take up a position on the Siamese side of the border as originally planned. Both these forces met with some opposition from the Siamese.

Meanwhile, in spite of resistance on the beaches and further back, the enemy had made progress at Kota Bharu, until by 1600 hours the aerodrome was so threatened by Japanese troops that our aircraft had to leave and fly to Kuantan.

101. A feature of the opening day of hostilities was the enemy air attack upon our Northern aerodromes. Gong Kedah, Machang, Penang, Butterworth, Alor Star and Sungei Patani aerodromes were all attacked, the total scale of enemy effort for the day being estimated at some 150 aircraft, of which probably 65 per cent. were fighters. Of these attacks, the most damaging were against Alor Star and Sungei Patani, several aircraft on the ground being rendered unserviceable in both cases and most buildings at Sungei Patani destroyed. Both aerodromes were henceforth unable to operate and had to be vacated.

The attack on Alor Star was made by a formation of 27 twin-engine bombers of the Army type 97, and started about twenty minutes after the return of No. 62 Squadron from their attack at Patani and whilst the aircraft were refuelling. The Japanese attacked from a height of about 13,000 feet and used pattern bombing, the bombs being partly high-explosive, mostly about 150 lb., and partly incendiary. The attack was very effective; some ten of our Blenheims were put out of action, four being completely written off. The fuel dump and some buildings were set on fire, and, as the water supply was put out of action, the fires were not extinguished till dusk. Casualties were small, only seven men being killed. Alor Star was defended by four 3-inch 20-cwt. guns, but they failed to bring down any Japanese aircraft, possibly owing to the height at which they were flying.

9th-11th December.

102. Broadly speaking, assaults on our aerodromes, coupled with fresh landings in Siamese territory, continued to be the main feature of the Japanese operations for the first two days of the war. The enemy was greatly helped in them by the prompt use to which he put Siamese aerodromes, our reconnaissances on the 9th and 10th December revealing concentrations of some sixty aircraft at Singora and eighty to a hundred aircraft at Don Muang, Bangkok. On the 9th December eleven Blenheims attacked Singora aerodrome, but they were met by a greatly superior force of enemy fighters and five of our aircraft were brought down; the results of our bombing were not observed. Aircraft of No. 62 Squadron, which had moved back to Butterworth at dawn on the 9th December, were also ordered to attack Singora, starting at 1700 hours the same day. Butterworth was attacked by Japanese aircraft just as ours were about to take off, and, although Buffaloes were up, considerable damage was caused, with the result that only one Blenheim left. The pilot, Flight-Lieutenant Scarf, reached and attacked Singora, but was badly wounded; he flew his aeroplane back, landed at Alor Star and died a few minutes later.

On the 9th December our aircraft were forced to vacate Kuantan owing to enemy bombing, though it was still used for refuelling. Already by this date it was clear that the success of the enemy's attack on our Northern aerodromes would considerably handicap our own air action, and that this in turn would unfavourably prejudice our fortunes in the fighting on land. Interference with Singora landings was made difficult, once our Northern aerodromes had succumbed, by our lack of bombers of adequate range. In a telegram to London from General Headquarters a warning was given that it was unlikely we should find it practicable to maintain the existing air effort for more than two or three weeks.

Dutch air reinforcements arrived in Singapore Island on the 9th; they consisted of three squadrons of Glenn Martin bombers, total 22 aircraft, and one squadron of nine Buffalo fighters. It was found necessary to send eight of the bombers back to the Netherlands East Indies to complete the training of their crews in night flying.

103. The 8th Brigade, defending Kota Bharu, was pressed back on the 9th, demolition being carried out before the aerodrome was evacuated. By the end of the day it was forced back to a line in Kelantan running Peringot-Mulong. The enemy was employing infiltration tactics and working round the flanks of our forces wherever possible. The 8th Brigade had put up a stout resistance round Kota Bharu, and its commander, Brigadier Key, was faced with a difficult problem in deciding when retreat would become necessary. (*See para. 138 below.*) The decision having been made, the Brigade was disengaged skillfully.

Japanese Army reinforcements meanwhile arrived on a considerable scale. A large force, consisting of transports escorted by a battleship, three cruisers and eleven destroyers, was sighted by our aircraft between Kota Bharu and the Penhntain Islands on the 9th December. North of Kuantan the Japanese landed in small numbers at Beserah during the night

9th-10th December. These were driven off, and by 0845 on the 10th December all was quiet there. The general situation in regard to Japanese landings was thus that all successful landings took place North of the Malaya-Siam frontier, except that at Kota Bharu, which, as already stated in para. 12 above, had no road communications to Southern Malaya, and depended for reinforcements from the South on the railway alone.

By the 10th December it was evident that the enemy's primary object was the establishment of air superiority in Northern Malaya, whilst at the same time he was testing our defences on a wide front. It was estimated that the Japanese were now employing about 30 Zero-type fighters from Patani and about 70 aircraft, mainly Zero fighters, from Singora. All but about 50 of the Japanese bombers previously based in Southern Indo-China had presumably been moved to Siam.

A complication of the situation which gave some anxiety at this date was that our efforts might be impeded by lack of support, or even actively hostile measures, among native elements. Native labour tended to disappear for days after bombing, and non-British railway employees, including engine-drivers, deserted temporarily on a large scale; the Army was able to replace the drivers to some extent.

104. By the 11th December the 8th Brigade, in Kelantan, retiring along the road which meets the railway at Kuala Krai, was in a position covering Machang. In Kedah a new threat was opening in the form of enemy infiltration from Siam, especially in the Chaglan area. This advance into Kedah, coupled with the heavy air attacks on Penang, indicated that the Japanese main attack would be down the road communications of Western Malaya. Advanced troops of the 11th Indian Division were in position South of a line Chaglan-Kodiang, while Krohcol sought to hold off the enemy in this more central region. Some of the demolitions that had been prepared in Northern Kedah failed to be effective; this was not due to any failure to act in time, but to some technical fault either in the fuses or explosives. All our serviceable aircraft had now been withdrawn from Northern Malaya. It was estimated that by the 11th December the Japanese were employing in Malaya at least two divisions, supported by 250-300 aircraft.

#### *H.M.S. Prince of Wales and Repulse.*

105. H.M.S. *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* arrived at Singapore on Tuesday, the 2nd December, 1941, Admiral Sir Tom Phillips having arrived by air two days before. He and I had no opportunity for full consultation over the situation before war broke out, partly because he was taking over from Sir Geoffrey Layton as Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, and partly because he visited Manila by air to meet Admiral Hart.

H.M.S. *Repulse* left to pay a visit to Port Darwin on the 5th December, and it was agreed she should proceed for the first 48 hours at comparatively slow speed. She was recalled as soon as the air reconnaissance report of the 6th December was received, and arrived back in Singapore on the 7th December. The naval forces at Singapore on the 7th December are given in Appendix C.

106. Admiral Phillips decided to take action with his two capital ships. So far as my Headquarters was concerned he was put into direct touch with the Air Officer Commanding with regard to the air co-operation required, and asked for three things:—

(a) Reconnaissance 100 miles to north of the force from daylight, Tuesday, the 9th December;

(b) Reconnaissance to Singora and beyond ten miles from the coast starting at first light on the 10th December; and

(c) Fighter protection off Singora at daylight on the 10th December.

The Air Officer Commanding gave tentative replies that he could provide (a), hoped to be able to provide (b), but could not provide (c). It was decided that he should go thoroughly into the problems involved and give definite replies to the Chief of Staff, Eastern Fleet, Rear-Admiral Palliser, who was remaining behind. Air Officer Commanding later confirmed his tentative replies and this information was sent on by signal to Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, in the evening of the 8th December. The doubt about (b) was due to the fact that the reconnaissance would have to be provided by Blenheim IV's based on Kuantan aerodrome, and it was uncertain whether this would be out of action or not. Actually, both the reconnaissances were carried out, though one of the Blenheims doing (b) had wireless troubles.

The reason why (c) could not be provided was mainly that the northern aerodromes were either untenable or else had been badly damaged by bombing; this meant that the fighters would have to operate from aerodromes at considerable distance from Singora, and, owing to the short endurance of the Buffalo, they would have been able to remain only a very short time over that area before having to return to refuel. The Dutch fighter squadron had not arrived by the 8th; it was uncertain whether it would be available by the 10th and thus there was a shortage of fighter aircraft. These factors meant that a short patrol might possibly have been provided at intervals at Singora, but that it was impossible to guarantee continuous fighter protection.

107. The *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*, accompanied by four destroyers, left Singapore in the afternoon of Monday, the 8th December. Early on the 10th December a signal was made to Singapore indicating that the ships would return earlier than originally planned. Except for this, no communication was received and their position remained unknown until, shortly after twelve noon on Wednesday, the 10th December, a signal was received from *Repulse* that she was being bombed in a position about 60 miles East-South-East of Kuantan. On receipt of the message a fighter squadron was at once despatched and reached the position of the ships in commendably quick time, but only to see the *Prince of Wales* go down. No enemy aircraft were spotted. Fighter cover, though only a weak one, was provided for the destroyers that picked up the crews from the sunken ships.

108. I had been asked by Rear-Admiral Palliser to give an indication of the strength of the air force that the Japanese might bring against these two ships from Indo-China, and gave an estimate of between 50 and 60 bombers.

which might be expected to arrive five hours after the ships had been first located by reconnaissance. Whether this information was ever received by the Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, I do not know.

109. The ships were attacked by high-level bombers and torpedo bombers, the latter being by far the more effective. It is possible that the high-level bombers were used with the object of attracting any of our fighters that might have been with the ships away from the torpedo bombers. The Japanese would probably have expected that such fighters would be flying high, and that they would naturally attack high-level bombers in the first instance, thus giving sufficient time for the torpedo bombers to get in their attack before our fighters could get down to them. Admittedly, this is conjecture, but it is on similar lines to the bombing attack carried out on Singapore Island early on the 8th December. It also indicates the value of the dive bomber as a third alternative method of attacking ships, thereby giving greater facilities for surprise.

110. The psychological effect on Malaya of the loss of these two ships was somewhat mitigated by the fact that shortly after they arrived I had summoned a Press conference, and talked to those present on the following lines:—

“The arrival of the two capital ships in no way reduced the need for continuance of every effort being made to improve the defences of Malaya and Singapore; indeed, it enhanced the importance of this effort. Warships must not be tied down to their base; they must be free to operate to the full limit of their range of action and know that they can still return to a safe base when necessary. These ships would be of value to the Far East as a whole, but must not be regarded in any sense as part of the local defences of Malaya and Singapore. Further, in the same way as these ships had arrived from distant stations, so, if the situation changed and they became needed elsewhere, we had to be prepared for them to be ordered away.”

Based on this, the local papers published good leading articles, bringing out the particular points I made. In addition, Mr. Duff Cooper, at my request, gave an excellent broadcast on the evening of 10th December, pointing out that the loss of these ships must not lead to despondency, but merely to a determination to fight all the harder and so avenge their loss.

#### *Japanese Command of the Sea.*

111. From the point of view of the defence of the Far East as a whole, what was more serious was the Japanese attack on the United States Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbour. In appreciations of the situation we had always relied on the deterrent effect of the existence of this Fleet, even if the United States were not in the war from the start. It was expected that this deterrent would prevent the Japanese from allotting more than a limited number of warships for escort duties, which fact would limit the number of convoys sent into the South China Sea, and that it would also stop them from sending an expedition round the East side of the Philippines towards the Netherlands East Indies, especially the Eastern islands.

An indirect result of the Pearl Harbour attack was to prevent the surface ships of the Asiatic Fleet from Manila co-operating with

British and Dutch ships in the Java and South China Seas in accordance with the A.D.B. agreement. This Asiatic Fleet was, by orders from Washington, limited to operations between Sourabaya and Port Darwin.

As a final result, the command of the sea acquired by the Japanese was greater than we had ever anticipated. We were, in fact, fighting under conditions of which the British Empire had very little previous experience.

#### *Penang.*

112. Penang Island was of no small importance for three reasons:—

- (a) Very fair port facilities.
- (b) Stocks of ammunition and stores.
- (c) The point of departure of two Overseas cables.

It was decided that the true defence of Penang was on the mainland and that, should the forces in Kedah be driven south, direct defence of Penang would be of no value. This enabled most of the garrison of Penang to be released to reinforce the mainland. One of the great weaknesses of Penang lay in the fact that there were no A.A. guns, which was entirely due to shortage of weapons. It had been laid down that the Naval Base, Royal Air Force aerodromes, Singapore Harbour and Kuala Lumpur had to have priority above Penang, and there were not enough to go round.

There was no analogy between Penang and Tobruk. Even had the garrison of Penang held out for some weeks, it would have been entirely isolated both by land and by sea, and could not have carried out any attacks against the Japanese line of communications except possibly an odd spasmodic raid. Any troops that might have been utilised for a garrison under these conditions would have been more valuable elsewhere.

113. The first attack on Penang was at 1100 hours on the 8th December, when the aerodrome was bombed by Japanese aircraft, the effect generally being small. At 1000 hours the 11th December, Georgetown was bombed and heavy casualties caused among the native population; these were due not so much to any inadequacy of A.R.P. as to the fact that the native population turned out into the streets to watch the sight, presumably under the impression that another attack was about to be made on the aerodrome. As a result nearly the whole native population left the town and the labour problem became acute. Next day the military authorities had to take over many civil duties, including burial of the dead, and the naval authorities had to work the ferries between the Island and the mainland.

114. In view of the situation in Kedah, it was decided to move women and children, other than Malays and Chinese, from Penang on the 13th December. This was intended to apply to Indians as well as Europeans, but owing to some misunderstanding the Sikh Police were not given the opportunity to send their women and children away, and in the end only the Europeans left, the total numbers being about 520.

At 2030 hours, the 15th December, orders were received by the Military Commander at Penang to destroy all military stores, etc., that could not be moved and to come away with the remainder of the garrison and British civilians. About half a dozen British residents

were left as they did not wish to move. The native Volunteers were given the option of moving, but most of them decided to remain with their families in Penang; the British personnel of the Volunteers were brought away.

The coast artillery denial scheme was carried out and all 6-inch guns destroyed. Approved armament was withdrawn and most first-line transport. Electrical machinery and the oil fuelling system of the Eastern Smelting Company were smashed, the river house, telephone exchange, cable and wireless station and aerodromes destroyed. The Singapore-Colombo and the Singapore-Madras cables were, however, connected by binding screws and left working in the hope that the Japanese might not discover them—a hope that proved vain. A reserve of food was opened for the civil population, which had suffered some 600 killed and 1,100 wounded in air raids during the last week.

The destruction of material was incomplete, the most notable example being certain vessels that were left intact. Efforts were made by the naval authorities to immobilise these by laying mines in the Southern Channel, the Northern already having been mined by the Japanese. Presumably this was not effective for long.

## XII.—THE RETREAT FROM NORTHERN MALAYA.

*12th-18th December.*

115. By the 12th December enemy pressure on the Kedah front was becoming very severe. The Kroh forces were being forced backwards over the frontier, while our right in Northern Kedah was also driven back, necessitating the 6th Indian Infantry Brigade withdrawing on the left to conform and hold a line River Bukit (north of Alor Star) to Penang. Penang was the subject of daily air attacks at this period. Two days of heavy fighting then saw our forces pushed back twenty miles south of Alor Star, the 11th Division taking up a position in the Gurun area. Some of the infantry units in this division reported losses up to 50 per cent., but this included missing, many of whom rejoined later.

The immediate preoccupation on our part at this moment was to co-ordinate the movement of the 11th Division with that of Krohcol. Unless this was done there was serious danger of the Japanese cutting off one of the two forces. Krohcol was now back in Kedah just east of Baling and under the command of the 12th Indian Infantry Brigade, which had been sent up from the south as reinforcements. But on the 16th December the enemy drove in between the Kroh forces and the 11th Division, and counter-attacks by two battalions of the 28th Indian Brigade proved unavailing to restore contact. It was now that the lack of adequate reserves to relieve troops who had been fighting continuously for a week began to be felt. The enemy were pressing home their attacks in spite of heavy losses. Troops from Penang were sent up as reinforcements, while the 6th and 15th Indian Infantry Brigades had been so weakened in the fighting that they were ordered to re-form into one composite Brigade.

The Japanese were now employing Kota Bharu aerodrome, reconnaissance revealing some forty of their fighters on the ground. To attack Kota Bharu, Singora and Patani aerodromes with the object of reducing the scale

of Japanese air effort was part of our general air policy at this period, but our bomber effort was painfully limited by our lack of aircraft. Apart from deficiency of adequate A.A. weapons, the defence of our aerodromes was handicapped by lack of adequate warning in the North. (See para. 54 above.) These formed two causes of our heavy losses of aircraft on the ground. The retention of our main fighter strength for the defence of Singapore (see para. 142 below) was a contributory cause and also reacted directly on our bombing effort, since it was impracticable to provide fighter escorts.

Two Buffaloes had been specially fitted for photographic reconnaissance. To allow of extra petrol being carried, and at the same time to reduce weight, all guns were taken out. Even then the Buffaloes were inferior in performance to the Japanese Zero fighters. The pilots of these specially fitted aircraft carried out useful work under very difficult conditions.

From the start of hostilities the Dutch submarines had been very active. On the 12th December one of them reported sinking four enemy troopships at Patani Roads.

116. The difficulty of combating the Japanese attacks on our aerodromes resulted on the 16th and 17th December in the evacuation and demolition of Butterworth, Taiping and Kuantan aerodromes, and our aircraft were forced further South. Ipoh, too, was now being bombed, and the aerodrome petrol dump was hit.

On land, the enemy, having advanced in Kelantan (as far as the Sungei Nal) and in Kedah, was now also attacking detachments of our troops in Perak round about the Grik area. The 3rd Indian Corps was accordingly authorised to withdraw behind the line of the Perak River to protect the communications of our forces North of Kuala Kangsar. The 11th Indian Division began withdrawing from the line of the River Muda Southwards behind River Krian, linking up with the 28th Indian Infantry Brigade and protected all the time on the right flank by the 12th Indian Infantry Brigade. During this period the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders made counter-attacks with gallantry and skill. This withdrawal was carried out successfully, the enemy being repulsed with loss at his first attempt to cross the river.

### *Inter-Allied Conference, 18th December.*

117. On the 18th December a conference of inter-Allied representatives took place at Singapore, in accordance with proposals made by President Roosevelt. Owing to the time factor, China was not represented. Results of the conference were telegraphed to England. The main conclusions were as follows:—

(a) The importance of Singapore to the war in the Far East, and to the world war, could not be exaggerated;

(b) The immediate plan was to dispose our combined forces then available in the Far East so as to—

(i) Keep the enemy as far North in Malaya as possible and hold him in the Philippines; and

(ii) Prevent the enemy acquiring territory, and particularly aerodromes, which would threaten the arrival of reinforcements;

(c) Our urgent and immediate need was for reinforcements, which must be on a scale not only to meet the present scale of attack, but also that likely to be put in the field against us;

(d) It was recommended that the United States convoy at present directed to Brisbane should proceed to Sourabaya, where aircraft would be assembled and flown on to destination;

(e) It was desirable that the Chinese should be asked to maintain the maximum pressure on the Japanese in order to contain as many divisions as possible, and subsequently to provide bases for long-distance bombing attacks on Japan.

Finally the conference considered that the situation, though serious, need not give rise to undue pessimism provided the necessary reinforcements were supplied in the available time, but time was the essential feature.

#### Reinforcements.

118. From the 8th December, 1941, onwards many requests for reinforcements had been made from General Headquarters, Far East. The time factor meant that reinforcements had to come from the Middle East, India and convoys already at sea rather than from the United Kingdom. Complicated quadrangular references between Malaya, India, the Middle East and London were hence entailed, but Commander-in-Chief, India, was most helpful in appreciating the need for diversion to Malaya of forces originally intended for his own command. A sub-committee of the Inter-Allied Conference, having considered all the previous requests for reinforcements, agreed on the following immediate requirements for Malaya to stabilise the situation:—

#### Air—

4 Fighter Squadrons;  
4 Bomber Squadrons;  
1 Photographic Flight;  
1 Transport Flight; and  
Reserves at 100 per cent. for fighters and 50 per cent. for bombers, plus aircraft to complete existing squadrons and their reserves.

#### Land—

1 Brigade Group;  
1 Division;  
Reinforcements for 9th and 11th Divisions;  
3 Light A.A. Regiments;  
2 Heavy A.A. Regiments;  
1 Anti-Tank Regiment;  
50 Light tanks;  
350 Anti-tank rifles;  
Bofors ammunition; and  
500 Tommy guns and ammunition;  
Further large forces would be required later in view of probable Japanese reinforcements.

By the 27th December the following had been definitely promised:—

#### Air—

51 Hurricanes. (One fighter squadron ex convoy W.S. 12.Z with 18 additional pilots);  
24 Blenheims. (One squadron from Middle East);  
52 Hudsons (from United Kingdom);  
While measures were in hand aiming at the release of a further 3 fighter squadrons from the Middle East, and for 80 4-engined United States bombers.

#### Land—

2 Infantry Brigade Groups }  
Reinforcements for 9th- } ex India.  
11th Divisions }  
85th Anti-Tank }  
Regiment complete }  
6th Heavy A.A. } ex Convoy W.S. 12.Z.  
Regiment (16 guns) }  
32nd Light A.A. }  
Regiment (24 guns) }  
Light tank squadron (17 Light tanks and reserves) ex India;  
53rd Infantry Brigade (18th Division), guns and transport of which were to follow after arrival of personnel;  
1 Machine Gun Battalion and reinforcements for the A.I.F. Brigades ex Australia;  
Provision of further tanks was under discussion, while General Headquarters, Far East, was also pressing strongly for the complete 18th Division.

Five Blenheims from the Middle East and four Hudsons from Australia arrived in Singapore on the 23rd December, 1941.

#### 19th-25th December.

119. In accordance with instructions from London, a scorched earth policy was ordered at this period instead of the denial scheme referred to in para. 65 above.

The general situation on land by the 19th-21st December was that our troops were trying to keep the enemy West of the River Perak, while at the same time preventing him advancing further South than the River Krian. To this end the 11th Indian Division, which it was considered essential to maintain as a fighting formation, was holding a line along the River Kuran with the 28th Indian Infantry Brigade, and also protecting Kuala Kangsar with the 12th Indian Infantry Brigade, a detachment of which was also further North along the Grik road. The Division as a whole was suffering from exhaustion, damaged feet and loss of equipment. The 6th and 15th Indian Infantry Brigades were now re-formed at Ipoh as the composite 15th Infantry Brigade, while a composite battalion of the 2nd/16th and 3rd/16th from these two Brigades was in Corps Reserve. The Kelantan forces, 8th Indian Infantry Brigade, 9th Indian Division, had suffered about a hundred casualties in each battalion, and were now along the railway at Manik Orai. Of elements not thus far engaged in the main operations, the 22nd Indian Infantry Brigade (9th Indian Division) was at Kuantan, while the Australian 22nd and 27th Brigades were responsible for Johore, and the 1st and 2nd Malay Infantry Brigades for Singapore Fortress. None of these last four Brigades could be despatched North to relieve the hard-pressed 11th Indian Division, for the reasons given below. (*See para. 138 below.*)

120. Heavy enemy air attack was now falling on Ipoh aerodrome, and our own fighters were driven further South to Kuala Lumpur (Selangor). Attacks on our road and rail communications were becoming an increasing feature of the Japanese air operations. Reconnaissance revealed that the enemy was now making use of Sungei Patani aerodrome, where thirty fighters were discovered. Our aircraft were making night and dawn attacks on enemy



aerodromes, and were very valuable for reconnaissance; reconnaissances were regularly being made—

- (a) 350 miles N.N.E. of Singapore;
- (b) along the East coast of Malaya;
- (c) over the Rhio Archipelago; and
- (d) to the Miri and Kuching areas—from Sinkawang;

in addition to those over the fighting area.

By the 21st-22nd December Kuala Lumpur was coming in for heavy air attack, though little damage was at first inflicted. Against an attack by Ju. 87's on the 21st December the Buffaloes were more successful, causing the Japanese bombers to break formation in disorder, but to deal with the Zero fighters it was apparent that only the speedy arrival of Hurricane reinforcements, while we still held sufficient air bases, could turn the tide.

The land situation in the next few days (21st-23rd December) witnessed further advances by the enemy in all areas. Pressure along the Grik road was heavy, in spite of severe losses inflicted during a successful clash on the night of the 19th-20th December.

The Japanese floated troops down the Perak River by night, and on the 22nd December the 12th Indian Infantry Brigade was forced back South of Kuala Kangsar. The 28th Indian Infantry Brigade was also pressed in the same direction, small detachments only being left North of Kuala Kangsar and West of the Perak River. Bridges were destroyed as the troops retired. While this was taking place on the Perak front, the Kelantan withdrawal was also continuing, the 8th Indian Infantry Brigade retiring South of Kuala Krai along the railroad. A problem similar to that of Krohcol and the 11th Division referred to above (*see para. 115*) now arose in regard to 8th Indian Infantry Brigade and the main body of III Corps in Perak, and, to a lesser degree, in regard to the force at Kuantan and the 8th Indian Infantry Brigade. It was therefore decided to withdraw this 8th Brigade much further South into Central Malaya, and it took up completely new positions in the Kuala Lipis-Raub area. A small party known as "Macforce" was left with an armoured train at Dabong to withdraw down the railway, demolishing it as they went. The Kuantan force was ordered to prepare to withdraw Westwards at short notice. On the 23rd December all our fighters on the mainland were withdrawn to Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Port Swettenham being kept as advanced landing grounds. The enemy was also occupying various points down the East coast of Malaya, and had proceeded from Kuala Trengganu to Dungun. By the 25th December it would be true to say that something like one-half of Malaya had passed from our control.

121. With the object of maintaining the morale of the civil population of Malaya I held a meeting on the 22nd December, attended by members of the Legislative Council, leading men of the different communities and the Press, the total number being about 120. The main points I stressed were that the available strength had proved inadequate; we had to remember that the aircraft, A.A. guns and tanks that might have come to Malaya were not being wasted, but were being used with great effect in Libya and Russia; that there was every reason for confidence that, now the requirements of the Far East had become press-

ing, those responsible were taking steps to ensure the despatch of adequate reinforcements of men and material; and that it was up to everyone to ensure that no effort was spared to hold up the enemy until the necessary forces arrived.

On the 22nd December, a telegram was sent to Mr. Duff Cooper to the effect that useless mouths were to be evacuated from Singapore without racial discrimination and on a voluntary basis so far as the general population were concerned.

The total number of British women and children evacuated from Malaya from the beginning of the war with Japan to the 31st January, 1942, was as follows:—

7,174 European;  
2,305 Indian; and  
1,250 Chinese.

According to a Japanese report, the number of British women and children left in Singapore at the time of capitulation was about 200.

### XIII.—THE ATTACK ON, AND FALL OF, HONG KONG.

122. On the 8th December, at 0800 hours, hostilities began with the launching of a Japanese air attack on Kowloon. Frontier demolitions were accordingly blown and our troops withdrew according to plan as the Japanese crossed the frontier on a broad front during the course of the morning. It was estimated that the enemy were employing a force of one division, with the possibility of increasing this to two divisions with the troops then in the area.

There was no enemy action from the air or sea during the night of the 8th-9th December, but heavy pressure was exerted against our forward troops along the Taipo Road. During the day of the 9th December these troops were compelled to withdraw within the Gin Drinkers' line in consequence of their left flank being turned. Enemy air attacks during the day, directed mainly against the south coast of the island, did little damage. Leaflets, too, were dropped. The day closed unfortunately, since the Shing Mun Redoubt, held by The Royal Scots, was suddenly captured at 2300 hours—an unexpected blow in view of the difficulty of approach over such country at night. It was considered that local fifth columnists must have guided the Japanese in this attack. One company of Winnipeg Grenadiers was now despatched to reinforce the Kowloon Brigade.

It was soon found necessary, in view of enemy pressure, to readjust the line south-west of the Jubilee Reservoir, where the enemy was making progress, and to vacate Kai Tak aerodrome, after the two remaining aircraft had been demolished. During the morning of the 11th December, however, after the two left Companies (Royal Scots) at Kowloon had been driven in, and reserves (including Winnipeg Grenadiers) had failed to effect more than a temporary halt, it was decided to withdraw from the mainland, with the exception of Devil's Peak. This withdrawal was successfully carried out, beginning at dusk on the 11th, and included howitzers, mechanical transport and armoured cars. Some interference by Kowloon Chinese fifth columnists was experienced. Stonecutter's Island, which had been heavily bombarded and had suffered damage to the military barracks, was also evacuated during the night of the 11th-12th. Hong Kong Island itself was now also the

subject of bombardment, both from the air and by artillery, the main target being the naval dockyard.

123. During the night the 12th-13th December, troops were withdrawn from Devil's Peak, our last post on the mainland. Coast defence guns were now used landwards for counter-battery work against the Japanese. It was noted that the evacuation of Kowloon had considerably disturbed the morale of the Hong Kong civil population, and defeatist elements came to the fore. It became necessary to organise rice distribution. The Japanese Commander-in-Chief demanded the surrender of Hong Kong, which was refused.

During the 14th December the Japanese shelling of the island increased in severity, and several of our gunposts were hit, as a result of which some Chinese gunners deserted. The enemy was now enjoying the use of Devil's Peak as an observation post. On the same day Aberdeen was bombed from high-level, and the generating station was hit, though not put out of action. Considerable trouble was still being experienced with the civil population, the police were unable to prevent robbery by armed gangs in the A.R.P. tunnels, and rice distribution was a difficulty. Propaganda was accordingly circulated about the proximity of a Chinese advance to relieve Hong Kong; the Chungking Government's representative was most helpful in maintaining order.

During the night of the 14th-15th December, the Japanese continued their systematic shelling, and gathered together a collection of small craft in Kowloon Bay. The Thracian entered the Bay and sank two river steamers, while a special agent succeeded in blowing up a third ship. The Thracian, however, in view of damage, had to be beached and dismantled the following day.

On the 16th December, Aberdeen was heavily bombed, eight times in all, with resulting loss of one Motor Torpedo Boat and damage to the dock. Most of our Auxiliary Patrolling Vessels were now useless in view of desertion by Chinese crews. The enemy landed parties on Lamma Island, and started concentrations of troops on the mainland at Customs Pass and Waterloo Road, but these were dispersed by our artillery. During the night of the 16th-17th mortar fire damaged some of our machine guns along the water-front.

On the 17th December, Hong Kong Island was twice raided by fourteen Army light bombers, coinciding with heavy bombardment by artillery. After this raid the Japanese again came across with proposals of surrender, which were rejected.

124. The night of the 17th-18th was very quiet, but on the 18th decisive events took place. The North face of the Island was subjected to continuous artillery, mortar and dive-bombing attack, some of our infantry defence posts being struck three or four times. Hospitals were badly hit and much damage was done to water mains, roads, cables and signal communications, also rice stores. Stanley and Murray Barracks were bombed in two raids by nine and six bombers, roughly 100 bombs being dropped—the largest number to that date. Much of the transport of the 2nd Battalion Royal Scots was destroyed, and C Battery Plotting Room O was demolished by a direct hit. The civil Government centre

was also dive-bombed. It was following this intense activity that, after dusk, the Japanese effected landings at Quarry Bay and at Lyemun in the north-eastern corner of the island.

The following day the Japanese infiltrated over the hill to the Wong Nei Cheong and Tytam Gaps with pack artillery and mortars. Our artillery from the Collinson and D'Aguilar areas (east and south-east of the Island) were successfully withdrawn to Stanley (south of the Island), but were compelled to destroy their heavy guns and equipment. Our line ran now from Stanley Mound northwards, Stanley Mound itself being held by one battalion of Canadians, two companies of Indian infantry and some miscellaneous artillery and machine guns.

During the afternoon of the 19th a counter-attack was attempted, with the help of motor torpedo boats, to regain possession of Mount Parker and Mount Butler, but broke down through heavy enemy shelling, failure of inter-communications and the exhaustion of our troops. Our motor torpedo boats were successful in destroying landing craft in Kowloon Bay, but two were lost in the operations.

125. On the 20th our line was still roughly North from Stanley Mound. A communiqué was again issued to inspire civilian morale with belief in near relief by Chinese forces. By the 21st the enemy was attacking strongly across Mount Nicholson through Middle Gap, and our troops were suffering greatly from exhaustion, the wet and cold of the night-time, and isolation from food and ammunition stores. Counter-attacks on the enemy rear by the Royal Rifles of Canada came to naught, and Winnipeg Grenadiers were also unsuccessful in an effort to retake Wong Nei Cheong Gap. The enemy still paid attention from the air to the Dockyard area, and practically all Naval personnel were now ashore and took their place in the land fighting. Japanese naval forces blockading the Island consisted of two cruisers, two destroyers and two torpedo boats.

It was during the 21st that the "Resist to the end" message from the Prime Minister was received, followed by instructions from the Admiralty to wreck all oil installations and storages.

The 22nd December witnessed a fresh enemy landing on the north-east coast of the Island. Part of our force was now cut off in Stanley, while various remnants were still holding out in isolated positions. The Japanese were now virtually surrounding Victoria, where a great deal of damage had been inflicted by bombing and shelling. Oil installations were destroyed, but it was found impossible to do so at Lai Chi Kok, since a large hospital would have been endangered. A telegram was received from the Admiralty giving the full text of Mr. Churchill's message, but also leaving to the Governor the discretion of surrender when resistance could no longer be usefully continued.

126. By the 23rd December the principal reservoirs were in the hands of the enemy, and the connections of those that remained under our control were damaged through shell-fire. Great efforts were made to effect repairs, but, in the absence of any substantial success in this direction, only one day's supply of water remained to the beleaguered city. Food stores, too, were greatly depleted. Our troops had become more or less exhausted, though Royal Marines managed to recapture ground on Mount

Cameron (protecting the South of Victoria), which had been heavily bombarded by the Japanese, and the Middlesex Regiment beat off an attack on Leighton Hill. The enemy, however, penetrated through the A.R.P. tunnels and street fighting began at Wanchai. The conduct of the civil population, which had thus far suffered some 4,000 casualties (1,000 killed), was, however, good and had become increasingly so since the first depression after the evacuation of the mainland.

On the same day the forces isolated in the South of the Island made an effort to counter-attack towards Stanley Mound, but to no avail.

On the 24th December the Royal Scots, following heavy enemy attacks, were driven off the top of Mount Cameron, and Leighton Hill was captured after bombardment. The position in the South of the Island was unchanged.

On the 25th December, in the early hours of the morning, street fighting took place as the enemy fought his way towards the centre of the town, but another Japanese demand for surrender was refused. Two hours later, however, the Governor was advised by the Military and Naval commanders that further effective resistance could not be made, and, after carrying out a series of demolitions, our forces were ordered to lay down their arms. The Chinese kept their word and had endeavoured to assist the defence of Hong Kong by advancing on Canton, but their force was not strong enough to produce any serious effect on the Japanese.

#### XIV.—OPERATIONS IN BURMA AND SARAWAK. *Burma.*

127. A fresh field of operations opened in Burma on the 9th December, when a landing was reported at Prachuabkhirikun, a clear threat to Mergui and the Tenasserim Peninsula.

On the 11th December, Tavoy was bombed. A further enemy landing at Chumporn (Siam) gave access to the southernmost tip of Burma, and an advance on Victoria Point threatened. In the next two or three days the Japanese advance materialised and coincided with raids on Mergui by about fifty aircraft, propaganda leaflets being dropped as well as bombs. An effort was made to cut off the Japanese advance southwards by crossing the Siam frontier to demolish the railway a few miles south of Prachuabkhirikun, but the strength of the opposition and the heavy rains proved too great for the success of this expedition. The situation was still in an undeveloped stage, but with a clear threat to Southern Burma, when on the 15th December Burma reverted to the province of the Commander-in-Chief, India. (*See para. 29 above.*)

#### *Sarawak.*

128. The general problem of the defence of Borneo was indicated in para. 16 above. The oil denial scheme was put into operation at the outbreak of war and completed by the 11th December. The landing ground at Miri was also demolished and the forces at Lutong evacuated by sea to Kuching in H.M.S. *Lipis*.

The Company of 2/15 Punjab Regiment rejoined the rest of its Battalion, which formed the regular garrison of Kuching and the remaining individuals—from the 2nd Loyals and S.S. Police—were brought on to Singapore.

Considerable anxiety and uneasiness was felt by the authorities in Kuching owing to the absence of Naval and Air Forces. It was pointed

out to them, however, that many places in England had stood up to bombing without any direct defence, and that they would be expected to do the same. It was evident, however, that the morale of the population of Kuching was in a bad way. This, in my opinion, was partly due to the fact that the ruler, Rajah Brooke, was absent—actually in Australia. He had a great deal of influence with the natives, and in view of the situation he should have returned to his country immediately on the outbreak of war, if not before. As it was, the Sarawak Rangers proved quite unreliable, and the 2/15 Punjab Regiment were left to carry out the defence by themselves.

The complete control of the South China Sea exercised by the Japanese reduced the problem of the capture of Kuching to a mere calculation of the strength necessary to overcome the resistance that they would probably meet. They appear to have attacked it with the equivalent of one Brigade Group.

129. Japanese naval forces were not long in appearing in strength before Miri. By the 16th December, some ten warships had been sighted in company with a tanker off Miri and Lutong, and these ships became the object of our attacks. On the 17th December, 6 Glenn Martins and 5 Buffaloes of the Netherlands East Indies Air Force delivered an attack from Sinkawang, but scored neither hits nor near misses. The same day, Dutch bombers from Samiukwa located and attacked this force, a Dutch navy Dornier scoring a direct hit on a destroyer. Encounters between Dutch Buffaloes and the Navy Zero fighters revealed the clear superiority of the Japanese aircraft. Reports of a Japanese landing at Lutong and Baram Point were received, and on the 18th December renewed attacks on enemy shipping in this area were made, without success, by a mixed force. Eight Glenn Martins from Sinkawang had to return without delivering their attack owing to the bad weather. The following day 6 Netherlands East Indies Glen Martins claimed a hit on a cruiser and some near misses. The 19th December, however, was also marked by Japanese air attacks, Kuching aerodrome and town being bombed by about 15 heavy bombers and one seaplane. Civilians suffered approximately 100 casualties, while the main material damage was the destruction of the Borneo Company Benzine Stores. The air war was also carried to Dutch Territory by a heavy attack on Pontianak, much of the city being destroyed.

An expedition clearly aimed at Kuching was then sighted on the 23rd December, and 5 Blenheim IVs, attacking this on the 24th December, scored one hit on a transport and some near misses. Air support from Sinkawang was no longer possible in view of the damage to the aerodrome from a Japanese attack, and the Dutch aircraft were withdrawn to Palembang.

The 2/15 Punjab Regiment carried out demolitions on the aerodromes, held up the Japanese for a time, and eventually moved in accordance with orders, along a jungle path, to join up with the Dutch, though this necessitated abandoning practically the whole of their equipment.

It was noteworthy that Malay labour at Kuching disappeared as the course of operations approached the area.

According to later reports, some 800 of the 2/15 Punjab Regiment joined the Dutch and

were still fighting with them at the end of January, 1942.

#### XV.—SPECIAL FEATURES OF THE OPERATIONS.

##### *Changes in Commands.*

130. A large number of changes took place shortly before or shortly after the war with Japan started. These were as follows:—

(a) Admiral Sir Tom Phillips replaced Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton on the 6th December.

(b) On the 10th December, after Sir Tom Phillips had gone down with the *Prince of Wales*, Sir Geoffrey Layton—who was then actually on board his ship about to start for Australia on his way home—resumed command.

(c) On the 6th November I was informed that “owing to recent developments in the Far East, it had been decided that the duties of Commander-in-Chief should be entrusted to an Army officer with up-to-date experience.” My successor was to be Lieutenant-General Paget. This prospective change became generally known in the Army and Air Force in Malaya by the end of November.

(d) On the 20th November a signal was received from Whitehall to the effect that General Pownall had been substituted for General Paget.

(e) On the 15th December the responsibility of the defence of Burma was transferred from the Commander-in-Chief, Far East, to Commander-in-Chief, India.

(f) On the 29th December General McLeod was replaced by General Hutton as General Officer Commanding, Burma.

(g) On the 10th December Mr. Duff Cooper was appointed as Cabinet representative in the Far East, and instructions were received by him that a War Council was to be formed under his leadership.

These changes may have been inevitable, and it could not, of course, have been foreseen that they would coincide so closely with the start of the war, but they did add to the difficulties of the situation.

##### *War Council.*

131. The composition of the War Council, the formation of which was started on the 10th December, was as follows:—

Mr. Duff Cooper, *Chairman*;  
H.E. the Governor of Malaya;  
C.-in-C., Far East;  
C.-in-C., Eastern Fleet;  
G.O.C. Malaya;  
A.O.C., Far East;

and later, Sir George Sansom, as being responsible for Propaganda and Press control.

The War Council did useful work in several directions, but as it was not formed until after the war began there had been no time to work out its correct functions. Actually, the composition led to its dealing rather too much with the details of what was happening in Malaya, whilst it would have been more useful if it had concentrated on the wider problems.

On the 16th December a Civil Defence Committee was set up to review and deal with all measures affecting the defence of Singapore other than those of a purely military character. Its composition was:—

Mr. Duff Cooper, *Chairman*;  
Fortress Commander;  
Inspector-General of Police; and  
One civilian.

##### *Intelligence.*

132. Turning to intelligence, perhaps the most serious error was one involving the broadest aspect, namely, the intention of the Japanese Government. From the tactical point of view in Malaya there was no surprise, but from the wider point of view there was. Whilst in General Headquarters we always realised the possibility of the extreme military party in Japan forcing their country into war, we did not believe, till the end of November, that Japan might be actually on the verge of starting war. (See paras. 61 and 94 above.)

As indicated in paragraph 75 above, there was also some error regarding the intentions of the Siamese Government.

133. As regards the more local intelligence, the forces that the Japanese would have at the beginning for an attack on Malaya were estimated with a fair degree of accuracy, but there was an under-estimate of the power of the Japanese to attack several places simultaneously. Before the war it was considered that the Japanese might attack in force either the Philippines (with or without Hong Kong), or Malaya or the Netherlands East Indies. It was not anticipated that they would attack in force both the Philippines and Malaya simultaneously; still less that they would also attack Pearl Harbour. So far as I could gather from telegrams, this opinion was also held in England, at any rate up to the last few days before war started, though I believe the Embassy in Tokio held a more correct view of the Japanese power to attack several places simultaneously.

134. There was also an under-estimate of the efficiency of the Japanese Army and Air Force, particularly in the following points:—

(a) Their disregard of weather conditions, especially their ability to land on beaches in bad weather. Also they appear to have been but little hampered by the flooded state of the country in the Southern end of the Kra Isthmus;

(b) Their mobility. This was due to several causes. The Japanese Army seemed generally to depend less on mechanism than ours and to be content with a smaller proportion of artillery. The men needed only simple food and were able to live largely on the country and apparently required nothing in the way of comforts. In some cases they used lighter weapons including a mortar that was lighter than our 2-inch mortar. As a result the Japanese Army was able to operate with less mechanical transport than ours and so was less dependent upon roads. The whole organisation could be kept less complicated than ours and more flexible;

(c) The individual initiative of the Japanese soldier;

(d) The performance of the naval single-seater fighter known as the Zero type. This had a detachable petrol tank under the fuselage and the Japanese got much value from the long range thus given to it. In spite of this complication, its speed and manoeuvrability at heights of 10,000 feet and over were remarkably good; and

(e) The rapidity with which repairs were carried out, in particular of bridges and aerodromes. This last affected the strength of the Japanese air force in the Singora area at the South end of the Kra Isthmus in the early days of the war.

These under-estimates were not attributable solely to errors on the part of F.E.C.B., but also to those of other bodies, including my own General Headquarters.

### *Japanese Army Tactics and Training.*

135. With regard to tactics, in general the Japanese endeavoured to infiltrate or outflank. They made use of certain novelties such as:—

(a) A type of light infantry screen acting in advance of their main body. The men were very lightly clad, had but little equipment and were armed with a light automatic weapon, the calibre of which was something under 0.3; they carried only about forty rounds of ammunition and a few hand grenades. These light infantry parties used to work individually, would get round to the rear of our advance troops, and resorted to such expedients as climbing trees from which to fire their automatic or throw hand grenades. Our men frequently mistook these light troops for Malays or Chinese, but it is doubtful if the Japanese soldiers were deliberately disguised as Malayan natives;

(b) The use of noise, including Chinese crackers and strange cries at night; these tricks, though laughable when one knew about them, had a certain amount of moral effect, especially on young Indian troops at the commencement of the campaign; and

(c) Inflatable rubber belts to enable men to cross creeks and small rivers.

To combat these tactics the General Officer Commanding, Malaya, stressed the importance of discipline and steadiness, the necessity for alertness and cunning on the part of the individual, and that the way to defeat the enemy was to attack or counter-attack him on every possible occasion. "Essentially war of movement and attack, and too much digging creates defence complex."

136. An anti-white campaign had started in Japan in 1936, and it was evident that for long before the commencement of the war the spirit of hatred of Europeans, particularly the British, had constantly been inculcated into the Japanese soldiers. They appear to have been taught that the killing of Europeans by any method was a patriotic action.

It is possible that had we adopted the same course some men might have fought harder at the start, but it is difficult to inculcate the spirit of hatred into the Englishman. This is partly due to his peculiar faculty of seeing a jest in the most depressing circumstances, and partly to the fact that hatred is ultimately based on fear, which is not a natural characteristic of our race.

### *Factors affecting Morale of our Forces.*

137. The majority of the Indian regiments laboured under some disability on account of the inexperience of most of their British officers. As a rule, there would be two or three senior officers, with fifteen or more years' experience, then a gap until we came to officers who had joined after September, 1939. Somewhere about half these officers had experience in India and could talk the language, but having only from one to two and a half years' service they did not carry the weight which more experienced officers would have done.

In both British and Indian units there was only a small leaven of war-experienced officers

and men, and it was under these conditions that young soldiers had to meet the first shock of the Japanese attack.

138. A factor which had some effect on morale generally was that, strategically, we were on the defensive; everyone knew that it was to our interests to avoid war with Japan, which meant that the initiative and especially choice of moment for opening hostilities rested with them.

As stated above, the Matador plan provided for a tactical offensive, provided adequate warning could be obtained. As events turned out, the execution of Matador was impracticable, and later events confirmed that the decision not to carry out this operation was correct.

Then, owing to the comparative weakness of our forces in Malaya we could neither afford heavy losses up North nor send up there more than limited reinforcements, because of the necessity for retaining a force to defend Southern Johore and in the last resort the island of Singapore itself. This was not the result of a sort of fortress-complex, but because the essential factor was preservation of the repair and other facilities in the Naval Base. The opinion held in London on this point was made perfectly clear in the latter part of December when the Chiefs of Staff telegraphed: "His Majesty's Government agree your conception that vital issue is to ensure security of Singapore Naval Base. They emphasise that no other consideration must compete with this."

Holding Northern Malaya was not an end in itself; it was with reference to the Naval Base that Northern Malaya acquired its importance. This meant that Commanders in the North had to bear in mind the possibility of withdrawal in the face of superior forces, their action—at any rate until Johore was reached—being mainly a delaying one to gain time for the arrival of reinforcements from overseas. This applied particularly to the Kelantan area, and to a lesser extent, to Kuantan, since in both cases (as stated in para. 12 above) the line of communication was a single one and vulnerable to air bombing.

139. It is easy to talk of the lack of an offensive spirit and of a "retreat complex," but under the conditions described above withdrawals from the North were necessary; and the adverse effect induced by having to carry out a continuous retreat over some hundreds of miles starting from the early days of the campaign must be attributed to the general situation rather than to any fault in the original morale of the troops themselves.

It is possible however, that the need for offensive action even during a retreat had not been so stressed during the training of officers and men as to become a second nature. For instance, there appeared to be a tendency to use reserves for supporting a weak portion of a defensive position rather than retaining them at all costs for bringing about a counter-attack. Again, up to the time I handed over command, there was a tendency to use the Independent Company in Malaya as a reinforcement and not to carry out the functions for which it was specially intended. Further, officers and men must be taught that occasions will arise when some parties have got to hold on to the last man, even though the main body of the force may be moving back.

*Royal Air Force problems.*

140. With regard to the Air Force, reference has already been made in paras. 79 and 88 above to the obsolescence of our Vildebeeste aircraft and to the effect of lack of reserves. Apart from this, the necessity for rapid evacuation of the Northern aerodromes had some effect on the ground personnel, many of whom were young and inexperienced. There were insufficient rifles or Thompson guns to equip all Air Force personnel, but they must be prepared to fight, and, if necessary, sacrifice themselves in the same way as the infantry; and further, must spare no effort to ensure that all material than can possibly be moved is despatched, or in the last resort destroyed, to prevent its being of value to the enemy.

141. The Royal Air Force suffered from lack of staff. It was not so much that more officers were required at headquarters as that sufficient should have been available to form another Group Headquarters. A Fighter Headquarters had been formed and operated well, but the rest of the operations had to be carried out direct by Royal Air Force Headquarters, with the result that practically all the headquarters air staff officers had to be employed in the operations room, and, including the Air Officer Commanding, were fully occupied in working out details of bombing and reconnaissance, leaving no one to plan and think ahead. This condition would have been improved had it been possible to form another group to operate the bombing squadrons, or, possibly, naval co-operation and overseas reconnaissance as well as all bombing.

142. As aerodromes in Northern Malaya became untenable there was a danger of those in the South becoming too few to allow of adequate dispersal of the Royal Air Force Squadrons. The possibility of this had also been foreseen some months before war broke out and it had been decided in such an eventuality to move the bombing squadrons to Dutch aerodromes in Sumatra, retaining most of the fighter squadrons on Singapore Island. Up to the time that war broke out this remained little more than a project owing to the Royal Air Force staff being fully occupied with other work. At the end of December, however, the plans were well advanced, not only for the move of these squadrons but also for the possible establishment of an erecting depot in Java.

143. The need for preserving an adequate force for the protection of the Naval Base (see para. 138 above) applied especially to the Royal Air Force. This accounts for the comparative weakness of the fighter strength in Northern Malaya at the start of the war and for fighter escorts not being available for our bombers. From the last week in December air protection for reinforcement convoys absorbed most of our fighter strength.

*Defence and Denial of Aerodromes.*

144. As indicated in para. 103 above, the primary object of the Japanese appears to have been to get command of the air, principally by the attack on our aerodromes by aircraft, or by their capture. The weakness of our aerodrome defence is referred to in para. 115 above. In regard to A.A. weapons, as a result of the experiences in Crete, I laid down that the defence of aerodromes was to take precedence

over everything else except the A.A. defence of the Naval Base. It was decided that the full scale of the defence would be eight heavy and eight light A.A. guns; this was altered after war broke out to four heavy and twelve light, a scale that was hardly every approached.

145. When our aerodromes had to be abandoned, steps were naturally taken to render them useless to the enemy, particularly by explosives in runways and other parts of the landing area. The effect of this action was generally of disappointingly short duration. The Japanese were certainly quick in carrying out repairs, but, even allowing for that, the results of many of the demolitions as carried out seem hardly to have repaid the energy expended and the adverse moral effect on troops of hearing explosions behind them. A system of delay-action mines would probably have been effective provided they could have been properly concealed; preparations would have been necessary for this at the time the aerodromes were constructed. A heavy tractor drawing some form of deep plough or scarifier and working in between craters would have been a very useful addition; it could not have gone on working to the last moment, unless it was intended to abandon the tractor, since these could only move very slowly and were likely to block roads if left to the last.

At aerodromes located in wet or low-lying areas, mines should be located with reference to the drainage system with the object of dislocating it and so putting the aerodrome out of action for a long period. Aerodromes in our possession were occasionally rendered unserviceable for about twenty-four hours by Japanese bombing of runways; this would have been much more effective had delay-action bombs been used.

*Left-Behind Parties.*

146. An attempt was made to organise left-behind parties in Northern Malaya with the object of obtaining information and carrying out sabotage of all sorts in the enemy's rear. This duty was entrusted to the O.M. Section of the Ministry of Economic Warfare under Mr. Killery. It was, however, started too late and there was no time to organise it thoroughly. This was in no way the fault of the O.M., but was due to the factors mentioned in para. 9 above.

*Question of a Military Governor.*

147. The appointment of a Military Governor might have been desirable for Singapore Island during the later stages, but I was of the opinion that such an appointment for the whole of Malaya at the start of the war was not a practicable proposition. The main reason was that the organisation of the Colony, with the Federated and the Unfederated States, was very complicated and that it was not a practical proposition for anyone to take it over at short notice. It would have been found far more practicable for Hong Kong.

*Australia's Assistance.*

148. The Australian Government fully realised the importance of Singapore to the defence of the Far East and especially to Australia and did everything in their power to help. In November, 1940, there were three squadrons of the Royal Australian Air Force



in Malaya. In December, 1940, the Australian War Minister visited Singapore. Largely as a result of his representations, the Australian Government despatched the 22nd Brigade, Australian Imperial Forces, to Singapore in February. The 27th Brigade followed later, and arrived on the 20th August. Besides these valuable reinforcements, Australia supplied officers for the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve for administrative work on aerodromes, men for two reserve mechanical transport units in the spring of 1941 and for the forty tanks which we had hoped to get from the Middle East. The situation regarding Beaufort aircraft has been mentioned in para. 79 above, and small arms ammunition in para. 92. In addition to this, Australia also supplied many items of signalling equipment and special radio sets for coast defence guns. After the war started four Hudsons from Australia reached Singapore on the 23rd December and Army reinforcements were promised. (See para. 118 above.)

#### *The Dutch.*

149. The Dutch in the Netherlands East Indies faithfully executed their share of the agreements and, indeed, went beyond them, and co-operated wholeheartedly with us in every way. They sent three bomber squadrons and one fighter squadron in the early days of the war in Malaya, although, owing to technical troubles they were having at the time with their engines, the bomber squadrons consisted of only six aircraft, the whole three, therefore, being equivalent to little more than one British bomber squadron. Their submarines operated with great gallantry in the Gulf of Siam. They also gave me three of their reserve flying boats to make good our losses, and sent over a guerilla band to Northern Malaya to operate in the Japanese rear.

At a later stage in the operations I believe they were somewhat critical of the amount of assistance we were able to send to the Netherlands East Indies, and of the length of time before it arrived; should this give rise to any acrimony in the future, I hope that the prompt and whole-hearted assistance they rendered to us will not be forgotten.

#### *Work of General Headquarters.*

150. In Malaya the operations of my own Headquarters were limited to the issue of certain directives to the General Officer Commanding and Air Officer Commanding. These laid down such matters as the withdrawal from Kelantan and Kuantan, and priority of tasks for the Royal Air Force. Apart from that, the main work was to secure the proper co-ordination of air operations with the Dutch and Australians.

A great deal of the time of my small staff was taken up at the beginning by the drafting of Sitreps telegrams and communiqués, as well as preparing appreciations demanded from England. One of the problems regarding the two former was the fact that they had to be sent to Australia as well as to England; their timing was, therefore, a matter of fine adjustment, since it was necessary to ensure, for instance, that a communiqué should not be printed in Australian newspapers before the Sitreps telegrams arrived in England. Eventually, it was found simpler to hand over most of this work to the combined Army and Air Force operations room, in so far as Malaya itself was

concerned, and General Headquarters Sitreps communiqués were confined to the situation as a whole.

Although my General Headquarters operated at the Naval Base at the beginning of the war, it was found that, after the loss of the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* and the formation of the War Council, it was more convenient for my Headquarters to be located near the Combined Operations Room. Preparations had been made for this some months before, and the necessary accommodation was available. The move was carried out about the 15th December.

151. After the transfer of the defence of Burma to Commander-in-Chief, India, and the fall of Hong Kong, it was felt that the location of General Headquarters should no longer be in Malaya, since to keep it there would not only hamper its own work but cramp the initiative of the General Officer Commanding and Air Officer Commanding and make the organisation in Singapore too top-heavy. It was decided before I left that the correct location of General Headquarters would be in Java, preferably near Bandoeng, and steps were already in hand to effect this move. The possibility of a move away from Singapore becoming necessary had been foreseen many months before.

152. The results of the campaign in the Far East naturally gave rise to some speculation as to the advisability of forming what may be called Strategic Headquarters, devoid of all responsibility for direct operational control or administration. Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, at the time I passed through Cairo in November, 1940, stated that, in his opinion, such a General Headquarters was impracticable. My view is that, under special conditions such as existed in the Far East, a strategic General Headquarters was a workable proposition; provided its limitations are fully recognized.

In para. 5 above were indicated the measures which it was expected to achieve by the creation of a General Headquarters, Far East. We failed to convince the Japanese that our strength was too great to be challenged with success; the limitation of the forces, especially aircraft, that could be sent to the Far East was imposed by prior requirements elsewhere.

Co-operation in Malaya and co-ordination of effort with neighbouring countries, including plans for mutual reinforcement, were achieved.

#### *Farewell Order.*

153. I handed over Command of the Far East to Lt.-General Sir Henry Pownall on the 27th December, 1941, and left Singapore, in accordance with instructions, on the 31st December.

I end with my farewell order which was published on the 28th December, 1941.

#### TO ALL RANKS OF THE ARMY AND AIR FORCE, MALAYA.

On relinquishing the Far East Command I send to you all in the Army and Air Force in Malaya a message of farewell, of admiration for the way you have faced danger, fatigue and hardship, and of all good wishes for 1942.

I know my successor well, and I turn over the command to good hands.

Remember that upon the issue of this war depends the welfare of the whole world, including our own families. Their eyes are upon you. Do your Duty unflinchingly, knowing that the resources of the Empire and of our Allies are behind you, confident that, however hard the struggle now, our cause will triumph in the end.

R. BROOKE-POPHAM,  
*Air Chief Marshal.*

## APPENDICES

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## APPENDIX A.

### DIRECTIVE TO THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, FAR EAST.

1. You are appointed Commander-in-Chief, Far East.

2. You will be responsible to the Chiefs of Staff for the operational control and general direction of training of all British land and air forces in Malaya,\* Burma and Hong Kong, and for the co-ordination of plans for the defence of these territories.

You will also be responsible for the operational control and general direction of training of British Air Forces in Ceylon and of the general reconnaissance Squadrons of the Royal Air Force which it is proposed to station in the Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal for ocean reconnaissance in those areas.

3. For these purposes, the following will be under your command:—

General Officer Commanding, Malaya.  
General Officer Commanding, Burma.  
General Officer Commanding, Hong Kong.  
Air Officer Commanding, Far East.

\*Including the Straits Settlements, the Federated and Unfederated Malay States, Brunei, Sarawak and North Borneo.

4. It is intended that you should deal primarily with matters of major military policy and strategy. It is not the intention that you should assume administrative or financial responsibilities or the normal day-to-day functions at present exercised by the General Officers Commanding and Air Officer Commanding.

These Officers will continue to correspond as at present with the War Office, Air Ministry, Colonial Office and Burma Office, on all matters on which they have hitherto dealt with these departments, to the fullest extent possible consistent with the exercise of your Command; keeping you informed as and when you wish.

5. Your staff will consist of the following only, and no expansion of this staff is contemplated:—

A Chief of Staff (an army officer of the rank of Major-General),  
A Senior Royal Air Force Staff Officer,  
A Naval Liaison Officer,  
An Army Officer of the rank of General Staff Officer, 1st Grade,

An officer from each Service of the equivalent rank of General Staff Officer, 2nd Grade, together with the necessary clerical and cypher staff.

6. You will, where appropriate, consult and co-operate with the Commander-in-Chief, China, the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies, and the Commander-in-Chief in India. You will also communicate direct with the Defence Departments of the Governments of the Commonwealth of Australia and New Zealand on all routine matters of interest to them, but on matters of major policy you will communicate to these Dominion Governments through the appropriate Service Department of His Majesty's Government.

7. You will keep the Governor of the Straits Settlements and High Commissioner for the Malay States, the Governor of Burma and the Governor of Hong Kong closely and constantly informed and will consult them as appropriate.

8. The General and Air Officers mentioned in paragraph 3 above remain, subject to your general direction and supervision, in touch with the Governor of the Straits Settlements and High Commissioner for the Malay States, the Governor of Burma and the Governor of Hong Kong. In the case of Burma you will ensure that the constitutional relations between the Governor and the General Officer Commanding are not affected. This is of particular importance with regard to any movement of troops which might affect internal security.

9. You will, where appropriate, maintain touch with His Majesty's representatives in Japan, China, the United States of America and Thailand, and with His Majesty's Consuls-General in the Netherlands East Indies and Indo-China. The maintenance of touch with His Majesty's representatives and Consuls-General in these countries will rest with you exclusively and not with the General and Air Officers referred to in paragraph 3.

10. The Far East Combined Intelligence Bureau, in addition to keeping you informed of current intelligence, will be charged with the duty of collecting such special intelligence as you may require. The Bureau will remain under the control of the Admiralty.

11. You will normally communicate as necessary with the Chiefs of Staff, the Air Ministry being used as a channel of communication for telegrams, and letters being addressed to the Secretary, Chiefs of Staff Committee; but you have the right to correspond direct with an individual Chief of Staff on matters particularly affecting his Service.

### APPENDIX B.

#### INSTRUCTIONS ISSUED TO GENERAL OFFICERS COMMANDING AND AIR OFFICER COMMANDING, FAR EAST.

Headquarters of Commander-in-Chief, Far East, will open at Singapore at 0800 hours on the 18th November.

(2) A prime function of staff of Commander-in-Chief, Far East, will be to prepare, in conjunction with Staff of Commander-in-Chief, China, all joint plans that may be required either by Chiefs of Staff organisation in London or by strategic situation in Far East. The Authority for such plans will be either Chiefs of Staffs in London or two Commanders-in-Chief.

(3) There will be no alteration in channels by which you correspond War Office, Air Ministry, Colonial Office or Burma Office on any matters other than questions of policy affecting strategy or operations. On these questions of policy you will correspond direct with this Headquarters, sending copies of your communications to appropriate Governor. Similarly, all communications from Commander-in-Chief, Far East, to you on these questions will be repeated to appropriate Governor.

On other questions you will repeat to Commander-in-Chief, Far East, such of your communications to War Office, &c., as you judge of sufficient importance.

(4) You will ensure that intimate touch now existing between yourself and Governor in your command is maintained.

(5) You will submit to Commander-in-Chief copies of your most recent appreciations and plans which are now in operation and will keep him fully informed of any changes in situation by signal if of immediate importance, otherwise by periodical liaison letter.

(6) You will submit location statement showing present location of all forces within your command. You will subsequently report major changes in location as they occur.

(7) The Commander-in-Chief requires to be kept informed of general administrative conditions of forces under your command, including position in respect of reserves of essential commodities. Any major administrative difficulties which you may now be experiencing, or which arise subsequently, will be reported at once, in order that both extent to which they may affect operations or policy may be accurately gauged, and that representations may be made direct by him to higher authority, if such a course appears to be required.

(8) You will submit short report of present state of training of units under your command and your programme of training for coming months. Further instructions will be issued on method by which Commander-in-Chief is to be kept informed of progress of training.

(9) Chiefs of Staff have made Commander-in-Chief, Far East, responsible for maintaining touch with His Majesty's representatives in Japan, China and Thailand, and with His Majesty's Consuls-General in Netherlands East Indies and Indo-China. Your direct touch with His Majesty's representatives or Consuls-General in these countries should therefore be restricted to matters immediately affecting your commands.

### APPENDIX C.

#### H.M. SHIPS BASED AT SINGAPORE AND HONG KONG ON 7TH DECEMBER, 1941.

##### Singapore—

##### Capital Ships—

*Prince of Wales.*  
*Repulse.*

##### Cruisers—

*Danae.*  
*Dragon.*  
*Durban.*

##### Destroyers—

*Jupiter.*  
*Electra.*  
*Encounter.*  
*Express.*  
*Tenedos.*  
*Thanet.*  
*Scout.*  
*Stronghold.*

##### Ships from other Stations refitting at Singapore.

##### Cruiser—

*Mauritius* (E.I. Station).

##### Destroyers—

*Isis* (Mediterranean Station).  
H.M.A.S. *Vampire* (Australian Station).  
H.M.A.S. *Vendetta* (Australian Station).

##### Submarine—

*Rover* (Mediterranean Station).

##### Hong Kong—

##### Destroyer—

*Thracian.*

This list does not include auxiliary minesweepers, patrol vessels and small craft.

### APPENDIX D.

#### SUMMARY OF ARMY STRENGTH, MALAYA, NOVEMBER, 1940.

##### Infantry—

##### 17 Battalions, viz.—

British	...	...	6 (including 1 M.G. Battalion).
Indian	...	...	10
Malay	...	...	1

##### Mobile Artillery—

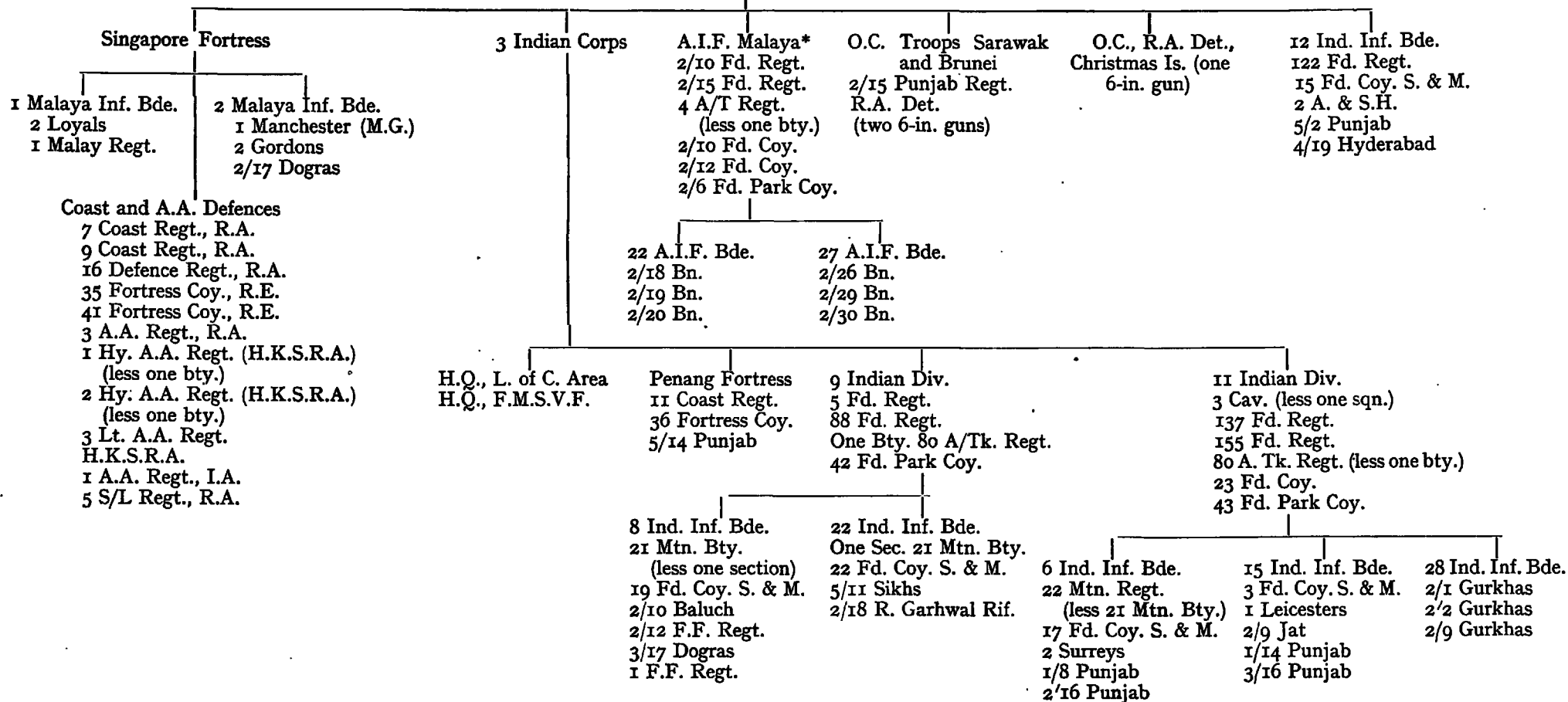
1 Mountain Regiment, R.A.

## APPENDIX E.

## MALAYA COMMAND.

*Order of Battle—December 7, 1941.*

## H.Q., MALAYA COMMAND.



\* The Australian Units of the A.I.F. Malaya shown here formed part of the 8th Australian Division.

*Summary of Strength of Army in Malaya, December 7, 1941.*

(Royal Engineers, Mechanical Transport, Signals and Ancillary Units not included.)

## Infantry Battalions—

British	...	...	6	(including 1 M.G. Btn.).
Indian	...	...	18	
Australian	...	...	6	
Malay	...	...	1	

Total	...	...	31	
Volunteer Battalions	...	...	10	
Johore Military Forces	...	...	1	
Indian State Forces	...	...	5	

## Artillery—

Field Regiments	...	...	7	(5 of 24 guns ; 2 of 16 guns).
Mountain Regiments	...	...	1	(24 guns).
Anti-Tank Regiments	...	...	2	(1 of 48 guns ; 1 of 36 guns).
Anti-Tank Batteries	...	...	2	(1 of 8 Breda guns ; 1 of 6 2-pounders).

## Total Strength—

## Regulars—

British	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	19,391	
Australian	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	15,279	
Indian	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	37,191	
Asiatic	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	4,482	
Total	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...		76,343

## Volunteers—

British	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	2,430	
Indian	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	727	
Asiatic	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	7,395	
Total	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...		10,552

Grand Total ... .. 86,895

## APPENDIX F.

## FAR EAST.

*Anti-Aircraft Position, December 7, 1941.*

	Approved Scale.	Holdings.	En route.	Allocated but not shipped.
Malaya—				
Heavy	176	70	12	20 } (b)
Light	100 (plus 144 field force)	78	28	
3-in. Naval	Nil	24	Nil	
Burma—				
Heavy	24	8 } (a)	8	
Light	68	16 }	8	
Hong Kong—				
Heavy	32	14	4	
Light	30	2	8	
3-in. Naval	Nil	2		

(a) Of these 4 heavy and 8 light had only just reached Rangoon and had not been installed.

(b) A proportion was to be allocated to Burma by Commander-in-Chief, Far East.

## APPENDIX G.

## BURMA.

*Order of Battle at Commencement of Hostilities.*

- (1) 1st Burma Division—  
consisting of—
- |                                  |     |     |     |     |  |
|----------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|--|
| Maymyo Brigade                   | ... | ... | ... | ... | 2nd K.O.Y.L.I.<br>1st Burma Rifles.<br>6th Burma Rifles.<br>7th Burma Rifles.<br>12th Mountain Battery.<br>56th Field Company (S. and M.).   |
| Tenasserim Brigade               | ... | ... | ... | ... | 2nd Burma Rifles.<br>4th Burma Rifles.<br>5th Burma Rifles.<br>8th Burma Rifles.<br>2nd Mountain Battery.<br>Sec. Field Company.   |
| 13th Indian Infantry Brigade     | ... | ... | ... | ... | 5th/1st Punjab.<br>2nd/7th Rajputs.<br>1st/18th R. Garh Rifles.<br>23rd Mountain Battery.<br>5th Field Battery R.A., B.A.F.  |
| (2) Rangoon Brigade              | ... | ... | ... | ... | 1st Gloucesters.<br>3rd Burma Rifles.<br>Coast Defence Battery.  |
| (3) 16th Indian Infantry Brigade | ... | ... | ... | ... | 1st/9th Jat.<br>4th/12th F.F. Regiment.<br>1st/7th Gurkha Regiment.<br>5th Mountain Battery.<br>Headquarters, 27th Mountain Regiment.<br>50th Field Company (S. and M.).           |
| (4) Burma Frontier Force         | ... | ... | ... | ... | Bhama Battalion.<br>Chin Hills Battalion.<br>Myitkyina Battalion.<br>Northern Shan States Battalion.<br>Southern Shan States Battalion.<br>Kokine Battalion.<br>Reserve Battalion. |
| (5) Garrison Companies           | ... | ... | ... | ... | 1st Garrison Company.<br>2nd Garrison Company.<br>3rd Garrison Company.<br>4th Garrison Company.<br>5th Garrison Company.  |
| (6) Burma Rifles (Territorials)  | ... | ... | ... | ... | 11th Burma Rifles.<br>12th Burma Rifles.<br>13th Southern Shan States<br>Battalion Burma Rifles.<br>14th Burma Rifles (forming).   |
| (7) Burma Auxiliary Force        | ... | ... | ... | ... | Rangoon Battalion.<br>Upper Burma Battalion.<br>Burma Railways Battalion.<br>Tenasserim Battalion.<br>1 A.A. Regiment (forming).   |
| (8) Burma Rifles                 | ... | ... | ... | ... | 9th and 10th Battalions (forming).<br>Six Anti-Tank Troops.<br>One Field Battery.  |
| (9) Field Company                | ... | ... | ... | ... | Forming.   |
| (10) Armed Police                | ... | ... | ... | ... | Three Battalions.  |



## SUMMARY OF STRENGTH OF ARMY IN BURMA, DECEMBER 7, 1941.

*Infantry—*

British	...	...	...	...	2 battalions.
Indian	...	...	...	...	6 battalions.
Burma Rifles (Regulars)	...	...	...	...	8 battalions (4 of these just formed).
Burma Rifles (Territorials)	...	...	...	...	4 battalions.
Garrison Company	...	...	...	...	5 battalions.
Burma Auxiliary Force	...	...	...	...	4 battalions.
Burma Frontier Force	...	...	...	...	6 battalions, 1 reserve battalion.

*Artillery—*

Indian Mountain Batteries	...	...	...	3
Burma Auxiliary Force	...	...	...	1 field battery, 18-pounders.
Five mobile detachments Burma Frontier Force.				

## APPENDIX H.

## HONG KONG.

*Order of Battle at Outbreak of War.*

At the outbreak of hostilities on the 8th December, 1941, the garrison comprised :—

*Hong Kong Infantry Brigade—**Arrived.*

1st Battalion Middlesex Regiment (M.G.)	...	...	...	...	August, 1937.
1st Battalion The Winnipeg Grenadiers	...	...	...	...	November, 1941.
1st Battalion The Royal Rifles of Canada	...	...	...	...	November, 1941.

*Kowloon Infantry Brigade—*

2nd Battalion The Royal Scots	...	...	...	...	January, 1938.
2nd 14th Punjab Regiment	...	...	...	...	November, 1940.
5th 7th Rajputana Rifles	...	...	...	...	June, 1937.

*Headquarters Fortress, R.E.—*

- 1 E. and M. Company.
- 1 Field Company (3 British, 1 Chinese section).
- 1 Bomb Disposal section.
- 1 Medium Regiment, H.K.S.R.A.
- 8th Coast Regiment, R.A.
- 12th Coast Regiment, R.A.
- 5th A.A. Regiment, R.A.

*Ancillary Units.*

Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps (strength about 2,000).

A Chinese machine-gun battalion was in process of being formed, but had not progressed beyond the cadre stage.

Appropriate strengths of all personnel mobilised at the 8th December, 1941, were :—

British	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	3,652
Canadian	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	1,982
Indian	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	2,254
Local Colonial	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	2,428
Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	2,000
Auxiliary Defence Units	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	2,112
Nursing Detachment	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	136
Total	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	14,564

## APPENDIX I.

## STRENGTH OF AIR FORCE IN MALAYA.

*November, 1940.*

Bombers : 2 squadrons Blenheim I—24 aircraft.

Reconnaissance : 2 squadrons Hudsons (R.A.A.F.)—24 aircraft.

Torpedo Bombers : 2 squadrons Vildebeestes—24 aircraft.

General Purpose : 1 squadron Wirraways (R.A.A.F.)—12 aircraft.

Flying Boats : 1 squadron Singapores—4 aircraft.

Total : 88 first-line aircraft.

## APPENDIX J.

## STRENGTH AND DISPOSITIONS OF THE R.A.F., DECEMBER 7, 1941.

*Malaya.*

<i>Aerodrome.</i>	<i>Squadron No.</i>	<i>Type.</i>	<i>Strength in Aircraft.</i>
Alor Star ... ..	62	Blenheim I (B) ... ..	11
Sungei Patani ... ..	21	Buffalo ... ..	12
	(R.A.A.F.)		
Sungei Patani ... ..	27	Blenheim I (F) ... ..	12
Kota Bharu ... ..	1	Hudson ... ..	12
	(R.A.A.F.)		
Kota Bharu ... ..	36	Vildebeeste ... ..	6
Gong Kedah ... ..	100	Vildebeeste ... ..	6
Kuantan ... ..	60 (a)	Blenheim I (B) ... ..	8
Kuantan ... ..	8	Hudson ... ..	8
	(R.A.A.F.)		
Kuantan ... ..	36	Vildebeeste ... ..	6
Tengah ... ..	34	Blenheim IV ... ..	16
Kallang ... ..	243 and 488	Buffalo ... ..	32
Sembawang ... ..	8	Hudson ... ..	4
	(R.A.A.F.)		
Sembawang ... ..	453	Buffalo ... ..	16
Seletar ... ..	100	Vildebeeste ... ..	6
Seletar ... ..	205	Catalina ... ..	3
			158

(a) No. 60 Squadron had arrived from Burma for Bombing practice, and was retained in Malaya on the start of the war with Japan. About the middle of December the personnel were sent back to Burma by sea, the aeroplanes being retained in Malaya to replace wastage in other squadrons.

There were two maintenance units, No. 151 at Seletar and No. 153 at Kuala Lumpur.

*Reserve Aircraft.*

Blenheim I and IV ... ..	15
Buffalo ... ..	52 (b)
Hudson ... ..	7
Vildebeeste ... ..	12
Catalina ... ..	2
Total ... ..	88

(b) Of these, 21 were temporarily out of action owing to trouble with the engine valve gear on a new mark of engine.

*Burma.*

<i>Aerodrome.</i>	<i>Squadron No.</i>	<i>Type.</i>	<i>Strength in Aircraft.</i>
Mingaladon ... ..	60	Blenheim I (B) ... ..	4
Mingaladon ... ..	67	Buffalo ... ..	16

*Reserve Aircraft.*

Blenheim I ... ..	Nil
Buffalo ... ..	16

Of the total of 32 Buffaloes in Burma, 24 were temporarily out of action owing to trouble with the engine valve gear on a new mark of engine.

*Ceylon.*

Catalina ... ..	2
-----------------	---

*Total in Far East.*

Initial Equipment ... ..	180
Reserves ... ..	104
Total ... ..	284

Of these aircraft, the Vildebeestes were obsolete, and if these are deducted the figures become :—

Initial Equipment ... ..	156
Reserves ... ..	92
Total ... ..	248

Requirements as laid down by the Chiefs of Staff were 336 Initial Equipment. Reserves for these on the basis of 50 per cent. for flying-boats and 100 per cent. for all other aircraft should have amounted to 327, a total of 663.

Omitting the Vildebeestes, the total deficiency in aircraft was 415.

The Dutch sent over a total of 22 bombers and 9 fighters. If these are included, the net deficiency becomes 384.

The figure of 100 per cent. for reserves of land-based aircraft was laid down in an Air Ministry telegram of the 23rd February, 1941.

## APPENDIX K.

### SUMMARY OF OPERATIONALLY SERVICEABLE I.E. AIRCRAFT IN MALAYA.

	Dec. 7.	Dec. 12.	Dec. 17.	Dec. 19.	Dec. 22.	Dec. 24.
Bombers (including Torpedo Bombers) ...	59	45	59	58	49	61
Fighters ...	72	53	58	53	45	50
Reconnaissance ...	24	7	12	11	12	13
Flying Boats ...	3	3	4	4	3	3
Total ...	158	108	133	126	109	127

The above figures do not include Dutch aircraft in N. Sumatra or in Borneo, which were stationed North of the Equator and thus came under the command of the Air Officer Commanding, Far East, under the terms of the A.D.B. Agreement. Nor do the figures include Immediate Reserves with Squadrons, Reserves in the Maintenance Units nor Aircraft in the A.A.C.U.

## APPENDIX L.

### PERFORMANCE OF THE BUFFALO SINGLE SEATER.

A report on the tests of a Buffalo was sent in from the A. & A.E.E., Boscombe Down, dated the 3rd July, 1941. Comparison of this with the official intelligence figures of the Japanese Naval fighter, Zero type, showed that the Buffalo was much inferior at heights of 10,000 feet, and over, viz. :—

	Zero Fighter.	Buffalo.
Rate of climb to 13,000 feet ...	4.3 minutes	6.1 minutes
Speed at 10,000 feet ...	315	270 (Approx.)

At 20,000 feet the performance, as indicated by the official figures, is more nearly equal, i.e. :—

	Zero Fighter.	Buffalo.
Speed at 20,000 feet ...	295	292

Actual experience in Malaya, however, showed that this speed of 292 for the Buffalo could not be obtained. Whether this was due to the aeroplane, to the climate or to the pilots I cannot say.

## APPENDIX M.

### MALAYA.

#### *Order of the Day issued December 8, 1941.*

Japan's action to-day gives the signal for the Empire Naval, Army and Air Forces, and those of their Allies, to go into action with a common aim and common ideals.

We are ready. We have had plenty of warning and our preparations are made and tested. We do not forget at this moment the years of patience and forbearance in which we have borne, with dignity and discipline, the petty insults and insolences inflicted on us by the Japanese in the Far East. We know that those things were only done because Japan thought she could take advantage of our supposed weakness. Now, when Japan herself has decided to put the matter to a sterner test, she will find out that she has made a grievous mistake.

We are confident. Our defences are strong and our weapons efficient. Whatever our race, and whether we are now in our native land or have come thousands of miles, we have one aim and one only. It is to defend these shores, to destroy such of our enemies as may set foot on our soil, and then, finally, to cripple the power of the enemy to endanger our ideals, our possessions and our peace.

What of the enemy? We see before us a Japan drained for years by the exhausting claims of her wanton onslaught on China. We see a Japan whose trade and industry have been so dislocated by these years of reckless adventure that, in a mood of desperation, her Government has flung her into war under the delusion that, by stabbing a friendly nation in the back, she can gain her end. Let her look at Italy and what has happened since that nation tried a similar base action.

Let us all remember that we here in the Far East form part of the great campaign for the preservation in the world of truth and justice and freedom; confidence, resolution, enterprise and devotion to the cause must and will inspire every one of us in the fighting services, while from the civilian population, Malay, Chinese, Indian, or Burmese, we expect that patience, endurance and serenity which is the great virtue of the East and which will go far to assist the fighting men to gain final and complete victory.

R. BROOKE-POPHAM, *Air Chief Marshal,  
Commander-in-Chief, Far East.*

G. LAYTON, *Vice-Admiral,  
Commander-in-Chief, China.*

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