DESPATCHES FROM THE FRONT

DISASTER IN THE FAR EAST 1940-1942

THE DEFENCE OF MALAYA, JAPANESE CAPTURE OF HONG KONG AND THE FALL OF SINGAPORE

INTRODUCED AND COMPILED BY
JOHN GREHAN & MARTIN MACE

Disaster in the Far East 1940–1942

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The Commanding Officers' Reports From the Field and At Sea.

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Introduction

The first officer to have his despatch on operations in the Far East published was Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brook-Popham. He took up his post in Singapore on 18 November 1940, with his area of command encompassing Burma, Hong Kong as well as Malaya, and included the Far East Air Command. The Indian, Chinese and the East Indies commands remained outside his authority.

Brook-Popham was directed to avoid war with Japan and was reminded of this fact in March 1941, being informed that, "Avoidance of war with Japan is basis of Far East policy and provocation must be rigidly avoided". This message was reinforced again in September of that year, this time it being stated that "Our policy in the Far East is still to avoid war with Japan".

Brook-Popham was also told that the defence of the United Kingdom, the Battle of the Atlantic and the fighting in North Africa had priority over the Far East. He would simply have to make do with whatever he was given in terms of men and machines. It is interesting to note that Brook-Popham recorded that when he was pushing to bring his forces up to what he described as an irreducible minimum, he was cautioned against over-estimate of the Japanese forces.

Brook-Popham sought to give the impression that the British and Commonwealth forces were so strong that the Japanese would not dare to attack them. As the Japanese showed no fear in attacking the United States, it is evident that, however great a show of force Brook-Popham displayed, it would not have deterred them.

In writing his despatch, Brook-Popham compiled a very thorough explanation of the reasons for the success of the Japanese in the weeks before he relinquished responsibility for the Far East Command. This included an analysis of Japanese tactics and equipment and their use of psychological warfare: "Chinese crackers [were used] 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."

Another factor which had some effect on morale generally, Brook-Popham explained, was that, strategically, the British forces were on the defensive. All the troops were aware that it was the intention to avoid war with Japan, which meant that the initiative and especially the choice of the moment for opening hostilities rested with the enemy.

That moment came at 01.30 hours on Monday, 8 December 1941, when the Japanese started to land from ships at Kota Bharu on the eastern coast of Malaya. Two large Japanese convoys escorted by warships had been picked up by aerial

reconnaissance as early as 14.00 hours on the 6th. Though it seemed fairly obvious that this was the start of the Japanese offensive, because Brook-Popham had been told not to take any provocative action (this had been re-stated as recently as 29 November, just a week before the Japanese attack) he had to wait for the Japanese to open hostilities.

Ridiculous as it may sound, Brook-Popham had to prepare in advance an Order of the Day to communicate to his troops that war had broken out. This had to be written in all the various languages of the people under his command. This also had to be distributed across the thousands of miles which comprised his command so that they could be released on the day war broke out. In order to be able to accomplish this, they had to be sent out the day before the fighting began. So the situation was that Brook-Popham had to issue orders to his troops that war had begun whilst not being permitted to take any action against the enemy.

Thus robbed of the opportunity to attack the Japanese whilst they were still at sea, Brook-Popham had to wait for the enemy to attack wherever and whenever they chose. Little wonder that the Japanese were able to overrun the British lines so rapidly.

Whilst Malaya and Singapore were the main territories Brook-Popham had to defend, he also bore responsibility for Hong Kong and he provided a report on its fall which, given the resources available for its defence, was inevitable. Initially Burma also formed part of the Far East Command but on 15 December this was handed over to the Commander-in-Chief, India. Brook-Popham also reports on the Japanese attack upon Borneo. Allied troops were still fighting in Borneo when, on 27 December 1941, Brook-Popham was relieved by Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Pownall.

A more detailed report on the Japanese attack on Hong Kong is provided in the second despatch reproduced in this volume. It was written by Major General Christopher Maltby, who, like Brook-Popham, was hampered by the reluctance of the British authorities to commit to defensive preparations which might be seen by the Japanese as provocative.

"That war was inevitable seemed clear to me," Maltby declared, "but it was hard to make that definite statement on the information available". As a result he was restrained by his instructions and by the civil authorities of Hong Kong from being able to implement all the defensive measures he believed were essential.

Maltby listed the reasons for this entirely unsatisfactory state of affairs as:

(*a*) The general doubt that Japan would declare war against the Allied powers.

(*b*) The weakness of our intelligence system.

(*c*) The belief that Japan was bluffing and would continue to bluff to the last.

Coupled with this, as Maltby makes very clear, was the absence of modern aircraft, the limited amount of naval support, the absence of radar, and the "paucity" of anti-aircraft guns.

Nevertheless, despite the obvious disadvantages which the British forces had to operate under, they put up a valiant defence. This is presented as a 'War Narrative' which was maintained by Fortress HQ throughout the fighting and probably represents the most comprehensive account of the battle of Hong Kong ever

published. Maltby was, of course, taken prisoner when Hong Kong fell, and we are fortunate that the War Narrative survived.

The man who compiled the third despatch was also imprisoned by the Japanese but unlike the information available to Maltby, many documents that would have been of value to Lieutenant General Arthur Percival were lost or destroyed following the fall of Singapore.

Even so, Percival wrote more than 100,000 words and, whilst he obviously sought to justify his decision to surrender to the Japanese, it does provide us with a careful analysis of the British Army's worst ever defeat.

The main reason that Singapore fell so swiftly he attributes to the completely inadequate air defence of the region. He points out that as long ago as 1937 a report was made by the commanding officer at Singapore indicating the problems of aerial defence that Malaya faced should the Japanese attack. This situation was made incalculably more dangerous when, following the fall of France in 1940 and the subsequent occupation of French Indo-China, Japanese air forces were stationed just 400 miles from the Malayan border and 700 miles from Singapore itself. "In the event," Percival wrote, "the Army had to bear practically the whole weight of the Japanese attack with little air or naval support. This was the main cause of defeat."

With regards to his decision to surrender, Percival cites the message he received from the Supreme Commander South-West Pacific on the morning of 15 February 1942: "So long as you are in a position to inflict losses and damage to enemy and your troops are physically capable of doing so you must fight on. Time gained and damage to enemy are of vital importance at this juncture. When you are fully satisfied that this is no longer possible I give you discretion to cease resistance . . . Inform me of intentions. Whatever happens I thank you and all your troops for your gallant efforts of last few days."

Whether or not Percival surrendered too early, when in the opinion of many his troops were still capable of fighting on and inflicting loss and damage to the enemy, is one of continued debate.

The subject of the air defence of Malaya and Singapore is dealt with in the final despatch in this book. Air Vice-Marshal Sir Paul Maltby (the brother of Major General Christopher Maltby), was assistant AOC Far East Command until 10 February 1942, when he was switched by Churchill to take over command of the air forces in Java from where he was expected to continue the fight.

It is surprising to read that Maltby was informed that in the absence of strong naval forces in the region, the primary defence of Singapore and Malaya was in the hands of the air force when, according to Percival, it was the lack of air defence that was the primary reason for the Japanese victory. The simple fact is that Maltby's chief, Air Vice-Marshal C.W. Pulford, was not provided with the means to adequately defend British interests in the Far East.

The tragic defeat in the Far East is neatly summed up by Paul Maltby, and we can do no better that to quote his words: "We lost the first round there because we, as an Empire, were not prepared for war on the scale necessary for the purpose. When war broke out in Europe it absorbed the Empire's resources to such an extent that only a

fraction of the strength could be deployed which had been calculated to be necessary for withstanding Japanese aggression in Malaya – navy, army, air force and civil organisation alike being much below the required mark. When Japan attacked she proved to be even more formidable than had been expected, the result being that she swamped our underdeveloped defences before they could be supported."

*

The objective of this book is to reproduce the despatches of Percival, Brooke-Popham and the two Maltby brothers as they first appeared to the general public some seventy years ago. They have not been modified or edited in any way and are therefore the original and unique words of the commanding officers as they saw things at the time. The only change is the manner in which the footnotes are presented, in that they are shown at the end of each despatch rather than at the bottom of the relevant page as they appear in the original despatch. Any grammatical or spelling errors have been left uncorrected to retain the authenticity of the documents.

List of Illustrations

10 Because of the effectiveness of Japanese air strikes, the RAF's ground crews were forced to do much of their work servicing aircraft whilst the latter were dispersed under the trees at Kallang. (Courtesy of Andy Thomas)

11 Deep beneath a Singapore hillside is the "Battle Box", the underground command centre of the British Malaya Command. Comprising twenty-two rooms linked by a corridor, the complex was bomb-proof and capable of recycling its own air supply. Now a tourist attraction, the interior of the "Battle Box" has changed little from as it was in the war. Indeed, this scene, in the actual room used at the time, replicates the dark hours when Lieutenant-General Percival and his staff discussed the impending British surrender. (Courtesy of Roslan Tangah)

12 Lieutenant-General Percival, General Officer Commanding (Malaya), and his party pictured whilst en route to the Ford factory at Bukit Timah, Singapore to surrender the colony to the Japanese, 15 February 1942. Never in the history of the British Army had such a large force laid down its arms to an enemy. (HMP)

13 A captured Japanese photograph, creased by folding, showing Lieutenant-General Arthur E. Percival signing the unconditional surrender of the British and Commonwealth forces at the Ford Works Building near the Bukit Timah Road, Singapore. Lieutenant-General Tomoyuki Yamashita can be seen on the extreme left. (HMP)

14 Japanese officers stand with Lieutenant-General Arthur E. Percival following the surrender of British forces on 15 February 1942. Note the white flag of surrender. At the end of the war, Percival travelled to the Philippines to witness the surrender of the Japanese forces there, which in a twist of fate were commanded by Tomoyuki Yamashita. The Union Flag carried by Brigadier Newbigging on the way to Bukit Timah was also a witness to this reversal of fortunes, being flown when the Japanese formally surrendered Singapore back to the British. (IWM; HU31329)

15 Now a national monument in Singapore, the Ford Works Building still exists. Built in October 1941, it was Ford's first motor car assembly plant in Southeast Asia. During the Malayan campaign, the factory was used to assemble aircraft which has arrived in crates for the RAF. After the surrender, the building was occupied by the Japanese as a military headquarters. Today, the former factory serves as a museum, exhibition gallery and archive.

16 Within Kranji War Cemetery, Singapore, stands the Singapore Memorial. On its walls are the names of over 24,000 casualties of the Commonwealth land and air forces who have no known grave. Many of these have no known date of death and are accorded within our records the date or period from when they were known to be missing or captured. (Courtesy of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission)

1

AIR CHIEF MARSHAL SIR ROBERT BROOKE-POPHAM'S DESPATCH ON OPERATIONS

17 OCTOBER 1940 TO 27 DECEMBER 1941.

The War Office,
January, I948.

OPERATIONS IN THE FAR EAST, FROM I7TH OCTOBER I940 TO 27TH DECEMBER I94I

I. – FORMATION OF GENERAL HEADQUARTERS, FAR EAST.

I. This despatch, covers the period from the date of my appointment as Commander-in-Chief, Far East, the I7th October, I940, to the date on which I handed over to Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Pownall, the 27th December, I94I.

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.I, 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 I4th November. General Headquarters, Far East, started to operate on Monday, the I8th November, I940.

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 I94I 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, I940.

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, I94I, 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* 7I *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 I94I 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, I940, and April, I94I; and Burma in June and September, I94I.

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 I,I00 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,I00, 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, I94I, that the total establishment should be raised to the following:-

Commander-in-Chief: I.
Chief of Staff: I.
Staff Officer, Ist Grade: Navy I; Army 2; R.A.F. 2.
Staff Officer, 2nd Grade: Navy I; Army 3; R.A.F. 3.
Staff Officer, 3rd Grade: Navy I.
Total, I5.

In addition to this, there were:-

Personal Assistant: I.
Cipher Officers: 2.
Signal Officer: I.
Chief Clerk: I.

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 2Ist 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.I, 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, I94I. 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.

I0. Colonel Warren arrived in Singapore early in I94I 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.

II. Air Vice-Marshal Pulford became Air Officer Commanding, Far East, *vice* Air Vice-Marshal Babington on the 26th April, I94I, and Lieutenant-General Percival took over the duties of General Officer Commanding, Malaya, from Lieutenant-General Bond on the I6th May,I94I.

The strength of the Army and of the Air Force in Malaya in November, I940, 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 I80 days.

Communications.

I2. 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.

I3. For some time before November, I940, 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.

I4. 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.

I5. 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.

I6. 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/I5th Punjab Regiment less one platoon to Kuching, had been moved to Lutong in December, I940, 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/I5th Punjab Regiment, less the one company referred to above, left Singapore for Kuching on the I0th and IIth May, I94I. 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.

7. Sir Reginald Dorman Smith replaced the Hon. Sir Archibald Cochrane as Governor of Burma on the 6th May, I94I, and Lieut.-General Hutton took over the duties of General Officer Commanding from Lieut.-General McLeod at midnight the 28th-29th December, I94I.

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.

I8. The main factor affecting the defence of Burma was that of communications. The total length of frontier facing Japanese-occupied territory in December, I94I, 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 – Chieng Mai railway, through Chieng 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.

I9. 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 Chieng Rai. The Chiefs of Staff considered in January I94I that, although four enemy divisions could be maintained at railhead on the Bangkok – Chieng 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 Chieng 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 Chieng Rai road.

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

Engineering Programme.

2I. 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 I94I, 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 I0th November, I94I.

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

23. In the Singapore Conference of October I940 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;

I field regiment and I battery;
2 mountain batteries;
I anti-tank battery;
I heavy A.A. regiment (24 guns);
I light A.A. battery, non-mobile (I6 guns);
I light A.A. battery, mobile; and
I 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;
I reconnaissance unit;
I field regiment (24 guns);
I medium regiment (I6 guns);
I light A.A. regiment (48 guns);
I anti-tank battery; and
I machine gun battalion.

In their comments of January I94I, 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 I94I (*see Appendix* G), and omitting the Burma Frontier Force and the Territorial and Auxiliary forces, the shortages were approximately-

3 field batteries;
I anti-tank battery;

and I 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 I940. 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 held 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 I940, air strength in Burma was practically non-existent. The Singapore Conference had recommended the following:-

I general reconnaissance squadron;
2 bomber squadrons; and
I fighter squadron.

No. 60 Squadron, equipped with Blenheim bombers, arrived from India in February I94I; in August I94I, 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 I94I, 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 I94I, 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, I94I, for the American Volunteer Group to carry out

operational training in Burma, and they were given assistance in many other directions.

On the 3Ist October, I94I, 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 maintaintence. 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 I94I. 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 I0,000 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 I94I.

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 I2th 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 I5th December, I94I.

IV. – FACTORS AFFECTING THE DEFENCE OF HONG KONG.

Authorities.

30. In November I940, General Norton was Acting Governor of Hong Kong. Sir Geoffrey Northcote resumed his post as Governor on the I3th March, I94I, and handed over to his successor, Sir Mark Young, on the I0th September, I94I. Major General Maltby took over the duties of General Officer Commanding from Major-General Grasett on the I9th July, I94I.

General Policy.

3I. 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 I94I 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 I94I, 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 I30 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 I6th November, I94I. 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 I94I, owing to the influx from China. The population in April I94I was-

Hong Kong	709,006
Kowloon	58I,000
Water population	I54,000
Total	I,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 I94I the stocks of food were not much short of that required for the period laid down, *i.e.,* I30 days. The local supply of firewood was insufficent, and some was being imported from North Borneo.

38. The A.R.P. organisation in Hong Kong was good, and some I2,000 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 hutments outside the town.

39. Most of the European women and children had been moved away from Hong Kong by July I94I, the total leaving being approximately I,680 women and children belonging to the Navy, Army or Air Force, and I,824 civilian. This left about 9I8 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 I8th 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 hutments 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, I94I, 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.

4I. From about June I94I 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 I939. 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, I940, with which should be included the Tactical Appreciation dated the I6th October, I940, 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 I940, 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 I94I, 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 I94I, 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 I 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 I94I, 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, I94I, 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, I94I, 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, I94I. 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 I94I.

Apart from minor Staff Exercises, two were carried out under General Headquarters: the first in December, I940, to test out communications and co-operation between the Army and the Royal Air Force; and the second, a more ambitious one, in March, I94I, 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, I94I, 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 outflanking the defender 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.* I2.)

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* I2 *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 I94I 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.

5I. 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 I94I, 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 I94I, 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 I94I, 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, I940, 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 I80. 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 I94I, .5 ammunition for the Buffaloes was difficult to obtain in adequate quantity.

By December, I94I, 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 I94I 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 I94I 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, I94I. 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 4I), 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* II0 *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, I94I, 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.

6I. At the end of September I94I, 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 blackout 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 I94I 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.* II9 *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 I94I, 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 I939. 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 I939, 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 I942, to hurried evacuation, with consequent loss of personal belongings and discomfort, and, later, to casualties. (*See para.* I2I *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 3Ist December, I940, 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 I3th November, I94I, that permission was given to send up bombs. The petrol and bombs were consigned to the Chinese, who took charge of them.

7I. 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 guerrilla 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 Chieng 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, I94I, and various Chinese officers also paid visits individually, including General Mow, of the Chinese Air Force, who was in Singapore from the I9th to the 25th June, I94I, 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, I94I, for giving the Siamese a few weapons, but nothing was actually sent.

It was suggested in March, I94I, 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 I940, 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, I94I, 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, I94I. 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 I5th August, I940, 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, I940, 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 I6th October, I940 (*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, I940, 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, I940, 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, Vildebeesltes were still in use in December, I94I (*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 I940, and the first months of I94I. 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 I94I, we should be able to reckon, as an absolute maximum, on a total of only 2I5 aircraft, including anticipated reinforcements of 39 Dutch aircraft, or I76 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, I94I.

8I. 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 I94I.

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, I941, 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, I94I. A total of I67

Buffaloes in all were received in Singapore, and on the 30th May, I94I, 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 propellors, 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 I0,000 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, I94I, 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, I94I, 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, I94I, 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, I940, 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, I94I.

On his arrival, General Percival went thoroughly into the question of the strength of the Army and, in August, I94I, 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.
I2 Field Companies.

This was based on my forecast of the strength which our Air Forces would reach by December, I94I, namely I86 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."

9I. In December, I94I, 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:-

I7 Battalions;
4 Light A.A. Regiments; and
2 Tank Regiments.

The strength in A.A. weapons in the Far Easton the 7th December, I94I, 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 I4th 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 Ist January, I942. On the I3th November, I94I, 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, I94I, 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, I94I, General Headquarters informed the War Office that, with releases in sight, we should be short of our authorised holding of I50 million rounds by 57 million on the Ist January, I942. 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, I940. 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 I8 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 I940, when our forces were far weaker than they were at the end of I94I. 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.* I34 *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 Ist 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