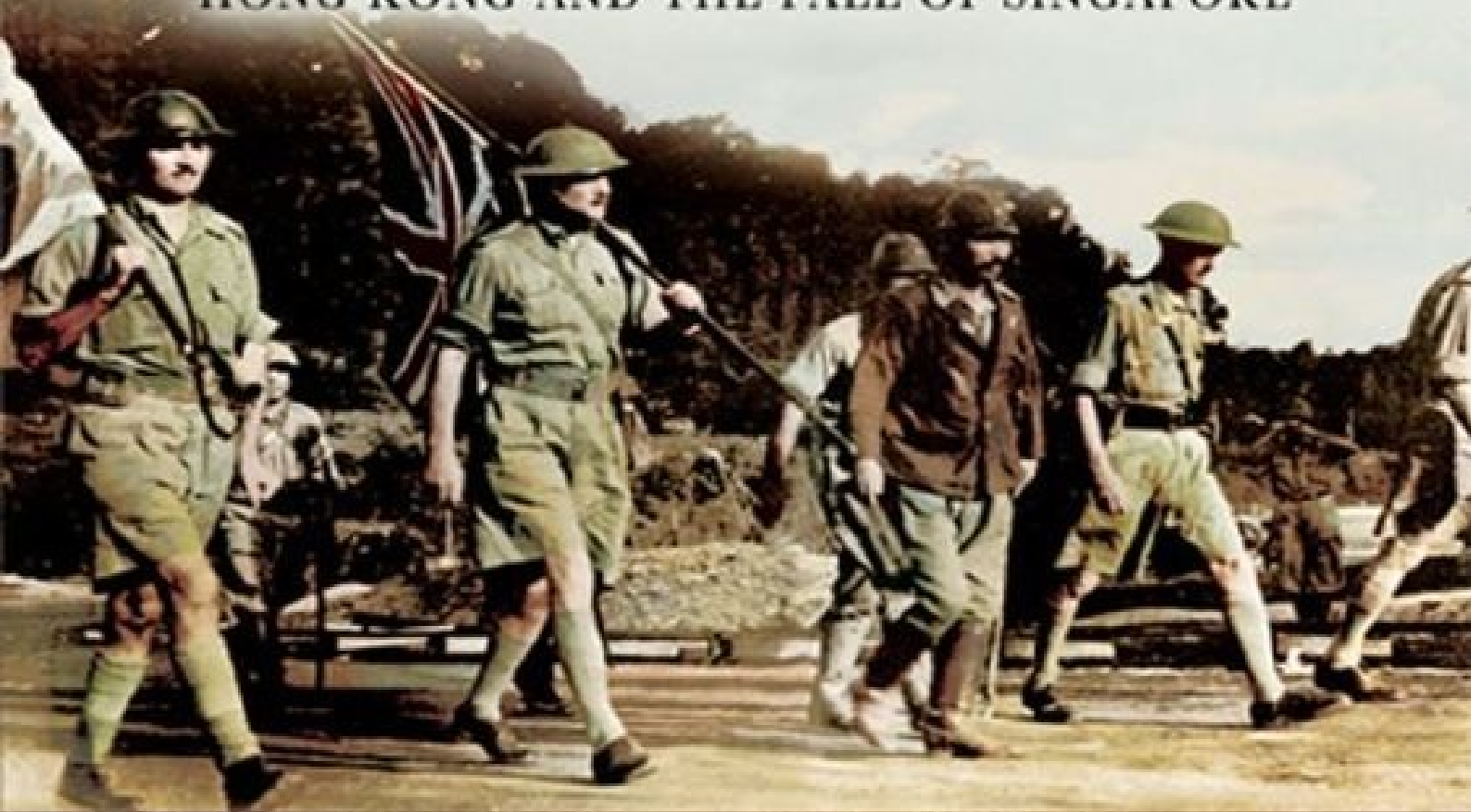




DESPATCHES FROM THE FRONT

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

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

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OF SINGAPORE

Introduced and compiled by
Martin Mace and John Grehan
With additional research by
Sara Mitchell



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Abbreviations

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 than 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.

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- 1 A portrait of Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, the author of the first despatch in this volume. (HMP)
- 2 Part of the preparations for the defence of Singapore – men of the 2nd Battalion Gordon Highlanders demonstrate a Northover Projector to Major General F. Keith Simmons, GOC Singapore Fortress, and other senior officers, 17 October 1941. (IWM; FE15)
- 3 Australian gunners on the island of Singapore waiting for the Japanese to cross the Johore Strait. Churchill said that if the Japanese broke across the Johore Strait in small boats – which of course they did – it would be “one of the greatest scandals that could possibly be exposed“. (HMP)
- 4 Stocks of rubber, held by a factory on a plantation in Malaya, are burnt during the British retreat to Singapore, December 1941. (HMP)
- 5 Bristol Blenheim Mk.I, L1134 ‘PT-F’, of 62 Squadron RAF, taxiing in front of a line of Brewster Buffaloes at Sembawang, Singapore, as another section of Buffaloes passes over the airfield, October 1941. It was in L1134 that Squadron Leader Arthur Scarf and his crew single-handedly attacked the Japanese-held airfield at Singora, Thailand, on 9 December 1941 – an action for which Scarf was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross. (IWM; K662)
- 6 A line-up of Brewster Buffalos at Sembawang in November 1941. The aircraft nearest the camera is 453 Squadron’s Mk.II AN185, TD-V. (RAAF)
- 7 A Japanese aerial photograph showing HMS *Prince of Wales* (top) and HMS *Repulse* during the early stages of the attack in which they were sunk, 10 December 1941. HMS *Repulse* had just been hit for the first time. (US Naval Historical Center)
- 8 A group of pilots from 488 Squadron pictured at Singapore in December 1941. (Courtesy of Andy Thomas)
- 9 Aircraft and vehicles burn during a raid on Kallang during the Japanese offensive. By January 1942, Kallang was the only operational fighter airfield in Singapore, as the other airfields (Tengah, Seletar and Sembawang) were within range of Japanese

artillery on the Malay peninsula. (Courtesy of Andy Thomas)

- 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 Tengah)

- 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, 1948

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

I. – FORMATION OF GENERAL HEADQUARTERS, FAR EAST.

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

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

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 14th November. General Headquarters, Far East, started to operate on Monday, the 18th November, 1940.

During the journey I was able to see the working of the Headquarters of both the Army and Air Force in Cairo, and to consult with the Commander-in-Chief, Sir Archibald Wavell, on the methods of operating his headquarters, and especially why he found such a big expansion from his original staff necessary.

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

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

Instructions and General Policy.

3. My Directive is given in [Appendix A](#).

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

With reference to [paragraph 2](#) of my Directive, the meaning of the term “operational control” was explained as being higher direction and control as distinct from detailed operational control.

In addition to this Directive, I had two main guides for action: first, that it was the policy of His Majesty’s Government to avoid war with Japan, and, secondly, that, until a fleet was available, our policy in the Far East should be to rely primarily on air power in conjunction with such naval forces as could be made available. The first was confirmed during 1941 in many telegrams, *e.g.*, in March, “Avoidance of war with Japan is basis of Far East policy and provocation must be rigidly avoided,” and again in September, “Our policy in the Far East is still to avoid war with Japan.” The second was laid down by the Chiefs of Staff in August, 1940.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(e) To establish as close co-operation as possible with the Dutch and Americans, as well as

with Australia and New Zealand, the main object being to ensure that, should an attack be made on any part of the Far East area, all the nations concerned would simultaneously enter the war against Japan, thus avoiding the risk of defeat in detail, as had happened in Europe.

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

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

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

Size of General Headquarters Staff.

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

The staff of General Headquarters, Far East, was very small for the work it had to carry out, and immediately on its formation in Singapore it was found necessary to add three duty officers of junior rank in order to ensure keeping a twenty-four-hour watch in the office. Requests for an increase in staff at General Headquarters were made on more

than one occasion, and finally it was agreed by the Chiefs of Staff, in August, 1941, that the total establishment should be raised to the following:-

Commander-in-Chief: 1.

Chief of Staff: 1.

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

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

Staff Officer, 3rd Grade: Navy 1.

Total, 15.

In addition to this, there were:-

Personal Assistant: 1.

Cipher Officers: 2.

Signal Officer: 1.

Chief Clerk: 1.

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

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

This sickness was largely attributed by the medical authorities to the effects of overwork. In addition, Wing-Commander Yarde had to be sent away sick, other officers were in hospital for shorter periods, and when war with Japan broke out Colonel Scott, who had taken Colonel Fawcett's place as the Army G.S.O.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, 1941. He and his staff were keen and capable, but they had no experience and very little knowledge of how to set about their work. Further, as in the case of intelligence, this is work that requires a great deal of preparation. In consequence of this, but through no fault of Mr. Killery or his staff, the O.M. activities really never got functioning properly by the time that war with Japan broke out. There was also a curious reluctance on the part of many people to have anything to do with these activities, or to help on the work. This was particularly noticeable in the case of intended activities in Siam.

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

II. – FACTORS AFFECTING THE DEFENCE OF MALAYA AND BORNEO.

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

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

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

The main reason for the defence of Malaya was to preserve the facilities of the Naval Base at Singapore. The port and rubber and tin production were also important, but on a different plane from the Naval Base. It was, of course, not sufficient to have a close defence of the area round the Naval Base itself. It was of great importance to keep enemy aircraft as far away from the Base as possible, on account of the danger of bombing; this

meant extending the defence right up to the Northern end of Malaya. It may be noted that this was not dependent upon the policy of defending Malaya by means of air power. Had the policy been to defend Malaya by means of Army forces, the dispositions might have been different, but it would still have been essential to hold the greater part of Malaya in order to deny aerodromes or their possible sites to the enemy. Singapore Island was to be provisioned for 180 days.

Communications.

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

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

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

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

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

13. For some time before November, 1940, the relations between the Army and the Air Force were not happy; there was some jealousy between them, co-operation left a great deal to be desired, and it was some months before this could be considered satisfactory. Every operation should have been looked upon as a combined operation of two, or very

often the three, services; for a long time there was a tendency for one of the services to work out a plan on its own and then see how one or both the other services could come in.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Borneo.

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

than any in South Indo-China.

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

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

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

III. – FACTORS AFFECTING THE DEFENCE OF BURMA.

Authorities.

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

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

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

Communications.

18. The main factor affecting the defence of Burma was that of communications. The total length of frontier facing Japanese-occupied territory in December, 1941, was nearly 800

miles. There were good roads, as well as railways, running north and south up the valleys of the Sittang and Irrawaddy. Roads in the Tenasserim Peninsula were bad.

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

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

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

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

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

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

20. Turning to the Chiang Rai line of advance, owing to the indifferent road on our side of the frontier and the shortage of Mechanical Transport, it was impracticable to

maintain a big force east of the Salween. The policy, therefore, was to fight delaying actions as far forward as possible, and to make the Salween the main line of defence.

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

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

Engineering Programme.

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

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

Strength of Forces.

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

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

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

23. In the Singapore Conference of October 1940 it was recommended that as

regards the Army, the force immediately required for the defence of Burma was as follows:-

5 infantry brigades and two additional battalions;

1 field regiment and I battery;

2 mountain batteries;

1 anti-tank battery;

1 heavy A.A. regiment (24 guns);

1 light A.A. battery, non-mobile (16 guns);

1 light A.A. battery, mobile; and

1 company light tanks.

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

2 infantry brigades, each of 3 battalions;

1 reconnaissance unit;

1 field regiment (24 guns);

1 medium regiment (16 guns);

1 light A.A. regiment (48 guns);

1 anti-tank battery; and

1 machine gun battalion.

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

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

3 field batteries;

1 anti-tank battery;

and 1 company light tanks out of the immediate requirements, and the whole of the additional requirement.

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

Rifles;

Mechanical transport vehicles;

Officers for the General Officer Commanding's staff and services; and Medical personnel.

24. A Burma Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve under the command of Commander K.S. Lyle, R.N., had been raised in 1940. It had two or three patrol boats operating off the Tenasserim Peninsula, and was also responsible for mine-sweeping the Rangoon approaches and for examination services. There were several other craft building at Rangoon, but these had been 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 1940, air strength in Burma was practically non-existent. The Singapore Conference had recommended the following:-

1 general reconnaissance squadron;

2 bomber squadrons; and

1 fighter squadron.

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

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

It was my opinion that the defence of Burma depended largely upon holding Malaya, and that the defence of the latter must have priority. I also considered it unlikely that the Japanese would attack Burma solely in order to cut the Burma Road to China. They knew that this must involve war with Great Britain, and in all probability with the Dutch and perhaps also the United States. If they were going to face this, they would be much more likely to start attacking Singapore than Burma. Admittedly, we were working on probabilities and not certainties, but, in view of the weakness of our air forces, it was

essential to concentrate the maximum effort and not try to be equally strong in two places.

The American Volunteer Group.

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

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

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

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

Aircraft Warning System.

27. There was an air observation corps under General Officer Commanding, organised in five groups, each under an ex-inspector of police, the observers being local Burmans and

Anglo-Burmans. This Observer Corps did good work, and, according to later reports, warnings of the attacks on Rangoon were received in time for the fighters to take off and get up. An R.D.F. set at Moulmein was just starting to operate in December 1941.

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

Political Factors.

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

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

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

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

IV. – FACTORS AFFECTING THE DEFENCE OF HONG KONG.

Authorities.

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

the duties of General Officer Commanding from Major-General Grasett on the 19th July, 1941.

General Policy.

31. Hong Kong was regarded officially as an undesirable military commitment, or else as an outpost to be held as long as possible. It must, however, be considered in relation to the whole defence of the Far East, especially China and the Philippines. The withdrawal of our troops from Peking, Tientsin and Shanghai in the summer of 1941 after the collapse of France was recognised by General Chiang Kai-shek and the Chinese as being an inevitable and wise move, but the Chinese interest in the defence of Hong Kong grew as their war developed and their difficulties increased. Hong Kong was very valuable to China as a port of access and had they not been convinced of our determination to stand and fight for its defence, and been taken into our confidence and given opportunities to inspect the defences and discuss plans for defence, the effect on their war effort would in all probability have been serious. A withdrawal of the troops in Hong Kong coinciding with the closing of the Burma Road might have had a marked effect on Chinese determination to fight on. Our policy for the defence of Hong Kong, therefore, in all probability played an important part at a critical period in China's war effort.

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

Strength of Defences.

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

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

Two Canadian battalions arrived in Hong Kong on the 16th November, 1941. This extra force was of greater value than the figures would indicate. Whilst there were only

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

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

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

Civil Population Factors.

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

Hong Kong	709,006
Kowloon	581,000
Water population	154,000
Total	1,444,000

This is exclusive of the population of what is known as the New Territories on the mainland. The great increase above the normal population led to many problems, e.g.,

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

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

37. As regards food, rice was a constant anxiety, since most of it had to be imported from Siam or Burma. In addition, what was known as the rice supplement was a problem, since fish would not be available in case of war, and storage of alternatives over a period of months was difficult. In December 1941 the stocks of food were not much short of that required for the period laid down, *i.e.*, 130 days. The local supply of firewood was insufficient, and some was being imported from North Borneo.

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

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

V. – PROBLEMS AND WORK OF GENERAL

HEADQUARTERS, FAR EAST.

Site of General Headquarters.

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

One of the first problems I had to decide was the site of my Headquarters. The Army Headquarters was at Fort Canning and the Air Force Headquarters was in newly-built 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, 1941, but I continued to reside in Singapore, which enabled me to have interviews with the General Officer Commanding, Air Officer Commanding and the Governor, either before I went to the office or on my return. This was not a perfect solution, but it was the best one in all the circumstances.

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

Relations with Commander-in-Chief, China Station.

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

Other questions, such as food supplies, we dealt with together. In this case also shipping was largely involved, and as the Commander-in-Chief, China, had a representative on the

Food Committee, he generally represented our combined views at meetings of the War Committee.

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

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

Conferences at Singapore.

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

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

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

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

(d) The Conference between British, Dutch and Australian representatives, with United States observers in attendance, held in Singapore in February 1941, resulting, in what is known as the A.D.A. agreement. This agreement included plans for mutual reinforcements, principally of air forces and submarines. (See [para. 44 below](#).)

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

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

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

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

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

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

The A.D.A. report was approved generally by the Chiefs of Staff, the main exception being that there could be no prior definition of an act of war and automatic reaction without reference to London.

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

The necessity for collective action was reaffirmed as well as the particular actions by Japan which would necessitate the Commanders concerned advising their respective

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

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

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

From Malaya: 4 bomber squadrons;

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

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

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

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

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

But, although signed by the representatives of the United States, the report was objected to in Washington, mainly on the ground that certain political matters had been introduced. An amended A.D.B. agreement, known as A.D.B. 2, was therefore drawn up

in London in August 1941, leaving all the main features of A.D.B. practically unchanged, but putting the political matters into an appendix. This, however, did not entirely satisfy the United States authorities in Washington, and eventually it was decided that a further conference should be held in the Far East to draw up a modified A.D.B. This information was conveyed to me on the 25th November, 1941, but was received too late for any action to be taken before war started.

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

Information from London.

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

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

Training.

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

Apart from minor Staff Exercises, two were carried out under General Headquarters: the first in December, 1940, to test out communications and cooperation between the Army and the Royal Air Force; and the second, a more ambitious one, in

March, 1941, to test out all the stages of a change-over from peace to war for the civil authorities as well as for the three Services. This brought out many useful lessons. A very successful exercise based on this second one was held in Burma in July, 1941, and Hong Kong carried out two or three on similar lines.

Defensive Preparations.

48. The question of the best method of defending the important sectors of the East Coast of Malaya gave rise to much discussion. One school of thought argued that, as there were insufficient numbers to defend any great length of beach, the enemy would be able to land outside the defended portion, thus 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. 12.](#))

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

It was found at one period that the work of preparing positions and putting up obstacles was taking up so much time that the training of the troops was being hampered and, in addition, the wire generally required renewing after about six months. Also, I was always on guard against too much reliance upon water obstacles, barbed wire and pill-boxes, in case this should lead to a Maginot Line complex to the detriment of the offensive spirit. Consequently, a division of available hours was drawn up, allowing a proportion for training, a proportion for renewals, and the balance for new work. As far as practicable, troops constructed the actual defences in which they would normally fight. New works carried out included not only defensive preparations, but facilities for making counter-attacks, *e.g.*, preparation of hidden paths fit for Bren Carriers.

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

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

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

Operation “Matador.”

50. The importance of the Southern end of the Kra Isthmus, especially the neighbourhood of Singora, has already been referred to ([see paragraph 12 above](#)). The possibility of an advance into this Isthmus, in order to hold a position North of Haad Yai Junction, was considered soon after the formation of General Headquarters, Far East. Detailed plans for carrying out this operation were prepared, and the code word “Matador” was eventually given to it. It was from the start realised that the essential feature of this operation was forestalling the Japanese on a position near Singora; see, for instance my telegram to the

Chiefs of Staff through the War Office, in which it is stated: "The success of this plan would depend on rapidity of execution in order to forestall the Japanese on the Songhla line"; also my telegram from which the following is an extract: "I wish to emphasise the fact that the forestalling of the Japanese in Singora area is essential to the success of 'Matador.'"

This necessitated at least twenty-four hours' start before the Japanese landed, and rapid movement of our force once the order was given. It was realised all along that, if these conditions could not be fulfilled, then the Matador operation would be impracticable. The psychological value of offensive movement at the start of the war and the possibility of thereby upsetting the Japanese plans were fully realised, but had to be weighed against the fact that we should be leaving prepared ground with which the troops were familiar, and that, unless we forestalled the enemy, the fighting would be in the nature of an encounter battle, quite possibly against superior numbers. Further, the attitude of the Siamese was uncertain, and questions of secrecy precluded any attempt to get prior agreement from Bangkok. Orders were issued that, should Matador be ordered, any opposition from the Siamese was to be overcome at once, but we could never be certain in advance how much delay might be caused to our movements by obstacles, destruction of bridges or active resistance. A margin of time was necessary.

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

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

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

(a) If I had information that the Japanese expedition was advancing with the apparent intention of landing on the Kra Isthmus; or

(b) If the Japanese violated any other part of Thailand (*Siam*).

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

the telegram of the 5th December.

Aerodrome Policy.

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

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

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

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

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

53. We learned a lesson from the Dutch as regards the siting of aerodromes. In

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

Aircraft Warning System.

54. There was no air observation system in Malaya when I arrived, and its organisation entailed a large amount of work. The responsibility was at first placed upon the G.O.C. and was later transferred to the A.O.C. Some R.D.F. sets were received during 1941, and before war broke out an air observation system was working well as regards Southern Malaya and Singapore; it was not good up North, partly owing to the lack of depth from the frontier and partly because we had not sufficient R.D.F. sets to install any in the North. Communications were difficult the whole time, as we were short generally of signalling equipment, especially material for the construction of land lines; but the Government Post and Telegraph Service was most helpful, and war experience proved that so long as the Japanese were kept out of Southern Malaya, Singapore could always rely on half-an hour's warning of hostile aircraft. This was, of course, reduced after the Japanese advance had forced us to leave certain R.D.F. stations.

Other Matters that Required Action.

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

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

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

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

Aircraft bombs at this time were also quite insufficient to allow for the expected

expansion, and up to the autumn of 1941, .5 ammunition for the Buffaloes was difficult to obtain in adequate quantity.

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

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

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

Press Relations.

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

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

Complaints reached the Ministry of Information in London that Press correspondents were not being properly treated; in my reply to one that was passed on to Singapore I stated: "Should be most grateful for any assistance you can give to assure that we get out here officers who have knowledge of the work and can be trusted to work

loyally as a team and not for their own individual benefit.” I feel that in this matter we should have had more help from England, principally in the way of suitable and experienced personnel from the beginning.

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

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

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

Meeting with British Far East Representatives.

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

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

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

recommended, including the following:-

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

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

Development of our aid to, and plans for operations in, China; and Liaison with Russian forces in the Far East.

VI. – CIVIL DEFENCE PROBLEMS IN MALAYA.

Food and Water.

62. On my arrival in Singapore I found a large number of Civil Defence matters requiring attention. As regards food supplies, a six months' supply for the whole population, as well as for the Navy, Army and Air Force, had been laid down as the minimum requirement. Rice was a constant source of anxiety. The yield of rice in Malaya was insufficient for the whole population, and so some had to be imported mainly from Burma, and this again was naturally dependent on shipping. As soon as the year's crop was gathered, stocks were plentiful, but the consumption was large and required constant watching. There was difficulty over the storage of rice for more than six months, but this had been solved by the introduction of the method of mixing a small proportion of lime with the rice, which, so far as tests went, preserved it for two years without deterioration. There was also the problem of the distribution of rice, some of the States producing an excess of their own requirements. The custom had been to store this surplus on the spot, and at one time there was some 50,000 tons of rice stored as far North as Alor Star. By the time war broke out, however, distribution was satisfactory.

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

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

fire service already existed for part of Singapore City.

Air Raid Precautions.

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

Black-out in Malaya was difficult. Owing to the construction of most of the houses, complete black-out meant shutting off most of the ventilation, which was extremely disagreeable in Malayan climate. Consequently, when 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 1941 for the event of an invasion of Malaya, and necessary instructions issued. This scheme was directed principally to the destruction or removal of everything that might facilitate the movement of invading forces. It included such things as the removal of food stocks, or their dispersal amongst the villages, the destruction of any form of repair workshop, as well as the demolition of bridges and the removal or destruction of all forms of vehicle or boat. The plan did not envisage a complete “scorched earth” policy. (See [para. 119 below](#).) For instance, in the case of tin

mines it was only laid down that essential parts of the machinery of dredges were to be removed and brought away. A plan for the denial of British-owned tin mines in the Kra Isthmus was also worked out by the O.M. Section of the Ministry of Economic Warfare, including arrangements with Commander-in-Chief, China, for the evacuation of British personnel by sea after the denial scheme had been carried out.

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

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

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

Service and Civilian Communities.

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

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

Attitude of Non-British Population.

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

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

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

VII. – NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES.

China.

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

Co-operation as regards air consisted mainly in the preparation of aerodrome sites and the dispatch to China of stocks of aviation petrol and, finally, bombs, all for British squadrons which it was hoped to send up later. (See [Para. 26](#) above.) The aerodrome sites were in three groups: the first in the area north and west of Kunming, the object of which was largely to protect the Burma Road; the second, an area north of Hong Kong, from which it was hoped to assist in the defence of that place and the third, an area further east, from which it was hoped that one day it might be possible to deliver air attacks on Japan. It was only in the first group that these preparations could be called complete when war broke out. Transport was one of the main difficulties, and it was not until the 13th November, 1941, that permission was given to send up bombs. The petrol and bombs were consigned to the Chinese, who took charge of them.

71. The second form of assistance to China was with their guerillas. It was agreed

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

72. The whole organisation for the supply to the aerodromes and to the guerilla squads was based on Burma. It was known first as Chi Base and later as Tulip. Lieutenant-Colonel McFeat was in charge; his own headquarters were at Rangoon, the training of guerilla squads was carried out at Maymyo, and stores of all sorts were sent up to Lashio and to Bhamo. A mechanical transport organisation for forwarding stores and supplies was in progress, but by no means complete in vehicles by the 7th December. Signalling and medical facilities were deficient for most of the 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, 1941, and various Chinese officers also paid visits individually, including General Mow, of the Chinese Air Force, who was in Singapore from the 19th to the 25th June, 1941, and stayed in my house. Certain members of my staff visited Chungking.

Siam and Indo-China.

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

It was suggested in March, 1941, that we should adopt a strong line with the Siamese. It is, however, at least doubtful whether, if we had done so, the Siamese would

have been willing or able to render any effective aid when the Japanese attacked their country. As events turned out, in spite of statements by the Siamese Prime Minister, the resistance offered by the Siamese for us lasted only a few hours at Battambang on the frontier east of Bangkok, whereas British troops advancing into Southern Siam were opposed by the Siamese after the Japanese had landed.

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

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

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

VIII. – DEVELOPMENT OF THE BRITISH AIR FORCES IN THE FAR EAST.

General Position.

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

reserves.

In the Singapore Conference of October, 1940, the final strength of the Royal Air Force recommended for the Far East was 582 aircraft, an increase of sixteen over that given in the appreciation dated the 16th October, 1940 (see [para. 42 \(b\) above](#)). The Chiefs of Staff agreed that 582 aircraft was an ideal, but considered that 336 should give a very fair degree of security. The figure of 566 aircraft given in the appreciation was stated by the Air Ministry to be far beyond the bounds of practical possibility in the light of total resources and vital requirements in active theatres at home and in the Middle East.

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

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

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

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

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

The following are extracts:-

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

increase”;

and:-

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

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

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

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

Fighters.

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

These new squadrons took a long time to become operationally efficient. The majority of the pilots had to be brought from Australia and New Zealand. They all came straight from the Flying Training Schools, and some from New Zealand had never flown anything beyond a Hart, and had no experience of retractable undercarriages, variable-pitch propellers, or flaps. Under these conditions it took over four months from the time that the pilots arrived in Malaya before the squadrons could be considered fit for operations; in fact, they had not been passed as fit when war with Japan broke out. It would have helped a great deal if we could have formed a proper operational training unit

in Malaya, but I was informed that neither personnel nor aircraft could be spared for the purpose, and that all the training of pilots would have to be done in the squadrons. As this would have seriously hindered the operational training of squadrons, the nucleus of an O.T.U. was formed from our own resources.

After the formation of the third and fourth Buffalo squadrons had been started, it was found that the re-equipment of the R.A.A.F. Wirraway Squadron was going to be delayed indefinitely, and I was requested by Australia to take any possible steps I could to ensure that this Australian squadron was re-equipped with some form of more modern machine than the Wirraway. The only possible course of action was to re-equip it with Buffaloes. This was sanctioned by the Air Ministry and carried out, but five squadrons were definitely too many for the total number of Buffaloes available, and overstrained the reserves.

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

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

85. Apart from the fighter squadron in Burma, we had in Malaya in December, 1941, a total of four Buffalo squadrons, one Dutch fighter squadron, which arrived on the 9th December, and one Blenheim squadron, the last principally for night fighting. This total was considered adequate both by the Chiefs of Staff and by my own General Headquarters, but results showed that more fighter squadrons were required, largely because the scope of a fighter's duties has widened. One Buffalo squadron was specially trained for Army co-operation, and we really wanted two. I had also agreed with the Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, that one squadron, which ought to have been a Buffalo, should be trained in the duties of fighter protection for ships. Fighter squadrons are also the most efficient type with which to attack enemy aerodromes. To carry out these functions at all adequately, as well as the normal duties of a fighter, at least seven fighter squadrons were needed in Malaya alone, without allowing for night fighters.

Long-Range Bombers.

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

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

Other Requirements.

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

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

88. The strength and location of the Royal Air Force in the Far East on the 7th December, 1941, are given in [Appendix J](#) and a summary of serviceable aircraft in Malaya

on different dates in December in [Appendix K](#).

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

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

IX. – ARMY STRENGTH AND REQUIREMENTS, MALAYA.

90. In the appreciation of the situation drawn up by the Commanders in Malaya previous to the Singapore Defence Conference of October, 1940, an estimate was made of the total armed forces required on the supposition that 582 aircraft would be available for the defence of the Far East. The estimate was as follows:-

26 infantry battalions, including 3 for Borneo.

5 field regiments.

3 light tank companies.

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

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

48 Infantry Battalions.

4 Indian Reconnaissance Units.

9 Forward Artillery Regiments.

4 Light A.A. Regiments.

2 Tank Regiments.

3 Anti-Tank Regiments.

2 Mountain Artillery Regiments.

12 Field Companies.

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

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

The main deficiencies were:-

17 Battalions;

4 Light A.A. Regiments; and

2 Tank Regiments.

The strength in A.A. weapons in the Far East on the 7th December, 1941, is given in [Appendix F](#).

92. The fact that we were entirely without tanks in Malaya was a serious handicap to any offensive land operations, whether on a small or a large scale. There were also very few armoured cars. Many efforts were made to obtain both tanks and armoured cars from various sources. On the 14th August the War Office offered forty light tanks from the Middle East. These tanks were at the time being employed for aerodrome defence, and they were offered to the Far East on the condition that they would be employed in an operational role, and that we could man them from local resources. Some delay occurred at Singapore in finding the best method of meeting the latter condition. Eventually Australia agreed to provide the necessary men and to train them up to a reasonable standard in Australia, this training to be completed by the 1st January, 1942. On the 13th November, 1941, however, Middle East reported to the War Office that they could not provide forty tanks for the Far East except at the expense of operational requirements. After war had broken out, War Office ordered Middle East to send fifty light tanks to India, their subsequent destination to be decided later.

With regard to armoured cars, a model of an armoured vehicle mounted on an American chassis was obtained from the Dutch and six were made in Singapore, chiefly at

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

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

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

X. – EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE WAR.

The Problem of Japanese Intentions.

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

94. Another difficulty in getting any long warning of the Japanese intention was due to the restriction on exports to, and imports from, Japan. So long as Japanese merchant shipping was being employed on its normal work, F.E.C.B. could keep track of every vessel, and should it be found that an unusual number was being kept in home ports for no good reason, it would indicate the possibility, or even probability, that the Japanese were refitting these ships as transports prior to an overseas expedition. The effect of the embargo, however, was to drive all Japanese shipping off the seas for purely economic

reasons, and once in Japanese ports they could be altered as required without our being any the wiser. This applied especially to the fast vessels, *i.e.*, round about 18 knots.

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

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

Aeroplanes, almost certainly Japanese, occasionally flew over parts of Malaya in the latter part of November and early December, in all probability carrying out photographic reconnaissance, but owing to the speed and height at which they operated we were never able to make contact and obtain definite identification.

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

carried out, and reconnaissances over the China Sea were instituted.

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

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

Order of the Day.

97. The Commander-in-Chief, China, and I had agreed as far back as May, 1941, that it was desirable to prepare an Order of the Day before the war broke out, so that it could reach Burma and Hong Kong in time to be translated into the different languages spoken by the troops in the Far East and be ready for issue on the first day of war. Drafting this Order presented difficulty because it had to appeal to men of varying races and religions, *e.g.*, British sailors and Burmese troops. The main object that I had in view when preparing it was to make an effective appeal to the Indian troops, as I considered it would be necessary to stimulate them rather than the British. Through information that has reached me subsequent to the outbreak of war I believe it had the effect it was meant to. The order is given in [Appendix M](#).

Approach of the First Enemy Expedition.

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

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

The location of these forces by Hudsons of No. 1 Royal Australian Air Force Squadron, based on Kota Bharu, was a particularly good piece of work in view of their being at the limit of their patrolling range, over 300 miles from the Malayan Coast. This same factor of distance, however, made it impossible for them to remain in contact until relieved, but a Catalina Flying-boat was despatched to shadow the convoy during the night. The Air Officer Commanding also ordered a reconnaissance by Hudsons starting early on the 7th December, fanning out from Kota Bharu on to the last known bearings of the convoy. No signal was received from the Catalina, and, from information received later, it is almost certain it was shot down. A second Catalina failed to make contact with the convoy. On the morning of the 7th December, visibility East and North-East from Kota Bharu was good. The reconnaissance found no ships in the area between Kota Bharu and the Southern end of Indo-China, thus confirming the supposition that the convoy had rounded Cambodia Point, and had followed the four leading ships North-North-West into the Gulf of Siam. In this Gulf the visibility was very bad and no positive information was received from this area until the evening, when a report was received that a Hudson had seen, through low clouds, three small Japanese ships which were then passing Singora and heading south. This information reached me about 2100 hours. I met General Percival and we proceeded together to the Naval Base; I decided not to order “Matador”; the main

reason being that at least 24 hours start was required before the anticipated time of a Japanese landing and this was most unlikely to be available, should the 3 ships seen turn out to be part of a Japanese expedition. Further, the conditions for reconnaissance were bad, on the information then available there could be no certainty that the Japanese were about to open hostilities, and on more than one occasion the British Minister to Thailand had stressed the serious consequences that would ensue should we be the first to break Thai neutrality. (See also [paragraph 51](#) above.)

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

XI. – THE START OF HOSTILITIES.

The Opening Day.

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

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

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

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

Naval, Army and Air Force establishments.

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

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

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

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

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

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

killed. Alor Star was defended by four 3-inch 20-cwt. guns, but they failed to bring down any Japanese aircraft, possibly owing to the height at which they were flying.

9th-11th December.

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

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

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

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

Japanese Army reinforcements meanwhile arrived on a considerable scale. A large

force, consisting of transports escorted by a battleship, three cruisers and eleven destroyers, was sighted by our aircraft between Kota Bharu and the Penhentai Islands on the 9th December. North of Kuantan the Japanese landed in small numbers at Beserah during the night 9th-10th December. These were driven off, and by 0845 on the 10th December all was quiet there. The general situation in regard to Japanese landings was thus that all successful landings took place North of the Malaya – Siam frontier, except that at Kota Bharu, which, as already stated in [para. 12](#) above, had no road communications to Southern Malaya, and depended for reinforcements from the South on the railway alone.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

107. The *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*, accompanied by four destroyers, left Singapore in the afternoon of Monday, the 8th December. Early on the 10th December a signal was made to Singapore indicating that the ships would return earlier than originally planned. Except for this, no communication was received and their position remained unknown until, shortly after twelve noon on Wednesday, the 10th December, a signal was received from *Repulse* that she was being bombed in a position about 60 miles East-

South-East of Kuantan. On receipt of the message a fighter squadron was at once despatched and reached the position of the ships in commendably quick time, but only to see the *Prince of Wales* go down. No enemy aircraft were spotted. Fighter cover, though only a weak one, was provided for the destroyers that picked up the crews from the sunken ships.

108. I had been asked by Rear-Admiral Palliser to give an indication of the strength of the air force that the Japanese might bring against these two ships from Indo-China, and gave an estimate of between 50 and 60 bombers which might be expected to arrive five hours after the ships had been first located by reconnaissance. Whether this information was ever received by the Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, I do not know.

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

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

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

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

Japanese Command of the Sea.

111. From the point of view of the defence of the Far East as a whole, what was more

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

An indirect result of the Pearl Harbour attack was to prevent the surface ships of the Asiatic Fleet from Manila co-operating with British and Dutch ships in the Java and South China Seas in accordance with the A.D.B. agreement. This Asiatic Fleet was, by orders from Washington, limited to operations between Sourabaya and Port Darwin.

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

Penang.

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

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

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

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

113. The first attack on Penang was at 1100 hours on the 8th December, when the aerodrome was bombed by Japanese aircraft, the effect generally being small. At 1000 hours the 11th December, Georgetown was bombed and heavy casualties caused among the native population; these were due not so much to any inadequacy of A.R.P. as to the

fact that the native population turned out into the streets to watch the sight, presumably under the impression that another attack was about to be made on the aerodrome. As a result nearly the whole native population left the town and the labour problem became acute. Next day the military authorities had to take over many civil duties, including burial of the dead, and the naval authorities had to work the ferries between the Island and the mainland.

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

At 2030 hours, the 15th December, orders were received by the Military Commander at Penang to destroy all military stores, etc., that could not be moved and to come away with the remainder of the garrison and British civilians. About half a dozen British residents were left as they did not wish to move. The native Volunteers were given the option of moving, but most of them decided to remain with their families in Penang; the British personnel of the Volunteers were brought away.

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

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

XII. – THE RETREAT FROM NORTHERN MALAYA.

12th-18th December.

115. By the 12th December enemy pressure on the Kedah front was becoming very severe. The Kroh forces were being forced backwards over the frontier, while our right in Northern Kedah was also driven back, necessitating the 6th Indian Infantry Brigade withdrawing on the left to conform and hold a line River Bukit (north of Alor Star) to Penang. Penang was the subject of daily air attacks at this period. Two days of heavy

fighting then saw our forces pushed back twenty miles south of Alor Star, the 11th Division taking up a position in the Gurun area. Some of the infantry units in this division reported losses up to 50 per cent., but this included missing, many of whom re-joined later.

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

The Japanese were now employing Kota Bharu aerodrome, reconnaissance revealing some forty of their fighters on the ground. To attack Kota Bharu, Singora and Patani aerodromes with the object of reducing the scale of Japanese air effort was part of our general air policy at this period, but our bomber effort was painfully limited by our lack of aircraft. Apart from deficiency of adequate A.A. weapons, the defence of our aerodromes was handicapped by lack of adequate warning in the North. (See [para. 54 above](#).) These formed two causes of our heavy losses of aircraft on the ground. The retention of our main fighter strength for the defence of Singapore ([see para. 142 below](#)) was a contributory cause and also reacted directly on our bombing effort, since it was impracticable to provide fighter escorts.

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

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

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

On land, the enemy, having advanced in Kelantan (as far as the Sungei Nal) and in Kedah, was now also attacking detachments of our troops in Perak round about the Grik

area. The 3rd Indian Corps was accordingly authorised to withdraw behind the line of the Perak River to protect the communications of our forces North of Kuala Kangsar. The 11th Indian Division began withdrawing from the line of the River Muda Southwards behind River Krian, linking up with the 28th Indian Infantry Brigade and protected all the time on the right flank by the 12th Indian Infantry Brigade. During this period the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders made counter-attacks with gallantry and skill. This withdrawal was carried out successfully, the enemy being repulsed with loss at his first attempt to cross the river.

Inter-Allied Conference, 18th December.

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

- (a) The importance of Singapore to the war in the Far East, and to the world war, could not be exaggerated;
- (b) The immediate plan was to dispose our combined forces then available in the Far East so as to-
 - (i) Keep the enemy as far North in Malaya as possible and hold him in the Philippines; and
 - (ii) Prevent the enemy acquiring territory, and particularly aerodromes, which would threaten the arrival of reinforcements;
- (c) Our urgent and immediate need was for reinforcements, which must be on a scale not only to meet the present scale of attack, but also that likely to be put in the field against us;
- (d) It was recommended that the United States convoy at present directed to Brisbane should proceed to Sourabaya, where aircraft would be assembled and flown on to destination;
- (e) It was desirable that the Chinese should be asked to maintain the maximum pressure on the Japanese in order to contain as many divisions as possible, and subsequently to provide bases for long-distance bombing attacks on Japan.

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

Reinforcements.

118. From the 8th December, 1941, onwards many requests for reinforcements had been made from General Headquarters, Far East. The time factor meant that reinforcements had

to come from the Middle East, India and convoys already at sea rather than from the United Kingdom. Complicated quadrangular references between Malaya, India, the Middle East and London were hence entailed, but Commander-in-Chief, India, was most helpful in appreciating the need for diversion to Malaya of forces originally intended for his own command. A sub-committee of the Inter-Allied Conference, having considered all the previous requests for reinforcements, agreed on the following immediate requirements for Malaya to stabilise the situation:-

Air-

4 Fighter Squadrons;

4 Bomber Squadrons;

1 Photographic Flight;

1 Transport Flight; and

Reserves at 100 per cent. for fighters and 50 per cent. for bombers, plus aircraft to complete existing squadrons and their reserves.

Land-

1 Brigade Group;

1 Division;

Reinforcements for 9th and 11th Divisions;

3 Light A.A. Regiments;

2 Heavy A.A. Regiments;

1 Anti-Tank Regiment;

50 Light tanks;

350 Anti-tank rifles;

Bofors ammunition; and

500 Tommy guns and ammunition;

Further large forces would be required later in view of probable Japanese reinforcements.

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

Air-

51 Hurricanes. (One fighter squadron ex convoy W.S. 12. Z with 18 additional pilots);

24 Blenheims. (One squadron from Middle East);

52 Hudsons (from United Kingdom);

While measures were in hand aiming at the release of a further 3 fighter squadrons from the Middle East, and for 80 4-engined United States bombers.

Land-

2 Infantry Brigade Groups	}	
Reinforcements for 9th-11th Divisions	}	ex India
85th Anti-Tank Regiment complete	}	
6th Heavy A.A. Regiment (16 guns)	}	ex Convoy W.S. 12.Z.
32nd Light A.A. Regiment (24 guns)	}	

Light tank squadron (17 Light tanks and reserves) ex India;

53rd Infantry Brigade (18th Division), guns and transport of which were to follow after arrival of personnel;

1 Machine Gun Battalion and reinforcements for the A.I.F. Brigades ex Australia;

Provision of further tanks was under discussion, while General Headquarters, Far East, was also pressing strongly for the complete 18th Division.

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

19th-25th December.

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

The general situation on land by the 19th-21st December was that our troops were trying to keep the enemy West of the River Perak, while at the same time preventing him advancing further South than the River Krian. To this end the 11th Indian Division, which it was considered essential to maintain as a fighting formation, was holding a line along the River Kuran with the 28th Indian Infantry Brigade, and also protecting Kuala Kangsar with the 12th Indian Infantry Brigade, a detachment of which was also further North along the Grik road. The Division as a whole was suffering from exhaustion, damaged feet and loss of equipment. The 6th and 15th Indian Infantry Brigades were now re-formed at Ipoh as the composite 15th Infantry Brigade, while a composite battalion of the 2nd/16th and 3rd/16th from these two Brigades was in Corps Reserve. The Kelantan forces, 8th Indian Infantry Brigade, 9th Indian Division, had suffered about a hundred casualties in each battalion, and were now along the railway at Manik Orai. Of elements not thus far engaged in the main operations, the 22nd Indian Infantry Brigade (9th Indian Division)

was at Kuantan, while the Australian 22nd and 27th Brigades were responsible for Johore, and the 1st and 2nd Malay Infantry Brigades for Singapore Fortress. None of these last four Brigades could be despatched North to relieve the hard-pressed 11th Indian Division, for the reasons given below. (*See para. 438 below.*)

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

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

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

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

The Japanese floated troops down the Perak River by night, and on the 22nd December the 12th Indian Infantry Brigade was forced back South of Kuala Kangsar. The 28th Indian Infantry Brigade was also pressed in the same direction, small detachments only being left North of Kuala Kangsar and West of the Perak River. Bridges were destroyed as the troops retired. While this was taking place on the Perak front, the Kelantan withdrawal was also continuing, the 8th Indian Infantry Brigade retiring South of Kuala Krai along the railroad. A problem similar to that of Krohcol and the 11th Division referred to above ([see para. 115](#)) now arose in regard to 8th Indian Infantry Brigade and the main body of III Corps in Perak, and, to a lesser degree, in regard to the force at Kuantan and the 8th Indian Infantry Brigade. It was therefore decided to withdraw this 8th Brigade much further South into Central Malaya, and it took up completely new positions in the Kuala Lipis – Raub area. A small party known as “Macforce” was left with an

armoured train at Dabong to withdraw down the railway, demolishing it as they went. The Kuantan force was ordered to prepare to withdraw Westwards at short notice. On the 23rd December all our fighters on the mainland were withdrawn to Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Port Swettenham being kept as advanced landing grounds. The enemy was also occupying various points down the East coast of Malaya, and had proceeded from Kuala Trengganu to Dungun. By the 25th December it would be true to say that something like one-half of Malaya had passed from our control.

121. With the object of maintaining the morale of the civil population of Malaya I held a meeting on the 22nd December, attended by members of the Legislative Council, leading men of the different communities and the Press, the total number being about 120. The main points I stressed were that the available strength had proved inadequate; we had to remember that the aircraft, A.A. guns and tanks that might have come to Malaya were not being wasted, but were being used with great effect in Libya and Russia; that there was every reason for confidence that now the requirements of the Far East had become pressing, those responsible were taking steps to ensure the despatch of adequate reinforcements of men and material; and that it was up to everyone to ensure that no effort was spared to hold up the enemy until the necessary forces arrived.

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

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

7,174 European;

2,305 Indian; and

1,250 Chinese.

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

XIII. – THE ATTACK ON, AND FALL OF, HONG KONG.

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

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

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

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

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

During the night of the 14th-15th December, the Japanese continued their

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

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

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

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

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

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

125. On the 20th our line was still roughly North from Stanley Mound. A communiqué was again issued to inspire civilian morale with belief in near relief by

Chinese forces. By the 21st the enemy was attacking strongly across Mount Nicholson through Middle Gap, and our troops were suffering greatly from exhaustion, the wet and cold of the night-time, and isolation from food and ammunition stores. Counterattacks on the enemy rear by the Royal Rifles of Canada came to nought, and Winnipeg Grenadiers were also unsuccessful in an effort to retake Wong Nei Cheong Gap. The enemy still paid attention from the air to the Dockyard area, and practically all Naval personnel were now ashore and took their place in the land fighting. Japanese naval forces blockading the Island consisted of two cruisers, two destroyers and two torpedo boats.

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

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

126. By the 23rd December the principal reservoirs were in the hands of the enemy, and the connections of those that remained under our control were damaged through shell-fire. Great efforts were made to effect repairs, but, in the absence of any substantial success in this direction, only one day’s supply of water remained to the beleaguered city. Food stores, too, were greatly depleted. Our troops had become more or less exhausted, though Royal Marines managed to recapture ground on Mount Cameron (protecting the South of Victoria), which had been heavily bombarded by the Japanese, and the Middlesex Regiment beat off an attack on Leighton Hill. The enemy, however, penetrated through the A.R.P. tunnels and street fighting began at Wanchai. The conduct of the civil population, which had thus far suffered some 4,000 casualties (1,000 killed), was, however, good and had become increasingly so since the first depression after the evacuation of the mainland.

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

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

On the 25th December, in the early hours of the morning, street fighting took place as the enemy fought his way towards the centre of the town, but another Japanese

demand for surrender was refused. Two hours later, however, the Governor was advised by the Military and Naval commanders that further effective resistance could not be made, and, after carrying out a series of demolitions, our forces were ordered to lay down their arms. The Chinese kept their word and had endeavoured to assist the defence of Hong Kong by advancing on Canton, but their force was not strong enough to produce any serious effect on the Japanese.

XIV. – OPERATIONS IN BURMA AND SARAWAK.

Burma.

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

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

Sarawak.

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

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

Considerable anxiety and uneasiness was felt by the authorities in Kuching owing to the absence of Naval and Air Forces. It was pointed out to them, however, that many places in England had stood up to bombing without any direct defence, and that they would be expected to do the same. It was evident, however, that the morale of the population of Kuching was in a bad way. This, in my opinion, was partly due to the fact that the ruler, Rajah Brooke, was absent – actually in Australia. He had a great deal of influence with the natives, and in view of the situation he should have returned to his

country immediately on the outbreak of war, if not before. As it was, the Sarawak Rangers proved quite unreliable, and the 2/15 Punjab Regiment were left to carry out the defence by themselves.

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

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

An expedition clearly aimed at Kuching was then sighted on the 23rd December, and 5 Blenheim IVs, attacking this on the 24th December, scored one hit on a transport and some near misses. Air support from Sinkawang was no longer possible in view of the damage to the aerodrome from a Japanese attack, and the Dutch aircraft were withdrawn to Palembang. The 2/15 Punjab Regiment carried out demolitions on the aerodromes, held up the Japanese for a time, and eventually moved in accordance with orders, along a jungle path, to join up with the Dutch, though this necessitated abandoning practically the whole of their equipment.

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

According to later reports, some 800 of the 2/15 Punjab Regiment joined the Dutch and were still fighting with them at the end of January, 1942.

XV. – SPECIAL FEATURES OF THE OPERATIONS.

Changes in Commands.

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

- (a) Admiral Sir Tom Phillips replaced Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton on the 6th December.
- (b) On the 10th December, after Sir Tom Phillips had gone down with the *Prince of Wales*, Sir Geoffrey Layton – who was then actually on board his ship about to start for Australia on his way home – resumed command.
- (c) On the 6th November I was informed that “owing to recent developments in the Far East, it had been decided that the duties of Commander-in-Chief should be entrusted to an Army officer with up-to-date experience.” My successor was to be Lieutenant-General Paget. This prospective change became generally known in the Army and Air Force in Malaya by the end of November.
- (d) On the 29th November a signal was received from Whitehall to the effect that General Pownall had been substituted for General Paget.
- (e) On the 15th December the responsibility of the defence of Burma was transferred from the Commander-in-Chief, Far East, to Commander-in-Chief, India.
- (f) On the 29th December General McLeod was replaced by General Hutton as General Officer Commanding, Burma.
- (g) On the 10th December Mr. Duff Cooper was appointed as Cabinet representative in the Far East, and instructions were received by him that a War Council was to be formed under his leadership.

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

War Council.

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

Mr. Duff Cooper, *Chairman*;

H.E. the Governor of Malaya;

C.-in-C., Far East;

C.-in-C., Eastern Fleet;

G.O.C. Malaya;

A.O.C. Far East;

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

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

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

Its composition was:-

Mr. Duff Cooper, *Chairman*;

Fortress Commander;

Inspector-General of Police;

and One civilian.

Intelligence.

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

As indicated in [paragraph 75](#) above, there was also some error regarding the intentions of the Siamese Government.

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

134. There was also an under-estimate of the efficiency of the Japanese Army and

Air Force, particularly in the following points:-

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

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

(c) The individual initiative of the Japanese soldier;

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

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

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

Japanese Army Tactics and Training.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Factors affecting Morale of our Forces.

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

In both British and Indian units there was only a small leaven of war-experienced officers and men, and it was under these conditions that young soldiers had to meet the first shock of the Japanese attack.

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

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

Then, owing to the comparative weakness of our forces in Malaya we could neither afford heavy losses up North nor send up there more than limited reinforcements,

because of the necessity for retaining a force to defend Southern Johore and in the last resort the island of Singapore itself. This was not the result of a sort of fortress-complex, but because the essential factor was preservation of the repair and other

facilities in the Naval Base. The opinion held in London on this point was made perfectly clear in the latter part of December when the Chiefs of Staff telegraphed:

“His Majesty’s Government agree your conception that vital issue is to ensure security of Singapore Naval Base. They emphasise that no other consideration must compete with this.”

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

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

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

Royal Air Force problems.

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

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

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

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

Defence and Denial of Aerodromes.

144. As indicated in [para. 103](#) above, the primary object of the Japanese appears to have been to get command of the air, principally by the attack on our aerodromes by aircraft, or by their capture. The weakness of our aerodrome defence is referred to in [para. 115](#) above. In regard to A.A. weapons, as a result of the experiences in Crete, I laid down that the defence of aerodromes was to take precedence over everything else except the A.A. defence of the Naval Base. It was decided that the full scale of the defence would be eight heavy and eight light A.A. guns; this was altered after war broke out to four heavy and twelve light, a scale that was hardly every approached.

145. When our aerodromes had to be abandoned, steps were naturally taken to render them useless to the enemy, particularly by explosives in runways and other parts of the landing area. The effect of this action was generally of disappointingly short duration. The Japanese were certainly quick in carrying out repairs, but, even allowing for that, the results of many of the demolitions as carried out seem hardly to have repaid the energy

expended and the adverse moral effect on troops of hearing explosions behind them. A system of delay-action mines would probably have been effective provided they could have been properly concealed; preparations would have been necessary for this at the time the aerodromes were constructed. A heavy tractor drawing some form of deep plough or scarifier and working in between craters would have been a very useful addition; it could not have gone on working to the last moment, unless it was intended to abandon the tractor, since these could only move very slowly and were likely to block roads if left to the last.

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

Left-Behind Parties.

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

Question of a Military Governor.

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

Australia's Assistance.

148. The Australian Government fully realised the importance of Singapore to the defence of the Far East and especially to Australia and did everything in their power to help. In November, 1940, there were three squadrons of the Royal Australian Air Force in Malaya. In December, 1940, the Australian War Minister visited Singapore. Largely as a result of his representations, the Australian Government despatched the 22nd Brigade, Australian Imperial Forces, to Singapore in February. The 27th Brigade followed later, and arrived on the 20th August. Besides these valuable reinforcements, Australia supplied officers for the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve for administrative work on aerodromes, men for two reserve mechanical transport units in the spring of 1941 and for the forty tanks which we

had hoped to get from the Middle East. The situation regarding Beaufort aircraft has been mentioned in [para. 79](#) above, and small arms ammunition in [para. 92](#). In addition to this, Australia also supplied many items of signalling equipment and special radio sets for coast defence guns. After the war started four Hudsons from Australia reached Singapore on the 23rd December and Army reinforcements were promised. (See [para. 118](#) above.)

The Dutch.

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

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

Work of General Headquarters.

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

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

Although my General Headquarters operated at the Naval Base at the beginning of the war, it was found that, after the loss of the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* and the formation of the War Council, it was more convenient for my Headquarters to be located

near the Combined Operations Room. Preparations had been made for this some months before, and the necessary accommodation was available. The move was carried out about the 15th December.

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

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

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

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

Farewell Order.

153. I handed over Command of the Far East to Lt.-General Sir Henry Pownall on the 27th December, 1941, and left Singapore, in accordance with instructions, on the 31st December. I end with my farewell order which was published on the 28th December, 1941.

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

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

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

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

R. BROOKE-POPHAM,

Air Chief Marshal.

APPENDICES

- A.— Directive to the Commander-in-Chief, Far East.
- B.— Instructions issued to General Officers Commanding and Air Officer Commanding, Far East.
- C.— His Majesty's Ships based at Singapore and Hong Kong, December 7, 1941.
- D.— Summary of Army Strength, Malaya, November, 1940.
- E.— Order of Battle, Malaya, December 7, 1941, and Summary.
- F.— Anti-Aircraft Position, December, 7, 1941.
- G.— Order of Battle, Burma, December 7, 1941, and Summary.
- H.— Order of Battle, Hong Kong, December 8, 1941.
- I.— Strength of Air Force in Malaya, November, 1940.
- J.— Strength and Dispositions of the Royal Air Force, December 7, 1941.
- K.— Summary of Operationally Serviceable I.E. Aircraft in Malaya.
- L.— Performance of the Buffalo Single-Seater.
- M.— Order of the Day issued December 8, 1941.

APPENDIX A.

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

1. You are appointed Commander-in-Chief, Far East.
2. You will be responsible to the Chiefs of Staff for the operational control and general direction of training of all British land and air forces in Malaya/ Burma and Hong Kong, and for the co-ordination of plans for the defence of these territories.

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

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

General Officer Commanding, Malaya.

General Officer Commanding, Burma.

General Officer Commanding, Hong Kong.

Air Officer Commanding, Far East.

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

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

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

A Chief of Staff (an army officer of the rank of Major-General),

A Senior Royal Air Force Staff Officer,

A Naval Liaison Officer,

An Army Officer of the rank of General Staff Officer, 1st Grade,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

APPENDIX B.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(7) The Commander-in-Chief requires to be kept informed of general administrative conditions of forces under your command, including position in respect of reserves of essential commodities. Any major administrative difficulties which you may

now be experiencing, or which arise subsequently, will be reported at once, in order that both extent to which they may affect operations or policy may be accurately gauged, and that representations may be made direct by him to higher authority, if such a course appears to be required.

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

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

APPENDIX C.

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

Singapore-

Capital Ships-

Prince of Wales.

Repulse.

Cruisers-

Danae.

Dragon.

Durban.

Destroyers-

Jupiter.

Electra.

Encounter.

Express.

Tenedos.

Thanet.

Scout.

Stronghold.

Ships from other Stations refitting at Singapore.

Cruiser-

Mauritius (*E.I. Station*).

Destroyers-

Isis (*Mediterranean Station*).

H.M.A.S. *Vampire* (Australian Station).

H.M.A.S. *Vendetta* (Australian Station).

Submarine-

Rover (Mediterranean Station).

Hong Kong-

Destroyer-

Thracian.

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

APPENDIX D.

SUMMARY OF ARMY STRENGTH, MALAYA, NOVEMBER, 1940.

Infantry-

17 Battalions, viz.-

British	6 (including I M.G. Battalion).
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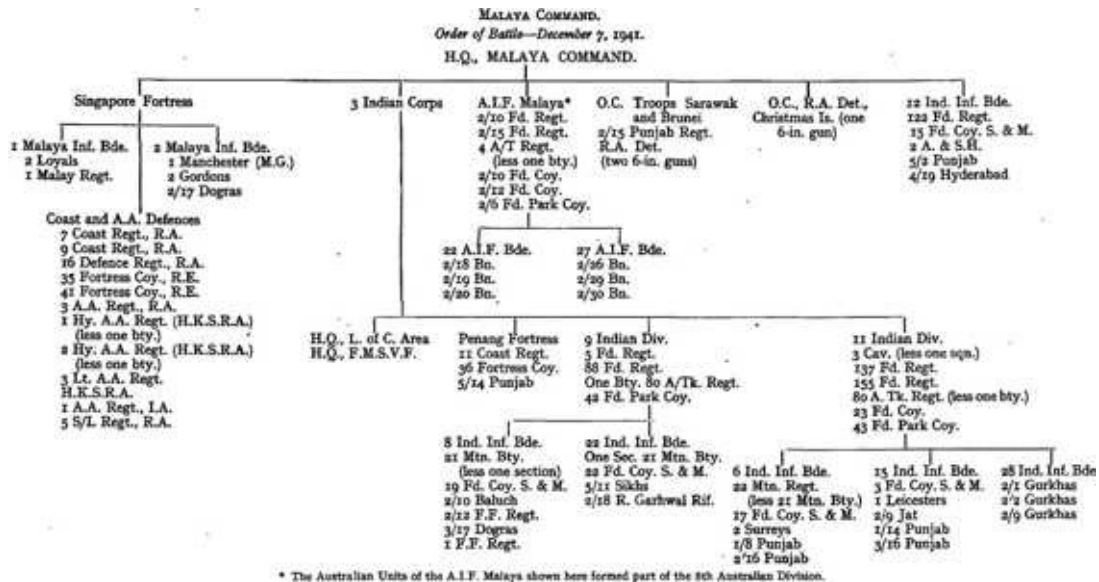
Indian	10
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Malay	1
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Mobile Artillery-

I Mountain Regiment, R.A.

APPENDIX E.



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

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

Infantry Battalions-

British 6 (including 1 M.G. Btn.).

Indian 18

Australian 6

Malay 1

Total 31

Volunteer Battalions 10

Johore Military Forces 1

Indian State Forces	5
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Artillery-

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

Regulars-

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

British	2,430
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Indian	727
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Asiatic	7,395
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Total	10,552
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Grand Total	86,895
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APPENDIX F.

FAR EAST.

Anti-Aircraft Position, December 7, 1941.

	Approved Scale.	Holdings.	En route.	Allocated but not shipped
Malaya – Heavy Light	176 100 (plus 144 field force)	70 78	12 28	20 } 52 } (b)
3-in. Naval	Nil	24	Nil	
Burma – Heavy Light	24 68	8 } 16 } (a)	8 8	
Hong Kong – Heavy Light	32 30	14 2	4 8	
3-in. Naval	Nil	2		

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

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

APPENDIX G.

BURMA.

Order of Battle at Commencement of Hostilities.

(1) 1st Burma Division-

consisting of-

Maymyo Brigade

2nd K.O.Y.L.I.

1st Burma Rifles.

6th Burma Rifles.

7th Burma Rifles.

12th Mountain Battery.

56th Field Company (S. and M.).

Tenasserim Brigade

2nd Burma Rifles.

4th Burma Rifles.

5th Burma Rifles.

8th Burma Rifles.

2nd Mountain Battery.

Sec. Field Company.

13th Indian Infantry Brigade

5th/1st Punjab.

2nd/7th Rajputs.

1st/18th R. Garh Rifles.

23 rd Mountain Battery.

5th Field Battery R.A., B.A.F.

(2) Rangoon Brigade

1st Gloucesters.

3rd Burma Rifles.

Coast Defence Battery.

(3) 16th Indian Infantry Brigade

Ist/9th Jat.

4th/12th F.F. Regiment.

Ist/7th Gurkha Regiment.

5th Mountain Battery.

Headquarters, 27th Mountain Regiment.

50th Field Company (S. and M.).

(4) Burma Frontier Force

Bhama Battalion.

Chin Hills Battalion.

Myitkyina Battalion.

Northern Shan States Battalion.

Southern Shan States Battalion.

Kokine Battalion.

Reserve Battalion.

(5) Garrison Companies

1st Garrison Company.

2nd Garrison Company.

3rd Garrison Company.

4th Garrison Company.

5th Garrison Company.

(6) Burma Rifles (Territorials)	11th Burma Rifles.
12th Burma Rifles.	
13th Southern Shan States Battalion Burma Rifles.	
14th Burma Rifles (forming).	
(7) Burma Auxiliary Force	Rangoon Battalion.
Upper Burma Battalion.	
Burma Railways Battalion.	
Tenasserim Battalion.	
I A.A. Regiment (forming).	
(8) Burma Rifles	9th and 10th Battalions (forming).
Six Anti-Tank Troops.	
One Field Battery.	
(9) Field Company	Forming.
(10) Armed Police	Three Battalions.

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

Infantry-

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

Burma Frontier Force 6 battalions,

I reserve battalion.

Artillery-

Indian Mountain Batteries 3

Burma Auxiliary Force I field battery, 18-pounders.

Five mobile detachments Burma Frontier Force.

APPENDIX H.

HONG KONG.

Order of Battle at Outbreak of War.

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

Hong Kong Infantry Brigade-

Arrived.

1st Battalion Middlesex Regiment (M.G.)

August, 1937.

1st Battalion The Winnipeg Grenadiers

November, 1941.

1st Battalion The Royal Rifles of Canada

November, 1941.

Kowloon Infantry Brigade-

2nd Battalion The Royal Scots

January, 1938.

2nd 14th Punjab Regiment

November, 1940.

5th 7th Rajputana Rifles

June, 1937.

Headquarters Fortress, R.E.-

I E. and M. Company.

I Field Company (3 British, I Chinese section).

I Bomb Disposal section.

I Medium Regiment, H.K.S.R.A.

8th Coast Regiment, R.A.

12th Coast Regiment, R.A.

5th A.A. Regiment, R.A.

Ancillary Units.

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

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

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

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

APPENDIX I.

STRENGTH OF AIR FORCE IN MALAYA.

November, 1940.

Bombers: 2 squadrons Blenheim I –	24 aircraft.
Reconnaissance: 2 squadrons Hudsons (R.A.A.F.) –	24 aircraft.
Torpedo Bombers: 2 squadrons Vildebeestes –	24 aircraft.
General Purpose: I squadron Wirraways (R.A.A.F.) –	12 aircraft.
Flying Boats: I squadron Singapores –	4 aircraft.
<hr/>	
Total:	88 first-line aircraft.

APPENDIX J.

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

Malaya.

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

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

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

Reserve Aircraft.

Blenheim I and IV	15
Buffalo	52 (b)
Hudson	7

Vildebeeste	12
Catalina	2
<hr/>	
Total	88

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

Burma.

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

Reserve Aircraft.

Blenheim I	Nil
Buffalo	16

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

Ceylon.

Catalina	2
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Total in Far East.

Initial Equipment	180
Reserves	104
<hr/>	
Total	284

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

Initial Equipment	156
Reserves	92
<hr/>	
Total	248

Requirements as laid down by the Chiefs of Staff were 336 Initial Equipment. Reserves

for these on the basis of 50 per cent. for flying-boats and 100 per cent. for all other aircraft should have amounted to 327, a total of 663.

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

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

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

APPENDIX K.

SUMMARY OF OPERATIONALLY SERVICEABLE I.E.

AIRCRAFT IN MALAYA.

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

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

APPENDIX L.

PERFORMANCE OF THE BUFFALO SINGLE SEATER.

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

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

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

	<i>Zero Fighter.</i>	<i>Buffalo.</i>
Speed at 20,000 feet	295	292

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

APPENDIX M.

MALAYA.

Order of the Day issued December 8, 1941.

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

We are ready. We have had plenty of warning and our preparations are made and tested.

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

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

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

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

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

Commander-in-Chief, Far East.

G. LAYTON, Vice-Admiral,

Commander-in-Chief, China.

Footnotes

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

MAJOR-GENERAL C. M. MALTBY'S
DESPATCH ON OPERATIONS IN HONG
KONG

8 DECEMBER 1941 TO 25 DECEMBER 1941

The War Office, January, 1948.

OPERATIONS IN HONG KONG FROM 8TH TO 25TH DECEMBER, 1941

The following Despatch was submitted to the Secretary of State for War, on 21st November 1945, by MAJOR-GENERAL C.M. MALTBY, M.C., late G.O.C., British Troops in China.

SIR,

I have the honour to address you on the subject of the operations in Hong Kong in December, 1941, and to forward herewith an account of the operations which took place at Hong Kong between 8th and 25th December, 1941.

2. In normal circumstances this despatch would have been submitted through Headquarters, Far East, but in the circumstances in which I am now placed I consider that it would be better, after this long lapse of time, to submit it to you direct.

3. Before beginning my account of the operations themselves, I feel it to be my duty, both to myself and the forces under my command, to place on record certain points. Of these you will be fully cognizant, but to compilers of history they may not be so obvious.

4. The defences of this Colony were on a limited scale, with the object of denying the harbour to an enemy rather than retaining the harbour for the use of our fleet. This object, combined with the forces available, necessitated a plan to defend the Island of Hong Kong only. The arrival of two Canadian battalions on the 16th November, 1941, caused me to alter my plan to a certain degree. I placed one brigade, with a proportion of mobile artillery under command, on the mainland to prepare and defend the so-called "Gindrinks' Line," with the hope that, given a certain amount of time and if the enemy did not launch a major offensive there, Kowloon, the harbour and the northern portion of the island would not be subjected to artillery fire directed from the land. Time was also of vital importance to complete demolitions of fuel stores, power houses, docks, wharves, etc., on the mainland; to clear certain food stocks and vital necessities from the mainland to the island; to sink shipping and lighters and to clear the harbour of thousands of junks and sampans. It will be appreciated that to take such irrevocable and expensive steps as mentioned in the foregoing sentence was impossible until it was definitely known that war with Japan was inevitable.

5. That war was inevitable seemed clear to me. I had all my forces deployed in their battle positions in ample time, but it was hard to make that definite statement on the information available, with the result that the civil authorities felt that they were not in a position to put into full force all the numerous measures required during the preliminary or the precautionary period of the Civil Defence plan. For this state of affairs I must blame three factors:-

(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. The true gravity of the state of affairs was not reflected in the embassy despatches from Tokyo.

6. That these full Civil Defence measures were not put into effect in time had definite reactions on the subsequent powers of defence and were of assistance to the enemy, e.g., small craft and sampans were available to assist the landings on the island, and supplies were to be found in Kowloon although the roads available to the enemy had been destroyed and were kept under harassing fire. These were not large items in themselves, perhaps, but were cumulative against us.

7. In fairness to the civil authorities I must state that I did say that unless the Japanese launched a major offensive against the “Gindrillers’ Line” I saw no reason why the period between their crossing of the frontier and the evacuation of the mainland by my forces should not extend to a period of seven days or more. I gave no guarantee and still maintain that this was a fair estimate and might well have been accomplished had not the key to our position on the mainland been captured by surprise by the enemy.

8. The forces under my command had many limitations and amongst these must be enumerated:-

(a) Absence of modern air power.

(b) The weakness of the naval units.

(c) The paucity of anti-aircraft guns, both light and heavy.

(d) The lack of any radar equipment.

(e) The necessary dilution, in order to economise manpower in the arms of the service, by Chinese personnel of unknown reliability in time of war.

(f) The lack of regular transport driven by disciplined drivers.

Reference 8(a) above, the aircraft here were no match for the enemy fighters, and I gave orders that they were not to be employed unless the opportunity occurred either at first light or at dusk for a torpedo attack on any enemy capital ship or large cruiser. In any case, all were put out of action in the first raid made by the enemy, though precautions such as dispersal had been taken. The lack of reconnaissance both landwards and seawards was naturally a serious handicap. Study of the past history of Japanese operations had led me to believe that they were past masters in combined operations, and throughout the period of the siege I always anticipated a landing on the Southern shores of the island; and lack of distant seaward reconnaissance was for me a distinct handicap. Similarly I know that the lack of opposition to the incessant enemy air raids had a somewhat depressing effect towards the end on the troops, and definitely increased the accuracy of the enemy

bombing and the material damage done. For similar reasons the enemy's counter battery tasks were very much simplified.

Reference 8(b) above, the forces available carried out their duties in very difficult circumstances with the utmost gallantry and in the true tradition of the Royal Navy. I have nothing but praise for their gallant conduct, and the Commodore R.N. will be submitting his own despatch.

Reference 8(c) above, these few detachments fought with great gallantry and can claim five enemy aircraft shot down, and three others probably never reached their base.

Reference 8(d) above, the survey for these equipments had been made but their installation had not begun when the war started.

Reference 8(f) above, although the R.A.S.C. performed wonders in organising improvised transport and the few regular drivers were never off the road for days and nights on end, the general desertion of local enlisted Chinese drivers (usually after putting their vehicles out of action) was a very serious factor both from the tactical and maintenance aspects.

9. I wish now to make it perfectly clear that I fully appreciate that the demands of Empire strategy made it impossible at the time for full provision to be made for my forces, and I only make these points so that those who may be writing history or wish to criticise the conduct of my forces may be in full possession of the true facts. Further, I submit that although I and my forces may have been a hostage to fortune, we were a detachment that deflected from more important objectives, such as the Philippines, Singapore, or perhaps even Australia, an enemy force that consisted of two first line divisions, one reserve division, corps artillery, about eighty aircraft and a considerable naval blockade force. Strategically we gambled and lost, but it was a worth while gamble.

10. *Appendix A.*

In this Appendix will be found the full account of the events. It was prepared shortly after our capitulation under considerable difficulties. The war diary and messages to and from Battle Headquarters were naturally all destroyed before and after capitulation; Japanese interest in all written matter necessitated various methods of subterfuge to retain anything, and the main credit for whatever has been compiled must go to my G.S.O.I. – the late Colonel L.A. Newnham, G.C., M.C. – who took the most meticulous care to make this account tally with the true events. There are naturally a few blanks owing to the fog of war and the inability to gain contact with all the survivors, but with more information that will become available from formation and unit war diaries it is to be hoped that finally there will be little left for the imagination to fill in.

II. Although this Appendix gives a very full account of events, I would like to comment on several points.

Japanese Tactics.

The salient points of the Japanese tactics were:-

(a) Nightwork.

The division which made the initial advance over the frontier and those troops that first landed on the island had reached a high standard of efficiency in nightwork. All were provided with rubber soled boots that made movement very silent, systematically they used the smallest of paths and avoided all the more obvious lines of advance, and their patrols were very boldly handled.

(b) Rapidity of Advance.

The pace of the advance was surprisingly fast, the troops were lightly equipped and must have been very fit to accomplish the marches undertaken.

(c) Agents and Spies.

It was obvious from all sources that agents and spies had been placed both on the mainland and the island well beforehand. Spies led the leading elements on the mainland, disguised as innocent labourers or coolies. Their patrols advanced by paths which could have been known only to locals or from detailed reconnaissance. Armed agents in Kowloon and Hong Kong systematically fired during the hours of darkness on troops, sentries, cars and despatch riders, but little damage was done thereby beyond straining the nerves of a number of the men. After the landing on the island had been effected, penetration to cut the island in half was assisted by local guides who led the columns by most difficult routes. The possession of these agents and guides with such intimate knowledge counteracted the first great advantage the defence normally has over the attack, i.e., familiarity with the ground.

(d) Intelligence.

It was obvious that the enemy system of intelligence was most complete. Marked maps found on dead officers gave a surprising amount of exact detail, which included our defences and much of our wire. Every officer seemed to be in possession of such a map, which was a lithographed reduction of our own 1/20,000 map. They seemed to be in possession of a very full Order of Battle and knew the names of most of the senior and commanding officers.

(e) Artillery Concentration.

Artillery and heavy mortar concentrations were very heavy and correctly placed. Those fired before landing on the island and for the capture of Leighton Hill were as heavy as any experienced in France during the war of 1914/18. The range of the heavy mortar must have been about 1300 yards as they fired across the harbour with accuracy and effect. The blast and noise of the bursting bomb was considerable, but the killing power was not high. On occasions artillery fire was most accurate, e.g., all the pillboxes on the north shore, where the landing was effected, were systematically destroyed.

(f) Maintenance of the Objective.

This principle seems to have been well understood by their junior leaders. The advance to cut the island in two was carried out regardless of cost to life.

(g) Air Force.

The efficiency of the enemy air force was probably the greatest surprise to me. Their opening attack on Kai Tak aerodrome by low level attack down to sixty feet was carried out with skill and marked boldness. Subsequent high level bombing proved to be most accurate, and they confined their attention to military objectives with marked results, such as the naval base at Aberdeen and the island water supply mains. Their evasive tactics and use of low cloud displayed a high standard of training. My general impression at the time was that either the Japanese pilots had reached a surprisingly high standard of training, or that German pilots were leading their flights.

12. *Appendix B – Summary of Casualties.*

An approximate summary of casualties has been compiled by me as far as possible. This is, however, by no means complete, and, owing to the facts that the survivors of this force were divided up from the beginning and that no communication was permitted between camps, the full casualty list cannot be known until all figures have been compiled by the Casualty Bureau. Since capitulation, a number have died from wounds and disease, and many drowned, with the result that it is feared that final and correct figures will take a long time to compile, and the fates of many will never be known.

13. *Conduct of the Troops.*

For the sake of clarity I have confined myself to the bare statement of military facts. I feel it to be my duty, however, to bring to notice the conduct of my troops during this period of hostilities

(a) 2 Royal Scots. – It was unfortunate that the enemy captured by surprise the most important Shingmun Redoubt and occupied the Golden Hill position. These two incidents were the direct cause of the hasty withdrawal to the mainland. The gallant action of their D Company (Capt. Pinkerton) on the extreme right flank of the Golden Hill position, the later gallant efforts of the whole battalion to recapture the Wong Nei Chong Gap, and their stubborn fighting in the Mount Nicholson and Mount Cameron areas accomplished much to retrieve their prestige. They commenced the siege with a high incidence of sickness, mainly from malaria, and suffered severe casualties during the operations.

(b) Royal Rifles of Canada and Winnipeg Grenadiers. – These two battalions proved to be inadequately trained for modern war under the conditions existing in Hong Kong. They had very recently arrived in Hong Kong after a long sea voyage, and such time as was available had been devoted to the completion of the south shore defences and making themselves au fait with and practising the problems of countering a south shore landing. In

this role they were never employed and, instead, they found themselves counter-attacking on steep hill sides covered with scrub, over strange country, and as a result they rapidly became exhausted. Many individual acts of gallantry were performed, their stubborn defensive fighting at the Wong Nei Chong Gap and in the area of Mounts Cameron and Nicholson was marked, and the losses they incurred were heavy and are deeply regretted.

(c) *5th Bn. 7th Rajput Regt.* – This battalion fought well on the mainland and their repulse of the enemy attack on the Devils Peak was entirely successful. The full force of the enemy's initial attack on the island fell on this battalion and they fought gallantly until they had suffered heavy casualties (100 per cent. British Officers and most senior Indian Officers being lost) and were over-run.

(d) Of the remainder of my force I wish to say little except to express my tribute to them all for the gallant part they played during a period of intensive fighting against overwhelming odds, with no rest, little sleep, and often short of water and hot meals. Whether Royal Navy, Royal Air Force, Royal Artillery, Royal Engineers, Royal Signals, Infantry or members of the ancillary services, one and all played their part fully in the true traditions of the services.

The casualties suffered and those inflicted on the enemy speak for themselves.

In closing my despatch I wish to pay a special tribute to the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps. They proved themselves to be a valuable portion of the garrison. In peace they had surrendered a great deal of their leisure to training, their mobilization was completed smoothly and quickly, and in action they proved themselves stubborn and gallant soldiers. To quote examples seems almost invidious but I should like to place on record the superb gallantry of No. 3 (Eurasian) Company at Wong Nei Chong Gap and of No. 1 Battery who undertook infantry defence in the Stanley area, while the efficiency and gallantry of their Signal section and despatch riders were outstanding.

My thanks and deep appreciation are also due to H.E. The Governor who was a tower of strength to me in our trying ordeal; and similarly I must place on record my admiration for all the members of his civil defence services who displayed magnificent fortitude and energy in their multitudinous activities.

APPENDIX A.

WAR NARRATIVE.

This War Narrative of the defence of Hong Kong is built up on the detailed record of Battle (Fortress) HQ kept at the time, minute by minute.

In some cases, where subsequent knowledge of facts has made it possible to insert items to make a clearer picture, this has been done in the text, but care has been taken not to include anything which would have a bearing on possible decisions which might have been taken. Frequently subsequent knowledge has been included in footnote form only. This despatch was compiled in a Prisoner of War Camp under constant fear of observation or search and with no clerical facilities. All maps, plans, schemes, orders, etc., were destroyed on capitulation and the officers and men marched to Shamshuipo, a distance of 5 miles, and were permitted to take only what they could carry on the person. The Fortress HQ War Diary was concealed and brought away. Cross checking has taken place where possible with survivors, but the Canadian troops were moved early to another camp and no visiting was allowed to hospitals, hospital camps or Indian camps. The timings are based on Hong Kong winter time then in force.

PART I.

Own Forces – Before the outbreak of war with Japan.

1. On the outbreak of war with Germany the garrison consisted of three infantry battalions and one machine gun battalion which permitted the employment of only one infantry battalion on the mainland; its role was to cover a comprehensive scheme of demolitions and to act as a delaying force.

With the arrival on 16th November, 1941, of two Canadian battalions a new defence plan was brought in which had been originally outlined in 1937. It had never been fully practised, as troops had never been available in sufficient numbers. It employed three infantry battalions on the mainland on a front of 10½ miles – the so called “Gindrunkers Line” sited on very commanding country but with certain inherent weaknesses. It had necessarily little depth, which in two localities was particularly dangerous, viz., Customs Pass and the Pass between Golden Hill and Laichikok Peninsula.

2. Owing to the extensive front, each battalion’s layout consisted of a line of platoon localities, the gaps between which were covered by fire by day and by patrolling

at night. One company only of each battalion could be kept in reserve and this was normally located in a prepared position covering the most dangerous line of enemy approach. The reserve company of the centre battalion (2/14 Punjab Regt.) was employed initially as “Forward Troops” on the Taipo Road to cover the demolitions and to delay the enemy’s initial advance.

3. Directly the news arrived of reinforcement by two Canadian battalions, reconnaissance was carried out by commanding officers only, in order to maintain secrecy. The existing garrison carried out detailed reconnaissances down to platoons later, and worked out the exact defence plan for holding the Gindrunkers Line. A considerable amount of work was found to be necessary, for (except for the centre sector) the line was in its partially completed form of three years previously, when the general policy of defence was altered and the Gindrunkers Line abandoned.

4. A few days before the Canadian battalions arrived large working parties were found by the mainland battalions and a little later the three battalions occupied their sectors permanently to push on the work faster.¹ It was in these battle positions that the 5/7 Rajput Regt. (Right battalion), the 2/14 Punjab Regt. (Centre battalion) and the 2 Royal Scots (Left battalion) were located when war against Japan broke out.

The time was too short, however, for either of the (new) flank battalions to be practised properly in their defence roles by a series of four day exercises which had been the custom in the past. These battalions, therefore, were not familiar with the successive rear defence positions. It was indeed unfortunate that the timing of events occurred in such a way that the Japanese attack developed when of the six battalions in the garrison, only two knew their roles in exact and practised detail. (The I Middlesex Regt. throughout had retained its role of beach defence and the 2/14 Punjab Regt. had been “Mainland battalion” centred on the Taipo Road.)

This Island Defence Plan had been developed in great detail in co-operation with the Royal Navy over a period of years. It needed extremely careful study to get full value from every man in the extensive defence sectors (especially in the South East and South West), and it needed careful rehearsals, as had been done in the past. The date of attack, however, forestalled combined training with the Canadian troops.

The change over to holding the Gindrunkers Line necessitated a change of policy re deployment of artillery. Previously it was too risky to deploy any of the Hong Kong Regiment H.K.S.R.A., i.e., the mobile artillery, on the mainland, when the one battalion only could not hope to cause more than 48 hours delay if the enemy attacked in strength.

The new plan deployed the following on the mainland:-

One Troop 6 in. Howitzers – 4 guns (2 Scammels for haulage).

One Troop 4.5 in. Howitzers – 4 guns (hired vehicles).

Two Troops 3.7 Howitzers – 8 guns, one troop only had mule transport.

Troops were sited for support as follows:-

One 3.7 in. Troop to cover the Right battalion.

One 3.7 in. Troop and the 4.5 in. Battery to cover the Centre and Left battalions.

The 6 in. Troop was to cover from the centre of the Right battalion to the extreme left on the Castle Peak Road. Additional support could be given to the Right battalion by two Sections of 6 in. Howitzers on the island.

5. The infantry organisation was also changed. Brigadier C. Wallis was appointed Mainland Commander, and the Island Commander (the two Canadian battalions and the I Middlesex Regt.) was Brigadier J.K. Lawson.

6. The evacuation of the mainland battalion under the former plan was the task of the Royal Navy (“Operation W/M”). It was not easy and had been practised three times. There was obviously no opportunity to work out full detail and to practise the new withdrawal operation. It was to the credit of all concerned that the eventual withdrawal from the mainland was carried out without any loss of guns and with less than forty men being cut off and captured.

Communications.

7. The change over to three battalions to hold the Gindrinkers Line necessitated complete reorganisation of the mainland communications and the carrying on of buried routes from the partially completed system that existed. Contracts were not completed when war came, in spite of the best endeavours of the Royal Corps of Signals which did excellent work.

8. It was unfortunate that the equipment situation in other theatres of war had not permitted earlier despatch of the garrison’s infantry mortars and ammunition. For instance, the worst case, the 2/14 Punjab Regt. had had one 3 in. mortar demonstration, of a few rounds only, but ammunition in any appreciable quantity did not arrive until November and then only 70 rounds per battalion both for war and for practice. Hence these mortars were fired and registered for the first time in their battle positions and twelve hours later were in action against the enemy.

The 2 in. mortar situation was worse, for there had been no receipt even of dummies, consequently the men had had no instruction in detonating. There had been no preliminary shooting and the 2 in. mortar ammunition was delivered actually in battle.

For 3 in. mortar there was neither pack mule nor carrying equipment for the men, consequently everything, including ammunition, had to be manhandled.

PART II.

Enemy Forces.

9. Appreciations of the situation at varying times during the preceding two years estimated two to four divisions of Japanese as available for the attack on Hong Kong.

On the evening of 6th December Chinese reports showed the arrival of three Japanese divisions at To Kat 8 miles from the frontier, on the previous day.

Information from the Far East Combined Bureau Singapore showed that attack was likely by one division, with another division in reserve. This I believe to be incorrect, as a Japanese Staff Officer informed me after the capitulation that two divisions had been deployed on the island and a third was held in reserve.

10. Three to four weeks before the outbreak of war all intelligence sources pointed to very unusual activity in Canton and Bocca Tigris, but the best efforts could not ascertain the contents of the shipping employed – the activities being equally explainable by either:-

- (a) a concentration for an advance North West from Canton on to Kunming, or,
- (b) development of a base of supply and staging depot for attack on Thailand.

The shipping was not universally fully laden towards Canton, and empty outwards. Information also showed that the Japanese defence lines round Canton had been drawn in so as to encircle the city more closely. It is clear that the Field Security Police of the Japanese Army had a high degree of efficiency.

Available information led to the following conclusions. That the:-

- (a) Japanese night work was poor.
- (b) Japanese preferred stereotyped methods and fixed plans.
- (c) Japanese light automatics were not as numerous as ours nor so up to date.
- (d) Japanese “Combined Operations” were thorough and that they had excellent boats and equipment but that their successes against the Chinese were flattering as there had never been real opposition.
- (e) Japanese Air Force was not up to first class European standards, that their bombing was poor, and that they would not go in for night bombing.
- (f) Japanese fifth column activities would be encountered, though no actual proof of such organisations existed. The proximity of Formosa, with its mixed population of Japanese and Chinese Formosans, and Canton, furnished the enemy with admirable intelligence bases.

II. About 1st November a Japanese deserter came across the frontier and gave himself up at a civil police post. He gave a certain amount of detail about the Japanese forces, which definitely indicated preparations for the concentration of troops North of the frontier, and the presence of large calibre-artillery, indicating that of a Corps.

12. From Tokyo, ambassadorial cablegrams did not indicate immediate impending hostilities, in fact the telegrams from there were extremely moderately phrased in comparison with those of June, 1940. Consular reports also were not particularly disturbing.

13. Such intercepts of enemy aircraft movements as were received during the weeks previous to hostilities showed no abnormal activity. Intercepts from other sources showed normality.

PART III.

14. During the early days of December as the situation progressively deteriorated so were more and more troops deployed, until on the evening of 7th December all were in their battle positions. By evening very definite reports were received of concentrations of Japanese forces in the villages bordering the frontier. The company of 2 /14 Punjab Regt at Fanling had been in position for some days with constant watch maintained from the frontier observation posts.

At 0445 hours 8th December intelligence sources reported hearing on a Tokyo broadcast code instructions to their nationals that war with Great Britain and U.S.A. was imminent at any moment. His Excellency the Governor was immediately warned and the message was passed on to all concerned. The frontier company (Major Gray, 2/14 Punjab Regt.) was telephoned and orders were issued for the forward demolitions to be blown, i.e., to the East and North of Fanling. Subsequent events showed that all these forward demolitions were blown successfully.

By 0645 hours the garrison had been informed that the British Empire and Japan were at war.

Command HQ had moved into the underground Battle HQ.

At 0800 hours Japanese aircraft dive attacked Kai Tak aerodrome (down to 60 feet, showing first class standard) and destroyed and damaged the following grounded planes:-

R.A.F. – 3 destroyed, 1 seriously damaged and 1 slightly damaged.

Civil – 1 Clipper and 7 others (D.C. 23 Condors, etc.).

Shamshuipo barracks were also attacked and bombed but very few casualties were caused, owing to full deployment.

By 0900 hours Fortress Engineers and administrative services were on the move to their dispersal areas in accordance with plans. Japanese machines on to Kai Tak and over Kowloon numbered respectively 36 Fighters and 12 Bombers. During the day subversive pamphlets, addressed mainly to Indian troops, were dropped. They were poorly drawn up and carried no weight either with British or Indian troops.

15. *Action of Forward Troops on the Taipo Road*, commanded by Major G.E. Gray, 2/14 Punjab Regt.

At 0800 hours 8th December the Japanese began bridging at Lo Wu and our observation posts reported hundreds of Japanese crossing into Laffans Plain. This was later estimated to be a battalion and it seems fairly certain that a two battalion front was adopted – the other battalion going later straight down the Taipo Road. The tactics were almost invariably to push a strong body up the nearest hill and round a flank directly any line of approach was found to be blocked. The threat of a battalion moving round his right flank was a constant menace, and necessitated Major Gray's decision to make sure of the big demolitions No. 731 and R 94 one mile North of Taipo and not to attempt any real delaying action forward of this. It was thus 1500 hours when the first enemy attacks developed in this area and were beaten off by fire. Outflanking movements developed immediately, necessitating withdrawal to South of the causeway, Taipo.

A platoon had been posted wide on the West flank as left flank guard. A Japanese detachment headed by three women (Chinese) attacked here at 1830 hours. All were shot.

At 1930 hours the mechanised portion of Forward Troops, composed of two armoured cars and four Bren carriers, co-operated most effectively in ambushing a Japanese platoon in close formation. It was virtually wiped out by machine gun and light automatic fire from one hundred yards range. The enemy never relaxed his pressure during the bright moonlight night. It was obvious that his small columns, using cross country tracks, were led by guides who knew the ground intimately, thus enabling the attack to develop quicker than had been thought possible, especially as this was combined with a high standard of night training. I was subsequently informed by a Japanese Staff officer (Major Nishiyama) that a month had been spent on concentrated night training for the attack on Hong Kong. At midnight Forward Troops withdrew to Taipo Mei where an important demolition was duly blown, followed by another withdrawal an hour later to Fo Tan Valley, this being necessitated by small parties of the enemy having reached positions on the road behind the Forward Troops' dispositions.

16. By 0330 hours 9th December all demolitions were successfully blown except one at Taipo where Japanese forward patrols were extremely quick in following up and cutting the leads to the abutments after the withdrawal of the final covering party. The safety fuze used for the piers, however, had burned too far for interruption and these piers were successfully destroyed.

At dawn Forward Troops were on Monastery Ridge just forward of the Gindrinks Line, where they maintained themselves all day, withdrawing by order at dusk. During the day many excellent artillery targets offered themselves and were engaged with success. The Forward Troops had fulfilled their role admirably, and had inflicted some 100 casualties to the Japanese at no real cost to themselves.

17. On the other main line of approach, viz.: Castle Peak Road, late in the evening 8th December enemy transport was seen banking up at the road bridge North of Au Tau, showing the success of the demolition there. 5.9 in. guns were seen to be tractor drawn up to the bridge and then manhandled into a village to the East. This battery fired at intervals during the next fifty-six hours on Hong Kong Island and was calculated by the Royal Artillery to be on Kam Tin aerodrome. Several shells passed over the main ridge of the island and landed near Aberdeen Reservoir; the firing was at too long a range to be taken seriously and in any case was out of range of our artillery.

At 1340 hours on 8th December a large formation of Japanese planes carried out another raid, this time on Stanley, dropping a few bombs. Little material damage was done.

18. (a) At 0600 hours 9th December I ordered Mainland Infantry Brigade to move the reserve company of 5/7 Rajput Regt. across to fill the gap East of Smugglers Pass, previously only patrolled until the direction of the main enemy thrust should be disclosed.

(b) Enemy action during the day was chiefly confined to patrol action. 2 Royal Scots had strong patrols on the tracks leading South East from the Kam Tin area which confirmed the use of Chinese guides by Japanese advanced troops. Later information from the Chinese member of "Z Force" was to the effect that these Chinese guides were drawn from the village of Tsun Wan Wai which he said was largely pro-Wang Ching Wei. "Z Force" was a band of local volunteers which had been trained beforehand for work behind the Japanese lines and was led by Mr. Kendall. Dumps of arms, supplies, medical stores, etc., had been made beforehand at three points in the new territories.

(c) It transpired at this time that the Japanese scouts and snipers were highly trained and extremely difficult to detect. Their uniform consisting of quilted material with cross stitching was particularly adapted to the insertion of twigs, grass, etc., obtained locally – thus blending perfectly with the surroundings. Others encountered later on the island had a camouflage net rolled up and carried high on the back, from which position it could be quickly drawn over head and shoulders.

(d) The demolitions on Castle Peak Road were blown successfully, except the one at the Dairy Farm, where the leads were cut by a saboteur who slipped in immediately the last sentry was withdrawn. He moved to the next demolition, close by, and was blown up and killed whilst standing on top of it.

(e) During the night 9th/10th arrangements were made with the police to evacuate the villagers from places where the front line posts ran through or too near to villages – a matter of great difficulty owing to the trip wires of antipersonnel mines which had been put out to supplement the thinly held front.

19. At 2200 hours the CNAC planes left for Free China. In one was despatched Lt.-Colonel H.O. Hughes (HKVDC) who was to act as our liaison officer with 7th Chinese

Army.

20. At about 2300 hours on the night of 9th/10th December a report was received from the Company Commander 5/7 Rajput Regt. (whose company had been moved across from being reserve company in the Right battalion Sector) that he could hear enemy moving in the Shingmun Valley on his immediate front, and later the nearest 2 Royal Scots Company ("A" Company) reported hearing explosions from one of the pillboxes constituting "Shingmun Redoubt." Within the hour it was clear that Shingmun Redoubt had fallen, including the artillery observation post and the HQ of "A" Company 2 Royal Scots.

The capture by surprise of this key position, which dominated a large portion of the left flank and the importance of which had been so frequently stressed beforehand, directly and gravely affected subsequent events and prejudiced Naval, Military and Civil defence arrangements. The possibility of mounting an immediate counter attack that night was considered with Commander Mainland Brigade but was ruled out as the nearest troops were a mile away, the ground precipitous and broken, and the exact situation round the Redoubt very obscure.

At about 0315 hours an artillery concentration was put down on the area of the western portion of the Redoubt and this was heard to take toll of the enemy.

21. At midnight 9th/10th December I decided to move the reserve company of the Winnipeg Grenadiers across from Hong Kong Island. It was placed at the disposal of Brigadier Mainland Brigade and arrived at his HQ at 0400 hours. Confused fighting took place South of Shingmun Redoubt, and a further enemy advance next morning was stopped by artillery support and by the vigorous action taken by Captain H.R. Newton, commanding the 5/7 Rajput Company there. About one enemy company attacked and was driven back into Shingmun Redoubt which was then shelled by 6 .in. Howitzers. Captain Newton was confident that severe casualties had been inflicted upon the enemy.

A counter attack by Captain Newton's Company was considered, but this would have caused a serious gap between the 2/14 Punjab Regt. and Shingmun, where the enemy had already made attempts to effect penetration. The enemy success, however, caused dangerous exposure of the centre ("B") and left ("C") Companies of 2 Royal Scots, and at 1530 hours I sanctioned their withdrawal from the Pineapple Road² and Texaco Peninsula positions (a mile in front now, and with an open flank) to the strong Golden Hill line which reached the sea at the Laichikok Peninsula. This withdrawal was carried out without incident at dusk – though the two companies required a certain amount of adjustment before dawn.

22. 10th December. – During that day I ordered the R.A.F. to evacuate Kai Tak aerodrome and to destroy machines and equipment. I had at no time contemplated the serious use of obsolete 100 m.p.h. aircraft which would have been shot down immediately

by modern fighters, but in any case by this time only one machine was fit to operate. Demolitions there were practically completed, and were finished later by No. I Company HKVDC allotted for aerodrome ground and air defence (together with 4 Bren carriers). This company under Captain A.H. Penn performed its duties very well. The aerodrome was left obstructed by using concrete sections of drains, railings from the “surrounds” and derelict M.T. Enemy air activity was spasmodic, but our first A.A. success, confirmed from three sources, was recorded; an enemy plane over Causeway Bay was hit and fell into the sea in Tide Cove.

23. By now the special warning system was in operation and proved most satisfactory. The arrival of enemy aircraft was forecast and known to within a couple of minutes.

An intense shelling of Stonecutters Island began during the day. At first the fire was inaccurate but later became extremely accurate and the attack was also taken up from the air. Much damage was caused by 5.9 in. fire in particular, one round landing between the two 60 pounders which had been moved over to Stonecutters a week previously for firing in enfilade down the Taipo Road, which they had been doing very successfully during the past thirty-six hours.

During the day a fair amount of movement seawards was observed – Japanese torpedo boats, minesweepers and one destroyer. Later three more destroyers and a cruiser were observed. H.M.S. “Cicala” had been covering the left flank of the 2 Royal Scots on the Castle Peak Road during the last three days, and on this day (10th December) discovered a Japanese working party clearing demolitions at Brothers Point. Fire was opened with 6 in. guns and direct hits obtained. Several Japanese attacks from the air were beaten off but eventually the ship received a direct hit which necessitated docking for repair.

At 1742 hours the last of the Eastern Telegraph Company cables between Hong Kong and the outside world was cut by enemy action. Orders were now issued to put in hand, starting with a “Priority A” group, the laying by Royal Engineers of antipersonnel minefields on beaches, etc., on the southern shores of the island.

24. 10th/11th December. – Intermittent shelling of both mainland and island continued throughout the night, and before dawn the Bowen Road Hospital was hit four times. The first air raid of the day took place at 0800 hours.

25. 11th December. – On the mainland at dawn the enemy opened up mortar fire and then attacked the left flank of the 2 Royal Scots³, driving them back in disorder and exposing the junction of the Castle Peak and Taipo Roads, thus seriously endangering the withdrawal of all the troops based on the Taipo Road (2/14 Punjab Regt., one company 5/7 Rajput Regt., troop 4.5 in. Howitzers, troop 3.7 in. Howitzers). The situation was critical but the company of the I Winnipeg Grenadiers and the Bren carriers from Kai Tak

aerodrome defences were moved into position covering the gap.

At midday 11th December I ordered withdrawal from the mainland under cover of darkness – except for 5/7 Rajput Regt. detailed under the scheme of defence for occupation of Devils Peak Peninsula. The withdrawal called for a difficult operation by the 2/14 Punjab Regt. – a move by night across the whole front, along the line of the passes (Kowloon Pass, Shatin Pass, Grasscutters Pass) and down the Devils Peak Peninsula – a move not practised beforehand. Brigade Headquarters, 2 Royal Scots and various administrative detachments were to cross from embarkation points on the East side of Kowloon Peninsula. The West side of the Peninsula was free⁴ for evacuation of civilians, civil stores of the food in the Godowns, etc. The notice I could give was regrettably short but unavoidable owing to the rapidity with which the situation had deteriorated. In spite of the short notice the Royal Signals personnel successfully evacuated 49 miles of D8 cable and 20 tons of buried type cable.

26. At 1000 hours 11th December the enemy was reported to be landing on Lamma Island, and guns of Aberdeen and Jubilee Batteries were brought into action. This was followed at 1300 hours by a report that an enemy party in Chinese sampans was attempting a landing at Aberdeen Island. This was driven off by machine gun fire.

Again during the afternoon the Japanese were reported to be concentrating about one hundred junks off Lamma, which our artillery engaged.

27. *Stonecutters Island.* – Enemy bombardment of Stonecutters continued throughout the day, West Fort having forty direct hits before midday. Much material damage generally was caused, chiefly to buildings. Telephone communications were continually cut. In the afternoon, to conform to the withdrawal from the mainland, I ordered the withdrawal from this island and the destruction of guns and all immovable stores, according to a detailed plan previously prepared. This was successfully carried out.

28. During the day 11th December fifth column activities developed in Kowloon. Some of the fifth columnists were armed,⁵ and rioting and looting occurred in the streets. A large number of launch crews and lorry and car drivers deserted, throwing a heavy handicap on the shoulders of the administrative services – civil, naval and military – particularly in view of the large and hurried evacuation for that evening and night.

Throughout the day 11th December Hong Kong was subjected to bombing and spasmodic artillery fire. The R.N. Dockyard, R.A.S.C. Camber and the R.A.O.C. Depot all suffered some damage, though casualties were few. The civilian population in Hong Kong remained calm, though naturally the news of early evacuation of the mainland came as a considerable shock.

29. *Withdrawal of troops from the mainland (11/12th December).* – (a) Careful plans had been drawn up by Brigadier Mainland Infantry Brigade, and all troops were employed on successive positions.

The operation was well carried out. However, HQ details of 2/14 Punjab Regt. and some others came down on to Kai Tak aerodrome by mistake in the darkness and became involved in street fighting in the outskirts of Kowloon City. A launch was sent over at about 0100 hours but could not gain contact with them. The bulk of the Company, however, were taken off at Star Ferry pier at dawn, breaking off a running fight with the enemy as they actually cast off from the pier side.

(b) Battalion HQ of the 2/14 Punjab Regt. and two Companies had been unable to maintain the timed programme during the night owing to enemy action, and at dawn they were withdrawing down the West side of Devils Peak Peninsula. They stayed that day dispersed in the foothills at the southern end, whilst two companies of 5/7 Rajput Regt. held the Ma Lau Tong line as planned, with one company on the rear position Hai Wan.

(c) The personnel of both Indian battalions were in good heart but somewhat exhausted after four days of continuous day and night vigilance and long night carries, over rough tracks and coolie paths, of many machine guns, light automatics and mortars. Owing to the simultaneous withdrawals of all three battalions, the 5/7 Rajput Regiment's transport had not been augmented by mules from the other battalions as planned, and this emphasised the shortage of mule transport which had always been apparent on peace exercises. It will be realised that units were on an improvised scale of trucks, lorries, and mules, as pooling of the inadequate "Colonial" establishments had been found to be necessary. The transport situation had become much worse with the arrival of the two Canadian battalions, for their transport had been shipped in a different vessel, diverted via. Australia, and had not arrived before war with Japan broke out.

(d) At midnight 11/12th December the Hong Kong Telephone Company cut all communications between the island and the mainland.

(e) One troop of 3-in. Howitzers remained at the southern end of Devils Peak in support of the Ma Lau Tong position. Mainland Infantry Brigade HQ also remained on the Peninsula pending further developments.⁶ Most of the Bren carriers and all the armoured cars were safely evacuated from the mainland.

(f) At 0600 hours 12th December military cables to Kowloon were cut at the R N. Yard cable hut.

(g) At dawn 2 Royal Scots temporarily took over the North East sector of the island defences, this being largely a precautionary measure only, as the occupation of the Devils Peak Peninsula by the 5/7 Rajput Regt. covered this sector effectively. This North East sector had previously been manned in skeleton form by some HQ personnel of I Middlesex Regt. plus a platoon of No. 3 Company HKVDC. In the North West sector was "Z" Company I Middlesex Regt., consisting of spare men of machine gun companies plus battalion cooks, storemen, bandsmen, etc., manning forty machine guns from Fortress reserve stocks. This Company constituted a valuable fighting force enabling *inter alia* the

I Middlesex Regt. to man the pill boxes on the entire perimeter of the island from 11th to 13th December.

30. Air raids and shelling of the island continued throughout the day 12th December. The North shore Dockyard was badly damaged and also the R.A.O.C. Depot, which was hit on five occasions. Aberdeen and Green Island cables were both cut. By now many coast defence guns, especially 6-in., were being used for landward firing, calculations to hit one hundred points having been worked out in peace time. Harassing fire by night, and counter battery fire and the engagement of observed targets by day, was carried out.

The allowance of 25 rounds per gun for such landward firing was greatly exceeded. High explosive Mk XIII A shell of 1918 manufacture was faulty, several bursting immediately in front of the muzzle.

31. A.A. – There were insufficient guns to give adequate gun density at any point. More 3.7-in. guns were expected shortly and also more Bofors (the garrison had but two), for “release telegrams” had been received from HQ Far East. The A.A. defences were well known to be inadequate, but I realised that the call for the European and Mediterranean theatres of war had prevented reinforcements. Targets were numerous (12th December) but the A.A. positions extremely few owing to the mountainous nature of the country of Hong Kong Island. The enemy, with such good observation from Kowloon, was very quick on to any A.A. section opening up, and I consider that Lt.-Colonel F.D. Field fought his command very well. The scarcity both of transport and roads severely handicapped the mobility of the guns and also the ammunition supply and administration of the sections. The shortage of British officers was very much felt. During the night one of the A.A. searchlights on Green Island acted as a sentry beam on receipt of a report that the enemy were landing near West Point.

At this juncture Wing Commander H.G. Sullivan, the Officer Commanding R.A.F., offered the services of one officer and 16 N.C.Os. for wireless and telephone duties, which I gladly accepted. They were incorporated with Royal Signals.

The morale of the civilian population had been considerably shaken, and fifth columnists became more active. Rice distribution and the monetary situation caused anxiety and necessitated urgent measures.

32. During the afternoon 12th December the enemy was reported to be occupying George Island (off Lamma) and there was considerable activity seawards.

33. In the late afternoon a strong enemy attack (about one battalion) developed against the left company of 5/7 Rajput Regt. on the Ma Lau Tong line but was successfully beaten off, assisted by quick support provided by the Royal Artillery. Heavy casualties on the enemy were observed. The 5/7 Rajput Regt. was subjected to dive bombing and heavy mortar fire throughout the day. In view of the weight of the Japanese attack, the rapid development of their heavy mortar fire, the constricted passage across the Lyemun Strait,

the shortage of launch crews, and as we now had no footing on the mainland except at Devils Peak Peninsula, I gave orders to Commander Mainland Infantry Brigade that the Ma Lau Tong line should be evacuated during the night.

The first task was to be the evacuation of HQ and two companies of 2/14 Punjab Regt. which had been previously arranged. This was to be followed by the withdrawal of the 3.7-in. Howitzer troop R.A. The second and the shorter of the Devils Peak Lines (Hai Wan) was to be held by HQ 5/7 Rajput Regt. and two companies, the remainder of that battalion being evacuated last. The first withdrawal was timed for 1930 hours.

34. Shell fire died down at dusk (12th December) but the water transport difficulties were serious. Chinese crews deserted in the darkness from the W.D. fleet, though covered by rifles, engineers were deficient, and some launches were found to be in a sinking condition. Administrative officers had been sent out from my HQ to accelerate matters and took personal charge and operated what boats they could, but serious delays occurred. It was not until 0130 hours that the 2/14 Punjab Regt., some 300 men, were all across.

At 0400 hours the bulk of the first troop R.A. (less mules) and one company of 5/7 Rajput Regt. were across, but the Mule Corps was still to come. It was clear that the situation was critical if daylight crossings were to be avoided and I called on the Royal Navy to assist. Their response was prompt. Three motor torpedo boats were despatched from Aberdeen and one more was recalled from patrol in Junk Bay where it had been covering the right flank of the 5/7 Rajput Regt. from possible enemy attack in sampans from Hang Hau area (an operation which had been attempted by night during peace training and found feasible).

The destroyer HMS "Thracian" was also ordered round from Aberdeen but could not be expected to arrive before 0600 hours, 13th December.

I ordered Brigadier Wallis to give full priority to personnel, and that there was to be no question of evacuating the 120 mules and further risking the operation. In any case the mule lighter crew had deserted, and the handling of this craft in the dark by personnel unaccustomed to it was a dubious proposition, and moreover she was badly holed by enemy fire and had to be abandoned in a sinking condition. Meanwhile the W.D.V. "Victoria" had been slowly and steadily evacuating personnel and equipment under Major A.J. Dewar and Captain C.G. Turner. When the torpedo boats arrived at the small pier on the Devils Peak Peninsula it was found that the state of the tide did not permit them to "lie close to" – a risk that had been foreseen and accepted. This meant more delay and ferrying by sampans. Ferry trips were, however, made by the torpedo boats directly H.M.S. "Thracian" arrived, the tide having risen slightly.

35. At about 0400 hours 13th December I discussed with Brigadier Wallis the advisability of also including in the withdrawal the two companies of 5/7 Rajput Regt.

holding the rear position. The enemy were in constant though light contact throughout, and after their severe handling would be temporarily disinclined to follow up. The water transport situation had already become more than precarious, it was extremely doubtful if any W.D. vessel, except perhaps the "Victoria" would be available next night, and I thus foresaw the greatest difficulties and even the impossibility of maintaining the 5/7 Rajput Regt. with ammunition and supplies in their isolated position. I decided that the risk was too great, and I also urgently required them to relieve and man the North East sector then held by 2 Royal Scots. This latter battalion was not in good shape, as they had lost many of their best officers killed or wounded, and I judged it to be necessary to withdraw them into reserve so that they could obtain a short respite in which to rest and re-equip. In addition they were unfamiliar with the ground, their previous sector having been the South West. One company of 5/7 Rajput Regt. was therefore ordered to cover the withdrawal of the remainder and then themselves embark in the last flights. Daylight had arrived by then, but they accomplished the evacuation without casualties, covered by artillery fire from various island positions.

36. It was not until 0920 hours that the last contingent of 5/7 Rajput Regt. from the mainland reached Aberdeen. The whole battalion was collected in the Tytam Gap area by noon and given twenty-four hours to rest and re-equip before taking over the North East sector from 2 Royal Scots. The 2/14 Punjab Regt. took over the North West sector. During the night (12/13th December), at the urgent request of the civil authorities, arrangements were made with the Harbour Master to pass 9 tons of dynamite from Green Island to the Star Ferry for collection and distribution.

On its return, loaded, it left Green Island two hours ahead of schedule, with the result that it reached the Vehicular Ferry (not Star Ferry) unexpectedly, and the N.C.O. commanding the pill box there gave the order to fire, as no lights or distinguishing marks were visible. The launch blew up and all on board thus unfortunately lost their lives.

37. At 0900 hours 13th December a launch bearing a flag of truce was seen to put off from Kowloon. It arrived at Victoria Pier with a Staff Officer of the General commanding the Japanese Forces (Lt.-General Sakai) bearing a letter addressed to H.E. The Governor. The letter demanded the surrender of the Colony and threatened severe artillery fire and aerial bombardment in the event of refusal. The demand was tantamount to unconditional surrender and was rejected categorically.

38. During the morning the Japanese were observed to be collecting launches in Kowloon Bay and concentrating them mainly at Bailey's Shipyard near the cement works. The situation as I saw it was that the enemy, if he attacked from the mainland, might direct his attack on to:-

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|---------|
| (a) Lyemun – Quarry Point area | } | From |
| (b) Northpoint Bowrington area | } | Kowloon |

(c) Victoria	}	Peninsula.
(d) Kennedy Town	}	

(b) or (c) seemed most probable in view of the short distance across, the easy support by artillery and mortars and the possible combination with Wang Ching Wei factions and others in the congested area of the town. The number of derelict craft in the area of (a) lessened the likelihood of attack there.

Any attack from the mainland might well be in combination with an attack on the South shore. My available reserves were:-

- (i) 2 Royal Scots, after relief and move from North East sector to the Wanchai Gap – Filter Beds area, but temporarily unfit until they could be thoroughly rested and reorganised.
- (ii) Two companies 5/7 Rajput Regt. North East sector.
- (iii) One company Winnipeg Grenadiers in South West sector.
- (iv) Two companies 2/14 Punjab Regt. in North West sector.
- (v) “Z” Coy. I Middlesex Regt. including one mobile machine gun platoon.

39. A.A. – In the early afternoon 13th December our A.A. guns brought down a large seaplane which crashed into the sea about 3000 yards West of Lamma (confirmed later by the Japanese).

40. During the day the enemy artillery fire increased in intensity (up to 9-in. calibre), one 9.2-in. gun at Mount Davis was knocked out by a direct hit, and at dusk Belchers Fort was heavily shelled and set on fire. Other serious fires were started at West Point and Kennedy Town.

Fifth columnists⁷ had been active during the day and a large number of army transport drivers deserted, some of them taking their lorries with them. Police dealt with these in due course. The civilian population showed signs of strain, and food queues in some districts became disorderly. The question of rice distribution presented a grave problem in the overcrowded quarters.

41. At 0200 hours 14th December great anxiety was caused by the speed of the fires at Belchers and Kennedy Town. The civil fire brigades had been fighting the fires for many hours and asked for military assistance. At various times three parties were accordingly sent but on each occasion were returned without any work having been performed on demolitions (a detailed series of “fire lanes” had been worked out and calculations completed before the war broke out). On the fourth occasion, however, some

houses were blown down. Fires were under control by midday. Elements of the civil population made these disasters an occasion for disorderly conduct; fifth columnists became more active and great care was necessary in checking telephone calls. The civil police found difficulty in maintaining guards over vulnerable points, and negotiated with the Chungking Government secret societies for assistance.

42. Certain movements of enemy warships were observed during the day (14th December), steaming on far distant courses.

43. (a) There was a marked increase in the intensity and accuracy of hostile shelling on the 14th December. Two 4.7-in. guns at Belchers had been hit and put out of action, and one 9.2-in. at Mount Davis had its communications cut for two hours. Also at Mount Davis, one 3-in. A.A. gun was hit and permanently disabled, causing about 30 per cent. casualties to the A.A. personnel. Many Chinese gunners deserted as a result.

(b) Pak Sha Wan Battery (Chinese volunteers) came in for particular attention, being both shelled and mortared. Its Battery Command Post and all internal communications were destroyed and the Battery Commander was wounded and evacuated. The guns were reduced to independent autosight control. At this juncture owing to an imperfectly conveyed message and an error of judgment of the junior officer left in acting command, the personnel were given the option of going to Stanley. All but two Chinese left; seventeen British and Portuguese stayed. A few regular British gunners were later sent up as reinforcements.

(c) A very heavy concentration on Magazine Gap cut eight main cables involving 195 circuits, severing communications between Fortress Headquarters and all terminals to the South of that Gap. Within 20 hours the Royal Corps of Signals, working magnificently, restored all lines.

44. *Civil Population.* – The civil police found their hands more than full in maintaining order in the city but had the situation generally under control except in the A.R.P. tunnels, where in certain cases armed gangs of robbers were operating. Pamphlets were dropped by the Japanese.

45. H.M.S. “*Thracian*” carried out an excellent operation during the night (15/16th December) making her way past Green Island, across the Japanese front on the Kowloon Peninsula, and then sinking two ferryboats at anchor full of enemy troops one thousand yards East of the Electric Power Station, Kowloon.

46. By now the new organisation of the island defences had been carried out viz.: division into two brigade areas – East Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Wallis) and West Infantry Brigade (Brigadier J.K. Lawson). The North-South dividing line approximated closely to the former dividing line between the easterly and westerly island sectors. At the northern extremity, however, it was placed further East to increase the front held by the 2/14 Punjab Regt. now considered a safer sector owing to the “anti-boat fence” or boom

which was in position from Sheung Wan to Green Island. The continuation towards Kellett Island had been prevented by the desertion of Chinese crews and there had been no opportunity of carrying the complete scheme through, i.e., a third portion constructed across to Kowloon Point.

I Middlesex Regt. was given a small but important sector based on Leighton Hill Ridge – Causeway Bay area. No preparations, however had been possible on the Ridge before hostilities, except a little wiring and three shell-slits, as the property was Government owned and housed many Government officials who could not be dispossessed or inconvenienced before the “precautionary period” of the Defence Scheme (which actually was never declared owing to the rapid development of full war conditions).

I Middlesex Regt. came directly under command of Fortress as “Corps Troops” for defence purposes. This eased the situation for Brigadier Wallis, who had the larger half of the island to command, and for Brigadier Lawson who was unfamiliar with the ground.

During the night 14/15th December the 5/7 Rajput Regt. relieved the 2 Royal Scots in the North East sector. The latter moved later to the area Wanchai Gap – Filter Beds to refit and re-organise, but one company took over a narrow front just West of the naval hospital.

47. During the early hours 15th December a broadcast from Kowloon could be heard of European songs and music; the talks, however, were not clear. They were probably from loud speakers on vans in the streets, as the radio transmitting station in Kowloon had been destroyed before evacuation. Several traitors, with lamps of primitive design operated from a dry battery, with a small but adequate mirror, were reported signalling from the island to the mainland. When these operators were intercepted they were shot.

48. (a) There was a systematic shelling of pill boxes along the North shore during the morning 15th December: three were knocked out and one badly damaged. One had forty holes drilled right through by a high velocity gun of small calibre located on Kowloon Peninsula, firing from a concealed position inside a water front “Godown.” The provision of alternative emplacements for the pill boxes of the North shore defences had already been taken up and some ten to twelve were completed. They should of course have been completed in peace time but it would have meant requisitioning valuable “Godown” and office properties, and requisitioning had not been sanctioned by Government until the proposed “Precautionary Period.”

(b) By nightfall all military and civil telephone routes in the North East sector, including those to pill boxes Nos. 40 to 53 were severely interrupted. Night repair work was at once put in hand.

(c) Aberdeen Island and the A.A. positions at Lyemun (Saiwan Hill) were heavily shelled,

one gun being put out of action temporarily.

(d) At noon 15th December the enemy was observed preparing sandbagged positions on the water front by the Kowloon Godowns, probably for mortars. Later, mortar fire fell in the vicinity of the R.N. Dockyard, Command H.Q., and Lower Peak Tramway Terminus.

(e) By now a “Command Observation Post” with direct lines to Fortress H.Q. was operating well from the Peak, manned by HKVDC, and also two special observation posts (pill box 69 and Kennedy Rd.) manned by 2/14 Punjab Regt.⁸

(f) Enemy was observed collecting small craft in Kowloon Bay – possibly for a raid; special arrangements were made to counter this viz.: a concentration was fired by 6-in. Howitzers and two craft were set alight. Orders were also issued from Fortress HQ to the A.A. searchlights at Saiwan and Braemar to cease their normal role at any time if they heard continuous machine gun fire on the North shore and to turn their lights down to illuminate the harbour.

49. At 2100 hours, 15th December, an attempted landing was reported by the Pak Sha Wan Battery (HKVDC). It was ascertained later from several sources that a very bold attempt was made by the enemy who, with small rubber boats and petrol tin rafts for equipment, swam across in fair strength – estimates varied from one to three Companies. All were shot in the water, the depleted battery (see [para. 43 \(b\)](#)) contributing stout defence.

50. (a) For four hours on 15th December Pinewood A.A. Battery was shelled by calibres up to 9-in. One gun was smashed irreparably and the other so badly damaged that it was out of action for the remainder of the battle. All instruments were rendered useless. Casualties to personnel were not numerous and men not hit were employed on salvage, and in an infantry role with 2/14 Punjab Regiment. We claimed two hits on enemy aircraft during the day.

(b) The general impression of Japanese artillery fire was that their gunners were extremely accurate on targets which were obviously well known from our peace time dispositions and under direct observation, but inaccurate in picking up new targets needing predicted fire, in spite of abundant air reconnaissance. About 30 per cent. of the ammunition burst defectively and of the heavier natures at times 50 per cent. failed to explode.

51. During this day (15th December) the last of the “Priority A” anti-personnel minefields was completed by Fortress R.E.

The morale of the civilian population remained shaky, chiefly due to rice distribution difficulties. The Chungking Government representatives had been most helpful in assisting in the maintenance of order.

52. News was received from the Chinese General Staff of the advance of Chinese forces towards Hong Kong. This fitted in with the plans which I had previously received

via Chungking of the proposed attack of General Yu Han Mou's 7th Army. However, the information now was modified by the statement that effective assistance could not be available until early January. Information of intended help from Chinese forces from the North was circulated to formations and units.

53. At daybreak 16th December observation revealed no enemy movements along the mainland waterfront between Kai Tak and the Kowloon Star Ferry, but launch activity in Kowloon Bay continued.

54. Bombing and shelling by the enemy were now showing a higher standard of accuracy and increasing in intensity, being confined mainly to military objectives. The first air raid occurred at 0900 hours and lasted thirty-five minutes.

In the afternoon, 16th December, seventeen enemy planes bombed Mount Davis, which was also heavily and accurately shelled: an unexploded 9-in. shell entered the Fortress Plotting Room and damaged the instruments. A bomb dropped in Shaukiwan caused 150 civilian casualties. Shek O, Lyemun and Aberdeen were also bombed; some casualties to Royal Navy personnel and damage being caused at the last named.

By the end of the day more than half of the pill boxes along North shore from Lyemun to Bowrington had been knocked out. Moves to alternative positions were carried out during the night (sixteen were now prepared but were not yet on the telephone system). The maintenance of communications to the North shore pill boxes, and on other subsidiary routes there, was proving extremely difficult on account of repeated breaks from hostile fire.

55. One enemy plane was seen at 0930 hours 16th December to crash into the sea (three sources confirmed) near Tatong, hit by the 3.7-in section at Wong Nei Chong.

At 1030 hours a fighter-bomber was hit by the Brick Hill 3.7-in. gun and crashed in a gulley (two sources corroborated).

56. Civilian morale improved somewhat.

The arrest this day of a prominent Chinese merchant for defeatist talk was expected to have a salutary effect – which in fact it did.

Fifth columnists were still active. Their methods consisted of shining lights to bring shell fire to bear on concentrations of transport, etc., sniping, spreading false rumours, inducing desertion from “essential services” and inciting to riot. They also again attacked the isolated A.A. searchlight position at Shaukiwan.

57. During the hours of darkness and early hours of 17th December mortar fire from Kowloon Peninsula continued on to the North shore pillboxes.

A force of 14 Army light bombers made two separate attacks at about 0930 hours 17th December – the first on Shaukiwan and Wanchai, and the second on the Peak

Wireless Station, Garden Road, and Central District in Victoria. These were followed by a short but relatively severe artillery and mortar bombardment on Central District.

Shortly afterwards two Japanese launches flying a white flag crossed the harbour. The delegation brought written proposals for surrender, similar to those of 13th December. It was thought that the Japanese supposed our morale to be shaken. The proposals were signed by Lt.-General Sakai and the Naval C.-in-C. Vice-Admiral Niimi. The envoys appeared genuinely surprised and disconcerted when the proposals were again summarily rejected. They left with the hint that future bombardments might not be so discriminate.

This second delegation coming within four days of the first suggested that either (a) they disliked the prospect of attacking across the water or (b) that the Chinese threat in their rear was taking effect, or (c) that it was an attempt to undermine our morale by thoughts of peace and quiet. The Japanese delegation announced on arrival that there would be no hostilities until 1600 hours by which time they expected a reply. Advantage was taken of this very welcome lull to repair communications, etc.

Considerable activity seawards was reported during the afternoon of the 17th December, including a 2,000 ton freighter operating in the shelter, westward of Lamma. On the mainland there was activity round Kai Tak aerodrome, both launch and motor transport and at Bailey's yard the following were seen – three ferry vessels, three barges, one large water boat, one steam tug, one motor boat.

During the 17th December our artillery suffered no damage or casualties for the first time for many days. Our counter battery fire silenced hostile artillery on Devil's Peak, Gun Club Mill, and also three mortars on the Kowloon waterfront.

58. Aircraft identified to date were of the following types; Navy Reconnaissance Flying Boat, type 94 – Heavy Navy Bomber, type 96 – Army light Bomber, type 98 – Army Fighter, type 97, unidentified fighter, now known to be the Navy O. Heaviest bomb dropped, identified, 250 lbs. – but from deduction (fuze caps, size of crater, etc.) it was considered that some of 500 lbs. were also dropped.

59. Morale of civilian population continued to improve and the rice distribution was getting better.

60. At 2100 hours 17th December hostile artillery fire started a severe fire at the large paint works at Braemar, causing a heavy smoke pall. Owing to its proximity the ammunition of the 18-pounder Beach Defence section nearby had to be moved to an alternative position, and at about midnight the guns themselves were forced to follow to the same position behind the Police station in that vicinity.

The shelling of the North East sector was particularly heavy and lines were being constantly cut and repaired. At 2000 hours many pill boxes were still out of touch and field cable had to be substituted for the buried system that night.

At about 0100 hours Aberdeen came under shell fire from seawards and the Industrial School (HQ of the Aberdeen portion of the R.N. Dockyard) was hit.

61.(a) At first light 18th December a Japanese destroyer was sighted sixteen miles South of Aberdeen.

(b) A considerable movement of small craft between the Kowloon wharves and piers was observed.

(c) In the early hours a 60-pounder gun which had been brought up into the North Point under cover of darkness (Lt. J.S. Vintner commanding) attempted to sink three freighters in Kowloon Bay suspected of being used as observation posts or being prepared as “jumping off places” for an attack. Only shrapnel was available but by obtaining hits on the water line one 4000 ton ship was holed and settled down.

62. At 1000 hours an air raid of considerable intensity developed on the Central District Victoria. The Anglo-Persian Company’s petrol and oil storage tanks at North Point were set on fire and subsequently shelled at intervals throughout the day. The attack seemed to be directed particularly against the Government Offices, where the Secretariat was hit, and many casualties were caused in the neighbourhood. During the early afternoon Causeway Bay area was very heavily shelled, the water front from that place to Lyemun now becoming a tangle of fallen tramwires and standards and almost impassable for vehicles and despatch riders.

At noon 18th December the Braemar beach defence gun position ([para. 60](#)) was shelled, received several direct hits, and the two 18 pounders destroyed beyond repair.

Further air raids occurred from 1500 hours onwards and the Saiwan artillery observation post was dive bombed and also shelled.

Between 1700 and 1800 hours a party of about two hundred enemy was seen working down from Haiwan to Devil’s Peak pier and were engaged by our artillery. Just before and after dusk an extremely heavy bombardment by artillery and mortars on Lyemun Peninsula was carried out.

At night fall it was reported that the North Point fixed beam (across to Kowloon Point) could not function owing to the intensity of the heat and the dense smoke arising from the burning Anglo-Persian Company’s oil installations. This fire continued for days and was a severe handicap to observed fire.

63. Landing on Hong Kong Island. – (a) At 1900 hours 18th December three armoured cars of the HKVDC were sent to Tytam Gap to be a mobile reserve in the hands of the Commander East Infantry Brigade at his HQ there, and two other cars remained in hand at Leighton Hill close to I Middlesex HQ.

(b) At 1930 hours a report was received that the Saiwan A.A. position and Old Redoubt had been under heavy shell fire (9-in.Howitzer) for half an hour, that the whole fort was

badly damaged and that the structure would not stand up to further shelling.

(c) At 2000 hours pillboxes 41 and 42 (Shaukiwan) and also the narrow 2 Royal Scots front at Bowrington were bombarded.

(d) At 2130 hours the Officer Commanding 5/7 Rajput Regt. reported difficulty in getting in touch with the Lyemun fixed beam and asked for illumination in area Quarry Bay – Aldrich Bay. The Braemar A.A. searchlight was ordered to come down on to a shore defence role but (not known till later) the telephone lines to its position were knocked out by shell fire and the motor cyclist despatch rider sent in lieu was badly wounded and never got through. The communications to the fixed beam at Lyemun had been giving difficulty throughout the evening, owing to breaks from shell fire, and Captain C.E. Otway, R.E., had finally been sent to take personal charge there.

At about 2130 hours 18th December the Officer Commanding 5/7 Rajput Regt. moved a reserve company from the area South of his HQ⁹ to a forward area closer to him. The remaining company (B) in battalion reserve was in the Tai Hang Road area, but communications to it had again been cut. Verrey lights were seen going up from North Point and Lyemun, and shelling and machine gun fire was heard in considerable volume along the North shore water front, and in the area of the Electric Power Station and the Anglo-Persian Company installation.¹⁰

(e) It was learnt later that at 2200 hours Captain Otway observed sampans lighting smoke flares in the harbour, and motor boats and small craft plying between Devils Peak and Lyemun pier. His light was twice attacked by an enemy patrol with hand grenades and after beating off a third attack he left the light exposed, locked the doors, and at about 2330 hours withdrew his six men through the Japanese lines to join the nearest infantry in the defence of the Saiwan 6-in. Howitzer position in Lyemun Gap. When he left, the Japanese were shooting straight down the beam with an “Infantry gun,” 50 per cent. of the shots hitting the concrete surround of the light.

(f) The landing of the enemy between Lyemun and North Point appears to have been simultaneous, for at 2200 hours night 18th-19th December pillbox N. 4 at Taikoo was reported in the hands of the enemy and a little later 5/7 Rajput Regt. was overheard reporting the occupation of the Sugar Factory by the enemy.

At 2205 hours I Middlesex Regt was ordered to send a mobile machine gun platoon to North Point to form a defensive flank from pillbox 49 (Power Station) to join up with the 5/7 Rajput Company in that area (“D” Company). An armoured car was also sent. Defensive artillery fire was promptly put down on Taikoo Dockyard and the Sugar Factory, and the Commanding Officer of 5/7 Rajput Regt. on the spot reported that the results were most effective.

(g) At 2242 hours pillbox 55 crew in Causeway Bay reported that the alternative position in which they were located was being shelled and also sniped at from their right flank.

(h) At 2330 hours Brigadier Wallis reported that the Officer Commanding 5/7 Rajput Regt. was still at Taikoo HQ and that on the other flank the intention was to recapture Saiwan Redoubt with the bayonet. The 6-in. Howitzer Section on Mount Parker was still in action.

(i) At midnight 18-19th December, B. Company (battalion reserve) of the 5/7 Rajput Regt. was now moving to the area of pillbox 53, a machine gun platoon of I Middlesex Regt. was in area of pillbox 50 and one platoon of B Company 5/7 Rajput Regt was still holding out in North Point area. The Power Station itself was held by a force known as the “Hughesiliers”, under the Hon. Major J.J. Paterson, which was formed before the outbreak of war from men of 55 and over who felt the call to duty though they themselves were outside the terms of the Compulsory Service Act. It contained many prominent men of considerable standing in the colony and their role was the prevention of sabotage to the electric plant. It was reinforced about the 16th December by 45 Hong Kong Electric Company employees (HKVDC), China Light and Power Company employees, from Kowloon (numbering 30) plus two officers and seven other “Free French.” The two officers were Captains Ega and Jacosta. This force was instrumental in holding the Power Station this night and fought in the streets next day until the late afternoon when the house-to-house fighting and mopping up by the Japanese caused their surrender by encirclement, except for a few who escaped.

The delay the force imposed was very valuable to me.

(j) Just after midnight it was reported that the armoured car sent to reconnoitre towards the Power Station had been knocked out by mobile anti-tank gun.¹¹ It is clear from reports since made that at that time the Japanese were in possession of the ridge overlooking and dominating the Power station and the approach along King’s Road from the West. It was from this direction that the reinforcing platoon of I Middlesex Regt came, as it was judged that the road nearer the water front was impassable owing to the flames from the Anglo-Persian Company’s installations. The platoon ran straight into the same anti-tank and machine gun fire, the Platoon Sergeant-Major and others were killed and the remainder got into action in the vicinity of the Power Station where they fought excellently. When the bulk of the Hughesiliers withdrew, three I Middlesex N.C.O.s rallied and collected a mixed party of Regulars and Volunteers, nine strong, and fought till 1400 hours in the main office building of the Power Station.

(k) At about 2200 hours 18th December the Royal Artillery at Lyemun Gap reported that propaganda from a loud speaker from Saiwan Redoubt was being broadcast – “We Japanese have captured Saiwan Hill,” “It is useless to resist,” etc. The area was promptly put under small arms fire.

At about 0100 hours it was reported that a counter attack by one platoon of Canadians had been carried out on Saiwan Redoubt, organised and led by an Artillery officer. The counter-attack did not succeed, as was discovered subsequently. This officer

then took a Tommy gun and carried out active local defence on his own, round the 6-in. Howitzer position at Lyemun Gap, in a most gallant manner.

(l) At 0145 hours the Hughesiliers (see sub-para, (i) above) reported the Power Station surrounded, but were ordered to hold on at all costs as other posts were holding out near them and it was hoped that B Company 5/7 Rajput Regt. (Captain R.G. Course) would at any moment make its presence felt.

(m) At 0200 hours 19th December Officer Commanding I Middlesex Regt. reported that B Company 5/7 Rajput Regt. was back in his vicinity South of Leighton Hill – the reason given being that the Company had gone forward into the Braemar reservoir area but had been unable to locate D Company 5/7 Rajput Regt. holding that sector. I Middlesex Regt. was still holding pill boxes 53 and 54 (Causeway Bay) and had sent officer reconnaissance patrols forward to North Point where the Hughesiliers had again reported that they were hard pressed.

(n) At 0300 hours R.A. (East) reported two Canadian platoons had tried to capture the Saiwan position about midnight under an accurate barrage on the hill top but that this counter attack was a failure.

The fighting here in the dark was very confused. Later Major Fielden, R.A., reported the road junction at Shaukiwan held by armoured cars and that he was trying to work round West of Saiwan observation post (on the top of the redoubt); he had thirty men covering the 6-in. Howitzer position in Lyemun Gap and he said that pill box 40 was still firing.

(o) Between 0400 and 0600 hours 19th December reinforcing platoons of the Royal Rifles of Canada were sent forward on to the Mount Parker high ground.

(p) To give increased defence in Victoria against possible landing on that water front which, supplemented by fifth columnists, would constitute a grave danger from the West and perhaps overrun Government House area, a company of 2/14 Punjab Regt. had been deployed on a line running from pill box 63 southwards past and including the Central Police Station. The situation now developing on the East of Victoria was judged to be serious enough, however, to warrant taking risks in the Victoria area, and so this company (about 0400 hours) was called in from its positions to be in hand at HQ of 2/14 Punjab Regt. at Garden Road. "A" Company Winnipeg Grenadiers was already in hand at Wong Nei Chong Gap for emergency use.

(q) Captain R.S. Cole, 5/7 Rajput Regt., during the early hours was waiting for troops of his battalion on the track from Braemar to Mount Butler when a party of Japanese, headed by three Chinese with rifles approached. They were dressed in uniform and obviously acted as guides. He challenged, shot the Chinese, and dispersed the party. This incident corroborates others, accounting for the speed with which the Japanese troops covered country, supposedly unfamiliar, in the dark.

(r) At 0400 hours 19th December I arranged with the Chief Engineer for the despatch of an R.E. party for an infantry fighting role, viz.: to reinforce the Wong Nei Chong Gap area and to come under orders of Commander West Infantry Brigade on arrival there. Seventy British and Chinese was the eventual composition of this party.

(s) Shortly after 0400 hours the Officer Commanding I Middlesex Regt. reported the enemy working round the hills by Tai Hang village and going East, that D Company 5/7 Rajput Regt. was still near the Reservoir, that Causeway Bay area was securely held, and that there was no signs of enemy action down the road from Taikoo. At this time I ordered 2/14 Punjab Regt. to send a company forward to help fill the gap between the Winnipeg Grenadiers and I Middlesex Regt.

(t) At 0430 hours Major E. de V. Hunt, R.A., reported the situation to be well in hand at Lyemun Gap.

(u) At 0500 hours a small party of enemy was encountered at the Filter Beds. This showed with what vigour the enemy was pressing the attack.

(v) At 0600 hours personnel of Fortress R.E.(see sub-para, (r) above) left, and (so it transpired later) arrived in the vicinity of Wong Nei Chong Gap, only to find West Infantry Brigade HQ under heavy enemy machine gun and mortar fire. Three mortar positions were located in folds of the ground but the Royal Engineers had no suitable weapons with which to reach such dead ground. Access to Brigade HQ shelters was out of the question and the Royal Engineers took up a position nearby.

(w) 0650 hours 19th December. I had previously consulted with the Commodore R.N. with a view to active participation by the Royal Navy in the land fighting. He now informed me that arrangements had been completed for the Royal Navy to take over infantry posts in the area Aberdeen – Little Hong Kong. This released A Company Winnipeg Grenadiers¹² from the Little Hong Kong Sub Sector, and it moved off at 0500 hours. The Royal Navy however did not take over these infantry posts, for the bulk of the naval party was used in an attempt to reinforce Wong Nei Chong Gap from the South.

(x) At daylight laden junks, barges, motor launches and ferries were observed crossing to the vicinity of North Point, but the exact area of landing was not under observation as “low level” observation posts had been over-run, and buildings, etc., obscured the foreshore from the view of the upper observation posts.

(y) Between 0800 and 0900 hours small parties of enemy were observed on Jardines Lookout, coming down on to Wong Nei Chong Gap. In this area confused fighting was taking place, troops of various units participating, as well as the Canadian Brigade H.Q. staff. Brigadier J.K. Lawson (about 1000 hours) reported that the H.Q. shelters were over-run, firing into them was actually taking place at point blank range and that he was going outside to fight it out, after destroying telephone exchanges, etc. He did so, and I regret to say was killed, together with his Brigade Major. Major Temple and personnel of H.Q.

West Group, R.A. were also killed. During the next thirty-six hours the groups of shelters here changed hands several times, but in spite of every effort the enemy secured a definite lodgment.¹³ Part of the enemy attack came on to Stanley Gap and involved the 3.7-in. A.A. Section there. The Royal Artillery of the nearest 3.7-in. Howitzer positions were called on to assist, and leaving their gun position were drawn into the fighting with their small arms. Unfortunately, as it was thought that a temporary counter attack only was involved, steps were not taken to remove small essential parts, e.g., locks, or firing levers, and these guns together with ammunition later fell into enemy hands and were used against us.¹⁴

64. The Officer Commanding R.A.F. had some time previously requested that his officers and men should be used for ground defence, and at this time the Royal Air Force were taking up positions with the Royal Navy in the Aberdeen area, where they assisted materially in the subsequent fighting.

65. (a) It now became necessary to form a new West Group R.A. This was done at Wanchai Gap, and communications readjusted by 1500 hours, Major Duncan being appointed Commander. This small group of artillery gave admirable support during the next few days, being continuously in action though repeatedly shelled and dive bombed. Such counter battery work as remained possible was undertaken by R.A. HQ at Fortress HQ.

(b) At 0845 hours, 19th December, the Mount Parker 6-in. Howitzer Section 600 yards North of Tytam Gap was firing with one of its howitzers straight down the road towards Lyemun Gap.

66. At 0730 hours six motor torpedo boats were sent to the vicinity of Green Island to be ready to attack enemy vessels ferrying troops from the mainland to the island. On the arrival at the rendezvous they were ordered direct by the Commodore to attack in pairs. The first attack by M.T.Bs. 07 and 09 was successful and sank one enemy landing craft set another on fire and forced a third to turn back (each held about forty troops). Whilst returning 07 was hit and damaged, and was towed in by 09. The second pair of motor torpedo boats had already been ordered to attack, but by the time of their arrival ferrying across the harbour had ceased. Whilst returning M.T.B. 12 was badly hit and ran ashore out of control in Kowloon Dock area. The third pair were ordered not to attack, but by mischance (or deliberately) M.T.B. 26 did so and was sunk with all hands in the middle of the harbour. During these operations these craft came under fire from both sides of the harbour, and in the final stages enemy fighter aircraft joined in both attacking them with light bombs and with machine gun fire. Our casualties amounted to 50 per cent. It was not considered that adequate results would accrue from further attacks by day or by night, the harbour being full of wrecked shipping and underwater obstacles.

67. At 1000 hours, 19th December, Lieut Colonel J.L. Willcocks (who as previously arranged, was commanding the Defence Force around Stanley Prison of which

he was Superintendent) reported that the Stanley platoon of prison officers was in its prepared position on Stanley Peninsula, covering the batteries.

68. At this juncture I conferred with Brigadier Wallis about the stabilisation of the position. The situation was that at 0800 hours the Royal Rifles of Canada were finding it difficult to maintain their positions on Mount Parker and they were attempting to hold the 6-in. Howitzer positions in that area, together with the R.A. personnel who had taken up local defence dispositions. Some of the R.A. personnel consisted of those from the 6-in. Howitzer Section at Lyemun Gap which had been over-run. No British officer was available for this latter section. Owing to the lack of mobilization transport and the 40 ft. haul up to the road by winch, the guns had been abandoned and small parts removed.

These defensive positions round the Mount Parker 6-in. Howitzer position were obviously not adequate to act as a serious “stop” to the enemy. They had been hastily improvised, Mount Parker not being held by us, they were overlooked by high ground on two sides, and were only six hundred yards in front of the Combined Headquarters of East Infantry Brigade, the infantry battalion in the South East Sector, and R.A East Group. Infantry available for reinforcing in this area had been employed towards Mount Parker and were now out of touch. There was thus the grave danger if the enemy staged a serious attack here, of the loss of all these Headquarters and the cutting off of all the troops in the area Collins Battery – d’Aguilar Peninsula – Obelisk (illegible) included in which were the wireless personnel of the Civil Government at d’Aguilar Wireless Station. Accordingly I authorised Brigadier Wallis to withdraw his HQ to the Stonehill Company HQ and to time his withdrawal so that the last troops left the Tytam Gap area at 1300 hours.

At 1145 hours 19th December his HQ there closed down.

There was the possibility of carrying out offensive operations from the area of Red Hill and the Tytam Reservoirs and connecting up with Wong Nei Chong Gap when cleared. This would involve capture of the important features Mount Butler and Jardines Lookout. The enemy, so far as could be ascertained, was distributed in small groups on that line of high ground and it seemed to me doubtful if their total strength on the island was more than two battalions. It was realised that the alternative might be necessary, viz.: to operate via Repulse Bay area in order to link up with West Infantry Brigade. Shortly after noon a message was received from the Officer Commanding 2 Royal Scots that one company in a counter-attack had reached a point 200 yards northwards of Wong Nei Chong Gap shelters, where they were holding out with only thirteen effectives left. At this time the 3.7-in. Howitzer section at the Gauge Basin was engaging the enemy over open sights, which it continued to do until small arms fire prevented the service of the guns. One gun was brought away.

69. At 1100 hours I ordered Lt.-Colonel G.R. Kidd to counter attack with two companies (“A”¹⁵ and “D”¹⁶ Companies) in an easterly direction from Leighton Hill to link up with “D” Company 5/7 Rajput Regt. and enable it to withdraw for more active

employment. At the same time such an attack would cut in at the enemy's rear, thus limiting his exploitation and obstructing further landings and movements in and from the North Point area.

70. At 1130 hours 19th December I was visited by H.E. The Governor and C.-in-C. who stressed the importance of fighting it out to the end however bad the military outlook might be. Every day gained was a direct help to the Empire war effort.

71. At 1300 hours a force of R.A.S.C. and details collected in the Pokfulum area, seventy strong, was moved to Bennets Hill to take up an emergency defensive position in case further exploitation by the enemy was attempted: then to move forward to the close support of the Winnipeg Grenadiers at Wong Nei Chong Gap. At 1330 hours I issued orders for a general advance eastwards at 1500 hours to reach as a first objective Middle Spur – Wong Nei Chong Reservoir – Clementis Ride and then to join up with the objective reached by the 2/14 Punjab Regiment's counter attack already referred to in [para. 69](#). The 2/14 Punjab Regt. was to co-operate by exploiting Northwards to relieve the "Hughesiliers"¹⁷ and others in the Power Station. The central axis of attack was to be Middle Gap – Wong Nei Chong Reservoir – Gauge Basin. 2 Royal Scots were to include Jardines Lookout. Only eight field guns were available to support this advance.

At about 1630 hours 19th December I Middlesex Regt. reported that Leighton Hill was being heavily shelled, that "B" Company 5/7 Rajput Regt. was forward on their right and that Major Kampta Prasad's "B" Company 2/14 Punjab Regt. was further to the right¹⁸ R.A. reported enemy in the Police Station at Wong Nei Chong Gap, on the ridge just to the North, and moving South of Wong Nei Chong Reservoir. From other reports it became clear that the general advance had not been successful and that the enemy was in greater strength than had been believed.

72. (a) At 1820 hours it became necessary to withdraw the crew from pillbox 53 at Causeway Bay (North East end) as it was isolated much in advance of the general line. The pillbox itself had been destroyed, the officer had been killed, and 50 per cent. of the crew had become casualties.

(b) Enemy transport vessels were still crossing the harbour and artillery action was taken.

73. (a) At 1900 hours the R.A.S.C. personnel at the transport pool at Repulse Bay were ordered to hold on to and defend their transport area and not to withdraw.

(b) At 2000 hours the party of R.A.S.C. moved forward from Bennets Hill. Its numbers had now been increased to about 150. The party, being unable to reach Wong Nei Chong Gap, joined the R.A.O.C. party at the Ridge.

(c) At 2000 hours 19th December it was reported that some of No. 3 Company HKVDC who had been surrounded in Jardines Lookout pillboxes, had managed to escape, after fighting all day, to the Blue Pool area. They were ordered to join I Middlesex Regt. at

Leighton Hill which they did at 0800 hours next morning.

(d) At 2100 hours heavy mortar bombardment of the China Fleet Club area took place.

74. Just before midnight 19-20th December the Commissioner of Police reported that reliable secret information pointed to the likelihood of enemy landings in the Central District and Kennedy Town, and that Police patrols had been sent out. All military units concerned were warned.

75. The troops had now been in action eleven days with no respite. Owing to the shortage of hot food and sleep, and the impossibility of providing reliefs because of the lack of troops, signs of strain were beginning to appear. My A A resources were now very reduced – luckily only three raids of any intensity were carried out by the enemy during the day of the 19th, but the last raid on Stanley was very severe. Two Bofors guns were still in action but were powerless to prevent the enemy bombing selected targets. His bombing throughout was confined to day bombing and my A.A. searchlight detachments were never employed in their true role.

76. At 0135 hours the armoured cars of HKVDC at Wong Nei Chong Gap reported that they were in difficulties and had arranged for help from 2 Royal Scots, who had two companies in the close vicinity. In the meantime the Hong Kong Regt., HKSRA, reported that the enemy had been cleared from Wong Nei Chong Police Station.

At 0400 hours 20th December 2 Royal Scots estimated the enemy to be one battalion strong in the vicinity of Jardines Lookout.

North of Wong Nei Chong Gap the situation was as before, viz., a company of 2/14 Punjab Regt. then “B” Company 5/7 Rajput Regt. then I Middlesex Regt. on Leighton Hill.

At 0715 hours the Officer Commanding the Winnipeg Grenadiers reported that he was withdrawing troops from the Mount Nicholson area, as two companies¹⁹ were distributed in many small units and needed reorganising for further employment, especially as they were much mixed up with 2 Royal Scots. He proposed to reorganise on the line held on the day before, viz, Middle Gap, thence South West to Cable Hill.

At 0745 hours it was learnt that the enemy had occupied the large garage at the Repulse Bay Hotel.

At 0800 hours 20th December the Royal Artillery reported two companies 2 Royal Scots digging in on North East slopes of Mount Nicholson.

The Commissioner of Police now reported that a party of enemy had discarded their uniform and had collected in houses in Happy Valley for, he thought, fifth column work. He proposed to round them up.

At about 1000 hours the Officer Commanding I Middlesex Regt. reported that the

crews of pillboxes 12, 13, and 15, which had been withdrawn to stiffen up the landward defences, were opposing an enemy advance on to Bennets Hill and that the enemy on Brick Hill were moving on Aberdeen. He reported that all pillboxes from Deepwater Bay to Repulse Bay were intact. The Officer Commanding the Winnipeg Grenadiers was authorised to withdraw his platoon from Aberdeen Island to assist in the main defensive positions.

77. At about 1000 hours 20th December orders were issued to 2/14 Punjab Regt. to send a company ("A" Company) to operate through Aberdeen and along Island Road to clear the enemy (estimated at thirty strong) from the Repulse Bay Hotel garage and to relieve the personnel there.

78. Repulse Bay Hotel. – At about 0930 hours Lt. Grounds, I Middlesex Regt., rang upon a civil telephone and reported that the Japanese had surrounded the Hotel. He was ordered to put the women and children on the lowest floor space and to make them lie down, to organise the defence himself and to take full charge with Lt. Tresidder, R.A.S.C., to assist. With him were two or three Royal Navy personnel²⁰, and his own Middlesex machine gunners. Lt Grounds did excellently until he was unfortunately killed whilst organising an attack on the isolated Hotel garage with the object of driving out a strong enemy party and rescuing HKVDC officers and others imprisoned there.

The area round the Hotel was not finally cleared till the afternoon, "A" Company Royal Rifles of Canada having arrived from the direction of Stone Hill and cooperating in the action. The enemy lost one officer and 25 men killed.

At about 1100 hours 20th December a message was received that "A" Company 2/14 Punjab Regt. had reached Aberdeen and was moving towards Shouson Hill, but during the day they could make no progress, as the enemy were in strength around that position, and the company itself numbered under thirty.

79. At 1200 hours Fortress R.E. were re-organised into three sections – two covering Wanchai Gap, the third in reserve. They were ordered to support the Winnipeg Grenadiers in every way possible.

A Japanese monoplane flying over Stanley was hit, was obviously in trouble, lost height and was last seen low behind Lamma Island, and not re-appearing, may be presumed to be a casualty, giving a total of five enemy aircraft shot down during the battle.

80. At 1300 hours the Chinese crew deserted the A.A searchlight on Aberdeen Island. The five remaining British other ranks temporarily joined the nearest infantry unit.

81. – (i) During the morning several eye witnesses stated that Chinese planes had bombed Kowloon.

(ii) Admiral Chan reported that General Yu Han Mou had wirelessly that 60,000 troops

were at Sham Chun on the frontier and were about to attack.²¹

82. During the midday period 20th December the enemy continued pouring troops and material across the harbour in every type of craft. The North Point area and other likely points were accordingly engaged by our artillery.

In the morning Colonel H.B. Rose, M.C., Commanding HKVDC, was nominated as Commander West Brigade. Its role remained as heretofore – to clear the enemy from Wong Nei Chong Gap and to establish itself on the A.A. position on Stanley Gap high ground.

1400-1500 hours. The enemy were active behind the Repulse Bay Hotel, at Shouson and Bennets Hill, and along the road between Tytam Reservoir and the Gauge Basin. An enemy battery and two platoons deployed near Stanley Mound.

During the day Brigadier Wallis from his HQ at Stone Hill was continuously forward along the Repulse Bay Road endeavouring with Lieut-Colonel W.J. Home to force a way either West via Middle Spur or North via the gap to join up with the West Infantry Brigade. It was not known till later that the attempts were unsuccessful owing to the strength of the enemy.

At about 1700 hours the enemy was reported to have surrounded the civilian food stores (Little Hong Kong) and to be attacking again at Wong Nei Chong Gap, driving out a company of 2 Royal Scots and some Winnipeg Grenadiers. Some of the enemy moved up towards the high ground, Mount Nicholson.²²

83. At about 1930 hours, 20th December, a counter attack, about which I had previously instructed Lieut.-Colonel J.L.R. Sutcliffe and planned for 1900 hours, was launched by a company of Winnipeg Grenadiers from Wanchai Gap, via Blacks Link to achieve the objects set out in [para. 82](#) above, and to collect considerable numbers of wounded known to be at Wong Nei Chong Gap. Artillery support had been arranged but nothing was achieved, nor was the preliminary clearing of Mount Nicholson effected.

84. (a) Major C. Manners (retired R.A.) telephoned at about 1900 hours from Repulse Bay Hotel reporting that Canadian troops had arrived.

(b) At 1930 hours East Infantry Brigade was ordered to hold Repulse Bay Hotel at all costs, and Major Young, Royal Rifles of Canada, the Company Commander there, was ordered direct from Fortress HQ to pay particular attention to strong patrolling that night. The company was 140 strong.

85. At 2000 hours, 20th December, the Senior Naval Officer Aberdeen reported that “A” Company 2/14 Punjab Regt. was still tied to the ground North of Brick Hill and that Major C.R. Boxer had been wounded – making the third General Staff Officer wounded in that locality that day. It was apparent that there was little chance of getting through to Repulse Bay from the Aberdeen side. (It was afterwards established that “A” Company 2/14 Punjab

Regt., only 25 strong, had tried every method of clearing the enemy from the strong pocket in which they were established with at least one machine gun and a light mortar.)

86. Serious fires were now reported in the Central District of Victoria and the Civil Fire Brigade asked for the assistance of troops which under the circumstances I was unable to provide.

87. (a) At 2230 hours I discussed the situation with Brigadier Wallis. A special reconnaissance patrol under Lieut. Bompas, R.A., had located two companies of enemy infantry working their way towards Repulse Bay Hotel, along the catchment from the East, during the afternoon. The road from Stanley to Repulse Bay was overlooked from the high ground Violet Hill and Middle Spur, with two hundred enemy in position, making the road unsafe. The Canadians could not get to Wong Nei Chong Gap by the routes tried this day. Brigadier Wallis considered the enemy to be in too great strength in the Hotel area to be turned out without proper artillery support, now a matter of great difficulty. He believed the enemy were not so strong in the Gauge Basin area and that another plan should be tried, but it was pouring with rain, visibility very bad, the men tired out and they had had little food. I ordered him

(i) to hold what he had got,

(ii) to press on to Wong Nei Chong Gap via Gauge Basin and

(iii) to use Bren carriers boldly in reconnaissance.

(b) By midnight 20th-21st December two 3.7-in. Howitzers had been positioned near Stanley Prison with an observation post on the hill behind, i.e., to the South. These, together with one 18 pounder from a Beach Defence role (which had to be man-handled and could only fire over open sights from road locations), were the only remaining field pieces in East Infantry Brigade Commander's hands.

(c) Later Commander East Infantry Brigade said that the earliest his attack could be staged was 0900 hours. Contributing factors were.-

(i) lack of transport and administrative facilities and

(ii) delay caused by a virtual breakdown of unit communications. He was unable to help in the last mentioned item, for the Brigade reserve of signals equipment had already been used to replace this unit's signal equipment, lost on the previous night's positions.

88. The company of 2 Royal Scots – see foot note to [para. 82](#) – was driven back in the early morning, exposing the flank of “B” Company 2/14 Punjab Regt.

89. Commander West Infantry Brigade arranged for a fresh attack at 0700 hours by the Winnipeg Grenadiers to recapture Wong Nei Chong Gap “C” Company of that regiment was in position at 0300 hours at Middle Gap, though they reported that they had encountered a party of enemy whilst moving up, and had suffered a few casualties. The

attack did not succeed.

90. At about 0700 hours 21st December Major Manners (see [para. 84](#) (a)) rang up again from Repulse Bay Hotel. He said the defences appeared to be quite inadequate, and with the women and children in the Hotel helpless, he viewed the situation with extreme pessimism.

At 0725 hours Major Young at Repulse Bay Hotel was ordered to organise two strong patrols, to reconnoitre Westwards from the Hotel and to clear up the situation at the junction of Island Road with the road to Hong Kong, where some troops who were coming down from “The Ridge” Advance Ordnance Depot had been ambushed overnight.

At 0800 hours a review of the situation was received from Lt. Tresidder at Repulse Bay Hotel:-

Enemy estimated 450 strong on Stanley Mound and over-looking Repulse Bay with HQ at Wong Nei Chong Gap: they had three machine guns and a heavy mortar they had British and Chinese prisoners with them some of the enemy were Koreans.

91. At about 0600 hours I Middlesex Regt. reported enemy attacking near pillbox 14 and on Brick Hill H.M.S “Cicala” (gunboat) was ordered to assist land operations in the Deepwater Bay area. Valuable close co-operation resulted.

This ship entered the bay and shelled enemy mortars and artillery, scoring hits. Unfortunately strong air action developed against her, and having been badly holed she withdrew and sank later in the Lamma channel.

92. Meanwhile (see [para. 85](#)) “A” Company of 2/14 Punjab Regt had still made no head way and I ordered a senior officer to be sent at once from the battalion in Victoria. Lt.-Colonel Kidd elected to go himself and collected a few naval ratings in Aberdeen en route, but he was most regrettably killed when putting his own men in to the attack on Shouson Hill in order to clear that area. The attack failed with twenty-one casualties (out of a strength of twenty-five).

At 0900 hours 21st December Major H. Marsh reported from his machine gun company H.Q. at Little Hong Kong that the enemy could be seen moving from Wong Nei Chong Gap along the crest of the hill westwards. That matters in that area had not progressed favourably was evident when at 1025 hours I learnt that our troops were being pushed back North of Blacks Link²³ and Mount Cameron. The Winnipeg Grenadiers now in positions on Mount Cameron were ordered to hold on at all costs.

93. A second air raid on the Peak District developed at 0950 hours and a bomb of 500 lbs. was dropped, amongst others, just below Jardines Corner, entirely blocking the road and cutting off communications with Volunteer HQ except by telephone, by which means the Observation Post Commander reported that forty steam launches in line, with

steam up, were assembled two hundred yards off shore by Kai Tak aerodrome. Unfortunately, at this time Royal Artillery communications to observation posts were destroyed except the one to High West, and from this observation post the target was invisible.

94. At 1000 hours 21st December 2/14 Punjab Regt. in the Garden Road – Kennedy Road area were ordered to re-orientate themselves to face South East to cover a possible break through from the Wanchai Gap direction. A section of machine guns was sent at once to connect up by fire with the Wanchai Gap dispositions, at which place were located the HQ of both West Infantry Brigade and the Winnipeg Grenadiers. At the same time all garrisons of 2/14 Punjab pillboxes on the North shore were to be withdrawn to Battalion HQ – I had now to take considerable risks on other portions of the island defences in view of the direct menace from the Mount Cameron area.

95. By 1100 hours the enemy had brought a heavy mortar into action just off King's Road near the Power Station, with which they bombarded the R.N. Yard. They also bombed Repulse Bay area and carried out a ground attack on the Little Hong Kong area from the direction of Aberdeen, thus threatening encirclement, at any rate temporarily, of that important area in which was located the new R.A.O.C. Magazine and the main bulk of the remaining ammunition stock. The enemy had landed some troops near Causeway Bay, and the housetops in that area were reported "crowded with them." At noon they were pressing down King's Road and had mounted a gun at No. 163. At this time all the guns, at the R.N. Yard were out of action, following a heavy bombardment.

96. (a) At midday 21st December our "line" ran from Little Hong Kong area to the Southern slopes of Mount Cameron. In the former area were located two parties under Major H. Marsh, I Middlesex Regt., and Major A.J. Dewar, R.A.S.C., respectively. Major Marsh had one officer (plus a R.A.M.C. officer), eighteen other ranks I Middlesex Regt., five men of the Winnipeg Grenadiers and fourteen Chinese of the Medium Detachment of the HKVDC, and was located in the "Combined Company HQ" of the defence sub sector – one company of the Winnipeg Grenadiers having been withdrawn for the Wong Nei Chong Gap counter attacks. Major A.J. Dewar, with twenty naval ratings, placed himself under the command of Major Marsh and was posted on the high ground (Shouson Hill private houses) covering the East flank. This "Island" of defence resisted all attacks from 20th December to the afternoon of 25th December and fought very gallantly, as did also a similar isolated detachment, viz, the administrative details on "The Ridge" under Lt.-Colonel R.A.P. Macpherson.

(b) During the course of the morning I had issued instructions to withdraw the Middlesex machine guns from the pillboxes between Sandy Bay and Aberdeen, and to put them on a mobile basis as far as possible: a platoon at a time could be "ferried," even though the transport situation was acute. The South West sector of the island defence was therefore completely denuded – another undesirable but necessary risk. A section of

machine guns was now sent to supplement the defences in the Aberdeen – Bennets Hill area, under Commander H.C. Millet, R.N. (retd.). A platoon was also sent to the Officer Commanding I Middlesex Regt., for the Leighton Hill defences.

97. (a) Mortaring of North shore defences continued at 1300 hours 21st December, and pillboxes were subjected to accurate high velocity shell fire from both Kowloon and positions on their flank on the island. Pillbox 59, for instance received thirty direct hits, but the Middlesex sergeant in command personally upheld the defence, though withdrawing the crew temporarily.

(b) Enemy craft were still ferrying backwards and forwards between Kowloon and the Sugar Factory – North Point area.

(c) In the morning a motor torpedo boat had evacuated from Stanley the Commanding Officer of 5/7 Rajput Regt. and the remnants of his battle HQ, and he now took over command of the troops of 5/7 Rajput Regt. who were fighting alongside I Middlesex Regt.

98. *HKVDC.* (a) A report was received that No. I Company had had heavy casualties in the Stanley Mound area and had lost all their officers. The remains of the company had rallied at Stanley.

(b) The A.A. Lewis gun post of No. 6 Company (Portuguese) at “Watson’s,” Causeway Bay, reported that they had been captured by Japanese, disarmed, and told to make off towards our lines. They did so and rejoined for duty.

99. 1330 hours. A Japanese destroyer, escorting two merchant vessels, was sighted South of Cheung Chau Island, heading for Hong Kong.

100. 1430 hours. (a) Two companies of enemy occupied the whole length of Mount Nicholson, and brought up a small gun.

(b) A report was received from “A” Company Royal Rifles of Canada that the whole company had moved. One platoon had reached the “Ridge” and another platoon was on Middle Spur though the enemy were still firing from it. The situation at Repulse Bay being so unsatisfactory, I ordered a senior officer to be sent to take local command there. Major C.R. Templar, R.A. was selected. On arrival he collected two trucks, filled them with Canadian troops and went up towards Wong Nei Chong Gap.

101. At 1600 hours 21st December a telegram was received from the Military Attache, Chungking, that the main Chinese attack could not start before 1st January but “it was hoped that” twenty bombers would operate at once against Japanese aerodromes.

102. The question of the women and children at Repulse Bay Hotel now arose. It was difficult to give a satisfactory answer but I decided that the safest course would be to leave them there for the night. The situation was extremely “fluid,” both in this area and the Little Hong Kong area.

103. After dark enemy landing craft operating near the R.N. Yard were fired on from pillboxes and passed West down the harbour, but no actual landing was attempted. Strong Police patrols were sent out in the Central and Western Districts for special reconnaissance to confirm this.

104. (a) During the day 21st December The Royal Rifles of Canada had been trying to force their way north-eastwards as planned – one company and carriers, with No I Company Volunteer Machine Gunners in support, up the Tytam Road; a second Company directed across country on to Bridge Hill. These companies made a great effort, in spite of handicaps, but by the late afternoon could get no further forward than Red Hill – Bridge Hill, owing to considerable resistance by the enemy. Volunteer machine-gunners (Nos I and 2 Companies) rendered valuable forward support on this occasion.

(b) At 2030 hours 21st December Major C.R. Templar reported an unsuccessful attack on Wong Nei Chong Gap and that there were still about one hundred R.A.S.C. and R.A.O.C. on “The Ridge,” with fifty Canadians in Altamira House. Further, that sixty to seventy Canadians were in Repulse Bay Hotel, round which sniping was continuing.

105. At about midnight a cable was received from the War Office emphasising the need to destroy all oil installations. This was carried out by artillery fire on the next day (22nd). The Texaco tanks at Tsun Wan Wai, the Shell tanks at Tai Kok Tsui (next to Cosmopolitan Dock), and the R.N. tanks a mile to the South thereof, were all set well alight, but the Socony tanks²⁴ at Laichikok could not be shelled as they were close to the hospital establishment in the women’s prison.

106. (a) In the evening (21st December) the decision was taken to evacuate “The Ridge,” and at about 2230 hours 8 officers and 120 other ranks left, trying at the same time to clear the catchwater in a southerly direction. This, however, failed under enemy machine gun fire. They sheltered for the night in “Overbays”, a private house on the edge of Deepwater Bay.

(b) During the evening some Japanese managed to penetrate into the Repulse Bay Hotel but were evicted by prompt action initiated by Major Templar.

107. Night 21/22nd December. Enemy launches kept the North shore defences on the alert, but there were no attempted landings. Sniping occurred from houses round the Race Course and also in Victoria. The civil population observed the curfew well.

108. In the morning the enemy opened heavy fire from Middle Spur and resumed operations on the high ground North of the Repulse Bay Hotel, and at 1000 hours he was reported in possession of two large houses overlooking Deepwater Bay. At 1030 hours 22nd December I placed Stanley Garrison under the direct orders of Brigadier Wallis. By now the intention of linking up East Infantry Brigade with West Infantry Brigade by moving westwards had perforce to be abandoned.

It may be noted that at this time the 3 7-in Howitzers at Stanley had only 45

rounds left in all. This was supplemented later when the provisioning of Stanley garrison was carried out by motor torpedo boats from Aberdeen.

In the meantime the enemy had cut off the water supply in Stanley by the capture of the Tytam Reservoir area machinery. For the forces in the Repulse area there was now only two days' supply of food and water. The evacuation of the civilians was still quite impracticable either by road or by water though I went into the question most carefully.

109 (a) 1030 hours 22nd December – Commander West Infantry Brigade reported that the Canadian troops in the Mount Cameron area were being heavily dive-bombed and mortared. They had no tools with which to dig in (although the rocky ground made this in any case almost impossible), no 3-in. mortars or bombs, there was no shelter, and there was nothing to do except stick it out with small arms fire from behind the rocks. These conditions applied in general to the subsequent fighting on the important high ground there.

Morale now had been seriously affected by the feeling that it was futile to continue resistance with insufficient equipment, with insufficient mobile artillery support, and without both air support and air observation.

(b) At this time, too, 2 Royal Scots were being heavily mortared from the ground near Jardines Lookout. The enemy seemed to have no difficulty in keeping up his ammunition supply across country from North Shore: and evidence was afterwards forthcoming that local Chinese were forcibly impressed as carriers. Much of the Japanese mortar ammunition, too, was of a much lighter nature than the British: one variety was 95 per cent. H.E., thus causing great moral effect, particularly valuable on un-seasoned troops in the opening phases of battle. The Japanese handling of mortars was extremely good. They were very quick into action; were quickly ranged, and accurate concentrations were put down at short notice at ranges of 1,500 yards.

(c) By the early afternoon 22nd December the enemy was consolidating his positions on the northern lower slopes of Mount Nicholson within one hundred yards of the 2 Royal Scots forward defended localities.

(d) The Japanese air force at this time was extremely accurate.

110. 1400 hours. The enemy gradually advanced in the Repulse Bay area. An 18 pounder here, over open sights, knocked out some enemy mortars on Violet Hill. In addition the enemy was infiltrating southwards from the high ground "The Twins" and Notting Hill. The Royal Rifles of Canada's positions on Sugar Loaf and Stanley Mound were precarious.

Commander East Infantry Brigade telephoned that he was hoping to arrange the evacuation of the civilians from the Hotel this night.²⁵

III. (a) During the morning I suggested to the Officer Commanding I Middlesex

Regt. that he could not long hope to exercise control from so forward a position as Leighton Hill. At 1600 hours very heavy mortar fire developed on this area. HQ I Middlesex Regt. accordingly withdrew and established itself in Hennessey Road, Wanchai – the densely populated area West of Mount Parish.

(b) The enemy launch traffic to North Shore, which had been going on all day, increased during the afternoon.

112. In the afternoon 22nd December, Commander West Infantry Brigade considered from the information available that the enemy was concentrating between Little Hong Kong and Mount Cameron with a view to attacking North-West on Wanchai Gap. Counter measures were accordingly ordered by him.

113. Meanwhile I had agreed to an adjustment of the line in the area of the Filter Beds. A gap existed between the right flank of the company of 2/14 Punjab Regt. and the left of 2 Royal Scots, thus giving the enemy a line of attack towards the Race Course, in which area he was already active with fifth columnists. Such an attack would envelop the whole Leighton Hill area, turn the left flank of the 2 Royal Scots and cut straight in to Wanchai, and I had insufficient troops in hand to meet such a contingency. This adjustment was carried out without incident and the company of 2/14 Punjab Regt. (only thirty-five strong) thus freed moved to the area South-East end of the Race Course, thus linking up with the 2 Royal Scots West of Mount Nicholson Camp. The Company Commander on arrival had, however, only eight men with two Light Automatics at his disposal, owing to casualties and dispersal of his men from enemy shelling in the darkness. The enemy attacked the company of 5/7 Rajput Regt. which remained in the area South-East end of the Race Course. Although this company was of a composite nature only – two platoons formed from the remains of “B” and “D” Companies – it held its ground successfully.

114. During the day 22nd December Stanley Mound and Stanley Prison had been shelled and mortared, and at midnight I received news of the enemy capture of the Stanley Mound feature.

115. The isolated troops at “Overbays” (see [para. 106](#)) had been in close contact with the enemy throughout the day and at about 1930 hours the place was evacuated in an endeavour to join up at Repulse Bay Hotel. The majority succeeded in getting past the Japanese. A Warrant Officer of the R.A.O.C., however, telephoned to Fortress HQ at 2000 hours to say that he and four wounded were alone in the house. He was instructed to surrender. There was in point of fact (though this was unknown at the time) a party of thirty others upstairs. This party attempted to surrender at 0800 hours the following day (23rd December) but were hand-grenaded in their rooms and a number were bayoneted. Corporal Jeffery and six men escaped, leaving twenty-eight dead, including four Japanese, in the room. The Warrant Officer and the wounded on the ground floor were not seen alive after 2300 hours on the 22nd, and they were not amongst the eventual Prisoners of War. It

can only be assumed that they were burned to death when the Japanese later fired the house.

116. A serious report concerning the water supply came from the Director of Public Works at 0100 hours. No water was coming from Tytam Reservoir, the Aberdeen supply was out of action for at least two days, and only a trickle was coming from Pokfulam. "The town (of Victoria) was now helpless." The fighting troops were also feeling the shortage of water.

117. At about 0130 hours Commander West Infantry Brigade reported the loss of Mount Cameron, that troops were coming back in disorder, and that an effort was being made to rally them at Magazine Gap and Mount Gough. Wanchai Gap was still held.

At 0345 hours 23rd December the Royal Engineers reported their rear party still in position on Mount Kellett and that the Winnipeg Grenadiers were being reorganised in the Gough Hill Police Station area.

At 0430 hours the Royal Engineers and 4 and 7 Companies H.K.V.D.C. were still in position, the Volunteers holding their original line in the area Magazine Gap which they had taken up three days previously.

A new R.A. (West) H.Q. was being established at Victoria Gap. At this critical time the Royal Navy offered valuable help – I officer and 40 men of the Royal Marines – who were ordered to Magazine Gap to report to the senior officer there (Lt.-Colonel F.D. Field, R.A.) for the purpose of clearing up the situation at Wanchai Gap, now out of touch.

At about 0600 hours it was reported that three platoons of the Royal Navy from Aberdeen had already moved forward to Bennets Hill to reinforce the machine gunners of I Middlesex Regt. already in position there.

By 0800 hours 23rd December Lt.-Colonel F.D. Field reported that he had got into touch with 2 Royal Scots at Wanchai Gap and he was instructed to send a fighting patrol to Mount Cameron to ascertain the situation there. It was learnt from him that "A" Company 2 Royal Scots was still in position near St. Albert's Convent, which had been occupied by us as a military hospital.

From now onwards until 1100 hours many conflicting reports were received concerning Mount Cameron, but it was apparent that the crest of this commanding and important feature remained in enemy hands. Information indicated that the enemy's local HQ and organising centre was at Wong Nei Chong Gap, but owing to the configuration of the ground it was not possible to shell this over the top of Mount Nicholson, for the remaining sections of mobile artillery were in positions in the area Victoria Peak – Mount Gough – Mount Kellett. However I am confident that heavy casualties were inflicted on the enemy on the stretch of Blacks Link between Wong Nei Chong Gap and Middle Gap, for a 9.2-in. gun from Stanley had been engaging enemy in this area for the last two days with immediate observation from Shoushon Hill nearby. In addition Major H. Marsh had

expended some 20,000 rounds from his medium machine guns on very good targets at ideal ranges. It was now learnt that two small ammunition convoys had got through to Little Hong Kong during the previous night and had returned successfully with much needed supplies. At this time Stanley was being supplied with ammunition by motor torpedo boat.

118. Meanwhile the situation to the North was causing me considerable anxiety. The composite company of 5/7 Rajput Regt. much reduced in numbers and short of ammunition and food, had been forced to withdraw at about 0800 hours, exposing the right flank of the Middlesex Leighton Hill position held by Captain C.M. Man's "Z" Company. At 0922 hours he was holding on, though the enemy was infiltrating into the houses and streets around him. He had only forty men, with six machine guns. At 1000 hours the enemy attacked him strongly, and heavily shelled the Bowrington area.

At 1100 hours the bombardment again intensified and the positions of one machine gun platoon were completely destroyed. The guns, however, moved into the Lee Theatre to hold the North flank. At Fortress H.Q. fifty Royal Artillery and 2 Royal Scots personnel were collected and sent to reinforce I Middlesex Regt.

119. At 1000 hours 23rd December Commander East Infantry Brigade reported that a counter-attack on Stanley Mound had failed. The Royal Rifles of Canada had had heavy losses, the enemy were infiltrating and the Commanding Officer felt he must fall back. The Infantry Brigade was in the process of reconnoitring and organising three defensive positions in depth which were to be held to the last, the most northerly being well forward of Stanley Village. The Canadians felt that they could put up a better resistance on flatter ground, and on a narrower front, where communications would be simpler. The loss of the tactically important high ground was fully realised and very regrettable.

120. At 1000 hours the enemy were attacking Bennets Hill and bombing Aberdeen Dockyard, also A.A. positions in Victoria City.

121. At 1130 hours HQ I Middlesex Regt. was forced to withdraw to a prepared position. At noon the line ran: – South-east corner Race Course to (exclusive) Leighton Hill (sixty men of 5/7 Rajput Regt.) – Leighton Hill and northwards (by I Middlesex Regt) to pillbox 55.

At about 1500 hours the enemy attacked, but was beaten off.

122. At 1330 hours 23rd December communication was re-established with HQ West Infantry Brigade at Magazine Gap and it was learnt that about 250 enemy were round St. Albert's Convent, that our troops on the Northern slopes of Mount Cameron were withdrawing²⁶ and that Magazine Gap and Wanchai Gap were being heavily bombed. The positions at every "gap" were unenviable, for the nature of the country was such that local defence was bound to be restricted and confined to the gap itself, thus

providing an excellent target for the enemy air force, which did not fail to take due advantage of the opportunity. These positions were originally prepared for limiting any enemy exploitation after a South shore landing.

At 1430 hours our line ran from Bennets Hill to Wanchai Gap, and a patrol of 2 Royal Scots was going out to Mount Cameron.

123. At 1645 hours 23rd December the last Army W/T set was knocked out by shell fire, and communications with the United Kingdom and Singapore ceased except that military messages could be and were transmitted by Royal Navy W/T.

124. At 1730 hours communication was re-opened at HQ 2 Royal Scots at Wanchai Gap, who reported that they were holding the western slopes of Mount Cameron.

125. With difficulty eight ammunition lorries had been collected and organised, and during the night six of these managed, with the help of an armoured car of the HKVDC, to get to the Ordnance Depot at Little Hong Kong and obtain some badly wanted gun and mortar ammunition. There were unfortunately no hand grenades there (they were in the other Reserve Depot at The Ridge), for these were now urgently needed in the street fighting which was developing in the area North of the Race Course.

126. Morning (23/24th December) dispositions of West Infantry Brigade were – Brigade HQ Magazine Gap, HQ 2 Royal Scots and Winnipeg Grenadiers at Wanchai Gap, 2 Royal Scots still holding the West slopes of Mount Cameron and patrolling forward, Winnipeg Grenadiers holding down to Aberdeen Reservoir, Little Hong Kong area still holding out, 4 and 7 Companies HKVDC on the new line to which they had been moved (Mount Kellett to Mount Gough).

127. – (a) At about 0400 hours 24th December the Royal Rifles of Canada were back on a line across Stanley Peninsula from near pillbox 27 on Tytam Bay, through St Stephens College buildings to West Bay, but the battalion required regrouping. A forward line had been formed through the Police Station manned by “B” and “D” companies I Middlesex Regiment, some H K.V.D.C., prison warders (enlisted as volunteers), and a few other personnel. The I Middlesex crews from the pillboxes in the area of Repulse Bay had been ordered to withdraw and had joined the Stanley Forces with all their machine guns, equipment and most of the small arms ammunition – a timely reinforcement and an excellent achievement.

(b) Brigadier Wallis assured me that Stanley Force were in good heart and that he was confident that if the enemy attacked his three lines of defence they would suffer heavily. He confirmed that he had enough food, water and ammunition, and I ordered him to fight on and not to surrender as long as these conditions prevailed.

128. Information was received in the morning that the enemy held the central and southern portions of Mount Cameron, and that the Royal Scots were on the northern extremity.

At 0915 hours the enemy had reinforced the northern portion of Mount Cameron where he was about 300 strong. The small party of Royal Marines (q.v. [para 117](#)) was now patrolling the spurs South of Mount Parish in touch with the 5/7 Rajput Regt. who had collected hospital discharges, etc, and formed a third platoon which had been positioned on the Mount Parish spur.

129. Noon. – (a) One of the 6-in. Howitzers at Mount Austin was put out of action by bombing.

(b) Two enemy launches on the West side of the Kowloon Peninsula were set on fire by our artillery.

130. At 1400 hours 24th December about 200 enemy were seen working North West, and an attack developed at about 1500 hours on Leighton Hill after a severe artillery and mortar bombardment, in addition to dive bombing. Attacked from three sides, the garrison was being rapidly surrounded when at 1645 hours it was authorised to escape, if it could, through the streets leading North West to Canal Road. The two officers and 40 other ranks did so, losing 25 per cent. casualties. A most determined and valuable resistance had been put up on this position (and q.v. [para. 118](#)). These troops withdrew into and assisted the defensive area between Lee Theatre and the Canal Road, already occupied by the reinforcements mentioned in [para. 118](#).

131. This evening a convoy plus an armoured car was again formed to obtain ammunition and bombs from Little Hong Kong. Accompanying the convoy were two trucks with reinforcements from 2 Royal Scots and I Middlesex Regt., plus two machine guns. It succeeded, though shot at repeatedly.

132. 1730 hours 24th December. – The patrol of the Royal Marines ascertained that no enemy was on the road North East of Wanchai Gap, and that 2 Royal Scots were at the Gap. Posts were to be established on the spur.

133. At 1800 hours Morrison Hill was heavily shelled. Holding this feature were detachments of I Middlesex Regt. with seven machine guns. All guns were reported knocked out but the majority of the crews escaped, having been withdrawn to nearby cover ready to repel an attack.

At 1900 hours a party of thirty clerks, spare signallers, military police, etc, was formed at Fortress H.Q. and went under Major R.E. Moody, D.A.A.G., to assist the Officer Commanding I Middlesex Regt. This party, with a few others collected on the spot, held Morrison Hill until the afternoon of 25th December.

The enemy now had three guns in action on the water front near the Peninsular Hotel, Kowloon, and another battery at Tai Hang. At about 1900 hours a large fire broke out on the water front near the China Fleet Club, hindering certain forward movements.

134. At about 2200 hours reports from Aberdeen and Shouson Hill indicated a

general move of the enemy from Mount Nicholson/Mount Cameron area northwards towards the Race Course. A possible intention, I considered, might be to turn West and join in the drive along the North face of the island, possibly with the left flank along the line of the “gaps” and the right flank just clear of Wanchai. This would strike a weak place where I had only the Royal Marines patrolling. In hand were less than a dozen men at H.Q. of 2/14 Punjab Regt. unless I drew on the two companies in positions covering Government House, Command H.Q., R.N. Yard, Military Hospital, i.e., our last stand.

135. Night 24/25th December. – Between 2200 and 2300 hours the Central District of Victoria came under a 3-in. Mortar bombardment – including the R.N. Yard, Victoria Barracks, and Fortress H.Q. Communications were not affected. The direction of the enemy advance on Wanchai made it possible that the enemy might use the A.R.P. tunnels for infiltration, and wardens were warned accordingly. The most important tunnels concerned were those under Mount Parish.

136. At 2300 hours all units were sent such seasonal greetings as were possible from H.E. The Governor and from Fortress H.Q.

137. Around midnight the enemy attacked in the area South of Wanchai Gap and effected a slight penetration.

138. At 0100 hours on Christmas Day Commander East Infantry Brigade reported a series of attacks on his positions at Stanley. The enemy had succeeded in getting behind some of the forward defended localities and were mopping up parties of H.K.V.D.C. at Stanley Police Station. I again instructed him to hold out till the last.

139. The enemy continued pressure North of Aberdeen, reached the North slopes of Bennets Hill, and “dug in” there, at 0300 hours he was reported to be advancing again. At this time only one of the two 4.5-in. Howitzers at the “Sanatorium” remained in action.

140. *Wanchai* – Before dawn 25th December a successful retaliation to the enemies’ light infantry gun²⁷ was carried out. A Bofors A.A. gun was taken to a position just South of Morrison Hill and vigorous short range fire silenced the enemy activity in the sports pavilions immediately South of Canal Road. Many calls had been made on the Bofors detachments during the last few days. Besides their continuous day role they had also performed night roles, e.g., beach defence, replacing equipments disabled or knocked out, such as at Belchers Fort, in which area the infantry beach defences had been weakened by 95 per cent. in order to find troops for counter-attack.

By 0700 hours anti-tank mines had been laid in the main approaches to Wanchai from the East but enemy house to house infiltrations continued to be reported even as far West as the China Fleet Club. This report I discounted, but awkward fighting was developing, for I was unable to employ suitably the available artillery in this street fighting, apart from the desire to escape causing innumerable civilian casualties in such a congested area. The Japanese on the other hand, with their overwhelming superiority of

artillery and noted carelessness for loss of life, had no hesitation in putting down in such areas heavy concentrations, with mortars super-imposed, lasting half an hour, and with a rate of fire comparable to those of the Great War.

At 0800 hours the enemy were on a front from the South end of Canal Road to the West arm of Causeway Bay, with snipers in houses further forward.

At 0830 hours, 25th December, the Royal Navy contributed a further small reinforcement which was placed at the disposal of the Officer Commanding I Middlesex Regt. (Lieut-Colonel H.W.M. Stewart, O.B.E., M.C.) who thereupon put in hand the building up of a second line running North from the Mount Parish area – Wanchai Market, O'Brien Street – to the water front ("O'Brien Street Line").

141. At daylight our troops were still holding the eastern slopes of Bennets Hill.

142. At 0900 hours Major C.M. Manners (q.v. [paras. 84](#) and [90](#)) and Mr. A.L. Shields came across from the Japanese lines under a white flag. They had been told that they could talk freely. They informed me of their march with civilians of both sexes from Repulse Bay Hotel via Wong Nei Chong Gap to North point, of the "incredible" number of guns and troops seen during the last half of their "trek" and (in their opinion, *not* put forward by the Japanese) the uselessness of continuing the struggle.

A special defence meeting was immediately called, where it was decided that there could be no talk of surrender.

The Japanese Commander sent one message – that their forces would not initiate active hostilities for three hours. I conformed, including regretfully closing down on a promising counter-attack by Canadian troops on a large enemy "pocket" North-West of Bennets Hill. This impromptu "truce" was difficult to stage, for Japanese planes, operating from Canton, did not conform and bombed Stanley, Aberdeen and Mount Gough. Stanley was also shelled. A constant service of launches was maintained over Kowloon Bay and Japanese artillery continued bombarding the Gaps.

143. At 1030 hours the Royal Marines patrol (q.v. [para. 132](#)) reported having established contact with 2 Royal Scots at Wanchai Gap. This patrol had meanwhile been increased by thirty all ranks of Fortress R.E. who were reserved for a minor operation that night, i.e., the mopping up of an enemy post on Stubbs Road. At midday Japanese artillery opened up punctually on a large scale, and later hand to hand fighting was reported by 5/7 Rajput Regt. on Mount Parish, where a platoon was surrounded. Shortly afterwards Mount Parish fell into the enemy's hands, and an advance along Kennedy Road was threatened. This put Fortress HQ area, which had a garrison of only one platoon of 2/14 Punjab Regt., in jeopardy. More road blocks and anti-tank mines were put out.

By 1300 hours, 25th December, the 2nd ("O'Brien Street") line was established, held by some 60-70 men of I Middlesex Regt., including small parties of Royal Navy, Royal Engineers, and 5/7 Rajput Regt. The enemy was now in the Wanchai A.R.P. tunnels

(q.v. [para. 135](#)) but about noon an 18 pounder gun had arrived there, which, mounted in the main street, covered several of the exits. A number of rounds were fired at these exits, more as a deterrent than anything else. No casualties were observed to have been caused, and no enemy emerged.

144. Communications were increasingly difficult to maintain: between 1100 and 1200 hours there were none to Stanley area, Wanchai Gap and Magazine Gap, nor to the 2 Royal Scots.

145. There were, at noon, only six guns of the mobile artillery left in action, with an average of 160 rounds per gun available.

146. At 1430 hours two officers and fifty other ranks of 2/14 Punjab Regt. reached the Officer Commanding I Middlesex Regt., who had given warnings several times that his men, though in good heart, were being slowly but surely overwhelmed. A further withdrawal was enforced from the Canal Road area, and the “O’Brien Street line” became the forward active line of defence. HQ I Middlesex Regt. withdrew to Murray Barracks.

147. Very heavy dive-bombing attacks were made in the Wanchai Gap area between 1400 and 1430 hours, and shortly afterwards this Gap was reported lost.

Magazine Gap was similarly attacked and incendiaries were dropped – most effectively, for the hillside was set on fire and field cables were burnt. A little later the Gap itself came under mortar and small arms fire, and Commander, West Infantry Brigade, reported that the area could not in his opinion be held for more than 24 hours at the most against a determined attack.

148. At 1450 hours the Officer Commanding I Middlesex Regt. reported that his forward positions were being shelled from both Kowloon and North Point and that Captain C.M. Man, the Officer Commanding “Z” Company, had telephoned “the line is breaking.” Lt.-Colonel Stewart said he would try to form yet another line East of the R.N. Yard if necessary, i.e., just below, and to the North of, Fortress HQ. The “O’Brien Street line,” if seriously attacked, could not hold out long – perhaps half an hour.

149. I had no communications with East Infantry Brigade HQ at Stanley and consequently had no information.

As far as it was known, the force surrounded in Little Hong Kong Magazine area, was still holding out.

Bennets Hill had been heavily attacked, had been completely surrounded and by 1500 hours had been forced to surrender. The Canadian line north of Bennets Hill had been forced to give ground.

150. This advance by the enemy along the line of Gaps, the possession of these Gaps by him, thus giving him an open line of advance to the Central District, the fall of Bennets Hill, the isolation of the forces in Stanley, the deployment by the enemy of such

superior forces and armament, the exhaustion after sixteen days of continuous battle with no reliefs for any individuals, our vulnerability to unlimited air attack, the impossibility of obtaining more ammunition for the few mobile guns I had remaining, the serious water famine immediately impending – these were the factors which led to the inevitable conclusion, namely, that further fighting meant the useless slaughter of the remainder of the garrison, risked severe retaliation on the large civilian population and could not affect the final outcome. The enemy drive along the North shore was decisive.

I asked Lt.-Colonel Stewart, the Officer Commanding I Middlesex Regt. how much longer in his considered opinion the men could hold the line now occupied. He replied “one hour.”

The Commodore agreed with my conclusion.

At 1515 hours I advised H.E. The Governor and C.-in-C. that no further useful military resistance was possible and I then ordered all Commanding Officers to break off the fighting and to capitulate to the nearest Japanese Commander, as and when the enemy advanced and opportunity offered.

APPENDIX “B”.

A SUMMARY OF APPROXIMATE CASUALTIES.

Officers.

Unit or Formation.	Killed or Died of Wounds	Missing.	Wounded.	Total Strength.
H.Q. China Command	2	2	3	33
H.Q. R.A.	-	1	-	6
8 Coast Regt R.A.	-	-	3	19
12 Coast Regt R.A.	1	1	1	16
5 A.A. Regt R.A.	-	8	1	23
1 Hong Kong Regt H.K.S.R.A.	3	7	3	24
965 Def Bty R.A.	-	-	1	3
22 Field Coy R.E.	-	1	-	7
40 Field Coy. R.E.	2	-	-	7
R.E. Services	-	1	1	18
2 Royal Scots	12	4	11	35
1 Middlesex Regt	10	2	4	36
Canadian Staff	2	4	3	14
Winnipeg Grenadiers	6	8	12	42
Royal Rifles of Canada	6	8	4	41
5/7 Rajput Regt	6	4	7	17
2/14 Punjab Regt	3	-	5	15
Royal Corps of Signals	1	-	-	7
R.A.O.C.	3	2	1	15
R.A.S.C.	2	-	3	24
R.A.V.C.	-	-	-	2
R.A.M.C.	2	1	-	28
Royal Army Dental Corps	-	-	-	4
R.A.P.C.	-	-	-	5
Hong Kong Mule Corps	-	-	1	3
Indian Medical Services	-	1	-	5
H.K.V.D.C.	13	6	13	89
	74	61	77	538
Total battle casualties	212			39.5 per cent.

British Other Ranks.

Unit or Formation.	Killed or Died of Wounds	Missing.	Wounded.	Total Strength.
8 Coast Regt. R.A.	19	2	23	285
12 Coast Regt R.A.	15	2	24	200
5 A.A. Regt. R.A.	16	11	10	231
1 Hong Kong Regt H.K.S.R.A.	2	2	10	30
965 Def. Bty R.A.	2	4	8	58
22 Field Coy. R.E.	8	20	9	213
40 Field Coy R.E.	2	7	1	220
R.E. Services	2	5	1	54
2 Royal Scots	96	45	188	734
1 Middlesex Regt.	94	25	110	728
Canadian Staff	6	10	5	78
Winnipeg Grenadiers	28	222	60	869
Royal Rifles of Canada	42	157	160	963
Royal Corps of Signals	16	5	14	177
R.A.O.C.	13	26	4	117
R.A.S.C.	23	10	11	183
R.A.V.C.	2	-	-	3
R.A.M.C.	13	3	3	146
Royal Army Dental Corps	-	-	-	6
R.A.P.C.	-	-	2	25
Military Provost Staff Corps	-	1	-	3
Corps of Military Police	-	-	-	18
Army Education Corps	-	-	-	8
H.K.V.D.C.	196	139	135	1,296
	595	696	778	6,645
Total battle casualties	2,069			31 per cent

Indian Other ranks.

Unit or Formation.	Killed or Died of Wounds	Missing.	Total Wounded.	Strength.
8 Coast Regt. R.A.	-	1	4	233
12 Coast Regt R.A.	3	-	3	187
5 A.A. Regt. R.A.	24	80	15	332
1 Hong Kong Regt H.K.S.R.A.	144	45	103	830
965 Def. Bty. R.A.	2	-	4	86
5/7 Rajput Regt	150	109	186	875
2/14 Punjab Regt	52	69	156	932
R.I.A.S.C.	-	-	1	13
Hong Kong Mule Corps	1	5	5	250
I.M.D. and I.H.C.-	-	2	-	55
	376	311	477	3,893
Total battle casualties	1,16			30 per cent.

NOTES

1. All figures are approximate as accurate information can only be obtained when the

Casualty Bureau has all facts and figures.

2. The wounded does not include lightly, or returned for duty, wounded. The total wounded shown is 1,332 but A.D.M.S. states that 2,000 wounded men passed through our hospitals alone, and many of the wounded of the 5/7 Rajput Regt. fell into Japanese hands and have not been recorded.

The final figures will probably be approximately-

	Killed or Died of Wounds	Missing	Wounded
Imperial Officers	74	595	
Imperial Other Ranks	61	696	
Indian Other Ranks	376	311	
	1,045	1,068	2,300

3. It has been impossible to collect any reliable data regarding the casualties suffered by the 450 locally enlisted Chinese.

4. Regarding Japanese casualties-

A local paper reported a Memorial Service held at Kai Tak Aerodrome to 1,995 Japanese who fell in the attack on Hong Kong. That figure is certain to be an under rather than an over statement.

A Japanese Medical Major told me early in January 1942, when I was appealing for assistance for my sick and wounded, that he had 9,000 wounded on his hands in Kowloon and on the Island.

Taking the wounded figure to be correct, and remembering that many must have been drowned on the assault on the Island, the averages of the last war should give about 3,000 and NOT 1,995 killed.

The Japanese admitted in broadcasts and in conversation to me that they had suffered severe casualties.

The Chinese have stated that 10,000 were killed, but this is undoubtedly an oriental exaggeration.

True figures will never be known, but from the above a fair estimate can be made-

Killed 3,000

Wounded 9,000

Total 12,000

And many of the latter died of their wounds, for funeral pyres near their hospitals were observed regularly for some months.

Footnotes

- ¹ The urgent necessity for speed called for this to be done in spite of it being a malarial time of the year. The 2 Royal Scots were in an area which was highly malarial and they had many cases. This weakened them considerably and, the hospital being full, many were sent back without the normal ten days convalescence. The battalion was 771 strong but only 600 effectives.
- ² Running North East from Tsun Wan Wai to Pineapple Pass.
- ³ Killing both the Company Commanders concerned.
- ⁴ Except that the Vehicular Ferry gave priority to all military vehicles and guns.
- ⁵ At noon in Prince Edward Road an ammunition convoy of 2 Royal Scots was attacked; fifth columnists were in dark grey uniform and armed with rifles.
- ⁶ Owing to shortness of time communications in the Devils Peak area were incomplete, but excellent work by Royal Signals provided efficient field cable circuits in time.
- ⁷ Fifth columnists attacked the A.A. searchlight position at Sau Ki Wan this night.
- ⁸ The Peak Observation Post was forced to move three times, for each location quickly came under heavy and accurate artillery fire in spite of every precaution for concealment. Treachery was certain but the source could not be ascertained.
- ⁹ Near the Police Station, Braemar.
- ¹⁰ It was subsequently ascertained that the Saiwan A.A. position was heavily shelled at 2145 hours and Japanese troops rushed it at 2200 hours.
- ¹¹ Lieut. Carruthers was the sole survivor (HKVDC).
- ¹² No evidence has been obtained as to what happened to this company. It is believed to have reached Wong Nei Chong Gap at first light and to have been ambushed by superior Japanese forces, all remaining personnel being captured.
- ¹³ After the capitulation a Japanese Staff Officer informed me that the Japanese had suffered very heavy casualties in this area.
- ¹⁴ Lt. Gen. Kitajamma three weeks after the capitulation informed my Commander, Royal Artillery, of this fact. Our defences in the Mount Cameron area also noticed that at one period the enemy artillery fire seemed far more efficient, every round going off, and no “blinds” as customary. A map of artillery dispositions was also shown to the Commander, Royal Artillery, with three regimental artillery areas marked, indicating the employment of the artillery of three divisions.
- ¹⁵ The “University Company” less a proportion of pillbox crews, total 45.

¹⁶ Kennedy Road – China Fleet Club Company.

¹⁷ It was afterwards ascertained that these orders did not reach Colonel Kidd and the two companies which at this time were still operating in the area East of Tai Hang. The spur was captured and occupied for some time but no trace of “D” Company 5/7 Rajput Regt. could be found.

¹⁸ This was the company referred to in [para. 63](#) (s). It was confirmed later that this company had earlier in the morning reached its objective successfully.

¹⁹ One company had lost one platoon in a counter attack.

²⁰ These R.N. personnel had been manning the mine control station at Chung Am Kok.

²¹ The following message was issued to all units – “There are indications that Chinese forces are advancing towards the frontier to our aid. All ranks must therefore hold their positions at all costs and look forward to only a few more days of strain.”

²² Nevertheless later in the evening this company of Royal Scots moved forward from the northern end of Mount Nicholson and occupied a position on the right of “B” Company 2/14 Punjab Regt. – q.v. [paras. 71](#) and [76](#).

²³ Blacks Link – the track leading from Wong Nei Chong Gap to Wanchai Gap.

²⁴ A demolition scheme had been fully prepared, but the area was over-run too quickly on the morning of 11th December. Luckily this Depot was only half full.

²⁵ It was not practicable. The women and children fell into the hands of the Japanese when the troops evacuated at midnight on 23/24th December.

²⁶ It was not till some time later that this statement re withdrawal was found to be untrue.

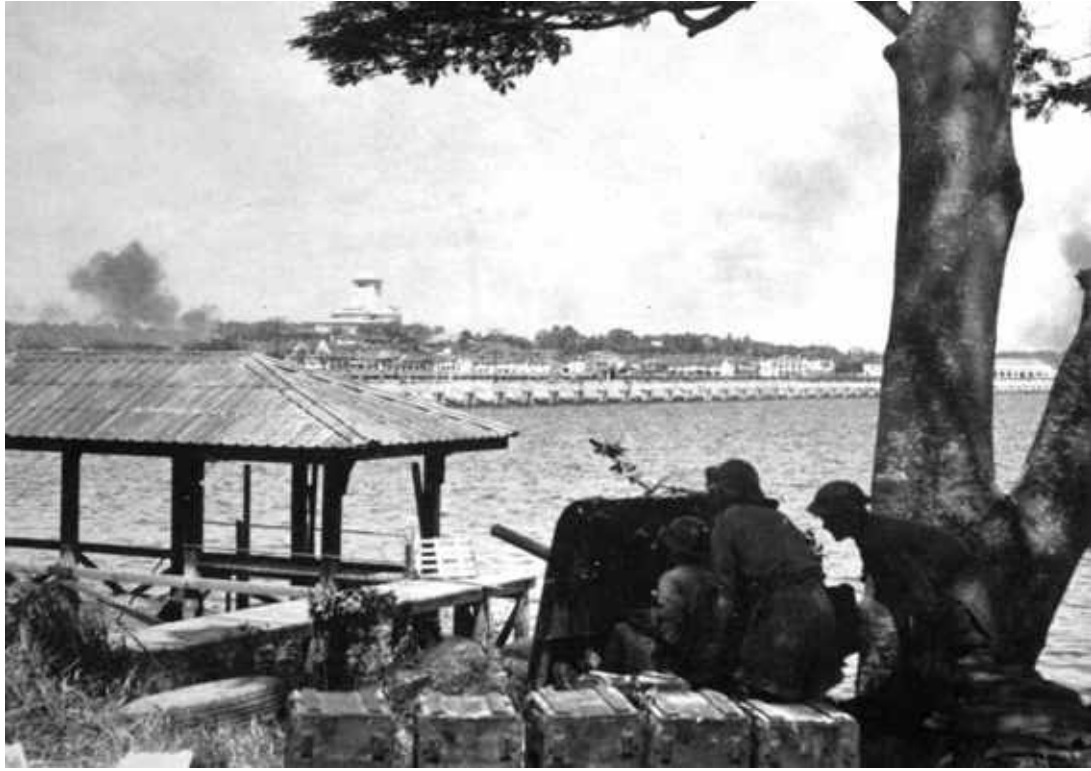
²⁷ This was mounted on balloon type tyres, was about 3” calibre, was very boldly handled, and produced most effective results, both material and moral. Each battalion had two.



A portrait of Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, the author of the first despatch in this volume. (HMP)



Part of the preparations for the defence of Singapore – men of the 2nd Battalion Gordon Highlanders demonstrate a Northover Projector to Major General F. Keith Simmons, GOC Singapore Fortress, and other senior officers, 17 October 1941. (IWM; FE15)



Australian gunners on the island of Singapore waiting for the Japanese to cross the Johore Strait. Churchill said that if the Japanese broke across the Johore Strait in small boats – which of course they did – it would be “one of the greatest scandals that could possibly be exposed”. (HMP)



Stocks of rubber, held by a factory on a plantation in Malaya, are burnt during the British retreat to Singapore, December 1941. (HMP)



Bristol Blenheim Mk.I, L1134 'PT-', of 62 Squadron RAF, taxiing in front of a line of Brewster Buffaloes at Sembawang, Singapore, as another section of Buffaloes pass over the airfield, October 1941. It was in L1134 that Squadron Leader Arthur Scarf and his crew single-handedly attacked the Japanese-held airfield at Singora, Thailand, on 9 December 1941 – an action for which Scarf was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross. (IWM; K662)



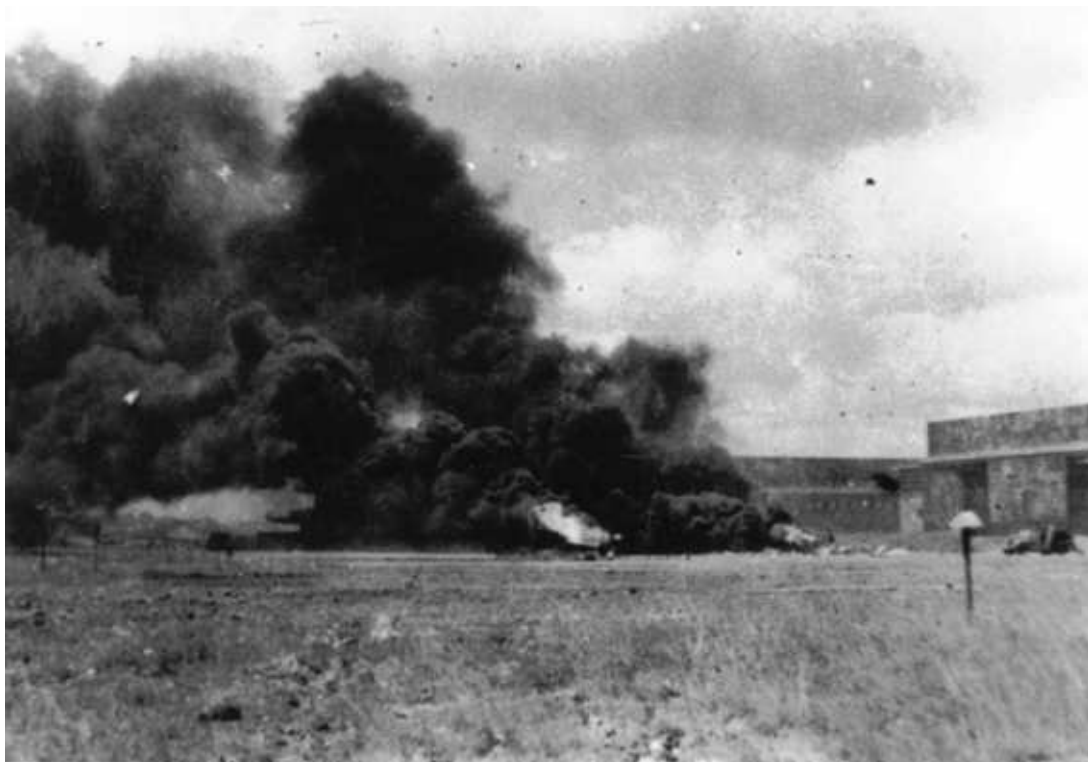
A line-up of Brewster Buffalos at Sembawang in November 1941. The aircraft nearest the camera is 453 Squadron's Mk.II AN185, TD-V. (RAAF)



A Japanese aerial photograph showing HMS *Prince of Wales* (top) and HMS *Repulse* during the early stages of the attack in which they were sunk, 10 December 1941. HMS *Repulse* had just been hit for the first time. (US Naval Historical Center)



A group of pilots from 488 Squadron pictured at Singapore in December 1941. (Courtesy of Andy Thomas)



Aircraft and vehicles burn during a raid on Kallang during the Japanese offensive. By January 1942, Kallang was the only operational fighter airfield in Singapore, as the other airfields (Tengah, Seletar and Sembawang) were within range of Japanese artillery on the Malay peninsula. (Courtesy of Andy Thomas)



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)



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)



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)



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)



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)



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 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.



Within Kranji War Cemetery, Singapore, stands the Singapore Memorial. On its walls are the names of 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 recorded in the CWGC files by the date or period from when they were known to be missing or captured. (Courtesy of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission)

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LIEUTENANT GENERAL ARTHUR PERCIVAL'S DESPATCH ON OPERATIONS 8 DECEMBER 1941 TO 15 FEBRUARY 1942

The War Office, 1948.

OPERATIONS OF MALAYA COMMAND, FROM 8TH DECEMBER, 1941 TO 15TH FEBRUARY, 1942.

The following Despatch was submitted to the Secretary of State for War on 25th April, 1946, by LIEUT.-GENERAL A.E. PERCIVAL, C.B., D.S.O, O.B E., M.C., formerly General Officer Commanding Malaya.

FOREWORD

The preparation of this Despatch on the Operations in Malaya which took place between the 8th December, 1941, and the 15th February, 1942, has been influenced by the fact that since the conclusion of those operations a great deal of literature has appeared on the subject. Statements have been made and opinions expressed by writers, many of whom had but a cursory knowledge of Malayan conditions or of the factors which influenced decisions. Often these statements and opinions have been based on false or incomplete information. It has therefore become necessary, in the interests both of those who made the preparations for the campaign and of those who took part in it, that a full and comprehensive account should be given both of the operations themselves and of the events which led up to them. A knowledge of events in Malaya prior to the outbreak of hostilities in the Far East is also essential for a proper understanding of the conduct of the operations because the initial dispositions for the defence of Malaya were to a large extent dictated by those events. The Despatch therefore is more detailed than would otherwise have been the case.

2. The Malayan campaign had two novel features (*a*) It was the first large-scale campaign for a very long time to be fought within British or British-protected territory, and (*b*) It was our first experience of a campaign fought with modern weapons in jungle warfare conditions. Many lessons were learned from this campaign under both these headings and many more have been learned since in other theatres of war. In reading this Despatch it should be borne in mind that the knowledge which now exists was not at that time available to those responsible for the conduct of the operations, whose task it was in consequence to attempt to solve many new and novel problems.

3. The preparation of this Despatch after a period of four years has naturally presented certain difficulties, especially as some of the relevant documents were lost either by destruction at the time of the capitulation of Singapore or at sea or from other causes. Every possible endeavour has, however, been made to ensure accuracy by reference to such documents as are in existence, to individuals, and by other means. In particular I have had the advantage of being able to refer to such War Diaries as reached Home safely and also to a very detailed narrative of the operations compiled under my instructions by the late Lt.-Col. F.R.N. Copley, the Loyal Regiment, while a prisoner-of-war in 1942 when

memories were still fresh.

I believe, therefore, that the facts as presented are substantially correct.

PART I.

THE PERIOD PRIOR TO THE OUTBREAK OF HOSTILITIES WITH JAPAN.

SECTION I. – TOPOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE.

1. Malaya is some 400 miles long as the crow flies. The length of the main road and the west coast railway from Singapore to the Malaya – Thailand frontier is approximately 600 miles. The width of the country varies from about 200 miles in the widest part to about 60 miles in the narrowest. Singapore Island lies at the southern end of the peninsula and is separated from it by the narrow Straits of Johore. Malaya is bounded on all sides, except on the North, by sea.

The area of Malaya is approximately equal to that of England and Wales excluding the western Welsh counties and the Devon – Cornwall Peninsula. The Island of Singapore corresponds approximately in size and position to the Isle of Wight. The distance from Singapore to the Thai border is much the same as that from the Isle of Wight to the Tweed.

An extensive mountain range forms a backbone to the peninsula separating the western and eastern areas. There are only a few communications between West and East. Apart from this mountain range the country is for the most part low-lying and rather featureless except for a few small hills on Singapore Island.

2. Malaya is thickly covered with vegetation. Where the country has not been brought under cultivation it is covered with jungle. This jungle is of varying types. Some of it is dense and difficult to penetrate while in other parts it consists of heavy timber and, while providing cover from view, is little or no obstacle to the passage of animals or men. Of the cultivated areas the greatest part is planted with rubber. Rubber plantations, while providing good cover from the air, can easily be traversed by men on foot, by animals and in most places by light tracked vehicles. There are also coco-nut and other plantations. Rice is grown in the north of the peninsula, which is generally more open, and also in certain areas on the west Coast. In the centre and parts of the north there are rich tin-mining deposits, the working of which has resulted in more open areas. Except for the rice and tin-mining areas visibility is almost everywhere restricted to a hundred yards or even less.

The west coast area is much more developed and more thickly populated than is

the east. Through it run the main road and rail communications linking Singapore with the North. There are also a coastal road, a number of lateral roads, especially in the central area, and branch railway lines linking the main line with coastal centres. The east coast railway branches from the main line at Gemas and, running east of the mountain range, strikes the coast in the State of Kelantan in north-east Malaya and then, running parallel to the coast, rejoins the main line at Haad-yai in Thailand. There are very few roads in the east coast area, the only ones of importance being those constructed to connect the ports of Mersing, Endau and Kuantan with the interior and the internal road system of the State of Kelantan. The only land communications between this latter State and the rest of Malaya are a single line railway and a fine-weather coastal track.

On the east coast there are good sandy beaches almost throughout. There are also some good stretches of sandy beach on the west coast, but a great deal of this coast line is covered by mangrove swamps.

Numerous rivers and streams, rising in the mountain range, traverse the coastal areas before reaching the sea. The largest of these is the River Perak in the northern part of the west coast area.

The Island of Penang lies off the west coast of Malaya some 350 miles as the crow flies, from Singapore.

To sum up, the country generally tends to restrict the power of artillery and of Armoured Fighting Vehicles. It places a premium on the skill and endurance of infantry. As is true of most types of close country, it favours the attacker.

3. The climate throughout Malaya is humid and enervating, though not unhealthy for normal people. The temperature, which is not excessive, varies little throughout the year. Similarly the rainfall, which comes mostly in tropical storms, is fairly evenly distributed throughout the year. Between April and September the wind blows from the south-west, and between October and March it blows from the north-east. During the latter period rough seas are at times encountered on the east coast.

The efficiency of Europeans who work at high pressure for long periods is liable to be affected unless periodical visits to places where the climate is more invigorating are possible. Malaya is a country where troops must be hard and acclimatized and where strict hygiene discipline must be observed if heavy casualties from exhaustion and sickness are to be avoided.

SECTION II. – THE FORM OF GOVERNMENT.

4. The form of government of Malaya was probably more complicated and less suited to war conditions than that of any other part of the British Empire. This resulted in the main from the way in which it had grown up. Broadly, it was divided into three parts, i.e.

(a) The Straits Settlements of Singapore, Malacca and Penang with Province Wellesley. These formed a British Colony and were administered from Singapore by the Governor acting through the Government of the Straits Settlements;

(b) The Federated Malay States of Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang. These States were Malay territory and were governed by their own Sultans assisted by British Residents. They were federated for certain centralized services which were administered by a Federal Government at Kuala Lumpur. The Governor of the Straits Settlements was also High Commissioner for the Federated Malay States.

(c) The Unfederated Malay States of Johore, Trengganu, Kelantan, Kedah and Perlis. These States also were Malay territory, incorporated in the British Empire by separate treaties. They were governed by their own Sultans with each of whom was a British Adviser. The Governor of the Straits Settlements was also High Commissioner for these States, with each of which he communicated direct through a Secretary for the Unfederated Malay States.

In pan-Malayan matters the High Commissioner could not deal with the four Federated States as one entity. He had to consult each, either direct or through the Federal Secretariat. More often than not, he had to deal with ten separate bodies, i.e. the Colony plus the nine States, and sometimes with the Federal Government as well, making eleven. This naturally tended to cause delay when subjects affecting Malaya as a whole were under discussion.

5. The British Government had by various treaties promised to afford protection against external aggression to most, if not all, of these Malay States. This was a factor which had to be borne in mind in the conduct of the operations. In a country where there was so little national unity, it was natural that the Sultans should be inclined to consider the security of their own territory as of primary importance.

SECTION III. – THE HIGHER ORGANISATION FOR WAR.

6. Prior to the outbreak of World War II there was a Defence Committee Malaya, modelled on the Committee of Imperial Defence at Home. The Governor was chairman of the Central Committee, while the members were the Heads of the Fighting Services and the leading Civil Officials. The Secretary was at first an officer of the Malaya Command Headquarters. Later joint secretaries were appointed, one military and one civil.

There were a number of sub-committees. The members of these sub-committees were as a rule partly military and partly civil. In some cases, the secretary of the Central Committee acted also as secretary to these sub-committees; in other cases independent secretaries were appointed. A great deal of useful planning work, which was invaluable when war came, was done by these sub-committees.

7. On the outbreak of World War II the Defence Committee Malaya and its subcommittees were dissolved by order of the Governor and High Commissioner. In place of the Defence Committee was set up a War Committee, the chairman and members of which were practically the same as those of the Defence Committee. At a later date, however, some of the leading Unofficials also became members of this War Committee. In 1941 meetings of this Committee were summoned by the Governor and High Commissioner as and when required. The Sub-Committees of the Defence Committee Malaya were replaced by controllers appointed by the Governor and High Commissioner.

A Secretary for Defence was appointed, responsible direct to the Governor and High Commissioner. Mr. Dawson, who held this appointment at the outbreak of war with Japan, had the confidence and respect of all.

8. Up to November 1940 the three Fighting Services worked independently, the commanders of the Army and Air Force being responsible direct to their own Ministries. The Senior Naval Officer at Singapore was originally responsible only for the sea defences of Singapore Island and for the local defence of the adjoining waters. Later he became, as Rear-Admiral, Malaya, responsible for all the coasts of Malaya. From July 1940 onwards, however, the Naval Commander-in-Chief, China Station, flew his flag on shore at Singapore and assumed responsibility for all the waters off the coasts of Malaya, except that the responsibility for those off Singapore Island was still delegated to the Rear-Admiral.

9. In October 1940 a Commander-in-Chief Far East was appointed, the position being filled by Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham. G.H.Q. Far East opened on the 18th November, 1940.

The C.-in-C. Far East was responsible to the Chiefs of Staff for operational control in Malaya, Burma and Hong Kong, and for the co-ordination of plans for the defence of these territories. He was informed that the two main principles to guide his actions were (a) It was the Government's policy to avoid war with Japan, (b) Reliance for the defence of the Far East was to be placed on Air Power until the fleet was available. He was further instructed that the G.O.C. Malaya was to continue to correspond with the War Office, on all matters on which he had hitherto dealt with it, to the fullest extent possible consistent with the exercise of his command.

The C.-in-C. Far East had no control over any naval forces nor did he have any administrative responsibility, the various Commands continuing to deal with their respective Ministries in this respect. The C.-in-C. Far East, therefore, had only a small operational staff and no administrative staff.

In conformity with the above instructions, the C.-in-C. Far East on assuming command issued the following instructions to his subordinate commanders:-

“You will correspond direct with Headquarters Far East on questions of policy affecting

strategy or operations. On other questions you will repeat to the C.-in-C. Far East such of your communications to the War Office etc. as you judge of sufficient importance.”

10. On the 16th May 1941 I assumed the duties of G.O.C. Malaya Command. I had previously served as Chief of Staff Malaya Command (General Staff Officer 1st Grade) in 1936 and 1937. On taking over command I was informed of the general policy and of the instructions of the C.-in-C. Far East as recorded above.

At that time the Air Officer Commanding Far East was Air Vice-Marshal C.W.B. Pulford. He had taken over command only a short time previously.

The Commander-in-Chief China was Vice-Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton. Rear-Admiral Drew was Rear-Admiral Malaya but was shortly afterwards succeeded by Rear-Admiral Spooner.

SECTION IV – THE LOCATION OF HEADQUARTERS.

11. The location of headquarters of the two Commanders-in-Chief and of the Fighting Services was a problem which received a great amount of attention but which was never satisfactorily settled. Probably there was no satisfactory solution.

In 1936 the headquarters of the Naval Commander were in Singapore City. The Army headquarters were at Fort Canning, also in Singapore City, but those of the Royal Air Force were at Seletar on the north side of the Island. In order to improve co-operation, the then A.O.C. moved his headquarters into Singapore City, but about the same time the Naval headquarters were moved to the Naval Base on the north side of the island, to enable the commander to supervise better the rapid developments which were taking place there.

In order to ensure co-operation in war a bomb-proof battle headquarters was constructed at Fort Canning, where it was intended that the Combined Operations Staff of the three Services should work. This headquarters, however, was already too small by the time it was completed and, although it was occupied during the operations, it was never actually used for the purpose intended.

Shortly before the outbreak of war with Japan a new headquarters for the Royal Air Force was completed at Sime Road, near the Singapore Golf Club in the centre of the island. When war broke out a temporary Army headquarters was under construction on an adjoining site with a Combined Operations Room between the two. Here the Operations and Intelligence Staffs of Headquarters Malaya Command worked during the campaign except for the last few days. The Administrative Staff, partly because the temporary accommodation was not finished, and partly to be in closer touch with the Civil Government, remained at Fort Canning.

The Commander-in-Chief China, after moving to Singapore, established his

headquarters at the Naval Base.

12. When the Commander-in-Chief Far East was appointed, the problem of the location of headquarters again came to the front. If his headquarters had been located in the Singapore City area they would have been close to those of the Army and Air Force and of the Civil Government, but would have been separated from those of the Commander-in-Chief China with whom much preliminary planning had to be done. Also the Far East Combined Bureau (Intelligence) which came under the Commander-in-Chief China was located at the Naval Base. The Commander-in-Chief Far East was largely dependent on this bureau for his intelligence. He therefore decided to establish his headquarters at the Naval Base with the intention of moving to the Sime Road area should operations develop in Malaya. This is what actually happened.

13. It will be seen that when hostilities started the headquarters of the Army, the Royal Air Force and the Civil Government were grouped in one area, while those of the two Commanders-in-Chief and of the Rear-Admiral Malaya were grouped in another, some 10 miles or more apart. This was far from an ideal solution, but possibly the best under the circumstances.

This problem of the location of headquarters has been discussed at some length as showing the difficulties of reconciling the requirements of independent Services. Had there been at that time a Supreme Commander with an integrated staff probably many of these difficulties would have disappeared.

SECTION V – HEADQUARTERS MALAYA COMMAND.

14. With the increase in the garrison as the defences developed and relations with Japan became more strained, so there was an increase in the strength of Headquarters Malaya Command. The senior General Staff Officer, who had been a 2nd Grade Staff Officer in 1935, became a Brigadier in 1940. The senior Administrative Staff Officer was a Brigadier i/c. Administration who, as is customary, was responsible to the War Office for control of expenditure on the administrative side. With the expansion of the Command in 1941, the “A” and “Q” Branches were separated, a Deputy Adjutant General being appointed as Head of the “A” Branch, while the Brigadier i/c Administration remained responsible for the “Q” Branch.

15. After the outbreak of war with Germany the filling of vacancies on the staff became more and more difficult as the supply of trained staff officers in the Far East became exhausted. Regular units serving in Malaya were called upon to supply officers with qualifications for staff work until it became dangerous to weaken them any further, and selected officers were sent for a short course of training at Quetta. The supply of trained staff officers from Home was naturally limited by nonavailability and by the difficulties of transportation. At the same time, even before war broke out with Japan, the

work at Headquarters Malaya Command was particularly heavy, including as it did war plans and the preparation of a country for war in addition to the training and administration of a rapidly increasing garrison. In addition, the Command was responsible for placing orders to bring up to the approved scale the reserves of all supplies and stores, except as regards weapons and ammunition. In fact, Headquarters Malaya Command combined the functions of a local War Office and those of a Headquarters of a Field Force.

The Staff of Headquarters Malaya Command was a loyal and conscientious body of men who worked long hours under trying conditions.

16. Authority for the raising of new units and for all increases in establishments had to be obtained from the War Office. With the pressure of war-time business it will be appreciated that delays occurred, some of which had serious consequences. An instance of this was the delay in connection with the raising of two additional Labour Companies which, owing to the shortage of labour in Malaya, became desirable in the autumn of 1941. All arrangements had been made for the raising of these companies at Hong Kong, but, as a result of delay in obtaining sanction, the outbreak of hostilities with Japan intervened and the project was rendered void. Their presence in Malaya during the campaign would have been of very great value.

In 1941 sea voyages from the United Kingdom were taking 2-3 months so that there was a long delay in filling staff vacancies from Home even after approval had been given. In consequence, the strength of Headquarters Malaya Command was usually much below establishment. When war with Japan broke out there were less than 70 officers at Headquarters Malay Command, including the Headquarters of the Services. This is about the war-time establishment of the Headquarters of a Corps. Our resources were thus strained to the limit.

17. It should be realized that the G.O.C. Malaya did not have a free hand in developing the defences of Malaya. In principle, the defences were developed in accordance with a War Office plan which was modified from time to time in accordance with recommendations made by the G.O.C.

By the beginning of 1941 the overall estimated cost of the War Office scheme had amounted to slightly over £5 million, and actual expenditure to 31st March, 1941, was over £4 million. Although originally the defence items were mainly in respect of coast artillery and fixed defences the scheme was later expanded to include services on landward defences. Such expansions of the main scheme had to receive War Office and Treasury approval and though they were submitted as major services, this entailed delay. On the 11th December, 1941, when Malaya became an active theatre of operations, the War Office gave the G.O.C. Malaya a free hand with regard to such expenditure.

In circumstances such as those which existed after the outbreak of World War II it is recommended that very much wider powers should be delegated to General Officers

Commanding in important potential theatres, who would naturally act in consultation with their Financial Advisers.

SECTION VI – THE DEFENCE PLAN.

18. It cannot be too strongly stressed that the object of the defence was the protection of the Naval Base, and later of the Air Bases also, at Singapore.

19. *The Initial Plan of Defence* – When in 1921 it was decided to build a Naval Base at Singapore, it was considered that the security of that base depended ultimately on the ability of the British Fleet to control sea communications in the approaches to Singapore. This it would doubtless have been able to do as soon as it had been concentrated in the Far East. For success, therefore, the Japanese would have had to depend on a “coup-de-main” attack direct on to the Island of Singapore. At that time the range of military aircraft was limited and it was considered that the only area suitable for the operation of shore-based aircraft against Singapore was a strip of land in the vicinity of Mersing on the East coast of Johore. Further, the long sea voyage from Japanese territory would both have limited the size of the expedition and greatly prejudiced the chances of obtaining surprise. It was against this type of attack that the defences were initially laid out. The problem was one mainly of the defence of Singapore Island and the adjoining waters. For this a comparatively small garrison only was required.

20. *The Influence of Air Power.* – The rapid development of Air Power greatly affected the problem of defence. Singapore became exposed to attack by carrier-borne and shore-based aircraft operating from much greater distances than had previously been considered possible. Similarly our own defence aircraft were able to reconnoitre and strike at the enemy at a much greater distance from our own shores.

In May, 1932, the Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence, after considering the relative merits of the gun and of aircraft for the defence of fortresses, laid down:

(a) Coast defences should be organized on the basis of co-operation between the three Defence Services, the gun retaining its place as the main deterrent against naval attack.

(b) The first stage of the plan of defence for the Naval Base at Singapore, modified in the light of the latest developments in coast artillery, should be proceeded with.... The second stage should await a further recommendation by the Committee of Imperial Defence.

(c) The Royal Air Force should continue to co-operate in the defence of Singapore with such forces as might from time to time be considered desirable. Such co-operation should extend to all branches of the defence, including A.A. Defence (Fighters) and offensive operations against aircraft carriers, capital ships and other forms of attack by sea, land and air.

In April, 1933, as a result of Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations, the Cabinet decided that immediate steps should be taken to increase the defences of Singapore.

As a result of these decisions the question of the location of aerodromes arose. At that time the only Royal Air Force aerodrome was at Seletar on Singapore Island. The construction of two further aerodromes on Singapore Island was immediately taken in hand. Further, in order to obtain the greatest possible value from the range of aircraft, it was urged that new aerodromes should be constructed on the east coast, an area which it had up till then been the policy to leave as undeveloped as possible, consistent with civil requirements, so as to present the enemy with difficult transportation problems should he land on that coast. It was obvious from the start that these aerodromes, if constructed on the east coast, would present the Army with fresh commitments for their defence – commitments which the existing garrison would be quite unable to meet. The danger of constructing aerodromes in an area where the defence forces might not be strong enough to prevent them falling into the hands of the enemy was also obvious. The Army urged that the policy of the development of air facilities on the east coast, with all the military difficulties which it involved, should only be accepted if a guarantee could be given that, in the event of an attack on Malaya, sufficient modern aircraft would be available to operate from those aerodromes. To ensure this, it was felt that there should in any case be a strong Air Force cadre permanently established in the Far East, and that it was unsafe to rely on the mobility of aircraft to concentrate adequate strength there from other parts of the Empire when danger threatened. On the other hand, the siting of the aerodromes was complicated by the fact that the aircraft at that time available in Malaya had a very limited range, and also by the fact that weather conditions sometimes made it difficult to fly over the central mountain range, so that it was undesirable to rely on aircraft based on the west coast for operations off the east coast. The result of this was that, when war with Japan broke out, three aerodromes had been constructed in the State of Kelantan and a further one at Kuantan, and a landing ground at Kahang in Eastern Johore. Although these were strategically well placed for air operations, they were quite inadequately defended either by land or air forces.

In 1936 it was decided to fortify the Island of Penang, though the approved scale of equipment was not immediately available.

21. *The Influence of World Politics.* – In 1937 the defence policy was still based on the fundamental assumption that the British fleet would sail from Home waters immediately on the outbreak of war with Japan and would arrive at Singapore within a maximum of 70 days. It was further assumed that the arrival of the fleet in the Far East would automatically put an end to any danger of the capture of Singapore. It followed from these assumptions that the defence plan only had to provide against such types of operations as the Japanese might hope to complete successfully within 70 days and that the role of the garrison was confined to holding out for that period.

In November, 1937, having, as G.S.O.I. Malaya, made a careful study of the problem of the defence of Singapore, I prepared on the instructions of the General Officer Commanding (Major-General, now Lieut.-General Sir W.G.S. Dobbie) an appreciation and plan for an attack on that place from the point of view of the Japanese. In this appreciation it was pointed out (a) that, as a result of the political situation in Europe, it was unlikely that the British Fleet would be able to reach Singapore in 70 days, (b) that in consequence, a more deliberate form of attack could be undertaken. The plan recommended consisted of preliminary operations to seize the aerodromes in South Thailand and in Kelantan, the Island of Penang and the naval and air facilities in Borneo, followed by the main operation to capture Singapore itself. From this appreciation deductions were made as to the main points in the defence plan which required attention. These deductions stressed the probability of the Japanese making use of territory in South Thailand, the increased importance of the defence of North Malaya and of Johore, the urgent need for the strengthening of our Air Forces and Local Naval Craft, and for more infantry, and the unsatisfactory situation as regards food stocks. A copy of the deductions made is attached as [Appendix A](#) to this Despatch. The Appreciation and deductions were forwarded by the G.O.C. to the War Office.

In May, 1938, General Dobbie in another appreciation of the defence problem wrote:

“It is an attack from the northward that I regard as the greatest potential danger to the fortress. Such attack could be carried out during the period of the northeast monsoon. The jungle is not in most places impassable for infantry.”

He further stated that defensive positions were being reconnoitred on the general line Johore River – Kota Tinggi – Kulai – Pulai River. Subsequently defences were constructed on the west bank of the river north and south of Kota Tinggi.

22. *Development of the Defence Plan.* – Up to the summer of 1939 the defence policy continued to be based on the assumption that the British Fleet would sail from Home waters immediately on the outbreak of war with Japan whatever the situation in Europe might be. It was then, however, officially recognized that this might not be possible. The “Period before Relief” was increased from 70 to 180 days and authority given for reserves to be built up on that scale. In August, 1939, the 12th Indian Infantry Brigade Group, which had been held in readiness for this purpose, was, in view of the threatening political situation, despatched from India to Malaya.

23. In April, 1940, the G.O.C., (Lt.-Gen. Sir Lionel Bond) submitted a new appreciation in the light of the new situation and especially of the increase of the period before relief from 70 to 180 days. In it he pointed out that the Japanese could now afford to establish their base at a much greater distance from Singapore and possibly in South Thailand. He considered therefore that the northern frontier might have to be held against a considerable force for several months. He estimated that the forces now required for the

defence of Malaya were of the order of 40 battalions (say 4 divisions) with 3 machine gun battalions and 2 tank regiments. He realised that it would be impossible at that time to provide this force, and suggested, as an alternative, that the Royal Air Force “could and should be made absolutely responsible, if not for the detection and destruction of a Japanese expedition before it landed, at least for ensuring that no base can be maintained and no line of communication can be operated within striking distance of our aerodromes.” If this could be done, he estimated that the land forces then required would be in the nature of 25 battalions with supporting arms, which should include 3 anti-tank batteries and one company of armoured cars or tanks.

It was at this time that the problem, which had hitherto remained one of the defence of Singapore Island and of a portion of Johore, developed, as had appeared inevitable as early as 1937, into one of the defence of the whole of Malaya. The G.O.C. asked for official confirmation of this. The problem was further complicated by the collapse of France in June, 1940, the immediate result of which was that Malaya was exposed to a greatly increased scale of attack.

24. In August, 1940, the Chiefs of Staff, in their Far East Appreciation, officially recognised that both the fundamental assumptions of the C.I.D. 1937 Appreciation had broken down because it was now impossible to send the Fleet to the Far East, and the Japanese advance southward, the development of communications and of aerodromes in Thailand, and the increased range of aircraft, had all contributed to the development of the overland threat to Malaya. The necessity for holding the whole of Malaya, with reliance primarily on Air Power, was now recognised. It was laid down that the role of the land forces was to be (a) The close defence of the naval and air bases, (b) Internal security, (c) To deal with any enemy land forces which might succeed in gaining a footing despite the action of the Air Force. Until the necessary air forces could be provided, their absence must be made up for as far as possible by the provision of additional land forces. It was estimated that a minimum of 336 1st Line aircraft would be required for the defence of Malaya and British Borneo, and for trade protection in the north east half of the Indian Ocean. It was laid down that the aim should be to complete this programme by the end of 1941. It was considered that, when this target was reached, the total land garrison required would be the equivalent of 6 brigades with ancillary troops. Meanwhile approximately three divisions would be necessary. It is to be noted that this appreciation was made before the entry of the Japanese into Indo-China. The Commanders in Singapore were instructed to make a tactical appreciation based on the Chiefs of Staff strategical appreciation.

25. In September, 1940, the Japanese occupied the northern portion of Indo-China, thereby greatly increasing the threat to Singapore. In fact, the whole conception of the defence problem had again been changed because a Japanese invading force, instead of having to be transported all the way from Japan, could now be concentrated and prepared within close striking distance of Malaya.

26. The tactical appreciation asked for was prepared by the Commander-in-Chief, China, General Officer Commanding, Malaya, and Air Officer Commanding, Far East. It was reviewed and endorsed by the Singapore Defence Conference held in October, 1940, attended by representatives of Australia, New Zealand, India and Burma, and by one American observer. It was estimated that 566 1st Line aircraft would now be required and that, when this target was reached, the strength of the land forces should be 26 battalions with supporting arms, ancillary services, etc. The Army estimate was accepted by the Chiefs of Staff who, however, declined to increase the previously approved air scale. The general situation and war plans were further discussed at staff conversations with officers from the Dutch East Indies on 25-29th November, 1940, at a conference with Dutch and Australian representatives and United States observers in February, 1941 ("A.D.A. Conference"), and at a full conference with American and Dutch (as well as Dominion) representatives in April, 1941 ("A.D.B. Conference").

27. Further reinforcements now began to arrive in Malaya. In August, 1940, two British battalions arrived from Shanghai on the evacuation of the latter place and in October and November, 1940, the 6 and 8 Indian Infantry Brigades, both of the 11 Indian Division (Major-General Murray Lyon) reached Malaya. In February, 1941, the first contingent of the Australian Imperial Force arrived. It consisted of the Headquarters and Services of the 8 Australian Division (Major-General Gordon Bennett) with the 22 Australian Infantry Brigade Group. In March, 1941, the 15 Indian Infantry Brigade and the 1st Echelon of the 9 Indian Division (Major-General Barstow) arrived from India and one Field Regiment from the U.K., followed in April by the 22 Indian Infantry Brigade also of the 9 Indian Division. In May the 1st Echelon of Headquarters 3 Indian Corps (Lt.-Gen. Sir Lewis Heath) arrived and was located at Kuala Lumpur. It took over the 9 and 11 Indian Divisions, the Penang Fortress and the F.M.S. Volunteers. Some readjustment of formations in the two Indian Divisions had previously been made.

28. *The Disposition of Troops, May, 1941.* – The disposition of the troops at the end of May, 1941, shortly after I took over the Command, was as under:-

(a) Northern Area: – 3 Indian Corps, distributed as under:-

East Coast Sub-Area: 9 Indian Division (of two Brigade Groups only) less one Infantry battalion. In the Kelantan area was 8 Indian Infantry Brigade with attached troops (Brigadier Key) and in the Kuantan Area 22 Indian Infantry Brigade (less one battalion) with attached troops (Brigadier Painter).

Northern Sub-Area: 11 Indian Division (of two Brigade Groups only). Headquarters and 15 Brigade Group (Brigadier Garrett) were at Sungei Patani in South Kedah, the 6 Brigade Group (Brigadier Lay) less one Infantry battalion was at Tanjong Pau Camp in North Kedah, and there was one Infantry battalion each in Perlis, Penang and at Kroh on the Thailand frontier in North Perak.

Penang: The Penang Garrison (Brigadier Lyon) consisted of one Infantry Volunteer battalion, two 6-in. batteries with searchlights, some Royal Engineer and administrative units. The remaining equipment for the Fixed Defences had not arrived and there were no Anti-Aircraft defences.

Lines of Communication: The L. of C. Area consisted of that part of the west coast area which lay south of the River Perak. The Commander was Brigadier Moir, who was also Commandant of the Federated Malay States Volunteer Force.

Corps Reserve: In Corps Reserve was one Infantry battalion situated at Mantin Camp south of Kuala Lumpur.

Federated Malay States Volunteer Force. – This force, which consisted of four Infantry battalions and some supporting units, was not yet mobilized.

The Commander 3 Indian Corps was responsible for the whole of Malaya north of Johore and Malacca and for the Island of Penang.

(b) *Singapore Island and Eastern Johore.* – The Singapore Fortress Troops (Major-General Keith Simmons) consisted of:-

The Fixed Defences (Brigadier Curtis) which were divided into two Fire Commands, i.e The Changi Fire Command which covered the approaches to the Naval Base, and the Faber Fire Command which covered the approaches to Keppel Harbour and to the western channel of the Johore Straits. In each Fire Command was one 15 in. and one 9.2 in. battery and a number of 6 in. batteries; also searchlights and smaller equipments.

The Anti-Aircraft Defences (Brigadier Wildey). – These Defences, which included both guns and searchlights, had been built up over a number of years under War Office direction. Most of the guns were of the static type but a few tractors were available. The defences had been sited on Singapore Island and in Southern Johore to protect the Naval Base and other important installations in the Singapore Fortress area. There were three Anti-Aircraft Regiments, one Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, and one Searchlight Regiment.

Field Troops. – There were three Infantry Brigades, one Field Regiment and one Field Company, etc. The 1 Malaya Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Williams) of two battalions only and the 2 Malaya Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Fraser) were responsible for the defence of the beaches on the south coast of Singapore Island and at Pengerang in Southern Johore. The 12 Indian Brigade Group was responsible for the defence of the east coast of Johore.

Fortress Troops. – There were also a number of Fortress units, i.e. Fortress Companies, Royal Engineers, etc.

Straits Settlement Volunteer Force (less the Penang Bn.) – This Force, strength about a

weak Brigade Group, was not yet mobilized. It was allotted a role in the defence of Singapore Town.

Command Headquarters and Base Units. – In addition to the troops directly under his command, the Commander Singapore Fortress was responsible for the administration of the Command Headquarters and Base units located in the Singapore Island area.

(c) Malaya Command Reserve. – The A.I.F. (8 Australian Division less two Infantry brigade groups) was in Command Reserve. It was located in the Malacca/Negri Sembilan area with Headquarters at Kuala Lumpur. It was to be prepared to operate anywhere in Malaya, and for this purpose officers of the A.I.F. were ordered to carry out reconnaissances of the areas where operations were most likely to take place.

(d) Borneo. – One Infantry Battalion (less one company at Miri), with some Local Forces and administrative units attached, was stationed at Kuching in the State of Sarawak. Its task was to protect the aerodrome under construction there for the use of our Air Force and to deny it to the enemy.

There was also a small infantry and engineer detachment at Miri, where two 6 in. guns had been installed. Its task was to destroy the oil fields and installations, if necessary to prevent them falling into the hands of the enemy.

(e) Christmas Island. – There was a small coast artillery detachment at Christmas Island, whose task was to protect the phosphate deposits there.

(f) Indian State Forces Units. – There were also in Malaya several State Forces units from the Indian States. They varied greatly in training, strength and efficiency. Being without transport and more suitable for a static role, they were employed principally on aerodrome defence, coming under the commanders of the areas in which they were situated.

The above dispositions were in accordance with the role of the land forces as laid down in the Chiefs of Staff Appreciation of August 1940 already referred to. The commanders of the various forces were given written instructions as to their role and the action to be taken in certain eventualities.

29. *The Advance into Thailand.* – Before leaving London I discussed on broad lines a proposal which was then under consideration to advance into South Thailand if a favourable opportunity presented itself. Immediately after taking over command I was instructed by the C.-in-C. Far East to give this matter my further detailed consideration. It was also discussed on several occasions at conferences. The operation was known as MATADOR. I was informed that it could not be carried out without reference to London since MATADOR could only be put into effect if and when it became clear beyond all reasonable doubt that an enemy expedition was approaching the shores of Thailand. As time would then be the essence of the problem it appeared almost certain that, by the time permission had been asked for and obtained, the favourable opportunity would have passed.

The military advantages of the occupation of South Thailand, or of part of it, were great. It would enable us to meet the enemy on the beaches instead of allowing him to land and establish himself unopposed, it would provide our Air Force with additional aerodromes and, by denying these aerodromes to the enemy, it would make it far more difficult for his Air Force to interfere with our sea communications in the Malacca Straits. It was a question, however, whether it was a sound operation with the meagre resources available. No troops could be spared for the operation other than the 11 Indian Division, strengthened by some administrative units. The proposal to occupy the narrow neck of the Kra Isthmus was rejected as being too ambitious and the discussions centred round the occupation and denial to the enemy of the Port of Singora and the aerodromes at Singora and Patani.

The following factors, among others, had to be considered:

- (a) The Thai Government had stated publicly that it would defend its territory against the invasion of any foreign troops. Therefore opposition, even if slight, was to be expected.
- (b) All the main bridges on the road between the Thailand frontier and Haad 'yai Junction were in process of reconstruction. Therefore time and material might be required for their repair.
- (c) Large quantities of M.T. would be required to mechanize the road parties of the force and to keep it supplied.
- (d) The psychological effect of offensive action would be considerable, but this had to be weighed against the possibilities of an encounter battle and the loss of prepared ground.
- (e) An enemy landing would certainly be supported by tanks, of which we had none. It was noted also that during the period of the North-East Monsoon, i.e. October-March, the country on the east coast is wet, and therefore, less suited to tank action, while on the, west coast it is comparatively dry.

After careful examination of the problem, it was decided:

- (a) That, provided a favourable opportunity presented itself, the operation MATADOR would be put into effect during the period October-March.
- (b) That it would take the form of (i) an advance by road and rail to capture Singora and hold a defensive position north of Haad 'yai Junction, and (ii) an advance from Kroh to a defensive position, known as The Ledge position, on the Kroh – Patani road some 35–40 miles on the Thailand side of the frontier. The reason for this limited objective on the Kroh front was lack of resources, both operational and administrative.
- (c) That at least 24 hours start was required before the anticipated time of a Japanese landing.

Detailed plans were worked out and preparations made for this operation. Maps were

printed, money in Thai currency was made available and pamphlets for distribution to the Thais were drafted though, to preserve secrecy, the printing of them was deferred till the last minute.

By a special arrangement made by the C.-in-C. Far East, authority was obtained for a limited number of officers in plain clothes to carry out reconnaissances in South Thailand. In all 30 officers, including some of the most senior officers, were able to visit Thailand in this way. They frequently met Japanese officers who were presumably on a similar mission.

On the 5th December, 1941, I was informed by the C.-in-C. Far East that, in accordance with the terms of a telegram just received from London, MATADOR could thenceforward be put into effect without reference to London (a) if the C.-in-C. Far East had information that a 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.

30. *The Northern Frontier.* – One of the first problems to which I turned my attention was the defence of the Northern frontier. Excluding the Kelantan frontier, which will be referred to later, the Malaya – Thailand frontier was crossed by only two roads and one railway, but there were in addition a number of bush tracks. The main road from Alor Star in Kedah to Haad 'yai in South Thailand and thence to Singora crossed the frontier a few miles north of Changlun. A secondary road, running eastward through Province Wellesley and South Kedah, crossed the frontier at Kroh and then continued via Yala to Patani in South Thailand, an unbridged river being crossed by a ferry. The west coast railway, passing through Alor Star, crossed the frontier in the small State of Perlis and then forked at Haad 'yai Junction, the main line continuing to Bangkok with a branch to Singora.

31. The C.-in-C. Far East having issued an order that the main road approaches from Thailand were to be put into a state of defence, the problem was studied by senior officers of 3 Indian Corps. The primary role of the troops in this area was to cover the aerodrome at Alor Star and those further south in Kedah and Province Wellesley. The position selected therefore had to be sufficiently north of the Alor Star aerodrome for this purpose. The frontier area itself was found to be unsuitable both for tactical reasons and because it was known to be very malarial. Ultimately a position was selected in front of the small village of Jitra, which lies at the junction of the main road with the branch road to Perlis, some 18 miles south of the frontier. This position had, however, obvious disadvantages, chief of which was the weakness of the left flank in dry weather, for between it and the sea was a stretch of some 12 miles of open or semi-open country, intersected by small canals and ditches. The main defences were, therefore, concentrated astride the two roads, reliance being placed on a skeleton pill-box defence combined with a maximum use of natural obstacles for the protection of the left flank. Plans were made to flood an area astride the railway, which seemed to be a probable line of enemy advance.

On the main front anti-tank ditches were dug where there were no natural obstacles and defended localities were constructed, though later preparations and training for MATADOR interfered to some extent with the development of these defences.

32. On the Kroh – Patani road, intelligence reports pointed to the fact that the most suitable place for a defensive position was a locality known as “The Ledge”, some 35-40 miles on the Thailand side of the frontier. Here the road had been cut out of a steep hillside and it seemed probable that it would be comparatively easy to block it by demolitions, though it was of course impossible to make any preparations in peacetime. Another defensive position was prepared west of the frontier upon which to fall back in case of need.

Although no large bodies could cross the frontier by bush tracks in North Perak, it was nevertheless possible for small parties to do so. Such small parties, by guerilla activities against our communications, could at least develop a nuisance value. In order to watch these tracks a special platoon of local men was formed and incorporated in the Perak Volunteer Battalion.

33. *The East Coast.* – Throughout the whole length of the east coast of Malaya there are numerous beaches very suitable for landing operations. For the greater part of the year the sea is comparatively calm off this coast. The exception is the period of the north-east monsoon. It had, however, been determined, as a result of a staff ride held in 1937, that even during this monsoon landings were possible though it was thought they might be interfered with for two or three days at a time when the storms were at their height. In consequence, it was thought that the enemy would be unlikely to choose the period December-February if he could avoid it.

It has already been explained (see [Sections I and VI](#)) that there are large undeveloped areas in the eastern part of Malaya and that communications are scarce; also that the original policy had been to avoid, as far as possible, further development of these communications with a view to reducing military commitments in this part of Malaya. By 1941, however, the Army had been obliged to undertake the defence of three areas on the east coast i.e the Kelantan area, the Kuantan area and the East Johore area. The primary role of the Army in the first two of these, both of which were situated at the end of very long and vulnerable communications, was the defence of the aerodromes which had been constructed there. In both cases the forces which could be made available were inadequate for their task.

34. The State of Kelantan is divided into two parts by the Kelantan River which flows roughly South to North and reaches the sea near Kota Bharu. The river is wide and unbridged for road traffic which makes communication from one bank to the other difficult and slow. The railway crosses the river west of Machang and then running west of it crosses the frontier into Thailand a few miles from the coast. There are no road communications across the frontier though, as in Perak, the frontier is crossed by tracks

and, in the more mountainous sections, by rivers navigable by small craft.

There were three modern aerodromes in Kelantan – one at Kota Bharu completed and in use, one at Gong Kedah some 30 miles down the coast, serviceable and nearly completed, and one at Machang on the Krai – Kota Bharu road under construction. All these were east of the Kelantan River.

The Commander of the Kelantan Force of one brigade group, which had only begun to move into position at the end of 1940, was instructed that his primary task was to secure the aerodromes for the use of our Air Force and to deny them to the enemy. He was also instructed that in order to carry out his task, he was to endeavour to prevent an enemy landing and that, for this purpose, pill-boxes were to be built and beach defences, both anti-personnel and anti-tank, were to be constructed as far as resources would admit. He decided to keep his force east of the Kelantan River with the exception of small mobile detachments whose task was to watch the frontier and, in face of an enemy's advance in force, to fall back across the Kelantan River. Arrangements were made to destroy the railway bridges near the frontier. The bulk of the force was therefore concentrated about the aerodromes at Kota Bharu and Gong Kedah, with beach defence troops on the most likely landing beaches. Reserves were held at Chondong and Peringat. Headquarters were in the Kota Bharu area in touch with the Sultan and British Adviser. Railhead was at Krai where the main reserves of supplies, stores, etc. were held. I approved these dispositions when I visited the area in company with the A.O.C. in July, 1941.

35. At Kuantan the small cantonment lies a mile or so from the sea in the bend of the Kuantan River. North of the river are some 12 miles of beach suitable for landing. South of the river mouth there are also good landing beaches but a tributary of the Kuantan River blocks the deployment from these beaches northwards. The road from Jerantut (100 miles distant) crosses the Kuantan River by a ferry west of the cantonment. The aerodrome was situated near this road some 7 miles west of the ferry.

The Commander of the Kuantan Force of one weak brigade group which had only moved into position in April, 1941, was instructed that his primary task was to secure the aerodrome for the use of our Air Force and to deny it to the enemy. The beaches were far too long to hold in strength, but if the enemy was allowed to land unopposed he could concentrate a large force for an attack on the aerodrome. Moreover, the slow ferry crossing of the Kuantan River was a source of great weakness. The plan, which I approved, was to deploy one battalion on the beaches, where material defences were constructed, and to hold one battalion for the defence of the river lines and of the aerodrome. I also authorised the construction of a swinging pontoon bridge across the river which, however, owing to difficulty in getting suitable material was not finished in time. Communication with Kuantan was by military wireless and by a civil land line. Both these channels of communication were subject to frequent interruption.

36. By far the greater part of the East Johore area is undeveloped forest. There are,

however, two small towns of strategical importance, Mersing and Endau, situated about 20 miles apart. Mersing is 90 miles from Singapore and connected to it by a motor road. There are good landing beaches both north and south of the town but the water off-shore is shallow so that ocean-going steamers have to lie a long way out. Mersing is also connected to Kluang in the centre of Johore and thence to Batu Pahat on the west coast by a lateral road which branches from the Mersing – Singapore road at Jemaluang. Endau, a smaller town than Mersing, is connected to it by a motor road. It lies at the mouth of the Endau River on which at Bukit Langkap, some 20 miles from Endau, was situated an important Japanese owned iron ore mine.

From this mine large quantities of iron ore were shipped to Japan annually, being brought down river in a fleet of Japanese-owned barges and loaded into Japanese steamers which lay off the mouth of the Endau River. From the mine there was also water communication with the Jemaluang – Kluang road. The whole of this area was therefore well known to the Japanese.

On the coast south of Mersing there are a number of water-ways in which a small force could be landed within striking distance of the Singapore road.

The Jemaluang road junction was clearly vital to the defence of this area. It was essential, therefore, that the main operations should take place in front of this junction. There were three contingencies to be provided for (a) an attempt by the enemy to land in the Endau area with the object of either moving on Mersing or via the Bukit Langkap iron ore mine to the Kluang road and the Kahang aerodrome situated close to it; (b) a landing in force in the Mersing area; (c) landings of small forces further south with a view to cutting communications with Singapore.

In May 1941, when I took over command, the responsibility for the defence of this area rested on the Commander, Singapore Fortress, who had allotted for this purpose the 12 Indian Brigade Group, one battalion group of which only was actually accommodated at Mersing. The general plan was to hold in force the Mersing area and the beaches to the south with a detachment at Endau and a reserve in a prepared position north of the Jemaluang road junction; other detachments watched the communications to Singapore. The beach defences in this area were more advanced than those further north. I approved this plan during a visit to the East Johore area in June 1941.

Some small minefields were laid off the East Johore coast by the Royal Navy but, owing to the limited supply of mines, it was not possible to lay them off other parts of the east coast.

In view of the possibility of enemy landings on the east coast detailed arrangements had been made with the civil authorities for the removal or destruction of all boats and other surface craft on this coast on receipt of specified code words.

37. *Air Defence* – Prior to the outbreak of World War II, Air Defence in Malaya

had been, for all practical purposes, limited to the anti-aircraft defence of selected areas on Singapore Island, though plans had also been made for the defence of Penang. With the extension of the defence problem, however, to embrace the whole of Malaya and the more imminent danger of active operations in the Far East, the plans for active air defence underwent rapid expansion, and passive air defence was organized.

38. As regards the Anti-Aircraft Artillery, the defences of Singapore had been developed in accordance with the War Office plan of 1936 as amended and extended by the plan approved by the Chiefs of Staff Committee in 1940. They were laid out for the defence of the Naval Base and of other vulnerable installations, for which an order of priority was laid down. In May 1941 there were three Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiments, one Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and one Searchlight Regiment in the Singapore area. In the autumn of that year the 1 Indian Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment arrived. A very large proportion of the men of this Regiment were still in the recruit stage and none of them had had any training on guns. When hostilities opened there were 60 Heavy Anti-Aircraft guns in the Singapore area out of the 104 which had been authorised. These consisted of two 4.5 in., thirty-eight 3.7 in. and twenty 3 in., the majority of which were static. Every effort had, however, been made to make as many as possible mobile and to train in mobile operations. Outside Singapore Island, authority had been received for the preparation of positions for the defence of Penang and of the aerodromes at Alor Star, Sungei Patani, Kota Bharu and Kuantan, but only those at Sungei Patani had been completed when hostilities opened. Temporary positions were, however, occupied by such 3 in. guns as could be made available for defence of the Alor Star and Kota Bharu aerodromes. One battery of the Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment from Singapore, on a mobile basis, was placed under orders of the Commander, 3 Indian Corps, for expected operations in North Malaya and was located at Alor Star. There were no guns available for the defence of cities on the mainland such as Kuala Lumpur and Ipoh.

At the time of my arrival in Malaya the anti-aircraft artillery was under the orders of the Commander, Singapore Fortress. Having in view, however, the increase in the scale of anti-aircraft defence and its extension to other parts of Malaya, I decided to bring the anti-aircraft artillery directly under my own command, except for purposes of administration, and to reorganize it under the Commander, Anti-Aircraft Artillery, into two brigades, one for Singapore and one for North Malaya. This reorganization had not been completed when war broke out. Command of the Anti-Aircraft Artillery in North Malaya was delegated to the Commander, 3 Indian Corps.

39. In 1940 the Active Air Defence was strengthened by the arrival of fighter aircraft. A proportion of these was always retained at the Singapore bases for defence of the important objectives in that area, the remainder being allotted to the northern area, which appeared to be the most vulnerable to attack.

40. With the arrival in Malaya in the summer of 1941 of Group Captain Rice, who

had had much experience, in connection with the Air Defence of Great Britain, the task of building up a co-ordinated Air Defence scheme for Malaya was energetically pushed forward. The fighters allotted to the defence of the Singapore area were placed under the command of Group Captain Rice. This officer was also authorised, as regards the Singapore area, to co-ordinate the action of the fighters and the antiaircraft artillery and, during hostile attacks, to issue orders direct to these two formations. A control station was established near the Kallang aerodrome.

41. As part of this Air Defence scheme an efficient Warning System was essential. An organization of civilian watchers had already been started. Efforts were now made to extend this organization and provide it with better equipment. There were two main difficulties. Firstly, there was the difficulty of finding suitable people in the less developed parts of Malaya to complete the chain of watchers. Secondly, and more important still, was the paucity of communications. The civil telephone system in Malaya consisted only of a few trunk lines, which followed the main arteries of communication, and local lines in the populated areas. This was quite inadequate for a really efficient Warning System, as it was impossible to allot separate lines for this purpose. A plan was worked out, in conjunction with the civil authorities, for the duplication of this system and for extensions where required. A start was made with the limited amount of cable available but only small progress had been made when war broke out. There were a few radar sets available but efforts to supplement the system with wireless communication met with only partial success owing to the unreliability of wireless in the difficult climatic conditions of Malaya. Nevertheless, in spite of these difficulties, an organization was built up which proved of great value during the subsequent operations, though it should be pointed out that it covered South Malaya and the Singapore area only, and that there was no adequate Warning System for North Malaya.

The organization of Passive Air Defence will be explained later when dealing with Civil Defence.

42. *Defence of Aerodromes.* – As a result of experience in Europe, and especially in Crete, the C.-in-C. Far East laid down that the defence of aerodromes was to take precedence, as regards A.A. weapons, over everything else except the defence of the Naval Base. A scale of Heavy and Light A.A. Guns for each aerodrome was laid down but, owing to lack of resources, it was never approached. Such guns as were available, however, were allotted for this purpose. In addition, small infantry garrisons, drawn from Malayan Volunteer units or Indian State Force units, were provided. There were also a few heavy armoured lorries specially constructed for this purpose. In no case, however, was the strength of the garrison really adequate for the defence of the aerodromes, the perimeters of which varied between 3 and 5 miles.

43. *Borneo.* – The large Island of Borneo, partly British and partly Dutch, was clearly of great strategical importance, lying as it did between the main routes linking

Japan with Malaya and Sumatra on the one hand and Java and the Southern Areas on the other, and containing large supplies of oil and other raw materials. Unfortunately neither the British nor the Dutch were able to find adequate garrisons for this island.

The British portion of Borneo consisted of:-

British North Borneo a territory controlled by the British North Borneo Company, whose headquarters were in London. The Governor and officials of British North Borneo were in the employ of that Company.

Labuan Island. – A British Colony administered by a Resident.

Brunei. – A British Protected State with its own Sultan.

Sarawak. – A Malay State which had for many years been governed by members of the Brooke family. In September 1941, however, the ruling Rajah made over much of his responsibility to a Council. He then left Sarawak for a holiday and was in Australia when hostilities broke out. His efforts to return to Sarawak were unsuccessful.

There had for some time been a project to open up air facilities in British Borneo. Aerodrome sites had been selected and surveyed. Ultimately, however, as there was no immediate prospect of British aeroplanes being available to use the aerodromes, the project was postponed except as regards an air landing ground at Kuching in Sarawak and a landing strip at Miri.

44. In British North Borneo there were several excellent natural harbours which were undefended. There was a small but efficient local Volunteer Force but, owing to lack of resources, it was not possible to provide any regular troops for the defence of this territory. The Governor of British North Borneo was therefore informed by the C.-in-C. Far East that his territory could not be defended and that the role of his local forces should be the maintenance of internal security.

45. In West Brunei and East Sarawak were situated the important Sena and Miri Oil Fields and the Lutong Refinery. It was the policy of the British Admiralty, in the event of war breaking out in the Far East, to do such damage to the wells and plant that they would be of no use to the enemy. This work was the responsibility of the Army, and for this purpose a demolition party with an infantry escort of about a company (partly Indian and partly British) was stationed there. There was also a 6 in. battery. A partial denial scheme was put into effect before hostilities broke out.

46. The town of Kuching, the capital of Sarawak, is situated some 8 miles from the coast and is approached only by waterways. The intervening country is mostly bush-covered or marshy. The town itself lies on both sides of the Bintawa River. The air landing ground is situated some 7 miles south of the town to which it is connected by a metalled road. The only land communication between Sarawak and Dutch West Borneo was a bush track unfit for wheeled transport.

The O.C. Troops Sarawak and Brunei (Lt.-Col. Lane) was instructed that his primary object was to secure the air landing ground for the use of our Air Force and to deny it to the enemy; also that if, owing to overwhelming forces, this object could no longer be attained, then he should act in the interests of the defence of West Borneo as a whole, his line of withdrawal being by the bush track into Dutch West Borneo. This defence problem was not an easy one. If the plan envisaged only the close defence of the landing ground, then the enemy would be free to move unopposed up the waterways where he would be most vulnerable. Moreover, the people of Kuching Town would be left entirely unprotected. On the other hand any attempt to defend Kuching itself would lead to great dispersion.

The O.C. Troops had at his disposal the 2/15 Punjab Regt. (less one weak company to Lutong), the Sarawak Rangers, some local volunteers trained chiefly for administrative duties and some regular administrative detachments. The Sarawak Rangers, which had previously been disbanded, had recently been reformed but owing to lack of weapons were only partially armed. There was no artillery, except some field guns manned by the infantry, and no engineers.

Under the defence scheme prepared by the O.C. Troops, the Sarawak Rangers were employed as scouts north of Kuching and detachments of regular troops were pushed forward to block the waterways. The remainder of the 2/15 Punjab Regt. was held in reserve at the landing ground, where defensive positions were under construction. I approved this plan during a visit to Kuching at the end of November 1941. I was informed at the same time that there were large Japanese plantations in the area immediately east of Kuching.

47. Review of Strength Required. – Shortly after taking over command I was instructed to review the Army strength required for the defence of Malaya. Before doing so I personally visited all the main defence areas and also arranged for a strategical examination of the defence problem by a joint staff committee. In the course of that examination I asked to be informed what damage the Air Force at its existing strength might be expected to inflict on a hostile sea-borne expedition before it reached the shores of Malaya. I based my estimate of the Army strength required on the figure given. In the event, unfortunately, the damage done fell far below this figure. I have no record to show, and I do not wish to infer, that this figure was given by the A.O.C.

I pointed out the serious deficiencies in the strength of the Air Force, the obsolescence of many of the aircraft, the weakness of our naval forces and the greatly increased threat from the Japanese occupation of Indo-China which had then been extended to the southern portions of that country.

On the 2nd August, 1941, I gave my estimate of the Army strength required in a telegram to the War Office. This estimate was not examined in detail by the C-in-C Far East but the despatch of the cable was approved by him as a definition of the target.

Summarized, it asked for:-

48 Infantry Battalions.

4 Indian Reconnaissance Units

9 Field Artillery Regiments.

4 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments

2 Tank Regiments.

3 Anti-Tank Regiments.

2 Mountain Artillery Regiments.

12 Field Companies.

with the necessary administrative units. This was exclusive of the Volunteers, the infantry anti-aircraft and tank units required for aerodrome defence, and also of the Anti-Aircraft units required for the defence of localities including the Naval Base. In a Tactical Appreciation forwarded by telegram in September 1941 two Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiments for the Field Force were asked for while the Anti-Aircraft Guns required for the defence of Singapore were estimated at 212 Heavy and 124 Light.

The main difference in the above estimate over those which had been submitted previously was that it made provision for a 3rd Corps Reserve in North Malaya of one complete Division and certain Corps Troops units, for a complete division instead of two brigade groups in the Kelantan – Trengganu – Pahang area, for two regular infantry battalions for Penang and for a brigade group instead of one battalion in Borneo.

This estimate was accepted by the Chiefs of Staff, but it was recognised that the target could not, in the existing circumstances, be fulfilled in the foreseeable future. A working target was subsequently approved by the War Office.

48. *Further Re-inforcements.* – On the 15th August 1941, the second contingent of the Australian Imperial Force arrived in Malaya. It consisted of the 27 Australian Infantry Brigade with attached troops. As the commander of this Brigade had been prevented on medical grounds from accompanying it, Lt.-Col. Maxwell was, on the recommendation of the Commander, A I.F., appointed by the Australian authorities to command it. The Brigade Group had had the advantage of a period of training in Australia but had had no experience of bush warfare. It was accommodated temporarily on Singapore Island pending the completion of hatted accommodation in West Johore and Malacca.

In September the 28 Indian Infantry Brigade disembarked at Port Swettenham. It was composed of three Gurkha battalions which, like other Indian units, had lost a large proportion of their leaders and trained personnel under the expansion scheme. It joined the 3 Indian Corps and was accommodated in the Ipoh area, being earmarked for operations under 11 Indian Division.

In November-December 1941 two field regiments and one anti-tank regiment arrived from the U.K. and one field regiment and one reconnaissance regiment (3 Cavalry) from India. These were all placed under orders of 3 Indian Corps. The artillery regiments consisted of excellent material but were lacking in experience and had had no training in bush warfare. The Indian reconnaissance unit had only recently been mechanised and arrived without its armoured vehicles. It was so untrained that drivers had to be borrowed for some of the trucks which were issued to it.

49. *Re-adjustment of the Defence Plan.* – On arrival of the 2nd Contingent of the A.I.F. I decided to make certain alterations in the Plan of Defence. I ordered the A.I.F. to take over responsibility for Johore and Malacca and brought into Command Reserve for operational purposes the 12 Indian Brigade Group, leaving it under the Commander Singapore Fortress for training and administration. My reasons for this step were as under:-

(a) I considered the dual task imposed upon the Commander Singapore Fortress of defending both Singapore Fortress and East Johore to be unsound as he might well be attacked simultaneously in both areas. Similarly some of the Fortress troops had alternative roles in the two areas.

(b) I was anxious to give the 22 Australian Brigade Group, which had now had six months' training in Malaya, a rôle which involved responsibility.

(c) There was a greater probability under the new arrangement that the A.I.F. would be able to operate as a formation under its own commanders instead of being split up. The advantages of this need no explanation. In this connection I had enquired on taking over command whether there were any special instructions with regard to the status and the handling of the A.I.F. I had been informed that there were none.

The responsibility for the defence of Johore and Malacca passed to the Commander A.I.F. at 1200 hrs. on the 29th August, 1941.

In September the Kelantan garrison was strengthened by the addition of the infantry battalion which had previously been held in 3 Corps Reserve, an Indian State Forces battalion from the South for aerodrome defence, and some supporting units.

50. *Dispositions on Outbreak of War with Japan.* – As a result of the above changes the disposition of troops in the Malaya Command (Lt.-Gen. A.E. Percival) on the outbreak of war with Japan was as under:

(a) *Northern Area* – 3 Indian Corps (Lt.-Gen. Sir Lewis Heath). Responsible for the defence of that part of Malaya which lies north of Johore and Malacca, including the Island of Penang, and for the conduct of Operation MATADOR should it be decided to put it into effect.

Troops-

9 Indian Division of two Brigade Groups, East Coast Area.

11 Indian Division, Northern Sub Area.

Penang Fortress.

Lines of Communication Area.

The Federated Malay States Volunteer Force and, for operational purposes, the Penang and Province Wellesley battalion of the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force. Corps Troops.

(b) *Johore and Malacca* – The A.I.F. (Maj.-Gen. Gordon Bennett). Responsible for the defence of the States of Johore and Malacca except the Pengerang area of Johore.

Troops-

The A.I.F. of two Brigade Groups.

The Johore Military Forces.

The Johore Volunteer Forces.

The Johore Volunteer Engineers (an European unit).

(c) *The Singapore Fortress*. – (Maj.-Gen.F. Keith Simmons). Responsible for the defence of Singapore and adjoining islands and of the Pengerang area in South Johore.

Troops-

The Fixed Defences of two Fire Commands.

Field troops of two Infantry Brigades etc. to man the beach defences.

Fortress units i.e. Fortress Companies Royal Engineers etc.

The Straits Settlements Volunteer Force (Less for operational purposes the Penang and Province Wellesley battalion).

The 12 Indian Infantry Brigade Group (for training and administration only).

Command Headquarters, Base and other units (for administration only).

(d) *The Anti-Aircraft Defences* (Brig. A.W.G. Wildey). Responsible, in cooperation with other arms, for the defence of selected targets in the Singapore area against hostile air attack.

Troops-

Four Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiments.

One Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (less one battery under 3 Indian Corps).

One Searchlight Regiment.

(e) *The Command Reserve.* – (Brig. A.C. Paris). To be prepared to operate anywhere in Malaya. Under Singapore Fortress for training and administration.

Troops-

12 Indian Infantry Brigade Group.

The Commander 3 Indian Corps was informed that, in the event of an advance into Thailand, this Brigade Group would immediately be moved North and placed under his orders. The Commanders 3 Indian Corps and A.I.F. were instructed that, in the event of this Infantry Brigade Group being committed to operations, they must be prepared to replace it with another infantry brigade group if called upon to do so.

(f) *Borneo.* – (i) *Kuching (Sarawak) Detachment.* – (Lt.-Col. C.W. Lane). Responsible for the defence of the Kuching air landing ground.

Troops-

One Indian Infantry Battalion (less one company).

The Sarawak Rangers.

The Sarawak Volunteers.

Administrative detachments.

(ii) *Miri Detachment.* – Responsible for the denial, in case of necessity, of the Miri and Sena Oilfields and of the Lutong Refinery, to prevent them falling in a serviceable condition into the hands of the enemy.

(iii) *British North Borneo, Labuan Island, Brunei.* – In these States no regular military forces were maintained, though in British North Borneo there was a small Volunteer Force. The Senior Civil Officials were responsible for internal security.

(g) *Christmas Island.*

Troops. – A Coast Artillery detachment manning a section of 6 in. guns. Responsible for the protection of the phosphate deposits.

(h) *Command Troops-*

Base and Other Administrative Units.

Command Troops units and a number of Base and other units, for the maintenance of all troops in the Malaya Command, were located in the Singapore area and elsewhere in Malaya.

The Order of Battle of Malaya Command on the 8th Dec. 1941, is given in detail in [Appendix B](#) attached to this Despatch.

The Plan for the Defence of Malaya was contained in the Malaya Defence Scheme, which was supplemented as necessary by special instructions for the conduct of

the defence in the various areas. In view of the wide area covered by the Malaya Command and the possibility of operations developing simultaneously in different parts of that area I considered it advisable to decentralise responsibility for the control of operations as far as possible. Every effort, therefore, was made to ensure that the Defence Scheme and pre-war Instructions should be as comprehensive as possible, so that subordinate formation commanders would be in a position to conduct operations with only such supplementary and amending orders and instructions from higher authority as the development of the situation might demand.

51. Special Operations.

(a) Early in 1941 an Independent Company, with a strength of about 300 partly British and partly Indian, was formed. It was accommodated first at Kuantan and then in Kedah, and was trained under Headquarters Malaya Command in amphibious operations and for special operations in enemy territory.

(b) In the summer of 1941 a Branch of the Ministry of Economic Warfare was started in Singapore. It suffered from an excess of secrecy and from a lack of knowledge on the part of the gentlemen responsible as to how to set about the work. Thus valuable time was lost. Later, however, some very useful work was done by this organization.

SECTION VII. – TRAINING.

52. Apart from the garrison of Singapore Fortress and the Command Reserve, of which most units had been in Malaya for some time, there were in 1941 very few trained units in Malaya. Practically all the Indian Army units had suffered severely from the rapid expansion of that Army which had only been commenced a year after the outbreak of the war. Officers and N.C.O.s had been withdrawn to meet the needs of this expansion until the lack of leaders, and even of potential leaders, reached a dangerously low level. Few units had more than two or three senior officers with experience of handling Indian troops and of the junior officers only a proportion had had Indian experience. The great majority of the troops were young and inexperienced.

The Australian units were composed of excellent material but suffered from a lack of leaders with a knowledge of modern warfare. The same applied in some degree to the British units in which there were few men with previous war experience.

No units had had any training in bush warfare before reaching Malaya. Several of the units had in fact been specially trained for desert warfare.

53. In June, 1941, the C.-in-C. Far East, in addition to ordering the construction of defences to cover the main road to Thailand, laid down a scale for the material defences on all defended beaches, to include anti-boat, anti-tank and anti-personnel defences. As an early outbreak of hostilities then appeared probable, he issued instructions that these

defences were to be completed as early as possible. On the east coast a great deal of work remained to be done.

54. A balance, therefore, had to be struck between the employment of troops on defence work and their field training. I decided that the proper course was to build up a foundation of good individual and sub-unit training, which could be done concurrently with the construction of defences. If hostilities did not break out in the autumn I hoped that we might then expect a period of three months (December/February) during which we could concentrate on higher training.

I therefore issued instructions that individual, sub-unit and unit training was to be carried out during the period July/November, when possible in bush country, under the direction of formation and unit commanders and that formation exercises would be held during the period December/February. During the latter period I also arranged for two exercises without troops to be held to study problems connected with the defence of Malaya as a whole. In the event, the political tension which existed in August and September prevented much training being done by units in the forward areas. The 1st Contingent of the A.I.F. and the Command Reserve, however, carried out some very profitable training in bush warfare conditions. Some units of the latter were still in the Port Dickson training area when war with Japan broke out.

Towards the end of September, the defences having made good progress, I directed that an increased proportion of time should be allotted to training.

55. An exercise with troops arranged by the Commander 3 Indian Corps to study the problems of a withdrawal from Kedah southwards was scheduled to take place early in December, but had to be cancelled when war appeared imminent.

56. During the tenure of office of my predecessor a handbook on bush warfare had been issued by Headquarters Malaya Command. A similar manual had been received from India, while all the War Office training manuals were available in limited numbers. Directives were issued to supplement these manuals as necessary.

57. As regards Courses, Schools of Instruction etc. a balance had to be struck between the requirements of co-ordinating instruction and the desirability of leaving officers and N.C.Os. as far as possible with their units to lay the foundations of field training. Accordingly, I decided as a policy that Command Courses would be held for those subjects in which technical knowledge was required, while courses in other subjects would be held under formation or unit arrangements. In accordance with this policy Command Courses were held in Physical Training, Chemical Warfare, Intelligence and Camouflage. In addition, there was an Officers Cadet Training Unit at Singapore where men from all parts of the Far East were trained for commissions.

58. Profiting by the lessons of Crete, a great deal of attention was paid to the defence of aerodromes, special exercises being held in several areas to study this problem.

Exercises were also held to study the movement of troops by M.T. and the handling of mechanized columns. As in other theatres, a tendency on the part of the troops to become road-minded was apparent. The effects of this were perhaps more serious in Malaya, where the essence of success is familiarity with the jungle, than elsewhere.

During this period both the Fixed and Anti-Aircraft Defences of Singapore Fortress reached a high standard of training.

59. To summarize, the troops in North Malaya were, for reasons given, less well trained when war broke out than those in the South. Had we been allowed a few more months for training, there is reason to suppose that great progress would have been made. Throughout the Army there was a serious lack of experienced leaders, the effect of which was accentuated by the inexperience of the troops.

SECTION VIII. – THE INTELLIGENCE ORGANISATION.

60. In Malaya were a number of Intelligence Organizations all of which had an interest in varying degrees in the local Malayan scene and in the affairs of other countries in the Far East which had an influence on it.

In 1941 the Far East Combined Bureau (F.E.C.B.) was primarily responsible for the collection and collation of intelligence from the Far East outside Malaya. This bureau was located at the Naval Base and was under the control of the Commander-in-Chief China. It was staffed by officers of the three Services, the senior of whom was a naval officer. It held daily meetings, which were attended by a staff officer of Headquarters Malaya Command, and published weekly summaries. It also interested itself in Malayan matters and demanded the closest co-operation of the Malayan Civil organization.

61. At Headquarters Malaya Command there was an Intelligence Branch of the General Staff, which dealt with operational intelligence immediately affecting Malaya and British Borneo. Its establishment was small and much of its time was taken up with matters affecting the Press, censorship, distinguished visitors, police liaison, the map production programme etc. So heavy were these day to day requirements that they absorbed much time that would have been better spent on broader issues more directly affecting operations. In 1941 I recommended a considerable increase in the establishment of the Intelligence Branch but this had not taken place when war broke out.

62. For Intelligence within Malaya the Services were naturally dependent to a great extent on the Civil Police Intelligence Branch. The Inspector General of Police was Chairman of the Defence Security Committee, of which representatives of the Services and of the Civil Police were members. This Committee examined and made recommendations upon all matters affecting security in Malaya in whatever form.

63. The constitutional organization of Malaya necessitated multiple separate

Police Forces and Police Intelligence Services, but the Inspector General of Police Straits Settlements was also Civil Security Officer for the whole of Malaya. Shortly before the outbreak of war the Malayan Security Service was set up to co-ordinate the work of the various Police organizations in the Peninsula, to establish a central control and uniform legislation for aliens, to provide security control of the northern border and pan-Malayan direction from a central office in all police civil security affairs, which covered a very wide field. Malayan Security was in its infancy but showed promising results and did much to overcome the difficulties inherent in the excessively complicated lay-out of the Peninsula.

64. It must be recorded that Headquarters Malaya Command was not well supplied with information either as to the intentions of the Japanese or as to the efficiency of their Fighting Services. At a Senior Military Commanders' Conference held at my Headquarters as late as the end of October 1941 to survey the defence arrangements and to consider the Far East situation as it affected Malaya at that time, a representative of the F.E.C.B. painted a very indecisive picture of the Japanese intentions. Flights of Japanese aircraft over Malayan territory, orders to their nationals to leave Malaya and other indications, however, gave us sufficient warning of the coming attack. As regards the Japanese Fighting Services, it was known that their troops were intrepid fighters and that they were experts in Combined Operations, but their efficiency in night operations, their ability to overcome difficulties, and the efficiency of their Air Force had all been underestimated.

65. Information of Thailand's attitude was similarly lacking even up to within a few days of war. It is difficult to say whether the Thai officers who came on official visits to Malaya were sent with the intention of misleading us or not, but there can be no doubt that there was at least an advanced degree of co-operation between some of the most responsible authorities in Thailand and the Japanese, and that the preparations made in South Thailand by the Japanese for their landing there and for their attack on Malaya were made with the connivance, if not with the actual assistance, of those Thai authorities.

SECTION IX. – ADMINISTRATION.

66. The scale of reserve stocks to be held in Malaya was based on the "Period before Relief" which, as has been stated, stood in 1941 at 180 days. Initially these reserve stocks had been held entirely on Singapore Island, where special bomb-proof magazines had been constructed for the ammunition. With the increase in the garrison, however, and the extension of the defence to cover the whole of Malaya new problems were presented. These problems were akin to those connected with the defence of the United Kingdom in 1940 i.e. the base at Singapore, except that it was more heavily defended, was equally as exposed to attack as were the more forward areas elsewhere in Malaya. It was therefore necessary to distribute some of the reserve stocks throughout the country instead of

holding them all in one area. In this way transportation problems would during active operations be reduced and all areas would be to some extent self-contained. Operation MATADOR was another factor in the problem. To meet the requirements of this, should it be put into effect, it was necessary to hold certain reserves well forward. I therefore decided that the main reserve stocks should be held on Singapore Island, that reserves on a scale to be fixed in each case should be held in the forward areas and that the balance should be held in advanced depots in Central Malaya. In accordance with this policy it was decided:-

(a) That the full 180 days for the garrisons of Singapore and Penang should be kept in those islands.

(b) That 60 days for all the troops, except the Penang garrison, north of Singapore should be kept in Singapore.

(c) That on the west coast 60 days should be kept north of the Perak River, and on the east coast 90 days in Kelantan and 60 days in Kuantan.

(d) That the balance of the 180 days for the troops in 3 Indian Corps area should be kept in the Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh and Jerantut areas.

In the Singapore Island area a policy of dispersal was adopted. This was due partly to the congestion in the Town area where depot space was difficult to obtain and partly to the desire to avoid heavy loss from air attack. The administrative situation at the outset of hostilities was approximately as under:-

67. *Weapons.* – Early in 1941 the scale of armament had been dangerously low. In particular all Indian formations and units arrived in Malaya with a very low scale of weapons. After March, however a steady and increasing flow came in Malaya, but it was not until November that formations received the higher scale of weapons and were issued with 25-pounder guns for the artillery. Even then many units, i.e. Artillery, Signals, R.A.S.C., were below establishment in light automatics and rifles and there were never more than a few of these weapons in reserve. Requests for weapons from the Sarawak Rangers, the British North Borneo Volunteers and other units had to be refused either in whole or in part, while the lack of weapons also rendered the further expansion of local forces impossible.

68. *Ammunition.* – It had been difficult to keep pace with the increase in the “Period before Relief” and the great increase in the garrison. Nevertheless, when hostilities started, the situation in most categories was satisfactory though in some, such as those for Light Anti-Aircraft and 25-pounders, there were shortages.

69. *Petrol.* – With an almost unlimited supply in the Netherlands East Indies it had been possible to build up large reserve stocks. The Army stocks were held chiefly in large 60-gallon drums. The Air Force stocks were held dispersed as in the case of the Army, but the main Air Force petrol reserve was held in specially constructed underground tanks at

Woodlands on Singapore Island a little south of the Causeway.

The Asiatic Petroleum Company held large reserve stocks for civil use both on Singapore Island and at certain places on the west coast.

70. *Food.* – The food problem was complicated with the Australian ration differing from the British ration and with the Indian and other Asiatic troops having their own specialized rations. Nevertheless, approximately 180 days reserve stocks of all types had been accumulated before hostilities broke out. Cold storage accommodation for frozen meat existed at Singapore and Penang and a few vans were available for distribution to troops on the mainland.

In order to build up reserves the meat ration of British troops (though not of the Australian troops) was reduced in the autumn of 1941 and replaced by other commodities, the full meat ration not being so necessary in the climate of Malaya as it is elsewhere.

The food supply for the civil population of Malaya was a complicated problem. It had been studied for some years by a sub-committee of the Defence Committee, Malaya, and, on the outbreak of World War II, a Food Controller was appointed. In peace-time only the rice-growing areas of Malaya are self-supporting. To all other areas, and especially to Singapore Island, rice has to be imported. Malaya had to import annually from Thailand and Burma two tons of rice for every ton grown. The annual consumption was about 900,000 tons. In Singapore and other large cities stocks for both European and Asiatics were held, while in each State rice stocks were accumulated under State arrangements. In addition, a number of cattle on the hoof were brought from Bali in the Netherlands East Indies. It is probable that, when hostilities broke out, a minimum of 180 days reserves were held in the more important commodities, though in some of the others the reserves were on a smaller scale.

The question of a rationing scheme had been under consideration by the Civil Government for some years but by the summer of 1941 no result had been achieved. Committees appointed to examine the problem reported that the difficulties in producing a rationing scheme for the Asiatic population were so great that they could not put forward a satisfactory solution. As a result, when hostilities broke out only a modified and limited scheme existed. In the light of subsequent experience it appears that it should have been possible to produce a workable scheme, though it is true that during the campaign there was no shortage of foodstuffs for the civil population.

71. *Water.* – It is only necessary here to explain the water supply in the Singapore Island area. In other parts of Malaya there was little or no danger of a water shortage. Singapore Island was dependent upon two main sources of supply (a) reservoirs at Gunong Pulai in Johore (10 miles west of Johore Bahru) and (b) rainwater catchment areas and open-air reservoirs on Singapore Island i.e. the Seletar, Peirce and MacRitchie Reservoirs. From the former water was brought by above-ground pipe line to Singapore

Town where it filled two high-level covered reservoirs at Pearls Hill and Fort Canning. Branches from the Johore pipe-line supplied the Naval Base and Army and Air Force barracks in that area.

The Peirce Reservoir fed by gravity into the MacRitchie Reservoir whence water was pumped into the distribution mains serving the Singapore and Changi areas against the Johore water coming via the Pearls Hill and Fort Canning Reservoirs. The supply from the Seletar, Peirce and MacRitchie Reservoirs was ample to give a restricted supply indefinitely even if the population was increased by refugees, provided the control of these reservoirs remained in our hands and the machinery for distribution continued to operate.

72. *Medical.* – The hospital accommodation which had been prepared in peacetime was of course quite inadequate for the increased garrison. The A.I.F. had their own Base Hospital which was housed in one wing of the new civil hospital at Malacca. The Base Hospital for other Europeans of all three Services was at the Alexandra Military Hospital on Singapore Island. The Indian Base Hospital was in hutted accommodation also on Singapore Island. On the mainland forward hospitals were established – often in schools taken over for the purpose. There were also convalescent camps and “change of air” camps for both Europeans and Indians, and steps were being taken for the construction of a large “change of air” station at Cameron Highlands.

Large reserves of medical supplies were held in the Tanglin (Singapore) area.

With a view to increasing the hospital accommodation in the Singapore area in the event of active operations arrangements had been made with the owners of certain large houses for a portion of them to be used, if required, as overflow convalescent hospitals.

The Civil Medical Services were well developed. There were excellent modern hospitals and a plentiful supply of medical stores. The standard of efficiency of the medical officers was high and there were some exceptionally clever specialists.

73. *Red Cross.* – There were Red Cross organizations working for both British and Indian troops. The Australian Red Cross was responsible for all the British troops.

74. *N.A.A.F.I.* – The N.A.A.F.I. organisation, which had been established in prewar days, was expanded to supply the needs of the British troops. By special arrangements with the Government of India it also in 1941 undertook responsibility for the Indian troops. This branch of its activities was, however, never fully developed, partly owing to the time required to bring in the additional supplies and partly also to the difficulty in finding suitable men to act as branch managers.

75. *Accommodation.* – In Malaya, as in other Eastern countries, the problem of accommodation for troops differs widely from that in European countries. There are no farms, large empty houses, or village halls, while billeting on the civil population, mostly Asiatic, has obvious objections. In most places there are good schools and these were made available, when the emergency demanded, by the civil authorities. A limited amount

of tentage was also available. A great deal of new construction, however, became necessary. This took the form of wooden hutments erected by civil contractors. Water supplies and eventually electric light had to be laid on. Delays were caused by the shortage of materials, some of which had to be brought from overseas. The R.E. Works Services received valuable help from the Public Works Department in the preparation of these camps.

Sites for the camps were selected in accordance with tactical requirements. Some of those in the North had been erected before my arrival in rubber plantations with a view to providing them with cover from air observation. From a health point of view, however, these camps were definitely unsatisfactory and caused me much uneasiness. The thick rubber tree-tops prevented the sun and light from penetrating to the camps, which in consequence were damp and depressing. This had an adverse physical and mental effect on the troops, some of whom were in consequence not as fighting fit at the end of 1941 as they otherwise would have been. I attempted to improve conditions by thinning the tree-tops and also by organising “change of air” camps on Penang Island and elsewhere to which troops could be sent in turn for short periods.

76. *Recreation.* – Everything was done to provide recreational facilities, both outdoors and indoors, for the troops. In some places, however, the nature of the country did not lend itself to outdoor recreation grounds. Clubs for the troops were organized and special buildings erected in Singapore and other of the larger towns. In this connection many of the civilians were both hospitable and generous in their help.

77. *Married Families.* – In peace-time married families accompanied the troops to Malaya. After the outbreak of World War II, however, no married families of the Army or the Air Force were allowed to enter Malaya, but those already there remained there. The same policy applied to officers’ families. The families of officers coming to Malaya from China were sent to Australia, where living was very expensive as it was also in India. In consequence, a number of officers of both the British and Indian Service, especially those who had children in the United Kingdom, became financially embarrassed. On the other hand, women were urgently required in Malaya as V.A.D.s, car drivers, for work in offices, and for other war work. For these reasons I recommended to the War Office at the request of the C.-in-C. Far East that officers’ families should be allowed to enter Malaya at my discretion. This request was refused though they were allowed to visit Malaya for limited periods.

78. *Furlough.* – In peace-time the normal period of service in Malaya was limited to three years. By 1941 many officers and men had already exceeded that period, some by a considerable margin. In order to avoid, as far as possible, deterioration in efficiency I authorised, with the approval of the C.-in-C. Far East, leave ex-Malaya for all ranks for limited periods and provided that no more than a fixed proportion of each unit was absent at any given time. Unfortunately, owing to expense and difficulties of travel, only a few

were able to avail themselves of this privilege.

79 Administrative Inspection. – In September, 1941, I made an administrative tour lasting eight days of the principal depots, hospitals and other installations in Malaya. Questions of policy were settled and contacts established with the civil authorities. I was satisfied that, as far as lay within our power, everything possible was being done to ensure the maintenance of the essential administrative services should hostilities break out.

SECTION X. – CIVIL DEFENCE.

The Civil Population.

80. European. – *The European Civilians in Malaya fell into two main categories, the Officials and the Unofficials. Most of them were men of energy and ability but there were some who, after many prosperous years in Malaya, especially during and after World War I, had lapsed into an easier routine. To this the climate partly contributed. This class was gradually disappearing, their place at the beginning of World War II being taken by a splendid type of young man who came out to join the Civil Service or to take up other appointments in civil life.*

The picture, so often portrayed, of the “whisky-swilling planter” was a gross misrepresentation of the conditions under which Europeans in Malaya lived at the time of World War II. That the consumption of alcoholic liquor was fairly high is not to be denied, any more than it can be denied in other tropical countries, but there was little drunkenness and the vast majority of Europeans lived very normal lives. The standard of living, however, as a result of the natural wealth of the country and of the climatic conditions, was exceptionally high – possibly too high for the maintenance of a virile European population.

I felt that in some quarters long years of freedom from strife had bred a feeling of security. This frame of mind was voiced in one of the local newspapers which wrote, when the decision to defend Penang was first announced: “There are not a few who view with concern the disturbance of the restful and placid atmosphere of Penang which will result from the military invasion.” Even in 1941 there were those who found it difficult to believe that an attack on Malaya was within the bounds of practical politics. It should be stated, however, that most of the Unofficial Europeans were engaged, directly or indirectly, in the rubber and tin industries which, by order of the Home Government, were working at maximum pressure. Bearing this fact in mind, the European community of Malaya, taken as a whole, shouldered its responsibilities as war approached in the same loyal spirit as was evident elsewhere in the Commonwealth.

81. Asiatic. – The bulk of the Asiatic population consisted of Malays and Chinese

in approximately equal proportions. In general, the Chinese were to be found in the towns and larger villages while the Malays inhabited the country districts and the sea-boards. The reason for this was that the Chinese, being more industrious by nature and more commercially minded, had gained control of a great deal of the business of the country while the Malays, a more easy-going and less ambitious race, were content to live on the natural products of the soil.

82. The Chinese themselves were of two categories – those who were and those who were not British subjects. For practical purposes the political sympathies of the Chinese population could be divided into four groups:-

(a) The pro-Kuomintang. This was probably the most powerful group.

(b) The pro-Wang Ching Wei, i.e., those who were in sympathy with Japanese aims. A small and not dangerous group.

(c) The pro-Communists, predominantly Chinese of the working classes. The most active and vocal group.

(d) The pro-British and Independents, the former being genuinely loyal adherents of the British Empire, and the latter those who wished to be left alone in the pursuit of fortune and their own self-interest. This group formed the large majority but unfortunately was only too prone to dragooning by (a) and (c) above.

The temporary reconciliation between the Kuomintang and the China Communist Party following the invasion of Russia by Germany resulted in the formation in Malaya of a “United Front” which, on the outbreak of war with Japan, absorbed all Chinese with the exception of Group (b).

As will be readily understood from the above summary, the Chinese population taken as a whole lacked homogeneity and centralized leadership.

83. The Malays were divided into four classes, i.e. the Ruling class of Malay Nobles, the “Intelligentsia”, the artisan and clerical class, and the peasant.

The Ruling Classes naturally felt that there should be an ever-widening control by the Sultans. Among the “Intelligentsia” were signs of a movement towards Nationalism. The other two classes were not in the broad sense politically minded.

The remainder of the Asiatic populations, totalling less than 20 per cent. of the whole, consisted of Indians, Eurasians, Japanese, etc.

84. The Indians, the great majority of whom were Hindu by religion with an active proportion of Sikhs, were divided politically into-

(a) Indian Nationalists who, through the Central Indian Association of Malaya, were bidding for control of the Indian population of the country on a strongly Nationalist basis.

(b) The general mass of Indians, normally a peaceful but ignorant section of the

population which was mainly interested in the quiet pursuit of its livelihood but was becoming an easy prey to the agitator.

(c) Indians who were whole-heartedly British in their loyalty, found largely in the better type of Indian trader and in the clerical classes and professions.

(d) The Sikh Community, strongly organized within itself and very susceptible to the anti-British propaganda emanating from overseas.

The Eurasians were to be found mainly in the Colony and particularly in Singapore. The community as a whole was loyal and presented no political problem. It was not politically active.

85. There were a number of Japanese in Malaya and, as all foreigners were treated alike, no special restrictions had up to 1941 been imposed on their activities. They were located mainly-

(a) In Singapore City, where there were large business houses, stores, hairdressing and photographic establishments, etc.

(b) In Johore, where they owned rubber and other estates and iron ore mines.

(c) In Trengganu and Kelantan where they owned large iron ore mines.

(d) In Penang where they carried on similar activities to those in Singapore.

Although access to the defence areas was forbidden to the Public and restrictions were imposed on photography and similar activities, it was quite impossible to maintain secrecy as regards the location and the general nature of the defences being constructed. Moreover, with such a cosmopolitan population, a Foreign Power could have little difficulty in obtaining most of the information it might require, topographical or otherwise, about Malaya.

86. To sum up, the majority of the Asiatic population were enjoying the benefits which British occupation had brought to Malaya. They had so long been immune from danger that, even when that danger threatened, they found difficulty in appreciating its reality and in bringing themselves to believe that the even tenor of their lives might in fact be disturbed.

87. As will be appreciated from this brief review of the civil population of Malaya, the sense of citizenship was not strong nor, when it came to the test, was the feeling that this was a war for home and country. Perhaps more might have been done by the Government in pre-war days to develop a sense of responsibility for service to the State in return for the benefits received from membership of the British Empire.

88. *Contribution to Imperial Defence.* – The Colony of the Straits Settlements was one of those which made an annual contribution to Imperial Defence. In addition to this, the Straits Settlements, the Federated Malay States and the Unfederated States of Johore,

Kedah and Kelantan each maintained Local Volunteer Forces. The Federated Malay States also maintained the Malay Regiment and the State of Johore maintained the Johore Military Forces. There were also Naval and Air Volunteer Forces. Among the gifts to Imperial Defence were the battleship “Malaya” given by the Federated Malay States, the 15 in. Johore Battery given by the Sultan of Johore and some armed coastal patrol craft given by the Straits Settlements.

89. *Malaya’s War Role.* – Prior to the outbreak of war with Japan Malaya had been given a charter for its participation in World War II. It was to produce the greatest possible quantities of rubber and tin for the use of the Allies. This was a factor which had considerable influence on its preparations for war.

The Governor and High Commissioner had wide powers to enact legislation by orders in Council.

90. *Manpower.* – The subject of the proper utilization of the available man-power had been carefully examined in peace-time by a sub-committee of the Defence Committee Malaya. It was clear that in time of war as in peace the Government of the country must be carried on and that many of the business concerns must continue to operate. Special war-time officials would also be required. There was no leisured or retired class in Malaya which could be called upon for war-time expansion.

Soon after the outbreak of World War II the Governor and High Commissioner, under the powers conferred upon him, ordered that all European males resident in Malaya should between certain ages be liable for service in one of the local volunteer corps. At Singapore a Controller of Man-Power was appointed in place of the Man-Power Sub-Committee and in each Colony and State Man-Power Boards, on which both civil and military interests were represented, were set up to consider and give decisions on claims for exemption. Many exemptions had to be granted, even after allowing for the fact that in many cases Government and business could be carried on temporarily with reduced staffs.

No liability to military service was imposed upon the Asiatic population. Many of the Asiatics were of a type unsuitable for training as soldiers and the difficulties of nationality of registration and of selection would have been great. Moreover, as already stated, there were no rifles or other arms available with which to equip Asiatic units. There was, however, great difficulty in filling the Chinese sub-units in the existing Volunteer organization. This was in no way due to lack of available material or to lack of effort on the part of the military authorities. It was due chiefly to the lack of unity and of forceful leadership which existed among the Chinese population.

Early in 1941 half the Volunteers were for the first time called out for a period of two months continuous training. It was unfortunate that in April-May labour troubles, involving the calling out of troops, developed on some of the estates in the Selangor and Negri Sembilan area and at the Batu Arang coal mines. This was imputed in some quarters

to the absence of European officials at the training camps. At the instance of Government the calling out of the remainder of the Volunteers was postponed to a later date. It never in fact took place.

In Singapore and other large cities Local Defence Corps were formed. They were trained in the use of small arms, but, their role was primarily to assist the Civil Police. They were not incorporated in the military organization but came directly under the Civil Government.

91. *Labour.* – The question of the conscription of labour in time of war had been considered and in accordance with the advice of those best acquainted with labour conditions in Malaya, rejected as unworkable. The question of the control of labour in time of war had, however, been the subject of frequent discussions and tentative schemes had been worked out.

Although the grave labour problems which developed after the outbreak of hostilities had admittedly not been fully foreseen, some of the trouble could in my opinion have been avoided had the problems of war-time control of civil labour been tackled more energetically in time of peace.

The Singapore Harbour Board and the Municipality, independent bodies operating in co-operation with the Government and carrying out its policy, had their own labour forces.

92. *Passive Air Defence.* – The steps taken by the Civil Government as regards reserve stocks of essential commodities, medical services etc. have already been described in [Section IX](#). The general organization of Passive Air Defence was based on the Home organization. Warning sirens were installed at all the main centres and the P.A.D. organizations included First Aid and Salvage detachments, Medical Auxiliary Services, Fire Services etc. As a rule the detachments were led by Europeans, the members being composed of both Europeans and Asiatics.

A few blast walls to important buildings were built. Only very few air raid shelters were constructed for the civil population. As regards Singapore itself this was partly due to the difficulty of constructing underground shelters, and partly due to the advice of the civil medical authorities, who were of the opinion that to obstruct the circulation of air by building surface shelters in the streets might well lead to epidemics. A number of slit trenches had been dug but these soon became waterlogged and bred mosquitoes.

In Singapore the general policy was to rely rather on dispersal to camps constructed outside the town area. Apart from members of the Fighting Services gas masks were provided only for those persons, such as members of salvage squads, whose duties might compel them to work in gassed areas. This decision was made by the War Committee after consultation with gas experts, on the grounds that the danger from gas bombing was not great in the climatic conditions of Malaya.

Generally speaking, it may be said that the arrangements for Passive Air Defence were in 1941 on too small a scale and inadequate to deal with anything but sporadic air raids. Realising this, arrangements were made in October and November of that year for a series of lectures to be given at the main centres of Malaya by Brigadier I. Simson, the Chief Engineer Malaya Command, who had recently had experience of Passive Air Defence both in London and in Scotland. These lectures were attended by both military and civil officials, but there was little time before war broke out for the instruction given in them to be put into effect.

93. *Evacuations.* – Careful plans were worked out jointly by the military and civil authorities for the evacuation, in case of need, of the civil population from the South Coast of Singapore Island and from other exposed areas. Some areas in East Johore were actually cleared of civilians before war broke out.

94. *Hospitality.* – The civil population, following the example set by the Governor and High Commissioner, were generous in their hospitality to the troops. Clubs were built, equipped and operated by civilians for their benefit. Many civilians invited troops to their houses and entertained them in other ways. A debt of gratitude specially is due to the women of Malaya, many of whom worked untiringly in that enervating climate in the interests of the troops.

95. *General.* – Nevertheless, an atmosphere of unreality hung over Malaya. In the restaurants, clubs and places of entertainment peace-time conditions prevailed. There was no restriction on the consumption of foodstuffs. A measure to restrict the hours during which intoxicating liquor could be sold was not passed into law after long delays until November, 1941. Long immunity from war had made it difficult to face realities.

SECTION XI. – RELATIONS WITH THE SERVICES AND THE CIVIL GOVERNMENT.

96. Throughout the summer and autumn of 1941 the co-operation between the Services was good, commanders and staffs working together on friendly and intimate terms. This was true both in the higher and the lower formations.

Relations with the Civil Government also showed a marked improvement. Generally speaking, officials throughout the country co-operated willingly with the military commanders.

I feel bound to record, however, that in my experience of Malaya there was a lack of the team spirit between the Service Departments on the one side and the Civil Government on the other in tackling problems of common interest. The vital importance of attaining the common object, i.e., the security of Malaya, was at times overshadowed by local interests, aggravated by the insistence of the Home Government on the maximum

production of tin and rubber. The task of balancing the requirements of a country of vital strategical importance to the Empire with those of a wealthy and prosperous commercial community was a difficult one requiring great tact and patience. Clashes of interests naturally occurred followed very often by long delays due in part to the complicated form of government. Other delays, as has so often happened before in our history, resulted from discussions as to the relative financial responsibility of the Home and Malayan Governments on matters of defence. There was also a difficulty in getting full and accurate information as to civil defence measures.

These difficulties and delays could to some extent have been overcome if there had been more regular meetings of the Defence Committee Malaya, and later of the War Committee. Both the Services and the Civil Government were represented on these committees and problems affecting the defence, both military and civil, could have been discussed frankly and more expeditiously than by ordinary routine methods. Similarly, reports on the work of the various sub-committees and controllers could have been made and the information could thus have been disseminated to all concerned.

SECTION XII. – INFORMATION, PRESS AND CENSORSHIP.

97. *Information.* – At Singapore were established the Ministry of Information Far East and the Malayan Information Bureau. It was through these channels, among other duties, that official propaganda was disseminated.

98. *Press and Censorship.* – The Local Press in Malaya was divided into two categories, i.e. the English Press and the vernacular Press in which each Asiatic community had its own paper or papers. In addition there were the war correspondents whose numbers increased rapidly as the situation worsened. For liaison between the Press and the Services a Public Relations Officer was appointed. The holder of this appointment was a retired naval officer who came directly under the Commander-in-Chief China until the beginning of December, 1941, and then under the Commander-in-Chief Far East. Under him were officers representative of the three Services, who acted as conducting officers, advisers to the censors, etc.

In the same building as the Public Relations Officer was the Chief Censor with his staff of subordinates, i.e. press censors, cable censors, mail censors, etc.

With permission of the C.-in-C. Far East I agreed to receive all Press correspondents for interviews at stated intervals. Similar interviews were given by other commanders. We considered that it would be better to give the Press some official data to work on rather than that they should publish statements and views, often harmful, based on false information or misunderstandings. Towards the end of 1941 I had regretfully to discontinue these interviews on instructions of the C.-in-C. Far East who had, I

understand, received instructions from Home to this effect.

Visits to troops in all parts of Malaya were arranged, when desired, for the war correspondents.

In the summer of 1941 there was a tendency in certain sections of the Press to give the Overseas troops very much more publicity than was given to the British Troops. This was damaging to good “esprit de Corps” and I had occasion to include the matter in the agenda for one of my Press conferences. I made it clear that my policy was to treat all troops alike and asked that the Press should do the same. This they agreed to do.

SECTION XIII. – THE POLITICAL SITUATION.

99. During 1941 the tension with Japan increased and there were various signs that she was preparing for hostilities in the Western Pacific. Towards the end of July she occupied the Southern part of Indo-China, where she increased her concentrations. She also increased her political activities in Thailand. The attitude of the Thais was uncertain. On two occasions Thai military officers paid official visits to Singapore, where they protested their friendship for Britain. One of them was actually there when war broke out. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the Japanese were permitted to make preparations in advance for their occupation of South Thailand, for our officers, carrying out reconnaissances in that area, frequently met Japanese there and one of them, though too late, found large petrol dumps on the Patani aerodrome which had been made ready for the occupation. In the autumn many Japanese nationals received orders from their Government to leave Malaya, and Japanese reconnaissance aircraft flew over Malaya and Sarawak. As a result of these activities varying degrees of readiness were from time to time ordered by the C.-in-C. Far East. On the 1st Dec., 1941, the 2nd Degree of Readiness was ordered and a State of Emergency was declared. On the same date the Volunteer Forces were mobilized.

SECTION XIV. – THE NAVAL SITUATION.

100. On the outbreak of World War II the greater part of the China Fleet had of necessity to be withdrawn for operations elsewhere. The Flag of the Commander-in-Chief, China Station, was transferred from Hong Kong to Singapore at the end of June, 1940. He brought with him, however, only a few light cruisers and destroyers as additions to the very inadequate fleet of local naval craft which existed there. We no longer had control over sea communications in the Far East.

On the evacuation of Shanghai in August, 1940, three river gunboats from the Yangtze were transferred to Singapore, while a few days before the outbreak of war with Japan the “Prince of Wales” and “Repulse” with some attendant destroyers arrived. There

were, however, still no aircraft carriers, heavy cruisers or submarines, so that there was nothing in the nature of a balanced fleet. With the arrival of the “Prince of Wales” and the “Repulse” on 2nd December, Admiral Sir Tom Phillips as Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, took over command of all Fleet operations, leaving local Naval defence in the hands of Vice-Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton, then Commander in Chief, China. The Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, immediately left Singapore by flying-boat for Manila to confer with the American Naval Commander-in-Chief, Asiatic Fleet, with whom contact had been previously established by Commander-in-Chief, China, and did not return to Singapore till 7th December. On the outbreak of hostilities with Japan, the appointment of Commander-in-Chief, China Station, lapsed.

Naval Headquarters remained at the Naval Base.

By December, 1941, the seaward approaches to the Naval Base and to Keppel Harbour were strongly defended by mine-fields, booms, submarine nets, detector loops, etc.

The following ships were at Singapore on the 8th December, 1941:-

Battleship	1
Battle Cruiser	1
“D” Class Cruisers	3
Destroyers (including 2 “S” Class)	7
Gunboats	3
Auxiliary Anti-Submarine Vessels	13
Minesweeping Vessels	4
Auxiliary Minesweepers	12 (and 5 at Penang).
Auxiliary Patrol Vessels	5
Motor Launches	11
Boom defence, tugs and depot ships	6

SECTION XV. – THE AIR SITUATION.

101. The Air Officer Commanding Far East, Air Vice-Marshal Pulford, on taking over command at Singapore on the 26th April, 1941, was faced with tremendous difficulties.

The aircraft at his disposal were still very deficient in numbers and few of them were of modern types.

102. The bulk of the fighters were the American built Brewster Buffalos, comparatively slow machines with poor manoeuvrability. The device by which the .5 in. machine guns with which they were equipped fired through the propeller was faulty and caused a lot of trouble. A large number of the machines were also temporarily unserviceable when war started. There was also a squadron of Blenheim night-fighters. None of these machines could be classified as modern fighters. For these fighters only a limited number of trained pilots were sent from the United Kingdom. The remainder had to be found from pilots, mostly New Zealanders, who arrived in Malaya with a minimum of flying training and no fighter training, or by transferring pilots from other types of aircraft.

103. The bombers consisted of two squadrons of Hudson General Reconnaissance machines and two squadrons of Blenheims. Some of these squadrons were below strength. There were no heavy bombers in Malaya.

104. There were two squadrons of Torpedo bombers of the Vildebeeste type. These machines were obsolete. They had a very limited range, and a speed of less than 100 miles per hour.

105. There was one Flying-boat squadron of Catalina machines, which had also become deficient in numbers owing to casualties and lack of reserves.

106. There were no special Army Co-operation aircraft in Malaya. I arranged, however, with the A.O.C. Far East for some of the fighters to be made available for training in Army co-operation work. It was only possible, in the short time available and owing to lack of resources, for the most elementary training to be carried out.

There were no transport or dive-bomber aircraft in Malaya.

107. There was a great shortage of spare parts, reserve aircraft, and reserve pilots. For this reason and in order to conserve resources flying was from May, 1941, onwards greatly restricted. In order to assist the Air Force, Army Officers, when travelling about by air, usually used light machines belonging to the Civil Transport Line or to the Volunteer Air Force.

The Air Force in Malaya was drained of trained personnel to supply shortages in the Middle East. Trained personnel were also withdrawn from the Australian squadrons to act as instructors in Australia.

The restrictions on flying and the shortage of trained personnel militated greatly against efficiency.

108. When war broke out with Japan, the total of operationally serviceable I.E. aircraft in Malaya was as under:-

Hudson General Reconnaissance land-based	15
Blenheim I Bombers	17 including 8 from Burma
Blenheim IV Bombers	17 including 8 from Burma
Vildebeeste Torpedo-Bombers	27
Buffalo Fighters	43
Blenheim I Night Fighters	10
Swordfish (for co-operation with Fixed Defences)	4
Shark (for target-towing, recce, and bombing)	5
Catalinas	3 (of which 1 in Indian Ocean).
<hr/>	
Total	141

This contrasted with the 566 1st Line aircraft which had been asked for.

In addition to the above, there were a few Light Aircraft (Moths etc.) manned by the Volunteer Air Force.

109. This was the Air Force with which we started the war. There was in fact no really effective Air Striking Force in Malaya and the fighters were incapable of giving effective support to such bombers as there were or of taking their proper place in the defence.

The A.O.C. was fully alive to the weakness of the force at his disposal. He frequently discussed this subject with me and I know that he repeatedly represented the situation to higher authority.

110. In order to facilitate co-operation between the Army and the Air Force in North Malaya should hostilities break out, an air organization known as Norgroup was prepared and a commander appointed. The functions of the commander were:-

- (a) to command such air forces as Air Headquarters might allot to him from time to time;
- (b) to act as air adviser to G.O.C. 3 Indian Corps and to command such air forces as might be placed under the Corps Commander.

SECTION XVI. – SUMMARY OF THE SITUATION ON THE OUTBREAK OF WAR WITH JAPAN.

111. When war broke out with Japan on the 18th December, 1941, there were some glaring weaknesses in the arrangements for the defence of Malaya.

112. The Navy no longer controlled the sea approaches to Malaya and there was a great shortage of craft suitable for coastal defence.

113. The Air Force, in place of a force of 566 1st Line Aircraft asked for by the A.O.C. Far East or of 336 approved by the Chiefs of Staff, had a force of only 141 operationally serviceable aircraft, very few of which were of the most modern types and some of which were even obsolete. There were no modern torpedo-bombers and no dive-bombers, the two types required for offensive action against an approaching sea-borne expedition, and no transport aircraft, the type essentially required for the maintenance of forward troops in jungle warfare. In addition, there were for reasons already stated comparatively few trained pilots and there was a great shortage of spare parts.

114. The Army dispositions are most easily explained by comparing Malaya again to England and Wales (see [Section I](#)). It may further be assumed that an enemy with a superior fleet is in occupation of Norway and that Scotland is a neutral State, whose territory may not be entered unless the enemy is advancing with the obvious intention of landing in the South of Scotland or has violated any part of that country.

In Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire, then, there is one Division watching the main road and railway approaches from Scotland. On the east coast there is a strong brigade group in Northumberland and a weak brigade group at Hull. The Headquarters of this northern area are at Crewe. In the South of England there is one Division consisting of two brigade groups only. One of these is on the east coast about the mouth of the Thames, while the other is about the Oxford area. The Isle of Wight, where the Army Headquarters is situated, is strongly defended on the seaward side and has reasonably strong anti-aircraft defences.

The Command Reserve, which consists of one brigade group only, is situated partly on the Isle of Wight and partly in the area of the Cotswolds where it has recently been carrying out training.

The object of the defence is to protect the Naval Base of Portsmouth which, for purposes of the comparison, it must be assumed is situated on the north coast of the Isle of Wight.

115. The dispersion of the land forces and the lack of reserves needs no stressing. The dispositions on the mainland had been designed primarily to afford protection to the aerodromes, most of which had been sited without proper regard to their security. The situation was aggravated by the fact that there was no adequate Air Force to operate from them. It is true that, even without this commitment, it would have been necessary, in order to protect the Naval Base, to hold at least most of Malaya but, had it not been for the aerodromes, better and more concentrated dispositions could have been adopted.

116. As soon as the threat to Malaya developed in the summer of 1940 everything possible was done, both at Home and in Malaya, to strengthen the land defences. The fact that more could not be done was no doubt due to our Imperial commitments elsewhere. The time proved too short to put a country almost the size of England and Wales, in which there was no surplus labour, into a satisfactory state of defence. The financial control also had a restrictive effect.

117. As regards the Army itself, the troops generally were inexperienced and far too large a proportion of them were only partially trained. There was a shortage of experienced leaders, especially in the Indian and Australian units.

Instead of the 48 infantry battalions and supporting arms (excluding the Volunteer Forces and troops required for aerodrome defence) which had been asked for, we had only 32 infantry battalions and supporting arms. There were no tanks which, as the operations developed, proved a very serious handicap.

118. Nevertheless, there was throughout the Fighting Services, in spite of these weaknesses, a firm resolve to do our best, with the limited means at our disposal, to ensure the security of the great Naval Base. The Japanese did not gain either strategical or tactical surprise. Our forces were deployed and ready for the attack.

119. As regards Civil Defence, much had been done but, viewed as a whole, the preparations were on too small a scale. There were many who responded nobly as soon as the call came but it cannot be said that the people of Malaya were fully prepared for the part they were to play in a total war.

PART II.

THE OPERATIONS ON THE MAINLAND OF MALAYA.

SECTION XVII. – THE OPENING OF HOSTILITIES 6-8TH DECEMBER, 1941

120. At about 1130 hrs. on the 6th December, 1941, the morning air reconnaissance, which was watching the approaches to the Gulf of Thailand, reported having sighted Japanese convoys consisting of warships and transports approximately 150 miles S.E. of Pt. Camo (South Indo-China) steaming westward. Information that there were two separate convoys was received at 1400 hrs. The position of these convoys was about 80 miles E.S.E. of Pul Obi. At that time I was at Kuala Lumpur, whither I had gone by civil air line that morning to confer with the Commander 3 Indian Corps. I received the information by telephone at about 1500 hours. At 1515 hrs. I ordered the Commander 3 Indian Corps to assume the First Degree of Readiness, and, anticipating that Operation MATADOR might be ordered, to instruct the Commander 11 Indian Division to be ready to move at short notice.

121. On returning to my Headquarters at Singapore at 1830 hrs. that evening I was informed that the C.-in-C. Far East appreciated that the Japanese convoys had probably turned North West with a view to demonstrating against and bringing pressure to bear on Thailand; that in consequence he had decided not as yet to order Operation MATADOR, also that one convoy consisted of twenty-two 10,000 ton ships escorted by one battleship, five cruisers and seven destroyers, and the other of twenty-one ships escorted by two cruisers and ten destroyers. Two Hudson reconnaissance aircraft had been sent out at 1600 hrs. to shadow the convoys until relieved by a Catalina flying boat which would continue the shadowing throughout the night. These Hudsons failed to make contact owing to bad weather, which prohibited relief Hudsons being sent.

122. The Combined Army and Air Force Operational Headquarters had already been opened at Sime Road. The Administrative Branch of Headquarters Malaya Command and the Headquarters of the Services remained at Fort Canning, partly because their accommodation at Sime Road was not complete and partly because it was desirable for them to remain in close contact with Government Departments.

During the evening I called on the Governor and the C.-in-C. Far East, to whom I reported that the First Degree of Readiness had been assumed by all troops under my command.

123. The first Catalina sent out failed to make contact during the night 6-7th December. A second was despatched early on the 7th December and instructed that, if no contact was established, a search was to be made from 10 miles off the west coast of Indo-China as G.H.Q. anticipated that the convoys might be concentrating in the Koh Kong area where there was a suitable anchorage. No reports were received from this Catalina and, from information subsequently received, it would appear that this boat was shot down by the Japanese. Three Hudson aircraft sent out on the same morning similarly failed to make contact, owing to bad weather conditions which forced two of them to abandon the search. Further Hudson reconnaissances were sent but only single merchant vessels were sighted in the Gulf of Siam at 1345 hours and 1545 hours respectively. These Hudsons were then sent on a diverging search off the Siamese Coast, and at 1750 hours one merchant vessel and one cruiser were sighted steaming 340°. The cruiser opened fire on the reconnaissance aircraft. At 1848 hours under conditions of very bad visibility, four Japanese vessels, perhaps destroyers, were seen off Singora steaming south.

It will thus be seen that for a period of nearly 30 hours after the first sighting the air reconnaissance sent out had failed to make contact with the main invasion forces, owing to bad weather.

If the report of the Catalina flying boat having been shot down by Japanese aircraft on the morning of 7th December, 1941, is correct, then this was the first act of war in the Malaya area between Japan and the British Empire. If not, then the first act was the firing on the Hudson reconnaissance aircraft by a Japanese ship on the evening of the 7th December.

124. An appreciation of the situation showed that the enemy convoy, if it was bound for Singora, could reach there about midnight 7-8th December, whereas if MATADOR was put into operation, it was unlikely that our leading troops, even if they met with no opposition or obstacles on the way, would arrive there before about 0200 hrs. 8th December. An encounter battle with our small force and lack of reserves would have been very risky, especially as the enemy was expected to include tanks in his force. There was also the complication of part of our force having, owing to the lack of M.T., to move forward by rail and subsequently be linked up with its transport in the forward area. For these reasons I informed the C.-in-C. Far East at a Conference held at Sime Road that I considered Operation MATADOR in the existing circumstances to be unsound. Subsequently at a Conference held at the Naval Base at about 2230 hrs. that night, at which both the C.-in-C. Far East and the C.-in-C. Eastern Fleet (who had just returned from Manila) were present, it was decided not to order MATADOR that night. At 2320 hrs. the Commander 3 Indian Corps was informed of this decision and was instructed to be

ready to put MATADOR into effect at dawn on the 8th December if ordered to do so.

125. On the Kelantan front the probable landing beaches had been heavily wired with three belts of double apron or triple dannert wire and concrete pill-boxes had been built. In addition, large numbers of anti-personnel and anti-tank mines had been laid; but the two forward Battalions had to watch a front of over 30 miles and the average company front was over 8,000 yds.

At about 2345 hrs. on the 7th December the Beach Defence troops on Badang and Sabak beaches, the point of junction of which at the Kuala Pa'amat was about one and a half miles N.E of the Kota Bharu aerodrome, reported ships anchoring off the coast. Shortly afterwards our beach defence artillery opened fire and the enemy ships started shelling the beaches. At about 0025 hrs. on the 8th December the leading Japanese troops landed at the junction of the Badang and Sabak beaches and by 0100 hrs. after heavy fighting had succeeded in capturing the adjacent pill-boxes manned by troops of the 3/17 Dogras. The garrisons of the latter inflicted very heavy casualties on the enemy before being themselves wiped out almost to a man. Hudson aircraft between midnight and dawn pressed home numerous attacks in the face of heavy A.A. fire from warships and transports. One of the transports which is believed to have contained tanks and artillery was set on fire, either by air attack or gunfire, or perhaps both, and prevented from discharging its cargo. As soon as the first landing took place the 2/12 Frontier Force Regt. (less one coy. West of the Kelantan River) and 73 Field Battery were ordered up from Chon-Dong with orders to prevent any penetration towards the aerodrome with a view to a subsequent counter-attack.

In the meantime I had informed C.-in-C. Far East and the Governor that hostilities had broken out.

126. At about 0430 hrs. 8th December a Japanese air formation raided Singapore area. It had presumably come from French Indo-China, a distance of about 700 miles. The air raid alarm was sounded but Singapore was not completely blacked out when the aircraft arrived. Bombs were dropped on the Seletar and Tengah aerodromes and in the City area, but damage was slight. This was the first indication the citizens of Singapore had that war had broken out in the Far East.

127. The A.O.C. Far East, in consultation with myself, decided that the task of the Air Striking Force was to co-operate with the Army in repelling the attack on Kelantan. Accordingly the Squadrons based on the Kedah, Kuantan and Tengah aerodromes were ordered to attack the enemy ships lying off Kota Bharu at dawn. Upon arrival at Kota Bharu these aircraft were unable to find the Japanese transports, which had by then withdrawn behind the Perintian Islands some 15 miles off the Kelantan Coast. One squadron went on to Parana, where other Japanese transports were seen and attacked, but owing to fighter opposition it is doubtful if results were obtained. From now on the absence of modern escorting fighters was keenly felt. On return to the aerodromes in

Kedah some of our aircraft were attacked by Japanese bombers and fighters while re-fuelling and considerable losses were sustained. The aerodromes at Alor Star, Sungei Patani, Butterworth, Penang, Kota Bharu, Gong Kedah and Machang were all attacked on this day. The performance of the Japanese aircraft of all types and the accuracy of their high level bombing had come as an unpleasant surprise. Our own air force had already been seriously weakened.

128. At 0820 hrs. 8th December G.H.Q. Far East reported that Operation MATADOR had been approved by the Chiefs of Staff if the Japanese attacked Kota Bharu but G.H.Q. added "Do not act". Air reconnaissance sent to Singora and Patani at dawn reported that enemy forces had landed at those places, that there were a number of ships lying off the coast and that the Singora aerodrome was in use. It was clearly too late now to put Operation MATADOR into effect, so I authorised the Commander 3 Indian Corps to start harassing activities and to lay demolition charges on the roads and railways.

At 1000 hrs. the Straits Settlements Legislative Council, in accordance with previous arrangements, met at Singapore. I took the opportunity to report the situation to it.

At about 1100 hrs. 8th December, sanction to enter Thailand then having been obtained from the C.-in-C. Far East, orders were issued to the Commander 3 Indian Corps to occupy the defensive positions on both the Singora and Kroh – Patani roads, and to send a mobile covering force across the frontier towards Singora to make contact with the enemy and to harass and delay him.

129. This change from an anticipated offensive, for which the 11 Indian Division had been energetically preparing for some weeks, to the defensive had undoubtedly had a considerable psychological effect on the troops. It was aggravated by the fact that on the 7th December certain preparatory moves had been carried out within the division in preparation for MATADOR, including the moves of two battalions of the 15 Indian Infantry Brigade to Anak Bukit Station to entrain. The Division was thus caught to some extent on the wrong foot for the defensive operations which were to follow. It had, however, always been realised that the chances of being able to put Operation MATADOR into effect were not great in view of the political restrictions and Commanders had been instructed to prepare for either alternative. Possibly the defensive preparations had been to some extent sacrificed in favour of the offensive.

130. It was originally intended that the column operating on the Kroh – Patani road, known as Krohcol and commanded by Lt.-Colonel Moorhead, should consist of the 3/16 Punjab Regt., the 5/14 Punjab Regt. From Penang, one coy. sappers and miners, one field ambulance and a light battery of the F.M.S.V.F. The F.M.S.V.F. battery had, however, been unable to mobilise in time, and was replaced later by the 10 Mountain Battery from the North Kedah front. The 5/14 Punjab Regt. was moved up to Kroh on the 8th December leaving one company in Penang but had not arrived when operations started.

Responsibility for operations on the Kroh front was on 8th December delegated by Commander 3 Indian Corps to Commander 11 Indian Division.

At 1330 hrs. on the 8th December the Commander Krohcol received orders to occupy the Ledge position some 35-40 miles beyond the frontier. It was hoped that the Thais would at worst be passively neutral. These hopes were speedily disillusioned. As the vanguard crossed the frontier at 1500 hrs. they were immediately engaged by a light automatic post manned by Thais. Throughout the afternoon the advance was disputed by snipers assisted by road blocks, the enemy fighting skilfully. By nightfall our troops had cleared only 3 miles of the road and then they halted for the night. The enemy were all Thais, some of whom were armed with Japanese rifles.

131. On the North Kedah front, a mechanised column consisting of two companies and the carriers of the 1/8 Punjab Regt. with some anti-tank guns and engineers attached, crossed the frontier at 1730 hrs. 8th December and moved towards Singora to harass and delay the enemy. Concurrently an armoured train, with a detachment of 2/16 Punjab Regt. and some engineers, advanced into Thailand from Padang Besar in Perlis. The Singora column reached Ban Sadao, 10 miles North of the frontier at dusk, where it halted and took up a position north of the village. Here, at about 2130 hrs. it made contact with a Japanese mechanised column, headed by tanks and moving in close formation with full headlights. The two leading tanks were knocked out by the anti-tank guns, but the Japanese infantry quickly debussed and started an enveloping movement. Our column was then withdrawn through the outpost position at Kampong Imam, destroying two bridges and partially destroying a third on the way back. Meanwhile the armoured train party had reached Klong Gnea, in Thailand and successfully destroyed a large bridge before withdrawing to Padang Besar.

132. To return to the Kelantan front, as soon as it had become clear from the dawn reconnaissance that there were no ships off the coast further south, the Commander Kelantan force moved up his reserve battalion, the 1/13 Frontier Force Rifles, with some anti-tank guns attached, from Peringat with a view to counter-attacking the enemy who had landed. Some local counter attacks had already been put in and progress made. At 1030 hrs. the 2/12 Frontier Force Regiment (less two coys.) was ordered to counter attack from the south and the 1/13 Frontier Force Rifles from the north. Owing chiefly to the difficulties of the thick waterlogged country and the impassable creeks which lay behind the beaches, these attacks failed to close the gap and by 1700 hrs. the advance of our troops was stopped.

At about 1630 hrs. the R.A.F. Station Commander decided that Kota Bharu aerodrome was no longer fit to operate aircraft and obtained permission from the A.O.C. Far East to evacuate the aerodrome. All serviceable aircraft were flown away and the ground staff was evacuated by road to rail-head. No offensive or reconnaissance aircraft were then available in that area. By 1900 hrs. more ships were reported off the Sabang

beach and the Japanese had started to infiltrate between the beach posts in the Kota Bharu area. The Commander Kelantan force therefore decided to shorten his line and ordered a withdrawal during the night to a line east of Kota Bharu. It was pouring with rain and pitch dark and communications had been reduced for the most part to Liaison officers. It was therefore not surprising that some of the orders went astray. As a result part of the 1/13 Frontier Force Rifles were left behind.

Mention should be made of the splendid work throughout a very trying day of the anti-aircraft detachment of the Hong Kong and Singapore Royal Artillery defending Kota Bharu aerodrome.

An important railway bridge on the Thailand side of the frontier was attacked by Hudsons of No. 1 Squadron (R.A.F.) prior to their withdrawal. Reports on this attack indicate that although the permanent track was damaged the bridge was not.

133. Thus within 24 hrs. of the start of the campaign the Japanese had gained their first major objective, but at considerable cost. It is believed that the forces landed in Kelantan consisted of rather less than one Japanese division. This force lost its accompanying tank formation and many of its guns before it got ashore and subsequent reports indicated that the Japanese suffered some of their heaviest losses during the first day's fighting in Kelantan.

134. A midday air reconnaissance reported 2 cruisers and 15 destroyers moving towards Besut, 6 transports lying off Patani and 25 transports off Singora.

At about 1130 hrs. 8th December I placed one Battalion of the Command reserve, the 4/19 Hyderabad which was then in the Negri Sembilan area on the conclusion of brigade training, under the command of 3 Indian Corps for duty in Kelantan. It was moved up at once by rail.

In the 3 Indian Corps area the 28 Indian Infantry Brigade was ordered on the 8th December to move forward from Ipoh and Taiping to the area of the Alor Star aerodrome and to come under orders of the commander 11 Indian Division.

SECTION XVIII. – THE FAR EAST WAR COUNCIL.

135. On the 10th December 1941, in accordance with instructions received from the Home Government, the Far East War Council was formed at Singapore. Its composition was as under:-

Chairman.-

The Rt. Hon. A. Duff Cooper, Cabinet representative in the Far East.

Members.-

The Governor and High Commissioner Malaya.

The Commander-in-Chief Far East.

The Commander-in-Chief Eastern Fleet.

The General Officer Commanding Malaya.

The Air Officer Commanding Far East.

Mr. Bowden representing Australia and later

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

Secretary.-

Major Robertson, the Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders (staff officer to the Cabinet representative in the Far East).

In addition to the above, Major-General Gordon Bennett, commanding the A.I.F., was told that he was at liberty to attend meetings if and when he wished to do so, and that he would be informed if and when matters particularly affecting Australia were on the agenda.

The Council met at Sime Road at 0900 hrs daily. The meetings usually lasted nearly two hours. The Secretary circulated minutes after each meeting.

If any of the members were unable to attend they were usually represented by deputies.

In January, after the departure from Singaport of Mr. Duff Cooper and Sir George Sansom, the Governor and High Commissioner became Chairman, Mr. Scott took Sir George Sansom's place and Mr. Dawson became Secretary. Later Brigadier Simson, as Director General of Civil Defence, joined the Council.

SECTION XIX. – OPERATIONS 9-11th DECEMBER, 1941.

136. *The Kedah Front.* – The plan for the defence of the Jitra position was to hold it with two brigades forward, the 15 Indian Infantry Brigade on the right and the 6 Indian Infantry Brigade on the left. Of the two forward battalions of the 15 Brigade the 2/9 Jats extended from the hills on the right flank of the position to a point exclusive of the main road. On their left were the I Leicesters whose front included both the main and Perlis roads. West of the latter they linked up with the 2 East Surreys, the right battalion of the 6 Brigade whose position included the wooded Pisang salient forward of the Alor Changlih Canal. On their left the 2/16 Punjab Regt. was responsible for the whole front from the railway to the sea. It had permanent positions on the railway and coast only and patrolled the several miles of padi and marsh which intervened. The remaining battalion of the 15 Brigade had the role of delaying the enemy between the frontier and Asun and of occupying an outpost position at Asun, subsequently coming into brigade reserve. The outpost position of the 6 Brigade at Kampong Imam was to be held by the reserve battalion, the 1/8 Punjab Regt.

less two companies. The 28 Indian Infantry Brigade less one battalion was to come into Divisional Reserve on arrival in the Alor Star aerodrome area. Its detached battalion had the role of L. of C. and anti-paratroop protection between Alor Star and Sungei Patani. The Divisional Artillery consisted of 155 Field Regiment of two batteries each of eight 4-5-in. Howitzers, the 22 Mountain Regiment, less one battery in Kelantan, armed with a mixed assortment of weapons, the 80 Anti-Tank Regiment, less one battery in Kelantan, with thirty-six 2-pounders, the 16 Light A.A. Battery with sixteen Bofors and, on its way up, the 137 Field Regiment with twenty-four 25-pounders. The 3 Indian Cavalry was on paper the Divisional Reconnaissance Regiment. It had recently arrived in Malaya without its armoured vehicles, having only recently handed over its horses. It consisted of three squadrons of dismounted men, many of them recruits who had had little training. It had very few trained drivers and was equipped in Malaya with a few unarmoured trucks. It was totally unfit for its role of divisional reconnaissance unit.

The defences in the Jitra position, although well advanced, were not complete. In addition, most of the posts had become waterlogged after a week's heavy rain, which still continued for the next few days. It was in these conditions that the troops set to work to complete the defences. The rain also had a serious effect on the demolitions, all of which were charged on the 8th December but several of which subsequently failed to operate.

137. On the Singora road the advance of the enemy column was delayed by the engagement at Ban Sadao and by demolished bridges and it was not until 0430 hours 10th December that contact was again made about the frontier a few miles north of Changlun. Our forward troops withdrew and the 1/14 Punjab Regt., with some artillery and engineers attached, took up a position behind a stream a little south of Changlun Cross Roads. The Commander 15 Brigade was told by the divisional commander that he must hold the enemy north of Asun at least until the morning of 11th December. He asked for an additional battalion and was given the 2/1 Gurkha Rifles from the 28 Brigade. This battalion took over the Asun outpost position.

138. During the 10th December the covering troops of 6 Brigade withdrew to Kodingan without incident, carrying out important demolitions on the railway before they went. This withdrawal entailed the evacuation of the State of Perlis, as a result of which Britain was accused by one of the Perlis Ministers of State of violating her treaty by abandoning the State.

139. At about 0800 hours 11th December the 1/14 Punjab Regt. was attacked in the Changlun position but succeeded in driving the enemy back. By midday, however, the enemy attacking from the right flank had penetrated into the middle of our position and the Commander of the Covering Force decided to withdraw behind the Asun outpost position, calculating that he would be able to reach there before the enemy tanks could negotiate the damaged bridges. At 1430 hours, however, he was ordered by the divisional commander to occupy a position 1½ miles north of Asun with a view to imposing further

delay on the enemy. At about 1630 hours, when the force was moving back, covered by a rearguard, occurred the first of many incidents which showed the influence of the tank on the modern battlefield, especially against inexperienced troops. Suddenly with little warning twelve Japanese medium tanks followed by infantry in lorries and other light tanks attacked the rear of the column. Few of the troops had ever seen a tank before. The tanks advanced through the column inflicting casualties and causing much confusion and approached the bridge in front of the Asun outpost position. The demolition exploder failed but the leading tank was knocked out by anti-tank rifle fire and blocked the road. The blitz was temporarily stopped, but at considerable cost in men and material. Some 200 men of the 1/14 Punjab Regt. With the Brigadier, all of whom had been cut off, rejoined the following day, but the battalion was temporarily rendered ineffective.

140. By 1830 hours the tanks, followed by infantry, had come on again and broken into the outpost position held by the 2/1 Gurkha Rifles. Shortly afterwards the Battalion Commander decided to withdraw all his three companies. But communications had been broken and of the forward companies only 20 survivors ever rejoined. The losses of the battalion in this action were over 500.

141. On the Perlis road, as may often happen with inexperienced troops, a demolition was prematurely exploded behind the covering and outpost troops. For various reasons it was not repaired in time although there was no contact on this front and all the transport, guns and carriers of the covering and outpost troops and seven anti-tank guns in the main Jitra position were lost.

142. Withdrawals are admitted to be among the most difficult operations of war even for seasoned troops and the above incidents, which have been described in some detail, serve to illustrate the great difficulty of conducting them successfully with inexperienced troops. They had a profound influence on the Battle of Jitra. At the same time I am of the opinion that some of the trouble might have been avoided had the commanders reacted more swiftly to the problems created by the appearance of tanks on the battlefield.

143. *The Kroh Front.* – The advance was continued early on the 9th December. Our column was still opposed by the detachment of the Thailand Armed Constabulary which was now some 300 strong and which adopted guerilla tactics. As the leading troops approached Betong, however, in the afternoon all opposition ceased. Here the column stopped for the night.

144. At first light on the 10th December Krohcol embussed in the 2/3 Australian Reserve M.T. Coy. and moved forward towards the Ledge position. When about 4 miles short of its objective the advanced guard came under fire from Japanese troops. It continued to advance rapidly for 1½ miles and then was held up. An encounter battle developed in which there was heavy fighting with considerable casualties on both sides, but again the issue was decided by Japanese tanks which made a surprise appearance on

this front. The 3/16 Punjab Regt. fought splendidly in this engagement as it did also the following day. The 10 Mountain Battery and 5/14 Punjab Regt. (less one Company) had now arrived at Kroh and the Commander Krohcol ordered them up to a position about 10 miles north of Betong. He also reported the situation to the Commander 11 Indian Division saying that he might have to withdraw. The latter in his reply imposed on him the rôle of stopping, and not merely delaying, the enemy.

145. During the afternoon of the 11th December the enemy made repeated attacks on the forward troops of Krohcol but were repulsed with heavy losses. The battalion casualties, however, after three days' and nights' fighting were past the 200 mark. The commander Krohcol estimated that he was opposed by four enemy battalions and reported accordingly to Headquarters 11 Indian Division. It was the night after the affair at Asun recorded above and in reply the Commander 11 Indian Division sent a personal message to the effect that the object of Krohcol must now be to ensure the safety of the whole division by preventing the enemy from debouching on to the L. of C. about Sungei Patani. The Commander Krohcol was given full permission to withdraw as necessary to the Kroh position, where his stand must be final.

A detachment of anti-tank guns was sent to this front.

146. *The Kelantan Front.* – Civil plans during the first day of war had gone smoothly under the capable direction of Mr. Kidd, the British Adviser. During the 8th December all European women and children were withdrawn to Kuala Krai and thence out of the State, and plans for the denial of sea and river craft to the enemy were put into effect. The few remaining Japanese civilians were rounded up for internment. Many of the Japanese civilians had left before the outbreak of war. The Sultan of Kelantan and his household left for his residence near Kuala Krai. The few Asiatic civilians who wished to leave did so under control and there was no refugee problem.

147. During the night 8th-9th December heavy fighting went on at the Kota Bharu aerodrome. At dawn the Japanese put in a heavy attack astride the aerodrome road and the Commander, Kelantan Force, decided to withdraw to a position with a good field of fire South of Kota Bharu. Eventually the line was stabilized at the new position and a large number of troops who had been cut off in the withdrawal rejoined their units. In the afternoon the 4/19 Hyderabad Regt. arrived from the Command Reserve and was ordered to take up a position some 12 miles South of Kota Bharu covering the camp at Chondong. In the meantime, the troops in the north half of the right sector of the beach defences had been ordered back from the beaches to cover the road Kota Bharu – Pasir Puteh. The troops on the main road were withdrawn through the Hyderabad's and night positions were established north of Chongdong.

148. On the 10th December units were reorganized. The strength of each of the battalions which had been heavily engaged was now up to 600 or more. As so often happened later in the campaign our casualties did not prove to be so heavy as at first

reported. Several attacks made by the enemy were beaten off.

149. Having in view the threat to his communications should the enemy make fresh landings further south on the coast of Kelantan, the Commander, Kelantan Force, decided on the morning of the 11th December to give up the Gong Kedah and Machang aerodromes, which were no longer required by our Air Force, and to concentrate his force south of Machang to cover his communications. This movement was carried out during the day and a good position occupied. Unfortunately the runways at both the Gong Kedah and Machang aerodromes had to be left intact, for at neither had the demolition arrangements been completed. Orders were given for the demolition of the Guillemard Bridge over the Kelantan River, the longest railway bridge in Malaya.

Information was received that the Japanese had on the 10th December landed another force at Besut in South Kelantan.

150. *The Kuantan Front.* – On the 9th December Japanese aircraft attacked the Kuantan aerodrome. They were engaged by small arms fire, there being no antiaircraft guns available for the defence of this aerodrome. In the afternoon the aerodrome was abandoned as being unserviceable. Subsequently the greater part of the aerodrome was cratered by Army engineers, one runway only being left for emergency use.

Early on the night 9th-10th December reports were received from the northern part of the beach defences that enemy ships were approaching the beaches. Defensive fire was opened and spread southwards and at about 0400 hrs torpedobombers attacked three ships off this coast. No landing took place but subsequently some boats with Japanese equipment were found on the beach south of Kuantan. This incident had a great influence on the movements of the “Prince of Wales” and “Repulse” which will be recorded later.

151. *Naval Operations.* – In accordance with pre-war plans, submarines of the Royal Netherlands Navy operated off the east coast of Malaya and in the approaches to the Gulf of Thailand during this period. They reported sinking 4 Japanese transports off Patani on the 12th December, and a merchant ship and a laden oil tanker off Kota Bharu on the 12th and 13th December.

Towards dark on the 8th December, Admiral Sir Tom Phillips put to sea with the battleship “Prince of Wales” and the battlecruiser “Repulse” to attack the Japanese ships in the Gulf of Thailand. They were escorted by 4 destroyers. The decision to take the fleet to sea was made by the Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, after discussing the situation with the Commander-in-Chief, Far East.

On the evening of the 9th December the British Fleet was sighted by a Japanese submarine and also by Japanese reconnaissance aircraft. The Japanese air striking forces, which were being held in readiness, probably in South Indo-China, for this purpose, set off for a night attack on the Fleet but ran into thick weather and were forced to return to their base.

The Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, realising from his having sighted Japanese aircraft that his movements had been seen, and that the element of surprise had been lost, decided to abandon the project and return to Singapore. During the night 9th-10th December, however, he was informed by his shore Headquarters at Singapore that a landing had been reported at Kuantan. Reconnaissance aircraft were flown off and the Fleet closed the shore in order to clear up the situation before returning to Singapore. Shortly after daylight the Fleet was again located by Japanese reconnaissance aircraft and their striking force was again despatched. At about 1115 it attacked the "Prince of Wales" and "Repulse" when about 60 miles off Kuantan, and by 1320 both these ships had been sunk. Fighter aircraft from Singapore were despatched as soon as the attack on the ships was reported, but only arrived in time to see them go down. 2,185 survivors were picked up by the destroyers and brought to Singapore. The Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, was lost and was succeeded by Vice-Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton.

With the sinking of these two ships the Japanese again obtained undisputed control of the sea communications east of Malaya and the whole of the east coast became exposed to attack. I wish to pay tribute to the gallant manner in which the C.-in-C. Eastern Fleet endeavoured to assist the land and air forces by attacking the enemy's sea communications.

152. *Air Operations.* – Early on the 9th December our Air Force attacked targets in the Singora area. Owing to lack of fighter support 5 out of 11 of our aircraft were lost. During the morning Alor Star aerodrome was again heavily bombed and was evacuated later in the day, the buildings being set on fire. The sound of the explosions and the sight of the burning buildings had a considerable psychological effect on the troops of the 11 Indian Division who had been told that their task was to secure this aerodrome for the use of our Air Force. Further attacks were carried out on Sungei Patani and Butterworth aerodromes and, again owing to the lack of light anti-aircraft and fighter defence, casualties were inflicted on the aircraft grounded there. On the 10th Dec. our aerodromes on the Kedah front were again heavily attacked. Sungei Patani aerodrome was evacuated during the day. On this day also the first of a series of heavy Japanese air attacks on Penang Island took place. It was carried out by 70 enemy bombers and Georgetown was the target. There were no anti-aircraft defences, except small arms fire, and few shelters. The inhabitants thronged the streets to watch the attack. The casualties from this raid ran into thousands. A large part of the population left Georgetown and moved to the hills in the centre of the Island, but the A.R.P. and the Medical and the Nursing Services stood firm. The small garrison, in addition to manning the defences, was called upon to assist the Civil Administration by taking the place of labourers and of the personnel of essential municipal services. It also had to assist in burying the dead. On the following day Georgetown was again raided by 25 aircraft and the experiences of the previous day were repeated on a smaller scale.

On the east coast front the enemy during this period concentrated his air attacks on

our aerodromes, all of which in the States of Kelantan and Pahang became unserviceable. Valuable photographic reconnaissances were carried out during this period, as they were throughout the campaign, by two pilots flying Buffalo aircraft.

153 *Borneo*. – In accordance with pre-war plans the denials of the Miri and Seria Oilfields and Installations in Sarawak and Brunei were completed, as far as could be done, as soon as hostilities broke out. The refinery at Lutong was also demolished on the 9th Dec.

154. *Command Reserve*. – On the 10th Dec., in view of the threat to Kuantan, the weak strength of the garrison there and the danger to the communications of the Kelantan Force, I moved one battalion of the Command Reserve (2 Bn. The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders) from the Port Dickson area to the Jerantut area on the east coast railway and placed it under orders of the Commander 3 Indian Corps for duty in that area only.

155. *Summary*. – Since the outbreak of hostilities the general situation had changed greatly to our disadvantage. The Japanese had established complete air superiority over North Malaya and had gained full control of the sea communications east of Malaya. As a result of this the whole of the east coast of Malaya and Singapore Island itself lay open to attack and, to meet attack, reliance would have to be placed almost entirely on the land forces. As regards the land situation the Japanese had established strong forces both in South Thailand and in Kelantan, and nothing could now prevent them from bringing in reinforcements as far as their resources would admit. To make matters worse they had, as far as could be ascertained, landed these forces with the loss of only 7 ships, of which 6 had been sunk by Dutch submarines, in place of the considerable losses which it had been hoped that our Air Force would inflict and which had formed the basis of my estimate of the Army strength required (See [Part I, Section VI](#)). Our own forces were weak everywhere and we could not expect any reinforcements until at least the following month, though it was certain that every endeavour would be made to send us such reinforcements as could be made available as early as possible. Further, it had been established that the Japanese force included tanks while we had none.

It was apparent that the safe arrival of reinforcements was of paramount importance and, if we were to attain our object of securing the Naval Base, it was essential that they should arrive in time to take part in operations on the mainland. To enable them to do this, it was necessary that we should impose the maximum delay on the enemy but that at the same time we should avoid having our forces destroyed in detail. If the latter should happen in any area, it might open the way for a rapid advance by the enemy which with our lack of reserves we might find it impossible to stop.

156. *Special Order of the Day*. – On the 10th December I issued the following Special Order of the Day:-

“In this hour of trial the General Officer Commanding calls upon all ranks Malaya

Command for a determined and sustained effort to safeguard Malaya and the adjoining British territories. The eyes of the Empire are upon us. Our whole position in the Far East is at stake. The struggle may be long and grim but let all resolve to stand fast come what may and to prove ourselves worthy of the great trust which has been placed in us.”

SECTION XX. – THE AIR SITUATION 11TH DECEMBER, 1941.

157. Photographs taken of the aerodromes in South Thailand showed that the Japanese were already operating large numbers of aircraft from them. On Singora aerodrome alone there were upwards of 100 aircraft with comparatively little anti-aircraft gun protection – a wonderful target had we had an adequate and balanced Air Striking Force. The enemy were of course also operating their longer range types of aircraft from their bases in Indo-China and possibly also from aircraft carriers. It is probable that they were operating some 300 modern aircraft at this time. Their bombers were of the Navy 96, the Army 97 and the Junkers 88 types, all twin-engined machines. Their dive-bomber was the Junkers 87B. Their torpedo-bombers were Navy 97's and their fighters were Navy “O” (or Zero) machines. A wide use of auxiliary petrol tanks for the fighters gave them increased range.

In face of this attack the losses suffered by our small Air Force in North Malaya had been comparatively heavy. They had been heavier than they otherwise would have been owing to the inability, due to lack of resources, to provide adequate fighters in North Malaya for the defence of aerodromes and the protection of the bombers, and also owing to the lack of ground defence against low-flying aircraft.

158. On the 9th and 10th December, Dutch air reinforcements arrived in Malaya from the Netherlands East Indies. They consisted of three squadrons of Glenn Martin Bombers totalling 22 aircraft and one squadron of nine Buffalo fighters. Unfortunately the Dutch bomber pilots were not fully trained in night flying or in advanced navigation over the sea, so that it was necessary for them to return, a squadron at a time, to the Netherlands East Indies for further training in these subjects. Nevertheless, the Netherlands East Indies had shown a most co-operative spirit in sending these aircraft, as well as submarines, so promptly to our assistance.

159. On the morning of the 11th December, 1941, rather more than 100 aircraft were available for operations disposed as under:-

Seletar.

Vickers Vildebeeste Torpedo-Bombers	18
Catalina Flying Boats	1

Sharks	5
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Swordfish	4
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Sembawang.

Hudson General Reconnaissance	4
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Buffalo Fighters	17
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Glenn Martin Bombers (N.E.I.)	13
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Tengah.

Blenheim IV Bombers	8
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Kallang.

Buffalo Fighters	26
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Taiping.

The surviving aircraft from the Northern aerodromes reinforced by a few from the South.

160. On the 11th December it was decided that the air policy should be as follows:-

(a) Bombing, except in special circumstances, to be confined to night. This was made necessary by the enemy's fighter superiority.

(b) The primary tasks of the fighters would be the defence of the Singapore Base and the protection of convoys bringing land and air reinforcements to Malaya. The reason for this was that we could not hope to regain superiority without powerful reinforcements. The safe arrival of such reinforcements was therefore the first essential in our air strategy.

As a result of this policy it was clear that the Army would suffer from lack of air support and of close co-operation in the fighting on the mainland, though some seaward reconnaissance would still be possible. I accepted this situation.

SECTION XXI. – THE WITHDRAWAL FROM KELANTAN.

161. On the 12th December 1941 the Commander, 3 Indian Corps, visited Command Headquarters to discuss the policy as regards the Kelantan Force.

It will be recalled that the task of the Kelantan Force had been the protection of the three aerodromes in that State for the use of our Air Force and the denial of them to the

enemy. In view of the situation some fresh instructions were clearly necessary. The alternatives were either to leave the force in Kelantan or to withdraw it for employment elsewhere. The factors in favour of the former course were:-

- (a) It might still be possible to prevent the enemy making full use of the three aerodromes.
- (b) The presence of our force in Kelantan would contain a proportion of the enemy's force in that State.
- (c) The moral effect of the withdrawal both on the civil population and on our own troops would not be good.
- (d) We should probably lose some material and equipment in the withdrawal.

In favour of a withdrawal were the following factors:-

- (a) The aerodromes were no longer required by our Air Force and there seemed to be no probability of them being required within a reasonable period of time.
- (b) It seemed probable that the main threat would develop on the west coast, where we had inadequate resources with which to meet it.
- (c) The communications of the Kelantan Force, which now consisted of only a single line railway with a number of bridges, were precarious, especially having in view the enemy's great air superiority.
- (d) In view of (c) above and of the superiority on land which the enemy was likely to develop, it seemed probable that we should lose the force if it remained in Kelantan.

After full consideration I decided, with a view to conserving our resources and concentrating them for the main battle which would probably develop on the west coast, to withdraw the Kelantan Force as soon as rolling stock could be made available. This decision was submitted to the C.-in-C., Far East, the same afternoon and approved by him. Orders were issued immediately and the evacuation of surplus stores started at once.

162. On the 12th December the enemy became very active and attacked in strength, but the 2/10 Baluch Regt. counter-attacked, coming to close grips with the enemy and inflicting casualties.

On the 13th December the 2/10 Baluch Regt. again inflicted casualties on the enemy who were trying to advance round their flank.

163. During the next few days the withdrawal continued systematically, the enemy being made to fight for each position, with comparatively little loss to the defenders. By the 16th December all surplus stores and equipment had been evacuated and the withdrawal of the troops by rail began. The 4/19 Hyderabad were the first to leave so that they could rejoin their own brigade on the west coast. On the 19th December the railhead at Kuala Krai was evacuated. The rearmost troops withdrew from Kuala Krai on foot as the large railway bridges a little south of that place had by then been destroyed. Practically

all the stores and all the vehicles, except about 80 for which no railway flats were available, were successfully evacuated. A rearguard under Lt.-Col. McKellar, known as Macforce, was left behind to watch the railway and prevent the repair of the bridges. It included troops of the Pahang Volunteers and the Malay Regiment and carried out its duties most efficiently.

On completion of the withdrawal on the 22nd December the 8 Indian Infantry Brigade concentrated in the Kuala Lipis/Jerantut area except for the 2/12 Frontier Force Regt. which rejoined its brigade at Kuantan.

164. The casualties suffered in the Kelantan fighting had been fairly heavy but not excessive. The conduct of the operations generally and especially of the withdrawal reflected great credit on the Commander of the Force (Brigadier B.W. Key) and his staff.

SECTION XXII. – WEST COAST OPERATIONS 12-17TH DECEMBER, 1941.

165. *The Battle of Jitra.* – In the absence of the commander of the 15 Indian Infantry Brigade who had, as stated in [Section XIX](#), been cut off as a result of the action in the outpost position, the commander of the 28 Indian Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Carpendale) temporarily took over command of the 15 Brigade as well as his own and held it until the return of Brigadier Garrett, the following day.

166. Shortly after midnight 11/12th December the Japanese attacked the left forward company of the 2/9 Jats east of the Singora road. Two Hours later the frontage had been extended to involve the right forward companies of the 2/9 Jats and the I Leicesters. By 0400 hrs. the right rear company of the Jats had also been attacked but had repulsed the enemy. At dawn the Japanese infantry made a determined frontal attack on the Jats and Leicesters and suffered heavy losses but by midday had penetrated deep into the area held by the Jats. The Leicesters formed a defensive flank to their right. In the meantime the Commander 15 Brigade had called upon the Commander 6 Brigade for assistance and had been given 1½ battalions which he used to protect his right flank.

167. At about 0830 hrs. the Commander 11 Indian Division asked Headquarters 3 Indian Corps for permission to withdraw his division to Gurun, some 30 miles to the south, and possibly later to the Krian River. The Commander 3 Indian Corps was at that time on his way to Singapore to confer on the Kelantan policy (see [Section XXI](#)), so the message was telephoned direct to me. Such a long withdrawal had not been considered in our pre-war discussions of war plans and it would immediately have prejudiced our chances of denying the west coast aerodromes to the enemy. Moreover I felt that such a withdrawal would have a most demoralising effect on both the troops and on the civil population. This view was endorsed by the War Council which was sitting at the time. I therefore replied to the effect that pending further orders the battle was to be fought out on

the Jitra position. At that time the Jats were, in point of fact, the only battalion which had incurred serious losses although two battalions had, as already recorded, been rendered ineffective on the previous day.

168. During the morning two counter-attacks were made by the 1/8 Punjab Regt. on the enemy who had penetrated east of the road and, although unsuccessful in recapturing the lost ground, were effective in stopping the enemy's advance for the time being.

In the early afternoon the enemy infantry resumed their advance on the right and attacked the 2/2 Gurkha Rifles holding the line of the Bata River. The left of this battalion was at the iron bridge on the main road and between it and the right of the Leicesters further north was a gap of 1½ miles. The Leicesters were now ordered to withdraw from their prepared position and to take up a new position with their right on the iron bridge, their centre on Jitra village and their left at Rimba. This gave them a front of over two miles with a pronounced salient in the middle.

Later in the afternoon the road south of Jitra came under close range enemy fire. The traffic on it at the time was heavy and some confusion developed. The Divisional Commander, fearing the enemy would move round our right flank, ordered two companies of the East Surreys to move back by rail to guard the vital bridges at Kepala Batas.

169. At about 1930 hrs. the Commander 11 Indian Division again asked for permission to withdraw. The request was telephoned to me at Headquarters Malaya Command where I was still in conference with the Commander 3 Indian Corps. After consultation I authorised the latter to despatch the following message to the Commander 11 Indian Division:-

“After consultation it is decided that your task is to fight for the security of North Kedah. Estimated that you are only opposed by one Japanese division at most. Consider best solution may be to hold up advance enemy tanks on good obstacle and dispose your forces to obtain considerable depth on both roads and to obtain scope for your superior artillery. Reserves for employment in divisional area are being expedited.”

170. The divisional orders for the withdrawal were sent out at 2100 hrs. The plan in outline was that the 28 Brigade, reconstituted under Brigadier Carpendale and with one battalion of the 15 Brigade under its command, should hold a position between Langgar and the south bank of the River Kedah at Alor Star. This meant a withdrawal of some 10 miles. The remainder of 15 Brigade was to be in reserve. The 6 Brigade was to occupy a position 7 miles further back at Simpang Empat. A small composite force was to hold the line of the River Padang Terap until the 15 Brigade had passed through.

This withdrawal would have been difficult under the most favourable conditions. With units mixed as a result of the day's fighting, communications broken and the night dark, it was inevitable that orders would be delayed and in some cases would not reach the

addressees. This was what in fact occurred. Some units and sub-units withdrew without incident. Others, finding themselves unable to use the only road, had to make their way as best they could across country. Some parties reached the coast and, taking boats, rejoined further south. Some again were still in position the following morning.

171. On the day after the battle the strength of the 15 Brigade was only about 600 and it was temporarily unfit for further fighting. The 6 Brigade, though still a fighting formation, had also had serious losses. In the 28 Brigade the 2/1 Gurkha Rifles, except for one intact company, had been almost wiped out. The other two battalions had suffered about 100 casualties between them. Several guns had been lost. The majority had either been caught on the wrong side of demolitions, or become inextricably bogged in their gun positions or been cut off by enemy penetration, it being impossible in most places to move them across country. A large number of vehicles were lost for similar reasons. The loss of carriers, small arms weapons, signalling equipment etc. had also been very heavy. These were serious losses as in many cases there were not sufficient reserves in Malaya to replace them.

The 11 Indian Division needed to be relieved, rested and reorganised before being again called upon to fight, but there were no troops available to relieve it.

172. It is unlikely that the Japanese employed more than one division during the battle of Jitra. Their success was won primarily by bold and skilful infantry tactics and by the use of tanks. They employed no artillery heavier than the infantry gun and in this action they made little use of aircraft in support of ground forces. They exploited the moral value of noise behind the defences. They also appear to have had an organized “fifth column” plan which had at least a partial success by spreading false rumours.

173. It is probably true to say that the battle of Jitra was half lost before it began. The change from an anticipated offensive to a strategical defensive had, as has been stated, an adverse moral effect on the troops. The temporary loss of two battalions on the previous day had left serious gaps in the reserves on the right flank. In consequence, when the enemy broke into the defences, the reserves were not strong enough to prevent the enemy getting control of the one vital artery of communications. Veteran troops would have found these conditions trying enough. They were in some cases too trying for the young and inexperienced troops of which the 11 Indian Division was composed. Finally, the eventual withdrawal, carried out in very difficult circumstances, was too complicated and too long for troops who were already exhausted and considerably disorganised.

174. *The Command Reserve.* – On the 12th December I placed the Command Reserve (12 Indian Brigade Group), with the exception of headquarters and one battery of the 122 Field Regiment, at the disposal of the Commander 3 Indian Corps for employment on the west coast. With the exception of the 4/19 Hyderabad Regiment, which had to be withdrawn from Kelantan, the Brigade Group began to move forward immediately by road and rail

175 *The Kroh Front.* – Early on the morning of the 12th December (the day of the Jitra battle) the enemy again attacked the 3/16 Punjab Regiment but was driven back. An outflanking movement, however, forced the Punjabs to withdraw with heavy casualties to one of their forward companies. Eventually the 3/16 Punjab Regiment withdrew through the 5/14 Punjab Regiment to Kroh. Their strength, including 50 reinforcements, was now about 400. They destroyed three bridges on the road to Klian Intan and Grik and moved into a prepared position 2 or 3 miles west of Kroh. The orders given to the Commanding Officer of the 5/14 Punjab Regt. were that he was to delay the enemy but not become inextricably involved.

Two Japanese companies attacking at dawn on the 13th December were practically annihilated by the fire of our light automatics. Enemy enveloping movements round both flanks, however, forced a withdrawal and the 5/14 Punjab Regt. with attached troops fell back to Betong, where the battalion embussed, and by dusk the whole force was in occupation of the position west of Kroh.

At midnight 12/13th December the Commander 3 Indian Corps took over direct command of Krohcol from the Commander 11 Indian Division.

At midday on the 14th December the Commander 12 Indian Infantry Brigade took over command of Krohcol and moved it to the Baling area some 9 miles west of Kroh. Krohcol, as an independent force, was then dissolved.

The withdrawal of Krohcol to the position west of Kroh left uncovered the jungle road through Klian Intan to Grik and thence the metalled road to Kuala Kangsar and Ipoh. Reports on this road had indicated that as far as Grik it was passable only for light M.T. in dry weather. We were soon to learn that these reports were optimistic. To meet the threat a company of the 2 Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders with a detachment of the F.M S.V.F. Armoured Cars was ordered to Grik.

176. *Headquarters 3 Indian Corps.* – On the night 13/14th December the Commander 3 Indian Corps moved up to Bukit Mertajam in Province Wellesley where he established an advanced headquarters.

177. *The Battle of Gurun.* – At dawn on the 13th December there were only three companies in position on the south bank of the Kedah River with one company at Langgar. The large road bridge south of Alor Star was destroyed, but an attempt to destroy the railway bridge was less successful. The enemy made only one attempt to cross during the day and, after getting a footing on the south bank, was driven back. During the night 13/14th December and the morning of the 14th all troops of 11 Indian Division were withdrawn to the Gurun position. Here, where the plain merges into the rolling thickly wooded rubber country of South Kedah, was perhaps the best natural defensive position in Malaya. It had previously been reconnoitred and was again reconnoitred as soon as the Japanese advance began. A large labour force had been ordered to assemble but failed to

appear and no work had been done on the position when the division arrived.

178. The Gurun position was occupied with the 28 Indian Infantry Brigade on the right and the 6 Indian Infantry Brigade on the left with the weak 15 Indian Infantry Brigade in reserve. On the afternoon of the 14th December the enemy attacked down the main road with tanks followed by infantry in lorries and supported by aircraft. Some penetration took place but the enemy were stopped by local counter-attacks. During the night, however, the enemy effected a deep penetration down the road and at 0700 hrs. attacked the Headquarters of the 6 Brigade. All the officers except the Brigadier himself were killed. There was a large gap now between the main road and Kedah peak. East of the road, however, our forward troops were still in position, but they were now moved to block the main road down which the enemy was advancing. By the afternoon the division was again in confusion and the 28 Brigade was the only one which could for the time being be relied upon. The Divisional Commander decided to withdraw his force behind the River Muda during the following night covered by the only fresh troops which were available i.e. the Independent Company which had just arrived from Penang and one squadron of 3 Indian Cavalry. Units of the 28 Brigade and the 2 East Surrey Regt. did some splendid work in covering the withdrawal. As had happened before, the premature demolition of bridges was the cause of losses of many vehicles and carriers.

179. By the morning of 16th December the Division was south of the River Muda and had passed into Province Wellesley. The 12 Indian Brigade Group (less one battalion) had moved into position on its right with one battalion (the 5/2 Punjab Regt.) at Batu Pekaka, an important bridge over the River Muda, and the Argylls at Baling.

180. The Division was in no fit state for further operations. Most of the men were tired and dispirited. They badly needed time to reorganise and refit. There had been a further heavy loss of vehicles and weapons. Some of these it was now impossible to replace. The tanks had again played their part in the battle of Gurun, but the enemy should not have been allowed to penetrate as he did down the main road. Later, lack of communications made it difficult for formation commanders to control the battle. The Divisional Commander courageously tried to control the battle from a carrier, but the thickly wooded country was against him. All the infantry brigade Commanders had become casualties.

181. On the 15th December the R.A.F. evacuated Butterworth aerodrome. The 16 Light A.A. Battery had done some good work in defence of this aerodrome, claiming 4 enemy aircraft certain and 6 other probables brought down.

182. *Penang.* – Although the Island of Penang had been since 1936 (see [Part I Section VI](#)) officially a fortress, it was in fact in December, 1941, far from being one. The garrison on the 12th December, 1941, consisted of:-

Fortress Headquarters and Signals.

11 Coast Regt. Hong Kong and Singapore Royal Artillery (two 6-m. batteries).

36 Fortress Company Royal Engineers (manning searchlights).

One Company 5/14 Punjab Regt.

1 Independent Company.

Detachment of 3 Indian Cavalry.

The 3 (Penang and Province Wellesley) Battalion S.S.V.F.

A Mixed Reinforcement Camp.

Administrative Detachments.

There were no anti-aircraft defences as the guns and searchlights had not yet arrived from the U.K. The civil airport was too small for normal R.A.F. requirements. The only fighter defence was provided by five Buffalo Fighters which were able to operate for one day only from the Butterworth aerodrome.

In addition to the Island the Commander Penang Fortress (Brig. Lyon) was responsible also for a part of the Prai-Butterworth area on the mainland and for the Lines of Communication area (North).

183. The original object of fortifying the Island of Penang was to secure the anchorage which lies between the Island and the mainland from sea and air attack, as the Royal Navy contemplated using it both for warships and as a convoy collecting port.

184. The pre-war instructions to the Commander 3 Indian Corps were to the effect that 11 Indian Division, if driven back, would fall back on the axis of the main road and railway communication arteries, leaving on Penang Island, which would be held, up to two additional infantry battalions with supporting troops.

185. The effects of the first air attacks on Penang on the 10th and 11th December have already been described in [Section XIX](#). On the 13th December 50 Naval Ratings, survivors from the “Prince of Wales” and “Repulse” arrived to operate the ferries, the crews of which had disappeared.

On the 12th December at a meeting between the Fortress Commander and the Resident Counsellor it was decided to evacuate on the following night all European Service families and the Resident Counsellor was asked to arrange for the evacuation of all civilian European women and children. This decision was taken as a normal measure to evacuate “bouches inutiles”. The evacuation of the sick and wounded from the military hospital was also ordered.

186. On the 13th December the policy as regards the defence of Penang had to be reviewed in the light of the situation on the mainland which has been described earlier in this Section. There was a very real danger that the 11 Indian Division, which at this time

was in an exhausted and very disorganized condition, would be overrun and cease to exist as a fighting formation. There was also the danger that the threat from Kroh, which was now much greater than we had anticipated, would cut the communications of the 11 Indian Division in the Kuala Kangsar area. If either of these things had happened, the enemy would have had a clear run down the west coast, for there were no other troops with which to oppose him north of Johore, and by doing so he would have cut the communications of 9 Indian Division on the east coast. That was the situation we had to face and we had the choice of trying to fight the enemy both on the mainland and on Penang Island or of concentrating the whole of our resources for the battle on the mainland. The anchorage was no longer of any use.

187. The matter was of such importance that I brought it before the Far East War Council on the morning of 14th December. The pros, and cons, were discussed and carefully considered. It was decided that our ability to hold Penang must depend upon the result of the battle upon the mainland, and that we should concentrate on averting the calamity which threatened; further, that if we failed to stop the enemy upon the mainland the policy would be to evacuate what remained of the garrison from Penang rather than leave the population exposed to unrestricted air attack against which we could provide them with no defence.

In accordance with the above decision, I caused the following telegram to be despatched to the Commander, 3 Indian Corps at 1125 hrs. 14th December:-

“Importance of covering Penang is increased by fact that bulk of remaining cables to U.K. and India pass through that Island. Considered that ability to hold Penang depends upon result of Kedah battle. You are at liberty, therefore to use any part of the garrison of Penang that can be made available to take part in Kedah operations, particularly Independent Company. Should it become impossible to cover Penang from mainland, policy will be to evacuate Penang removing by sea the garrison and such essential stores as possible and destroying remainder. Preliminary arrangements should be made as necessary but to avoid causing alarm it is of utmost importance that such arrangements should be kept secret. Resident Counsellor Penang is being given similar instructions. Acknowledge.”

188. On the 14th December the Municipal Commissioners of Georgetown presented a memorandum to the Fortress Commander stating that the Civil Administration had broken down and pointing out the danger of outbreaks of cholera and typhoid owing to the fouling of the water catchment area and the breakdown of the sanitary and conservancy services.

189. At 1100 hrs. 15th December, following a warning the previous evening, the Fortress Commander received an order from the Commander 3 Indian Corps that the evacuation, which was to take place by sea, would be completed on the night 16th-17th December. Shipping had to be found locally. Most of the troops were moved to the mainland but the remainder and all Europeans, except a few who remained behind at their

own request, were evacuated. Asiatics serving in the Volunteers were given the option of being evacuated or of staying. The majority decided to stay to protect their families. Lack of transport would have made it quite out of the question to evacuate large numbers of Asiatics. Moreover it was undesirable at that stage to increase the population of Singapore.

190. A great deal of denial work was done at Penang. The Fixed Defences were effectively destroyed and the smaller weapons were withdrawn. At least most of the ammunition in the magazines was destroyed, as also was much of the oil and petrol. Denial schemes were similarly carried out at many of the civil establishments. But it was hardly to be expected in the circumstances that the destruction would be complete and there were two unfortunate omissions which had a very considerable effect on subsequent events. One was the failure to destroy the Penang Broadcasting Station from which during the rest of the campaign a stream of anti-British propaganda was sent out and the other was the failure to remove or scuttle all the small vessels and barges in the harbour. The latter was probably due, at least in part, to the masters and crews having disappeared. The Japanese later made great use of them in developing their threats to our communications from the west coast. When this omission was discovered a destroyer was sent by night to mine the southern exit from the harbour, but this could not have been entirely effective.

191. *Province Wellesley Operations.* – On the 16th December heavy fighting developed at the Batu Pekaka Bridge on the right of the River Muda position where the 5/2 Punjab Regt. was attacked by enemy troops led by an European. Late in the afternoon the enemy succeeded in getting a footing south of the river but were ejected by counter-attack. The Argylls were withdrawn from Baling to Titi Karangan.

During the day the units of 11 Indian Division were being reformed in Province Wellesley covered by a weak rear-guard which consisted of one platoon and the armoured train on the railway bridge, the Independent Company and a company of Leicesters at the two main road bridges and a squadron of 3 Indian Cavalry at the ferry to the west of them. The 137 Field Regt. was in support.

The Commander 3 Indian Corps, in consultation with the Commander 11 Indian Division, decided to withdraw the division behind the River Krian, the main bridges over which were at that time being held by personnel from the Penang Reinforcements Camp. The 28 Brigade moved by road and rail to Simpang Lima and the next morning took over the defence of the River Krian from the railway bridge at Nibong Tebal to the sea. Fifteen miles to their right at Selama was the 3/16 Punjab Regt. from Kroh.

During the 17th December the troops on the Muda River and in the Bukit Mertajam area were withdrawn to the Taiping area where they came into reserve to the Krian defences. The 12 Brigade Group fought a rear-guard action from the Batu Pekaka Bridge to the Terap – Selama area. By the 18th December all troops were south of the River Krian.

192. *The Grik Road.* – On the Grik Road contact was made a little north of Grik during the night 16th-17th December. Our small force, which consisted only of one company of the Argylls and a detachment of F.M.S.V.F. Armoured Cars was hard pressed on the 17th and fell back to the area South of Sumpitan. It was reinforced by two platoons of the Perak Battalion F M.S.V.F. It now became clear that the enemy had directed the main body of his Patani Force down this road, difficult as it was for wheeled transport, and was endeavouring to cut off the 11 Indian Division by reaching the main road at Kuala Kangsar. Indeed, reports from Japanese sources have subsequently indicated that this was a strong attack and that their grand strategy was to cut off and annihilate the whole of the troops in Kedah and Province Wellesley.

193. On the evening of the 17th December the Commander 3 Indian Corps decided that the 12 Brigade Group which he had intended to withdraw into reserve at Taiping, should go straight through to Kuala Kangsar and that the I Independent Company should leave Taiping at first light on the 18th December for Lenggong on the Grik Road.

194. *Future Operations.* – On the evening 17th December I authorised the Commander 3 Indian Corps to withdraw to the line of the River Perak if he thought such a withdrawal absolutely necessary. I also instructed him to arrange for reconnaissances to be carried out of the Slim River Line in South Perak and placed at his disposal officer teams from the Officers Cadet Training Unit to assist in carrying out rearward reconnaissances.

I now foresaw that, if the Japanese advanced into Perak, their communications would become very vulnerable to raids from the sea coast. I therefore arranged for a small force of about 50 picked Australians to be organized for seaborne raids on the enemy's communications, using Port Swettenham as a base.

SECTION XXIII. – THE STRATEGICAL SITUATION, 17TH-23RD DECEMBER, 1941.

195. *Naval.* – Following the loss of the “Prince of Wales” and “Repulse” the seagoing naval forces based on Singapore consisted only of a few light cruisers and half a dozen destroyers and sloops. Most of these were employed on escort work, leaving only three destroyers and a number of auxiliary vessels and small craft for local defence.

On the 17th December the Perak Flotilla, which consisted of H.M.S. “Scout” and some light craft, was formed to deny to all enemy craft the approaches to the West Coast between the River Krian and the River Bernam (south of Telok Anson).

The submarines of the Royal Dutch Navy, which during the first few days had operated successfully in the waters east of Malaya, had had losses and only a very few now remained.

The Japanese Navy had so far confined its activities to protection of its convoys.

Although it held undisputed control of the waters east of Malaya it had as yet made no attempt to interfere with our communications south or west of Malaya either by naval or air action.

196. *Air.* – The main concern of the Japanese Air Force was obviously to confirm and extend the superiority which it had already established. Apart therefore from the heavy attacks on Penang and a few attacks on targets in the battle area, its activities continued to be directed against our aerodromes.

The strength of our Air Force, including the Dutch reinforcements, was now a little over 100 – probably about one quarter of the Japanese strength.

In accordance with the agreed policy, the bulk of the fighters were retained on the Singapore aerodromes for defence of the Singapore Base and for convoy protection work. The balance were under command of Norgroup for operations in the 3 Corps area.

The Dutch bombers were, for reasons already given, being used principally for reconnaissance work. The torpedo-bombers, with their limited radius of action, were retained for attack on any naval force which might approach Singapore or the east coast of Johore. As regards the possibility of reinforcements, the Japanese had cut the established air route between Singapore and India. It now became necessary to use the Dutch aerodrome at Sabang, an island off the northern tip of Sumatra, as a link in the air route, but this could only be used by the longer range type of aircraft. Fighters could only be brought by sea.

In order to provide accommodation for the large number of aircraft which it was hoped would shortly concentrate in the Singapore area, the construction of new aerodrome strips was put in hand, both in South Johore and on Singapore Island.

I felt that the recovery of air superiority was so vital that I agreed to give priority to the Air Force so far as labour was concerned for the construction of these new air strips and for the maintenance of the existing aerodromes.

There was no way of regaining air superiority unless and until a sufficient number of modern fighters, superior to the Japanese fighters, could be brought to Malaya and until their pilots could have time to develop full fighting efficiency in conditions that would be strange to them. The first of these fighter aircraft could not be expected to reach Malaya in much under four weeks.

197. *Army.* – Our troops who had been in contact with the enemy had suffered severe losses both in men and material. Our strength on the west coast, apart from the Volunteer units, was now barely one division, including the 12 Indian Brigade Group and 1st Line Reinforcements. Against this the Japanese probably had in the front line one division moving on the axis of the main road and one division on the Grik road. Behind these we estimated that they had in reserve and already landed further forces at least equal to those in the front line.

On the east coast the enemy had landed one division in the Kelantan area.

In Indo-China he undoubtedly held reserves, which he could either use to reinforce those formations which had already landed or for fresh enterprises.

The striking power of his field force was greatly increased by the inclusion of a component of modern tanks of which we had none.

198. On our side we knew that every endeavour would be made to send reinforcements to Malaya, but we also knew that no reinforcements could arrive before some time in the first half of January. The comparison of forces as above showed clearly that we must make every endeavour to ensure the safe arrival of these reinforcements, for it was only with their assistance that we could hope to turn the scales on land. One of the chief dangers to which convoys bringing reinforcements would be exposed was from attack by Japanese aircraft as they were approaching Singapore. If the Japanese could establish their fighters on the aerodromes in Central Malaya they would be able to give their bombers much more effective support and thus render their attacks more dangerous. It was clear therefore that we should make every endeavour to deny these aerodromes to them for as long as possible.

199. On the west coast the terrain in the State of Perak was, generally speaking, more suitable for delaying action than was that in the States of Selangor and Negri Sembilan further south. In the latter States were many more roads to facilitate the enemy's movements, while the vast rubber estates rendered movement off the roads easy for infantry and at the same time provided good cover for the attacker. The States of Perak and Selangor also were the centre of the tin-mining industry which was at that time of such vital importance to the Allied war effort. There were also vast rubber estates in this area.

The weakness of the Perak area from the defence point of view lay in the fact that the long road and rail communications lay roughly parallel to the River Perak. Consequently if enemy detachments could get a footing on the left bank of that river they would be able to harass and temporarily to interrupt our communications.

200. It was necessary also to take into consideration the condition of the troops of 11 Indian Division. Though their morale was not broken, it could not be regarded as being as high as one would have wished. They were undoubtedly very exhausted by almost continuous fighting and movement both by day and night. Moreover, the superiority which the Japanese possessed in the air coupled with the complete absence of tanks on our side could not but have the most adverse effect upon the trust reposed by the Indian troops in the might of the British Empire. It is not too much to say that the Indian troops were dismayed to find the British so outclassed in these two essentials of modern war.

201. As regards the enemy's course of action, it was now clear that he intended to continue his advance down the west coast with a view to attacking Singapore from the

North. Combined with this, his forces in Kelantan might move southward by the coastal route or he might deliver sea-borne attacks against the Kuantan and/or East Johore areas with a view to cutting our communications with our forces in the North, or he might deliver a sea-borne attack against Singapore direct. There remained also the possibility of an air-borne attack directed against our aerodromes.

202. I was informed by the C.-in-C. Far East that the policy was to keep the enemy as far north in Malaya as possible in order to prevent him acquiring territory and particularly aerodromes which would threaten the arrival of reinforcements.

203. I considered the possibility of moving up all or part of the A.I.F. in relief of troops of 11 Indian Division but rejected the idea for the following reasons:-

- (a) The relief could not be carried out without temporarily leaving the Johore defences very weak;
- (b) It was undesirable to break up the A.I.F. organization;
- (c) On the other hand, if the whole of the A.I.F. was sent, the relief would necessarily take a long time and ultimately the vital Johore area would be held by tired troops with no previous experience of that part of Malaya.

204. I decided to go to Ipoh to discuss the situation with the Commander 3 Indian Corps and left Singapore late on the 17th December.

After a reconnaissance of the area and a visit to some of the forward troops on the 18th December the following decisions were made:-

- (a) While adhering to the general policy of withdrawal behind the River Perak, the enemy would be held west of the river as long as possible without permitting our forces to become inextricably committed.
- (b) The Commander 3 Indian Corps would select and have prepared a series of positions between Ipoh and Tanjong Malim.
- (c) The immediate role of 9 Indian Division would be (i) to continue to deny the Kuantan aerodrome to the enemy, (ii) to secure the 11 Indian Division and its communications against attack from the east coast.
- (d) As soon as the withdrawal across the River Perak had taken place, the best area for the operations of the sea-borne raiding force (to be known as "Rose Force") would be that part of the state of Perak which lies west of the river and south of the railway.
- (e) Arrangements were to be made for land raiding parties and for "left behind" parties to harass the enemy's communications.
- (f) A liaison officer was appointed to co-ordinate the action of the military and civil authorities in the west coast theatre of operations.

(g) The 6 and 15 Indian Infantry Brigades were to be amalgamated and to be known as the 6/15 Indian Infantry Brigade. Certain units were to be amalgamated, notably the East Surreys and Leicesters which became known as the British Battalion. The 12 Indian Brigade Group was to be incorporated into the 11 Indian Division.

(h) The Commander 3 Indian Corps was to consider the question of the command of 11 Indian Division. It was felt that an officer with the widest possible experience of bush warfare was required. A few days later Brigadier Paris, the Commander 12 Indian Infantry Brigade, who had been in Malaya for 2½ years, was appointed to succeed Major-General Murray Lyon.

As all the infantry brigade commanders of the division had become casualties, Lt.-Col. Moorhead was appointed to command the 6/15 Brigade, Lt.-Col. Stewart the 12 Brigade and Lt.-Col. Selby the 28 Brigade.

(j) All troops were to be given a minimum period of 48 hours rest as soon as this could be arranged. Defence in depth astride the main road after crossing the River Perak seemed to be the only way to make this possible.

(k) It was now clear that we were faced by an enemy who had made a special study of bush warfare on a grand scale and whose troops had been specially trained in those tactics. He relied in the main on outflanking movements and on infiltration by small parties into and behind our lines.

For support of his forward troops he relied on the mortar and the infantry gun rather than on longer range weapons. His snipers operated from trees. He exploited the use of fireworks. For mobility he made a wide use of civilian bicycles seized in the country. His tanks he had up to date operated mainly on the roads. His infantry had displayed an ability to cross obstacles – rivers, swamps, jungles, etc. – more rapidly than had previously been thought possible. Finally, speed was obviously of vital importance to him and he was prepared to press his attacks without elaborate preparations.

To meet these tactics, it was agreed that brigade groups should be echeloned in depth astride the main arteries of communication and that in selecting defensive positions special regard should be had to tank obstacles and cover from air, in both of which arms the enemy were well equipped while we were entirely deficient.

205. On return to Singapore I circulated an Instruction on the tactics to be employed, the main points of which were as follows:-

- (i) Enemy outflanking and infiltration tactics must not lead to withdrawals which should take place only on order of higher authority.
- (ii) Immediate counter-attacks should be exploited. These should, whenever possible, be planned beforehand and, owing to the necessity for speed, should usually be carried out by small bodies of a company on the initiative of local commanders.

(iii) It was suggested that the defences should consist of a holding group dug in astride the main communications, with striking forces forward on the flanks which should attack as soon as the enemy made contact with the holding groups.

(iv) The spreading of rumours must be suppressed.

(v) The enemy could not be defeated by sitting in prepared positions and letting him walk round us. We must play him at his own game and attack on every occasion. The efficiency, cunning and alertness of the individual were of primary importance.

Arrangements were made for the evacuation of as much as possible of the reserve stores from the Ipoh area. There was not, however, sufficient M.T. available to move the petrol, which was stored in 60-gallon drums. Arrangements were made for these to be destroyed by puncturing the drums.

I returned to Singapore on the morning of the 20th December.

206. The importance of the lateral road Jerantut – Kuala Lipis – Raub – Kuala Kubu, which was the main communication between East and West Malaya, now became apparent. If our forces on the west coast were driven back beyond Kuala Kubu, the enemy would be able to cut the only road communication of our forces on the east coast.

I discussed this situation with the C.-in-C. Far East and the A.O.C. It was agreed as a general policy that we should withdraw the Kuantan garrison at a time to be decided later in accordance with the development of the situation.

I also thought it desirable to take preliminary steps for the defence of North Johore and of Singapore Island itself against attack from the North.

On the 23rd December I caused to be issued Malaya Command Order No. 28, an extract from which is attached to this Despatch as [Appendix “C”](#).

207. The Commander A.I.F. delegated responsibility for the defence of North Johore to the 27 Australian Brigade Group in A.I.F. Malaya Operation Instruction No. 11 dated 24th December 1941 from which the following is an extract:-

“The 27 Brigade Group is made responsible for holding delaying positions towards the Johore – Malacca boundary. Requisition for local labour is to be submitted to the C.R.E.”

“The Bde. Gp. is to be disposed as under:-

(i) Gemas – Segamat, one Bn. Gp. plus one Coy.

(ii) Muar, one Bn. (less two Coys.) with attached troops.

(iii) Reserve (in Kluang – Ayer – Hitam area) one Bn. Gp.”

SECTION XXIV. – WEST COAST OPERATIONS, 18TH-

30TH DECEMBER, 1941.

208. *The Grik Road.* – On the 19th December our troops, who had now been reinforced, moved forward to recapture Sumpitan, led by the Independent Company. An encounter battle took place in the village, where our troops fought gallantly and were only withdrawn in face of a strong counter-attack. That night they fell back to Lenggong. On the 20th the Argylls were heavily engaged all day and had to drive off by counter-attack an enemy force which had moved down the river on rafts and reached Kota Tampan in their rear. On the 21st the Argylls held the Kota Tampan area against renewed enemy attacks, while the 5/2 Punjab Regt. occupied positions west of Chenderoh Lake. Some enemy rafts were sunk on the lake. At about 1800 hrs. the Argylls disengaged and withdrew through the 5/2 Punjab Regt. and the enemy following up were stopped at the Causeway.

The river approach through the Chenderoh Lake now gave the Japanese the opportunity of by-passing Kuala Kangsar and of threatening the main road and railway bridges over the River Perak and the communications east of them. To meet this threat the 4/19 Hyderabad Regt., which had now arrived from Kelantan, was concentrated east of the River Perak.

The enemy were now only some 12 miles from Lawin, where the Grik road joins the trunk road, and the situation demanded the speedy withdrawal of the 28 Brigade Group before it could be cut off in its positions north of Taiping.

209. *The Krian River Front.* – On the 19th and 20th December there was some activity on the right of the Krian River position and, to avoid being outflanked on the right, the 28 Brigade Group fell back to Ulu Sapetang and Bagan Serai. The bridges over the River Krian were demolished.

210. *The Tactical Situation.* – On the evening of 21st December all troops west of the River Perak, including those on the Grik road, were placed directly under the Commander 11 Indian Division. He decided that, in view of the situation on the Grik road, an immediate withdrawal behind the River Perak was necessary. He realised the importance of covering the Blanja Pontoon Bridge over the River Perak which gave direct access to the Ipoh area and the communications south of it.

The withdrawal of the 28 Brigade Group commenced at 2000 hrs. 21st December, the units being disposed as far as possible to meet all possible threats.

On the 22nd December there was further fighting on the Grik Road and that night the 12 Brigade Group withdrew across the Perak River covered by troops of the 28

Brigade Group. By the morning of the 23rd December all troops, except for a bridgehead at Blanja, were east of the river. The Blanja bridgehead was withdrawn on the night 23rd-24th December.

A gap was successfully blown in the Iskander Bridge, the fine main road bridge over the River Perak. A portion of the pontoon bridge at Blanja was swung to the eastern shore and the pontoons sunk.

On withdrawal the 12 Brigade Group bivouacked in the Salak North area and the 28 Brigade Group concentrated in the Siputeh area with a detachment watching the River Perak at Blanja.

211. *Summary.* – After sixteen days of continuous and exhausting operations our troops on the west coast were back behind the River Perak. What would have happened had Operation MATADOR been put into effect in good time is a matter for speculation. It is almost certain that it would have eased the air situation by denying to the enemy some of its fighter bases. On the other hand, had we been unable to hold the strong enemy thrust on the Kroh front our communications to North Malaya and subsequently to East Malaya would have been severed and our whole structure of defence undermined. For the frustration of the enemy's plan to destroy our forces in this way we are indebted particularly to the fine fighting of the troops on the Kroh and Grik roads and to the quick reaction of all commanders to the very real threat which the enemy's thrust on this front constituted.

212. *Operations in the Ipoh area.* – On the 22nd December the Commander 3 Indian Corps decided to hold the areas south of Ipoh as under:-

One Brigade Group between Kg. Sahum and Tapah.

One Brigade Group covering road and railway north of Kampar.

One Brigade Group covering road and railway north of Bidor with a battalion at Ct.

Jong and the Independent Company at Telok Anson.

On the 23rd December the Commander 3 Indian Corps issued instructions to the Commander 11 Indian Division, the gist of which were as under:-

(a) The Commander 11 Indian Division would assume control of all combatant troops north of the Rivers Slim and Bernam.

(b) The enemy was to be delayed for as long as possible west of the River Kinta.

(c) The positions at Kg. Sahum – Kampar – Tapah and Bidor must be held until the strategic situation demanded that the Division be withdrawn. A rear position was being prepared in the neighbourhood of the River Slim.

(d) Local offensive operations were advocated.

(e) In case communications should be cut, each battalion was to hold 10 days' supplies and ammunition.

(f) Fighting patrols were to be employed to watch the flanks which could never be secure.

(g) Civil labour was being engaged and handled by the Europeans of the Perak Volunteer Force.

The 6/15 Indian Infantry Brigade had now been rested and reorganised. Three days in the Ipoh area had worked wonders. All units had been partly, but far from completely, re-equipped. The outlook was very much brighter. The Kampar position was rapidly put into a state of defence.

213. On the 26th and 27th December the 12 Brigade Group fought a delaying action north of Chemor (10 miles north of Ipoh) inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy, whose units moved forward in close formation. The 5/2 Punjab Regiment, upon which the brunt of the fighting fell, distinguished itself though it suffered fairly heavy losses.

During these two days the 28 Brigade Group continued to watch the line of the River Perak in the Blanja area.

By the 26th all troops remaining in Ipoh had moved south. Among the last to leave their posts were the Chinese and Eurasian girl operators of the telephone exchange who were handling military traffic and who continued to do so in the face of bombing and the approach of the enemy until ordered to leave. They deserve the highest praise.

The withdrawal of the 12 and 28 Brigade Groups began at 1900 hrs. on the 27th December and continued throughout the night. The 12 Brigade Group, to which had been allotted the task of delaying the enemy's approach to the Kampar position north of Dipang, occupied a position south of Gopeng, while the 28 Brigade Group took up positions astride the defile road which protected the right flank of the Kampar position, with one battalion in the Tapah area.

The newly formed Kedah Armoured Car Company, manned by European Volunteers, acquitted itself well during and following the withdrawal. It now became apparent, however, that the enemy were using an armour-piercing bullet against which the armour of the Marmon-Harrington armoured cars was not proof. Many casualties were suffered by the crews of these cars during the subsequent operations.

214. On the 29th December the 12 Brigade, Group was early in contact with the enemy who attacked at 1000 hrs. The attack was repulsed but, realising that the enemy was now in strength, the divisional commander ordered the brigade to withdraw that evening through the Kampar position and come into reserve at Bidor. The enemy followed up the withdrawal closely and again tanks produced a demoralizing effect on the tired troops. The situation was saved by some excellent work on the part of the 137 Field Regt. and the 80 A/Tk. Regt. The large bridge over the River Kampar at Dipang was destroyed after several abortive attempts.

The 12 Brigade Group had had a gruelling time. Since the battle of Gurun it had borne the brunt of the fighting, and in its doggedly fought rearguard actions between Batu Pekaka and Selama, on the Grik road and in the Ipoh area it had gained time for the re-

organization of the remainder of the 11 Indian Division and the occupation of the Kampar position and had inflicted delay and heavy casualties on the enemy. It had, however, suffered severely itself.

215. In order to protect the long and vulnerable communications the I Independent Company had been sent to the Telok Anson area on the lower reaches of the River Perak. From here distant boat and cycle patrols were sent out. It was supported by one infantry battalion at Ct. Jong.

216. *Operations of Rose Force.* – Towards the end of December a successful raid was carried out by Rose Force, strength about 40 men, against the enemy's communications west of the River Perak. The party was landed from the sea on the Perak coast but was unfortunately weakened by the breakdown of one of the troopcarrying launches. A M.T. column was ambushed and some lorries and two staff cars containing high-ranking officers destroyed. The party was then withdrawn to Port Swettenham. With a little more persistence even greater results might perhaps have been obtained.

217. It was hoped to repeat and develop this enterprise which undoubtedly offered great possibilities. That it was not found possible to do so was due to the lack of sea transport which resulted in the main from losses suffered as a result of the aerial supremacy which the enemy had established on this coast. The last hope disappeared when on the 1st January five "Eureka" fast coastal vessels which the Army had purchased from America and handed over to the Navy to operate were attacked by aircraft on their way north to Port Swettenham and either sunk or driven ashore. On the 30th December also H.M.S. "Kudat", the base depot ship for this force, was bombed and sunk in the harbour of Port Swettenham.

218. *Air Operations.* – The 23rd December was the first day of intensive air action against our troops in the forward areas. Up till then the enemy's air effort had been concentrated chiefly against our aerodromes. On that day heavy attacks were made against troops in bivouac areas and on the move and against Ipoh railway station. These attacks continued for the rest of the month. Our own troops were almost entirely without air support as all the remaining fighters except for a few which operated from Kuala Lumpur had by now been withdrawn to the Singapore area.

Air attacks against the Singapore area were not renewed until the 29th December when the first of a succession of night attacks took place.

Our own Air Striking Force, which seldom consisted of more than half a dozen machines, carried out night attacks against enemy occupied aerodromes. The Sungei Patani Aerodrome in particular, where over 100 Japanese aircraft had been located, was attacked on several occasions. In addition, aerial reconnaissances were carried out daily off both the east and west coasts as far as the availability of aircraft permitted.

The C.-in-C. Far East laid down as a policy that convoy protection work must in

the future take precedence over all other calls on the Air Force.

219. *Strategy.* – In a telephone conversation which I had with the Commander 3 Indian Corps at 1100 hrs. 29th December it was agreed that it would be better to fight the enemy in the positions then occupied rather than carry out any rearward movements in the immediate future, although this in no way altered the general instructions.

On the same day I informed the Commanders 3 Indian Corps and A.I.F. that I had arranged with the Director of Public Works to form Works Groups in selected areas under State engineers who would report to them for orders. The object of this was to prepare a series of obstacles, especially anti-tank obstacles, in great depth on the probable line of the enemy's advance. The idea was that the officers of the Public Works Department should be given outline instructions and be left to carry out the work themselves with civil labour.

On the 28th December the Commander Singapore Fortress was ordered to prepare schemes for the destruction of the Causeway which connected Singapore Island with the mainland.

SECTION XXV. – THE BORNEO AND CHRISTMAS ISLAND OPERATIONS.

220. *Sarawak and Brunei.* – On the 13th December the Miri detachment, having completed its task, left for Kuching in H.M.S. "Lipis".

At 0330 hrs. on the 16th December Japanese troops landed at Seria. Some of them proceeded by road to Belait. Early on the 22nd they reached Danau.

On the 19th and 20th December Japanese aircraft attacked the aerodrome at Kuching and also dropped bombs on and machine-gunned the town. Many of the inhabitants evacuated. On the 23rd December the O.C. Troops reported that there had been a complete break in civil labour.

221. On the evening of the 23rd December two Japanese cruisers and seven transports arrived off the mouth of the River Santubong near Kuching and landings were made during the night. Before arrival the convoy had been attacked by submarines of the Royal Dutch Navy and three transports and one tanker were reported to have been sunk or disabled. The Japanese troops advanced in landing craft up the waterways leading to Kuching and were engaged by our forward troops at Pending and elsewhere. Later in the day, the situation having become confused, the forward troops were withdrawn to the vicinity of the aerodrome. In the meantime, in accordance with the instructions received from Singapore, the denial scheme on the aerodrome had been put into operation.

222. At 1305 hrs. 24th December I received a wireless message from O.C. Troops Sarawak and Brunei to the effect that, as the aerodrome was no longer required by our Air Force, he presumed that he was at liberty to withdraw his force into Dutch West Borneo. I

replied to the effect that he should fight the enemy for as long as possible, and that subsequently he should act in the best interest of West Borneo as a whole, withdrawing if necessary into Dutch territory.

223. On the evening of the 24th December the enemy ships off Kuching were attacked by a small force of Blenheim Bombers.

After some sharp fighting in the vicinity of the aerodrome on the 25th December contact was broken off in the evening and withdrawal to Dutch West Borneo via the 50 mile jungle path was effected. All wheeled transport had to be abandoned. The force arrived at Sanggau in Dutch Borneo on the 29th December and came under orders of the local Dutch commander. Arrangements were made by Headquarters Malaya Command to drop supplies and ammunition on the aerodrome at Sinkawang for this force.

224. *The Japanese arrived at the Sarawak* – Dutch West Borneo frontier on the 7th January, 1942, but were held there by the 2/15 Punjab Regt. until the 18th January. Much bitter fighting took place here in the endeavour to prevent the enemy reaching the large Dutch aerodrome at Sanggau. Eventually the aerodrome, installations and bomb stores were successfully demolished. A rearguard action was then carried out to Nyabang, where contact with the enemy was lost.

225. Subsequently it was decided to move to the South Coast of Borneo in two columns, one making for Sampit in the centre of the south coast and the other for Pankalang Boen 120 miles to the West. It was hoped to find sea transport which would take the columns to Java. The columns left early in February and arrived at their destinations simultaneously. On arrival at Sampit the eastern column found a Japanese force there which it engaged. It then joined the western column by marching on a compass bearing through dense jungle for six days. The distance covered by the eastern column from Kuching to Sampit was over 800 miles, the major portion on foot through jungle. On the 3rd April the whole force, which was in an exhausted state after its long march, became prisoners of war. A high standard of discipline had been maintained by the troops who had covered hundreds of miles carrying their light automatics and ammunition with no transport through some of the worst country in the world.

226. *Labuan.* – On the 3rd January, 1942, a small Japanese force took possession of the Island of Labuan, which was not defended.

227. *British North Borneo.* – The State of British North Borneo was organized into two Administrative Divisions, the east and west coast Residencies. The seat of Government was at Sandakan.

On the 3rd January a small detachment from the Japanese force which had landed at Labuan proceeded in a captured motor vessel to Mempakul on the coast of British North Borneo and from there to Weston, a small port at the mouth of the River Padar. At Weston the detachment commandeered a train and proceeded to Beaufort 20 miles distant. The

detachment at Beaufort was reinforced on the evening 3rd January. On the 6th January Japanese forces entered Jesselton by rail from Beaufort (56 miles). All the west coast area was now under Japanese control and the Governor (Mr. C.R. Smith) severed all connection between the east and west coast Residencies.

On the 19th January a Japanese force, estimated at 600 strong, arrived at Sandakan, British North Borneo, having assembled at Banggi Island off the north coast of North Borneo two days earlier. It came in two coastal vessels captured in Brunei waters and twelve Japanese motor fishing vessels. The troops from the latter landed in two creeks to the north of the Sandakan area and reached Sandakan by land at about 0900 hrs. The two coastal vessels entered Sandakan harbour at about 0930 hrs. The Governor surrendered the whole State at 0900 hrs. 19th January and refused to carry on the administration under Japanese control. He and his staff were interned.

Tawau, situated on the east coast near the N.E.I. border, was occupied by the Japanese on the 24th January and Lahad Datu, between Tawau and Sandakan, on the 26th or 27th January. Kudat on the north coast was occupied about the 1st February and the whole State then came under Japanese control.

A great deal of denial damage was done under the Governor's orders in accordance with plans carefully prepared beforehand. In particular, coastal vessels and local craft, including a number of Japanese craft, were sunk. The Japanese occupying forces were much incensed at the damage done, especially at Sandakan and Tawau.

228. *Christmas Island.* – On the 20th January our Coast Defence Artillery at Christmas Island engaged an enemy submarine which had torpedoed a Norwegian vessel.

SECTION XXVI. – THE HIGHER COMMAND.

229. On 5th January, Vice-Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton, Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, moved his headquarters from Singapore to Batavia.

This move was decided on primarily because of the now vital necessity of taking every possible step to ensure the safe and timely arrival of troop convoys at Singapore. This necessitated close co-operation with the American and Dutch Commanders, which could only be achieved at Batavia.

Moreover, by this date it had become apparent that Singapore would shortly be exposed to heavy air attack by bombers escorted by fighters and therefore would be of little value in the immediate future as a base for heavy surface ships. The Rear-Admiral Malaya (Rear-Admiral Spooner) became Senior Naval Officer at Singapore, and resumed responsibility for the whole of the local naval defence of Malaya.

230. On the 23rd December, 1941, Lt.-Gen. Sir Henry Pownall arrived to succeed Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke Popham as Commander-in-Chief Far East in

accordance with a decision which had been made before the outbreak of hostilities. He immediately went North to the 3 Indian Corps area, visiting the 11 Indian Division on the 25th Dec. and the 9 Indian Division on the 26th Dec. On the 7th Jan., 1942, General Sir Archibald Wavell (now Field-Marshal Earl Wavell) arrived at Singapore to assume the appointment of Supreme Commander South West Pacific Command. After visiting Headquarters 3 Indian Corps and troops of the 11 Indian Division on the 8th Jan. General Wavell left Singapore for Java. The Far East Combined Bureau accompanied him except for a few officers who were left to strengthen the Intelligence Branches of the Service Staffs at Singapore. On the establishment of Headquarters South West Pacific Command, the appointment of Commander-in-Chief Far East lapsed.

231. Mr. Duff Cooper, the Cabinet representative in the Far East, also left Singapore early in January.

232. It was generally agreed that these rapid changes in the Higher Command, necessary though they may have been, had an unsettling effect and did not make for continuity.

SECTION XXVII. – THE SCORCHED EARTH POLICY.

233. Early in 1941 a denial scheme for the event of the invasion of Malaya had been prepared and necessary instructions issued. This scheme was directed principally to the destruction or removal of everything that might facilitate the movement of invading forces, i.e., the destruction of any form of repair workshop, 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.

About the middle of December, 1941, the Cabinet Representative in the Far East informed the War Council that he had received instructions to the effect that, as our troops withdrew, an unrestricted Scorched Earth Policy was to be applied throughout Malaya. It was at once apparent that our problem differed in some important respects from that which had a few months previously confronted the Russians. This was due in the main to the fact that, whereas their armies were withdrawing through a country inhabited by their own people, our forces were withdrawing through a country inhabited by Asiatic peoples to whom we had by treaty promised our protection. If we deprived these people of the necessities of life such as food, water, etc., or destroyed the symbols of modern civilisation, such as the power supplies of their hospitals, they would claim that we were not treating them in accordance with our promises and they would become fertile ground for the seeds of the enemy's propaganda. On the other hand the machinery, most of which was owned by British firms and individuals, and the rubber stocks could quite properly be destroyed. Of greater importance from the military point of view was the destruction of road and railway bridges. This was obviously essential if we were to succeed in our efforts

to delay the enemy and it had in fact been done since the beginning of the operations.

234. Two other aspects of the problem which received consideration were the practicability of applying a Scorched Earth Policy and the moral effect it would have, if applied, on both soldiers and civilians.

As regards the former, widespread destruction of property is not an operation which can be carried out effectively at the last minute. To be effective it must be both prepared and put into execution in advance of the final withdrawal. In that case, however, the explosions and fires give to the enemy a sure indication of the intention to withdraw. It was impossible also for the military authorities to carry out or supervise the destruction in so large an area. The best that could be done was to appoint officers to tour the country to see that adequate preparations had been made. The executive work had to be left to the owners or agents on receipt of orders from a central authority.

235. The moral effect on both soldiers and civilians would be, it was anticipated, extremely adverse. At a time when we were doing our utmost to raise the morale of our troops we feared that the noise of explosions and the sight of smoke in their rear would have the opposite effect. As regards the civilians, we wanted all the help we could get from the Asiatic population but, as is well known, Asiatics tend to take the side of the more powerful and we feared that the sight of destruction being carried out well behind our lines would induce them to help the enemy rather than ourselves.

236. With these considerations in mind the Far East War Council, after referring the matter to London, issued instructions that a scorched earth policy would be enforced, but that it would not apply to foodstuffs already distributed to the civil population, to water supplies or to power plants.

SECTION XXVIII. – WOMEN AND CHILDREN.

237. The situation as regards Army Families at the outbreak of hostilities has already been explained in [Part I, Section IX](#), “Married Families.” A similar situation existed in the Royal Air Force. There were also in Malaya a number of families of naval personnel who had shore appointments. On the civil side no restrictions had been imposed on the entry of families into Malaya, so that there were some thousands of women and children, the families of both officials and unofficials. Many of these had made their home in Malaya for a number of years.

238. In December, on instructions from Home, the question of the evacuation of women and children from Malaya came before the War Council. It was at once apparent that important issues were involved. In the first place many of the European women were engaged in essential war work – either in offices or in hospitals or in the Passive Air Defence Organization. In many cases it would be difficult to release them without weakening the organization. Moreover, many of them, especially in the Passive Air

Defence Services, were working side by side with Eurasian and Asiatic women. It was in fact the European women who had in many cases taken the lead in building up the local organizations. If these women were to be withdrawn now that war had broken out and there was work to be done, the effect on the Eurasian and Asiatic population would clearly be little short of disastrous and a severe blow would be dealt to British prestige. Again, if European women were to be evacuated, why should not those Eurasian, Chinese, Indian and other Asiatic women, who were not natives of Malaya, also be evacuated if they wished to go? Although Japan's policy was to try to rally all Asiatics to her flag with the cry of "Asia for the 'Asiatics'" our political object was clearly to hold Malaya for the British Empire. It was not to gain a victory of Europeans over Asiatics. If, therefore, we evacuated immediately all European women, leaving the Eurasian and Asiatic women to do their work, we should, it seemed, be playing into the hands of the Japanese and provide a fertile ground for the seeds of their propaganda.

239. An analysis of the European women in Malaya showed that they could be divided broadly into the following categories:-

(a) Married Families of Service Personnel. – (Rank and File).

Not very many of these were employed on essential war work. Moreover, many of them were occupying Government accommodation which would shortly be required for reinforcements. They were for the most part "bouches inutiles." Their evacuation was therefore both possible and desirable.

(b) Families of Officers and Civilians who wished to leave.

It was considered undesirable to force these to stay against their will.

(c) Families of Officers and Civilians who did not wish to leave but who were not engaged in essential war work.

These could be ordered to leave on the grounds that they constituted "bouches inutiles."

(d) Families of Officers and Civilians who did not wish to leave and who were engaged in essential war work.

There were a large number in this category. For reasons given above there were strong objections to their evacuation.

The Far East War Council, after full consideration of the factors involved, issued instructions that evacuation should start forthwith and that all available accommodation in ships returning to suitable destinations should be used. A Joint Service and Civil Committee was set up to allot accommodation. In providing passage accommodation for those civilians who wished to leave Singapore the civil Government ordered that all nationalities should receive absolutely equal and impartial treatment. A Committee was set up with a Judge of the Supreme Court as Chairman to decide on priority of claims. The

implementation of the policy will be dealt with later in this despatch.

240. This was one of the most difficult problems we had to solve. It is a problem upon which there will be many and varied opinions. It was complicated by the known characteristics of our adversary, and by considerations for the care of children. I do feel, however, that women who stick to their posts in these conditions so long as the commander allows them to do so are making a very valuable contribution to the general war effort and especially to the maintenance of morale.

SECTION XXIX. – CIVIL DEFENCE.

241. It had become apparent very soon after the outbreak of hostilities that the prewar civil defence arrangements were in many respects inadequate for the situation which was developing. This did not apply so much to the Passive Air Defence Services which were for the most part operating efficiently in the area which had been bombed, though they required strengthening especially as regards the Fire Fighting Services whose work was invaluable. It applied chiefly to the material protection of important buildings and to the control of labour and transport.

242. *Martial Law.* – Towards the end of December 1941 Martial Law was, at the instigation of the Cabinet Representative in the Far East, declared in the Colony of Singapore. The Commander Singapore Fortress was appointed Administrator. The Commander 3 Indian Corps and the Commander A.I.F. were authorised to declare Martial Law in the Federated Malay States and in Johore and Malacca respectively at their discretion. They did not find it necessary to do so.

243. *The Civil Defence Committee.* – In an endeavour to develop and bring up-to-date the Civil Defence arrangements for Singapore the Cabinet Representative in the Far East set up on the 16th December a Civil Defence Committee to review and deal with all measures affecting the defence of Singapore other than those of a purely military character. Its composition was as under:-

Chairman.-

The Cabinet Representative in the Far East. (The Rt. Hon. A. Duff Cooper).

Members.-

The Commander Singapore Fortress (Maj.-Gen. Keith Simmons).

The Inspector General S.S. Police (Mr. A.H. Dickinson).

Mr. Denham.

The Defence Security Officer (Col. Johnson).

The Committee was dissolved early in January.

244. *The Directorate of Civil Defence.* – Towards the end of December the Cabinet Representative in the Far East proposed the formation of a Directorate of Civil Defence under a Director General. I was asked if I would be willing to make my Chief Engineer, Brigadier I. Simson, available for the appointment of Director-General. Although I was loath to lose the services of so important an officer at this juncture, I agreed to make Brigadier Simson available provided he retained concurrently the appointment of Chief Engineer. This provision was made in his own interests and for financial reasons. In

sending my reply I expressed the opinion that the organization which would result from the proposed new Directorate was faulty because it cut across the existing organization and would lead to a clash of responsibility between the Director General of Civil Defence and the Secretary for Defence. Nevertheless, the Directorate was created on the 31st December, Brigadier Simson being appointed Director-General and Mr. F.D. Bisseker, the General Manager of the Penang Smelting Works and the Senior Unofficial Member of the Legislative Council, Deputy Director-General. Mr. Bisseker, was also appointed Director of Labour and Transport.

The Minister gave the D.G.C.D. plenary powers on all matters pertaining to Civil Defence in Singapore Island and Johore, subject only to reference to the War Council through the Minister where considered necessary. A letter to this effect, signed by the Minister, was addressed to certain Heads of Government Departments, Public Bodies and Civil Firms, with copies to the Governor and the Service Chiefs.

On the 1st January 1942, under amended terms of reference issued by the Governor, Johore was excluded, so that the Directorate of Civil Defence actually operated in Singapore Island only.

On or about the 23rd January, the D.G.C.D. became a member of the Far East War Council.

245. As the campaign progressed the activities of the Directorate of Civil Defence increased rapidly, but it was an impromptu organization and suffered from lack of staff and normal office facilities. Also the extent of its functions were never clearly defined or understood. The Director-General and his Staff worked untiringly, but I remain convinced that the organization was fundamentally unsound. There was already a Secretary for Defence and there was a Permanent Labour Committee. Plans had also been made for transport in wartime to be handled by the Registrar of Vehicles and his staff. It is true that at this time strong action was required for the rapid development of some of the Civil Defence arrangements but, by making the Director-General of Civil Defence responsible through the Minister to the Far East War Council, the Governor and his subordinates were presumably deprived of some at least of what should have been their responsibility. It would, in my opinion, have been better to build on the existing organization, strengthening it as necessary by the introduction of men of character and experience.

SECTION XXX. – LABOUR.

246. War experience soon showed that, while the organized military labour units worked on the whole satisfactorily, this was far from being the case with civil labour. Trouble first broke out in Kedah, where civil labour disappeared as soon as the operations started. At Penang, during the heavy air raids, the majority of the Asiatic municipal employees disappeared leaving the troops to carry on their functions, an experience which was to be

repeated later in Singapore. On the railway, after the spasmodic enemy air attacks on the stations, many of the non-European officials and labourers absented themselves. These included such key men as engine-drivers, stokers, signalmen, plate-layers etc. As a result there was a real danger that railway traffic would come to a standstill. The danger was averted, firstly by the Volunteer Railway Unit and secondly by seconding for work on the railways military personnel with previous railway experience. The conduct of the senior railway officials throughout was, however, exemplary.

247. In the Singapore area the trouble first appeared on the aerodromes. It had from the first become obvious that a secure base from which our aircraft, and especially our fighter aircraft, could operate was essential for the successful development of the campaign. I therefore agreed to the maintenance of the existing Singapore aerodromes and the construction of new air strips taking priority over other military work. Large labour gangs were required to fill in the craters caused by enemy bombing and for work on the new air strips. After each raid, however, the greater part of these gangs disappeared and after a time it became difficult to get labourers to work on the aerodromes at all. To ease the situation I had to arrange for working parties to be found, whenever available, from the Army Reinforcement Camps for work on the aerodromes, even though this meant that little or no labour was available for work on the beach defences of Singapore Island. The trouble soon spread to the Naval Dockyard where, after one or two air attacks, many of the permanent civil staff absented themselves, with the result that the repair of local naval craft and other work was seriously delayed. Later the Dock workers, employed by the Singapore Harbour Board, similarly disappeared when the Docks became the main target for enemy air attacks. Here also military personnel had to be called in to unload the ships.

248. In the Army, War Office authority had been received shortly before war broke out to form up to six labour companies, but for some time the War Office refused to agree to increase the fixed rate of 45 cents per day for coolies. As the current rate in Singapore at that time was in the region of one dollar per day plus free rations and accommodation, it was not surprising that, in spite of strenuous recruiting efforts, these companies could not be formed. By the 7th January only one additional company had been formed.

249. Early in January efforts were made to solve the grave labour problem. Mr. Bissek was appointed Director of Labour under the Director-General of Civil Defence. He worked through the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and through influential representatives of the other communities. The Services applied to him for their requirements.

250. On the 8th January a Director of Army Labour was appointed. He took over control both of the existing labour companies and of the labour supplied by contractors. Many of the latter were of a very poor quality and it had become apparent that the only satisfactory solution was to recruit as many labourers as possible into the labour

companies; also that it was essential that they should be handled by officers and N.C.Os. who understood them and that accommodation should be provided as near as possible to their work. By arrangement the Governor cabled to the Colonial Office requesting that the Services should be given authority to accept decisions by the D.G.C.D. as regards conditions of service reached after consultation with interested departments. No authority was received, but the War Office was informed that in view of the urgency the labour scheme agreed upon locally was accepted.

251. We continued to be hampered by the lack of centralized leadership among the Chinese in Singapore, from whom the bulk of the labourers were drawn. The coolies understood little of the war and many of them were quite content to hide in their villages unpaid. There were few who would go among them and lead them. The situation was to some extent aggravated by the distribution of rice to each Asiatic household to be held as a reserve, a measure taken by the Government in order to disperse food reserves but which had the effect of making it unnecessary for the labourers to earn their subsistence.

252. There were those who urged that compulsion should be applied but those best acquainted with the Asiatics, and especially with the Chinese, were opposed to it. They considered that better results would be obtained by trying to find, and get the co-operation of Asiatic leaders. I supported this view. It was only when this had failed to produce the required results that a measure was passed on the 20th January to introduce compulsion, but it came too late for its value to be disclosed.

253. The shortage of civil labour remained a great source of weakness throughout the campaign. It is right to add, however, that many of the senior officials, both European and Asiatic, performed their duties loyally and well. This was particularly the case in the Railway and in the Posts and Telegraphs Departments which were kept working in spite of very great difficulties.

SECTION XXXI. – THE STRATEGICAL SITUATION, 30TH DECEMBER, 1941 – 2ND JANUARY, 1942.

254. Our object remained as before, i.e. the Defence of the Naval Base.

There had been no change recently in the Naval situation.

The Air situation has been described in [Section XXIV](#). The safe arrival of 50 Hurricane Fighters, due to reach Singapore by sea about the 13th-15th January, appeared to be of paramount importance as this was still the only chance of reestablishing any measure of air superiority.

255. As regards the relative strength of the Land Forces, we knew from air reconnaissance that Japanese ships had been steadily discharging at Singora and other ports, but the general situation as regards the strength of the forces on both sides remained

as stated in [Section XXIII](#).

We had, however, now been informed that we might expect substantial reinforcements during the month of January, the principal of which were as under:-

(a) *During the first few days of January.* – One Indian Infantry Brigade with attached troops.

(b) *About 13th-15th January.* – One Brigade Group of the 18 British Division with certain artillery units. These troops were coming in large American liners, the safe arrival and despatch of which were of the utmost importance.

(c) *Later in January.* – The 18 British Division (less one Brigade Group), one Indian Infantry Brigade, some Australian and Indian Reinforcements and certain other units.

256. The Hurricane Fighters were coming in the same convoy as (b) above. This was therefore a most valuable convoy, the chief danger to which lay in air attack from bases either in West Borneo, in Malaya or in South Thailand, or from aircraft carriers. The scale of air attack which the enemy could deliver would be much increased if he could, before the arrival of the convoy, establish his aircraft on the Kuantan and Kuala Lumpur aerodromes.

257. In the west coast area the situation appeared to be slightly improved. The new 6/15 Indian Infantry Brigade had had 10 days in which to reorganize and to occupy the Kampar position. The 28 Indian Infantry Brigade, though on continuous front line duty, had had no heavy fighting for the last 10 days and was now also in position. The 12 Brigade Group had, it is true, been continuously in action since its arrival in the North and was tired. A defensive position, to which to fall back, was being prepared north of Tanjong Mahm. The chief danger lay in the threat to the left flank and rearward communications from enemy forces which might either cross the lower reaches of the River Perak or be landed, from coastal craft. It seemed, however, that the strength of such forces must be limited.

258. On the east coast the Kelantan Force was resting in the area Kuala Lipis – Jerantut – Raub covered on the North by Macforce which was still operating on the railway north of Kuala Lipis and on the South by detachments watching the approaches through Pahang. In the Kuantan area patrols had made contact towards the end of December with enemy troops moving South by the coast road in Trengganu and the Kuantan Force had, in accordance with instructions received from Higher

Authority, been re-disposed with the bulk of the force, material and transport west of the River Kuantan and with light mobile forces only operating east of the river.

259. It was clear that the enemy intended to continue his advance down the west coast as rapidly as he could. He might also be expected to attempt landings of small forces

on the west coast from the sea. On the east coast a combined sea and land attack against Kuantan seemed possible, while the enemy might also deliver a seaborne attack against East Johore or against Singapore Island direct. In this connection a special landing-craft carrying ship had been seen lying off Singora by our reconnaissance aircraft. There remained also the possibility of an airborne attack directed against our aerodromes.

260. As regards our own course of action, the governing consideration was the safe arrival of land and air reinforcements and time to deploy them. An early withdrawal would enable the enemy to establish his aircraft on the aerodromes at Kuantan and Kuala Lumpur before the arrival of the mid-January convoys. In consequence, it would make the task of bringing in these convoys much more difficult.

To achieve our object of protecting the Naval Base it was necessary to fight the main battle on the mainland and it was hoped to be able to deploy all the reinforcements due to arrive in January for that purpose. Therefore the longer we could delay the enemy in Central Malaya the better.

Further, there was a great deal of machinery and large quantities of stores, both military and civil, in the Kuala Lumpur area. Time for the evacuation of these was required.

I hoped to be able to hold the Kuantan aerodrome for another 10 days or so, which would make it impossible for the enemy to repair and organize the aerodrome before the middle of January. Allowing time for the Kuantan garrison to withdraw and cross the Jerantut ferry, this would mean that the west coast force would have to hold the enemy north of the Kuala Kubu Road Junction until about the middle of January. That would mean that it would have a depth of about 70 miles in which to manoeuvre for 15 days.

With the above considerations in mind I went north on the 30th December to discuss with the Commander 3 Indian Corps and his Divisional Commanders the details of the strategy to be pursued.

261. Accompanied by the Commander 3 Indian Corps I visited the Headquarters 11 Indian Division at Tapah on the 31st December. The Divisional Commander reported that the position at Kampar was satisfactory. As regards future strategy, he expressed confidence in his ability to hold the enemy north of the Kuala Kubu Road Junction until at least the 14th January. He was therefore instructed that he was not without permission to withdraw his force beyond that road junction before the 14th January, and that he was to continue to impose the maximum delay on the enemy's advance. I impressed upon all commanders the importance of taking adequate measures to prevent penetration by enemy tanks down the main road – a danger which I considered a very real one in view of our complete lack of tanks with which to counter it.

262. On the 1st January we visited the Headquarters 9 Indian Division at Raub. The Divisional Commander reported that he had instructed the Commander Kuantan

Force that he should hold the Kuantan aerodrome for as long as possible, provided he did not thereby jeopardise his force. He had indicated that the aerodrome should be held for 5 more days if possible. Communication with Kuantan had broken down and an officer sent to ascertain the situation had not yet returned. After discussion it was decided that the Commander Kuantan Force should be instructed to hold the aerodrome until the 10th January.

263. Late on the 1st January the Commander 11 Indian Division reported that an enemy force had landed at Ulu Melintang near the mouth of the River Bernam (a little south of the mouth of the River Perak) and that he had moved the 12 Brigade Group to meet this threat. He further said that he thought he could continue to hold the Kampar position, where a strong attack had already been repulsed, for several days but that, if he did so, his ability to hold the enemy north of the Kuala Kubu Road Junction might, in view of the threat to his communications, be prejudiced. He asked for authority to withdraw his force from Kampar at his discretion. This was granted.

264. The Commander 3 Indian Corps was already having reconnaissances carried out of lines on which to co-ordinate the withdrawal as far back as North Johore. With a view to co-ordinating future defence plans I arranged to hold a conference at Segamat in North Johore on the 5th January at which both the Commanders 3 Indian Corps and A.I.F. should attend.

265. After visiting Port Swettenham and Port Dickson, I returned to Singapore late on the 2nd January.

266. During this tour the following matters, in addition to those reported above, were discussed:-

(a) Measures to harass the enemy's communications. "Left behind" parties, consisting for the most part of Chinese led by Europeans, were being rapidly trained at Singapore. It was planned to send these parties up to the 3 Indian Corps area as soon as ready. In addition, an offer had been received and accepted from the N.E.I. Military Authorities for a detachment of Marechaussees, specially trained in guerrilla warfare in the jungle, to be sent to Malaya.

(b) The preparation of special news sheets for distribution among the Indian troops to counter Japanese propaganda.

(c) Methods of anti-tank defence. In this connection, a very large number of concrete cylindrical blocks were being manufactured both at Singapore and at Kuala Lumpur and some were now ready for distribution.

(d) Policy as regards the Federated Malay States Volunteer Force. – This Force consisted partly of European and partly of Asiatic personnel. It was organized on a State basis and maintained out of Federated Malay State funds. In practically all cases the families of the Asiatic personnel were resident in the State and would remain there after withdrawal.

Faced with the prospect of moving into South Malaya and leaving their families behind, some of the Asiatic Volunteers began to show discontent and desertions had taken place. We were faced with the alternative of continuing to enforce service with the Colours at the expense, almost certainly, of weak and discontented units or of releasing those who wished to leave. We decided on the latter course. Thereafter, when a unit was to be withdrawn from its State every Asiatic member was given the option of remaining with it or of handing in his arms and equipment and going to his home. In almost every case the latter course was chosen. The arms and equipment were re-issued to units requiring them as there were few or none at that time in reserve.

267. On return to Singapore I circulated a letter on Tactics. A copy of this letter is attached as [Appendix "D"](#) to this despatch.

SECTION XXXII. – THE KUANTAN OPERATIONS.

268. The Kuantan area was very isolated. As already stated, it was over 100 miles, through desolate jungle country, from Jerantut on the east coast railway, and it was 160 miles from the Headquarters of the 9 Indian Division at Raub. These are big distances when there are no aircraft available for inter-communication. Its military importance lay solely in the R.A.F. aerodrome, 9 miles inland from the town and on the other side of the Kuantan River.

Kuantan was garrisoned by the 22 Indian Brigade Group under command of Brigadier Painter.

269. Since the 9th December when the aerodrome had been evacuated, Japanese aircraft had been daily active over the Kuantan area, reconnoitring, bombing and machine-gunning, but little damage had been done. It appears that the enemy had intended to make landings on the coast of Trengganu but had been prevented from doing so by his losses, especially of landing craft, in the Kelantan operations.

Between the 20th and 24th December our long distance patrols were in contact with Japanese troops moving southward in M.T. on the coast of Trengganu. On the 27th the enemy were engaged by our artillery near the Trengganu/Pahang frontier.

270. It was now apparent that the threat against the Kuantan area was developing from the North, though it might still be accompanied by a sea-borne landing. It will be recollected that we had by that time had heavy losses of material on the west coast and that our reserves had been depleted. We could not afford to have further heavy losses. The situation at Kuantan was particularly hazardous owing to most of the material being east of the River Kuantan which was crossed only by a single ferry. In consequence of this and of the situation which was developing on the left flank instructions were issued to the Commander Kuantan Force that he should concentrate the bulk of his force, material and transport, west of the River Kuantan, holding the area east of the river with light mobile

forces only.

271. This readjustment of the position was going on when, on the morning of the 30th December the Japanese advanced via the Jabor Valley in greater strength than they had previously shown. They were engaged by our artillery and small arms fire and confused fighting continued throughout the day. The ferry, which had been split into two working halves, was bombed during the day and one half only remained in action.

272. By the morning of the 31st December the enemy were attacking the ferry, but a bridgehead was maintained during the day. During the night 31st December/1st January the rearguard was withdrawn across the river and the ferry destroyed. At that time, however, the River Kuantan was fordable in its upper reaches, a most unusual occurrence at that time of year. This seriously weakened the defence.

273. In the meantime the Commander Kuantan Force had been ordered to hold the aerodrome till the 5th January (see [Section XXXI](#)) and this had been later extended to the 10th January. On the 2nd January, however, events on the west coast and the serious threat to our communications there forced the Commander 3 Indian Corps to expedite the programme and early on the morning of the 3rd January the Commander Kuantan Force received orders to withdraw his force to Jerantut forthwith. During the day the enemy closed in on the aerodrome and at about 1745 hours, as the withdrawal was taking place, a strong attack developed and very heavy fighting took place. It was during this action that Lt.-Col. Cummings, commanding the 2/12 Frontier Force Regt., won the Victoria Cross. During the withdrawal the rearguard was twice ambushed on the main road by a Japanese force, which had passed by bush tracks west of the aerodrome, and suffered heavy casualties.

274. The withdrawal was continued on the following days, the rearguard crossing the ferry at Jerantut on the night 6th/7th January. The Kuantan Force then moved to the area Raub – Tras – Trantum. One Infantry battalion (5/11 Sikhs) was still nearly at full strength. The strength of the other two battalions combined was rather less than one battalion. The losses in the supporting arms and administrative units had been comparatively small.

275. The Kuantan Force, like many other forces in Malaya, had had a difficult task to perform, because it had been greatly influenced by events elsewhere. It can be claimed, however, that by denying the aerodrome to the enemy for a month it had greatly decreased the scale of air attack which the enemy was able to develop against the Singapore area. That this was so was proved by the rapid increase in the scale of that attack during the month of January. It has also been ascertained from Japanese sources that heavy casualties were inflicted on them during these operations – especially by our artillery when the enemy concentrated his troops in the Kuantan township. There is little doubt that these casualties were considerably in excess of those suffered by our own troops.

SECTION XXXIII. – WEST COAST OPERATIONS, 31ST DECEMBER, 1941 – 8TH JANUARY, 1942.

276. *The Battle of Kampar.* – The Kampar position was the strongest of any occupied in Malaya. The main position was semi-circular covering the township of Kampar on a frontage of about four miles. The eastern flank rested against a limestone mountain 4,000 feet high with its steep sides and summit covered with thick jungle. Close under its western slopes ran the main road. To the North, West and South lay an extensive, open, tin-mining area, broken only to the south-west by a large rubber plantation. Fields of fire for small arms, except in the rubber plantation, extended up to 1,200 yards and more. There was excellent artillery observation from forward O.P.s on the mountain slopes. The newly organized 6/15 Indian Brigade Group was made responsible for the main position.

On the eastern flank the mountain was circled by a loop road which, leaving the trunk road at Kuala Dipang, passed through Sahum and Chenderiang and rejoined the trunk road a little north of Tapah. On this road, covering, Sahum, a position subsidiary to, but independent of, the Kampar position was occupied by the 28 Indian Brigade Group. The 12 Indian Brigade Group was in reserve in the Bidor area.

277. On the 31st December the Japanese increased the pressure which had commenced the previous day on the 28 Brigade Group but made no headway. The Gurkhas, who were fighting in country suited to their well-known qualities, proved themselves superior to the Japanese and, ably supported by the 155 Field Regiment, inflicted heavy losses on the enemy.

278. At 0700 hrs. on the 1st January the enemy started a determined attack on the Kampar position and heavy fighting continued throughout the day, particularly on the right flank where the British battalion was located. The garrisons of the defended localities held on grimly and localities lost were immediately recaptured by counterattack. At the end of the day all positions were intact.

279. On the following day the enemy renewed his attacks east of the main road where fierce fighting took place. The British battalion under the inspiring leadership of their Commanding Officer (Lt.-Col. Morrison) fought desperately. Late in the afternoon the enemy were driven out of a vital position, which they had captured, by the Sikh Company of the 1/8 Punjab Regt. magnificently led by the Company Commander (Capt. Graham) and the situation was again restored.

280. The influence of events elsewhere, however, again predominated though it is doubtful whether in any case the position could have been held much longer and at 2100 hrs., under orders from the divisional commander, the 6/15 Brigade Group started to withdraw. The withdrawal was closely followed up but, covered by the 28 Brigade Group, the 6/15th eventually disengaged and moved to the Tapah Bidor area.

281. The Battle of Kampar, where our troops fought extremely well, showed that trained British troops are at least the equal of the best Japanese troops. The infantry were splendidly supported by the artillery, the 88 Field Regt. on the Kampar front doing some particularly good work.

It is worth recording that during their stay at Kampar the British battalion lost over 100 officers and men evacuated with malaria – the result no doubt of operations further north.

282. *West Coast Operations.* – As recorded in [Section XXIV](#) the 1 Independent Company had been sent to the Telok Anson area to watch the seaward approaches.

Here it was joined by a squadron of the 3 Indian Cavalry. Supporting units were moved to the Changkat Jong area on the Telok – Anson/Bidor road, where work on defensive positions was begun.

283. On the 28th December long distance reconnaissance patrols reported Japanese troops at Lumut and at Sitiawan. At the latter place repairs were being carried out to the air landing strip. On the 31st December, air reconnaissance reported small steamers with barges in tow moving down the Perak coast. At 0900 hrs., 1st January, a motor launch patrol located a tug with four barges in tow stationary at the mouth of the River Perak. It was clear that the tug was stuck on a sandbank. Naval and Air action were requested, but the Japanese air cover proved too strong and nothing could be effected.

284. On the afternoon of the 1st January six small steamers accompanied by other craft were reported anchored at the mouth of the River Bernam, which flows into the sea a few miles south of the River Perak. The River Bernam is navigable for launches to Rantau Panjang, whence tracks lead to the main road, so that the threat to our communications was obvious. At 1930 hrs. some enemy troops landed at Ulan Melintang on the River Bernam. To meet this threat the 12 Brigade Group was moved from its rest area at Bidor to the Changkat Jong area.

285. At dawn on the 2nd January an enemy force, strength about one battalion, landed at Telok Anson. It had come down the river Perak in boats. The instructions given to the 1 Independent Company and the Squadron 3 Cavalry were to the effect that they were to delay any landing and cover the occupation of the Changkat Jong position. Accordingly, after some fighting in the outskirts of the town, these troops withdrew and passed through the 12 Brigade Group. The enemy followed up closely and by 1400 hrs. were in contact with the forward troops of this brigade which fell back fighting. By the evening the Commander 12 Brigade Group estimated that he was being attacked by at least a regiment and reported that he could not guarantee to keep the main road open for more than 24 hours. It was as a result of this report that the withdrawal from Kampar was ordered.

286. On the 3rd January the enemy again attacked strongly in the Changkat Jong

area supported by their Air Force but were repulsed. In the evening the 12 Brigade Group withdrew to the Trolak sector of the Slim position. The 6/15 Brigade Group followed them to a covering position at Sungkai. The 28 Brigade Group moved to the Slim River Village area.

287. South of Perak the Commander of the L. of C. Area (Brigadier Moir) was responsible for the defence of the west coast. He came directly under the orders of the Commander 3 Indian Corps. Immediately the threat to the west coast developed the forces at his disposal were strengthened by the temporary transfer of an infantry battalion from the 9 Indian Division and of another infantry battalion, the 3 Cavalry and some artillery from the 11 Indian Division which was later itself reinforced by another battalion drawn from the 9 Indian Division.

288. Late on the 2nd January two small steamers and about a dozen motor landing craft or barges approached the coast at Kuala Selangor a small village a little south of the Perak frontier. One of the steamers was sunk by artillery fire and the remainder withdrew. On the afternoon of the 3rd January a number of small craft were sighted off Kuala Selangor but out of artillery range. About midday on the 4th, however, patrols of 3 Indian Cavalry made contact with an enemy force moving south down the road from 8th Mile Village north of Kuala Selangor. This enemy force, driving back the cavalry patrols, advanced eastwards along the River Selangor, exercising a direct threat to the main road communications at Rawang. A sharp engagement took place at the bridge east of Batang Berjuntai. To meet this threat the 6/15 Brigade Group, recently withdrawn from the Kampar position, was moved to Rawang and thence to the Batang Berjuntai area which it reached on the 6th January. It took up a defensive position south of the River Selangor. Orders were given for the Denial Scheme to be put into force at the Batu Arang coal mines – the only coal mines in Malaya – which are situated in this district.

One destroyer (H.M.S. “Scout”) and naval patrol craft operated against enemy craft off the west coast.

289. *Reinforcements.* – On the 3rd January the 45 Indian Infantry Brigade with attached troops arrived at Singapore. This was a comparatively newly formed brigade which was only semi-trained. It had been intended for operations in the Middle East and had had no experience of jungle warfare. It was commanded by Brigadier Duncan. It was accompanied by an Indian Pioneer battalion – a non-combatant labour unit. On disembarkation the Brigade and the Pioneer battalion concentrated in the Segamat – Malacca area.

290. *Plans for the Defence of Johore.* – On the 4th January the Commander A.I.F. informed me that, if 3 Indian Corps fell back to Johore, he would like to be allowed to exercise operational control over all troops in Johore. If this was impossible, then he would prefer that the A.I.F. should be responsible for the West area and the 3 Indian Corps for the East area.

I replied that I could not agree to this for the following reasons:-

(a) The fusion of the 3 Indian Corps and A.I.F. must lead to Command and Administrative difficulties.

(b) The proposal to transfer the A.I.F. as a whole from East to West Johore was not practical owing to the complicated moves that would become necessary in the middle of active operations and the weakening of the east coast defences.

I informed him that the only practical solution at that time seemed to be for the A.I.F. to be responsible for the East area and the 3 Indian Corps for the West area, but that I would be guided by events.

291. At 1100 hrs. 5th January I held a conference at Segamat in North Johore as previously arranged (see [Section XXXI](#)) to discuss plans for the withdrawal and the defence of Johore. It was attended by the Commanders 3 Indian Corps and A.I.F. with members of their staffs, and by staff officers of Headquarters Malaya Command.

292. As a result of this conference, orders were issued for the withdrawal to and defence of Johore, the main points of which were as under:-

(a) *Intention.* – The intention was to continue to ensure the security of the Singapore Naval Base.

(b) *Policy.* – The broad policy was to continue opposition on the mainland to cover the arrival of reinforcements.

(c) There was to be no withdrawal without my permission south of the line Endau (later amended to read Mersing) – Batu Anam (N.W. of Segamat) – Muar.

(d) North of the line given above the 3 Indian Corps would continue to fight the enemy in areas selected by the Corps Commander. No withdrawal from one area to another would take place until necessitated by enemy action. The enemy should be attacked in flank and rear. It was of the utmost importance for strategical reasons to deny to the enemy the use of the Kuala Lumpur and Port Swettenham aerodromes for as long as possible, but at least until the 14th January.

(e) In view of possible enemy attempts to land on the west coast of Singapore Island, the Commander Singapore Fortress should pay particular attention to the defence of that area.

(f) After withdrawal the 3 Indian Corps would be responsible for the defence of the West area of Johore and the A.I.F. for that of the East area.

(g) The Main Line of resistance to be on the general line Mersing – Batu Anam – Muar.

(h) The 45 Indian Infantry Brigade with attached troops to come under orders 3 Indian Corps at once and the Pioneer Battalion from midday 7th January.

(j) 3 Indian Corps to take over immediately from A.I.F. Malaya operational control of the

area north of the line G. Besar – Labis – Semarah all inclusive to 3 Indian Corps.

(k) The State of Johore and Settlement of Malacca to be formed at once into an administrative area to be known as Johore/Malacca area.

293. *The Slim River Battle.* – At dawn on 4th Jan. the 12 Brigade Group was moving into the Trolak sector and the 28 Brigade Group into harbours near Slim River Village ready to man its positions in that area when ordered. No battalion could now muster more than the equivalent in men of three poorly armed companies. No battalion had more than two anti-tank rifles. Some had none.

The Trolak sector of the Slim River position extended for three miles forward from Trolak village and was divided into three battalion sub-sectors. The terrain in the two forward sub-sectors consisted of thick jungle through which the road and railway ran in narrow parallel corridors about 400 yards apart. This jungle was impassable for A.F.Vs. It was also a poor country for artillery support. To block the road against tanks a supply of large concrete cylinders had been sent up. Owing to the constant presence of enemy aircraft which flew up and down the road bombing and machine-gunning all day, work on the defences had to be done under cover of darkness. On the afternoon of the 5th Jan. an enemy attack down the railway was repulsed with heavy loss.

294. At 0345 hours 7th Jan. the enemy attacked the forward troops frontally in bright moonlight. They succeeded in clearing the tank blocks and 15 tanks followed by infantry advanced down the road. On reaching the second sub-sector the leading tank struck a mine and some 30 tanks piled up behind it in close formation. The attack was held up for some two hours in this sub-sector during which seven tanks were destroyed. Then they cleared the obstacles and continued their advance closely followed by infantry. The news of this tank break-through had, partly owing to lack of telephone cable, not reached the troops in rear who were in turn taken completely by surprise. Two battalions were overtaken by the tanks while marching along the road to occupy their position and were badly cut up. Artillery units were similarly surprised. It was not until the tanks had reached a point two miles south of Slim and 15 miles from their starting point that they were stopped by a 4.5-in. howitzer of the 155 Field Regt. There was practically nothing between them and Kuala Lumpur.

The effect of this break-through was disastrous. The enemy tanks were now in control of the bridge at Slim and all our wheeled transport was on the further side of it. The enemy infantry had followed up quickly and there was considerable fighting during the day in the forward areas. In the afternoon the brigade commanders issued orders for a withdrawal down the railway line to Tanjong Malim 17 miles away.

295. Our losses from this battle were very heavy. The three battalions of the 12 Brigade mustered only the equivalent of about a company each. One battalion of the 28 Brigade had been obliterated while the remaining two had a total strength of less than one

battalion. In the artillery, the engineers and the administrative units, the losses were on the same scale. A large number of guns and wheeled vehicles had been lost. The 11 Indian Division had temporarily ceased to exist as an effective fighting formation.

296. On the 8th January the Supreme Commander South-West Pacific, who had visited 3 Corps area on taking over command, initiated a plan to withdraw what remained of 3 Indian Corps into Johore without delay.

297. It would be easy, but unprofitable, to attribute the defeat at the Slim River Battle to the inadequacy of the anti-tank defences, the failure to blow the bridges or to a variety of other causes. The real cause lay in the utter weariness of the troops, both officers and men. They had been fighting and moving by day and by night for a month, and few of them had had any proper rest or relief. In the exhausting and enervating climatic and topographical conditions of Malaya this is far too long. The enemy's troops also no doubt suffered from the local conditions which were no more natural to them than to the majority of ours. But the enemy, with the initiative conferred by the offensive and by the freedom of the sea and air and with the ability to concentrate the whole of their forces against portions of ours in detail, could always relieve their tired troops or ease the pace whenever they found it necessary. Without reserves we were able to do neither. Had we had at this time the reserve division, which had been asked for, in 3 Indian Corps area, the story might have been very different.

298. *Air Operations.* – During this period the enemy gave continuous air support to his troops in the forward areas and also to his craft moving down the West Coast. He also made a series of attacks on the Kluang aerodrome in Central Johore and of night attacks against objectives in the Singapore area. Our own air strength during this period fell to a very low level. Our forward troops were entirely without air support. A large proportion of the available aircraft were employed on the defence of Singapore, on convoy protection duties and on seaward reconnaissances.

SECTION XXXIV. – THE WITHDRAWAL TO NORTH JOHORE, 9TH-14TH JANUARY, 1942.

299. *Orders for the Withdrawal and Defence of Johore.* – On the 9th January, in accordance with instructions received from the Supreme Commander, South West Pacific, I issued outline orders for the withdrawal to Johore, and the defence of that State. The main points of these orders were as under:-

(a) Commander A.I.F. to concentrate one Brigade Group, A.I.F., in the Segamat area as soon as possible.

(b) 45 Indian Brigade Group to come under command of A.I.F. Malaya immediately.

(c) 3 Indian Corps to withdraw from present positions into Johore covered by maximum

possible demolitions. Withdrawal to be carried out by rail and by M.T. as ordered by Corps Commander.

(d) Withdrawal to be covered by rearguards on the demolitions.

(e) On entering Johore 9 Indian Division to come under command of A.I.F.

(f) 3 Indian Corps, less 9 Indian Division, to take over operational responsibility for South Johore up to and inclusive of the line Endau – G. Beremban – Kluang – Batu Pahat on a date to be fixed later.

A copy of Malaya Command Operation Instruction No. 33 is attached as [Appendix “E”](#) to this Despatch.

300. To the best of my belief these orders were in accordance with the instructions received from the Supreme Commander, South-West Pacific. He has since stated that he directed that the Australian Brigade Group in the Mersing area should be moved as soon as possible to join the remainder of the A.I.F. I have no record or recollection of such instructions, though it was my intention, if opportunity offered at a later date, to relieve this brigade group by a newly arrived formation.

The Supreme Commander, South-West Pacific has also stated that he directed that the 9 Indian Division should be employed in the southern portion (i.e. Muar Sector) of the position to be occupied. I have equally no record or recollection of this instruction.

301. At 1100 hours, 10th January, I held a conference at Segamat. It was attended by the Commanders 3 Indian Corps and A.I.F. with their staff officers and staff officers of Headquarters, Malaya Command. At this conference the orders already issued on the 9th January were supplemented as under:-

(a) The troops in Johore would be reorganised into two forces, the one under Maj.-Gen. Gordon Bennett to be known as Westforce, and the other under Lt.-Gen. Sir Lewis Heath to be known as 3 Indian Corps. This did not include troops under command Singapore Fortress or directly under Headquarters, Malaya Command.

(b) The composition of Westforce to be as under:-

9 Indian Division.

A.I.F. less 22 Australian Brigade Group.

45 Indian Brigade Group.

2 Battalion The Loyal Regt. less one company (from Singapore Fortress).

Artillery, Engineer and Administrative units not included in formations.

The Indian Pioneer Battalion.

The task of Westforce was to hold the North-West portion of Johore, the main line of resistance to be on the general line, Batu Anam – Muar. There was to be no withdrawal

behind the line Segamat – Muar without my permission.

(c) The composition of 3 Indian Corps to be as under:-

11 Indian Division.

22 Australian Brigade Group with attached troops, which included 2/17 Dogra Battalion from Singapore Fortress, to be known as Eastforce (Brigadier Taylor).

3 Corps Troops, which included Artillery, Engineer and Administrative units.

The task of 3 Indian Corps was the defence of Johore south of and inclusive of the line Endau – G. Beremban – Kluang – Batu Pahat except the Pengerang area, for which Singapore Fortress was responsible.

(d) The 11 Indian Division, less 12 Indian Infantry Brigade, to be accommodated in areas where it could be rested and re-organised. The 12 Indian Infantry Brigade to be withdrawn direct to Singapore.

302. After the conference we reconnoitred in detail the positions to be occupied. I approved a plan for a major ambush on the road west of Gemas.

303. On the morning of 12th January, after a visit to troops of 9 and 11 Indian Divisions, I held a co-ordinating conference at which the Commanders A.I.F. and 9 Indian Division were present. At this conference the tactics to be adopted were discussed and I approved the following plan:-

(a) *Segamat area.* – The crossings over the Rivers Muar and Segamat, which were vital to the defence, to be held strongly against all forms of ground and air attacks.

West of River Muar localities to be held as focal points with striking forces available on the flanks to attack the enemy when he tried to move round them.

An ambush force to be located west of Gemas.

(b) *Coastal area.* – On the west coast flank the 45 Indian Brigade Group to cover the main coast road at Muar south of the river with detachments and patrols watching the river and exits south from it over the front Kg. Lenga to Muar.

(c) *Anti-Tank Defence.* – Forward field guns to be used for anti-tank and antipersonnel roles. The necessity for a physical obstacle, to be covered by fire, wherever it was intended to stop tanks was stressed.

304. *Commanders.* – At the request of the Commander 3 Indian Corps I appointed Brigadier Key to command the 11 Indian Division in place of Major-General Paris. The reason for this was that we considered that an Indian Army Officer was now required to pull together and re-establish confidence in what remained of the 11 Indian Division. Brigadier Lay, who had now returned to duty, was appointed to command the 8 Indian Infantry Brigade and Col. Challen took over command of the 6/15 Indian Infantry Brigade

in lieu of Brigadier Moorhead.

305. *The Withdrawal of 3 Indian Corps.* – At 0600 hrs., 9th January, the 1/14 Punjab Regiment on the right of the Batang Berjuntai position was suddenly attacked and suffered considerable losses. In the afternoon the 6/15 Brigade Group fell back to the Batu Arang area. On the West Coast road our troops after some skirmishing fell back to a position about three miles north of Klang. On the main road the 28 Brigade Group occupied a position at Serendah without being pressed.

306. For the withdrawal of 3 Indian Corps there were in the West Coast area two main roads available, i.e., the main trunk road Kuala Lumpur – Seremban – Tampin – Gemas – Segamat, and the coastal road Klang – Morib – Port Dickson – Malacca. The 9 Indian Division had the tortuous and little-used road Bentong – Durian Tipus, thence either via Kuala Pilah or Bahau to join the main trunk road two miles south of Tampin.

In the States of Selangor and Negri Sembilan and the Settlement of Malacca through which the withdrawal was to take place the roads are much more numerous than they are in the States of Perak and Pahang. The beaches also are sandy and more suitable for landings. These facilities conferred on the enemy greater freedom of action and made our task more difficult.

307. The plan was for the 11 Indian Division and L. of C. Troops to occupy two delaying positions during the withdrawal, the one covering Seremban and Port Dickson and the other covering Tampin and Malacca. The existence of the lateral road Kuala Pilah – Seremban and the convergence of the two divisional routes at Tampin made it necessary that the 9 Division should be clear of Kuala Pilah and Tampin respectively before the first and second delaying positions were vacated by the 11 Division.

308. Soon after dawn on the 10th January the enemy attacked the 28 Brigade Group at Serendah and, adopting his usual tactics, quickly enveloped both flanks. Some fierce fighting went on during the day, our troops gradually falling back to Sungei Choh Village, which they found already in possession of an enemy force which had come from the West. They managed to force their way through, however, though suffering severe losses, and late in the afternoon embussed for Tampin leaving behind a party to cover the engineers working on road demolitions.

The 6/15 Brigade Group, which had been withdrawn the previous night from the Batu Arang area, followed the 28 Brigade Group through Kuala Lumpur. The last bridge in the Federal Capital was blown at 0430 hrs. 11th January and the Brigade, leaving a small force to cover further demolitions, moved to the Labu area west of Seremban.

309. The 12 Indian Infantry Brigade, now only some 600-700 strong, was already in position guarding the Mantin (Setul) Pass, a narrow hilly defile a few miles north of Seremban. A battalion of the newly arrived 45 Indian Infantry Brigade had also been sent forward with requisitioned transport (it's own having not yet arrived) to the Sepang area.

310. On the coastal road Port Swettenham was evacuated on the afternoon on the 10th January and the big bridge at Klang was rather ineffectively blown at 2030 hrs. that night. After some local engagements with the enemy, all troops were withdrawn during the night 10th/11th January to positions covering Port Dickson.

311. During the 11th and 12th January there was no contact on the front, though the Japanese aircraft were active on both days reconnoitring and bombing. On the night 12th/13th January the 6/15 Brigade withdrew to the Alor Gajah area and the remnants of the 12 Brigade entrained at Gemas for Singapore. On the coast road the L. of C. troops fell back to a position covering Malacca. The 9 Indian Division moved in conformity.

312. On the evening of the 13th January, the final stage of the long withdrawal started. As there is only a ferry crossing over the broad river at Muar, all wheeled transport had to pass through Segamat which thus became a bad bottleneck. By the 14th January, however, all troops of 3 Indian Corps were clear and the command of the forward area passed to the Comdr. Westforce. The Commander 3 Indian Corps assumed responsibility for South Johore at 2000 hrs. 14th January.

313. During the withdrawal demolitions were carried out on all roads. In particular gaps were blown in all bridges over what might constitute an anti-tank obstacle.

314. On completion of the withdrawal the formations of 3 Indian Corps were disposed as under:-

Headquarters 3 Indian Corps, Johore Bahru.

Headquarters 11 Indian Division, Rengam.

6/15 Indian Infantry Brigade and 11 Divisional Artillery, Kluang.

28 Indian Infantry Brigade, Pontian Kechil.

3 Indian Cavalry, Independent Company and one Company Malay Regiment, Batu Pahat.

315. On the 13th January the Supreme Commander South West Pacific visited Malaya. At Segamat he discussed the defence dispositions with the Commander Westforce.

SECTION XXXV. – THE ADMINISTRATIVE SITUATION, 15TH JANUARY, 1942.

316. As a result of our rapid withdrawal from North and Central Malaya there had naturally been losses in material and reserve stocks. This was particularly the case as regards petrol, which required more transport for its removal than was available. On the whole, however, it had been possible by careful organization to evacuate a good proportion of our reserves. The general policy which I had approved was to create new dumps in South Johore for issue to troops in the Johore area. A large dump a few miles south of Segamat, which had been established in the pre-war period to serve both the East

and the West Coast areas, was built up. There was also a dump of Royal Engineer material, established for the same purpose, at Batu Anam. The advantages of this policy were threefold. (i) It avoided further congestion on Singapore Island; (ii) it avoided traffic congestion on the Causeway between Singapore Island and the mainland; (iii) it would reduce the length of the forward carry. Accordingly dumps were formed at Johore Bahru and near the waterways in South-West Johore.

317. *Food.* – The general food situation remained on the whole satisfactory in spite of the large increase in the population of Singapore caused by the influx of refugees from the mainland, and in spite of the decrease of military reserves occasioned by the arrival of reinforcing units which usually only brought a limited quantity of foodstuffs with them.

318. *Water.* – The water situation also up to this time had given no serious cause for anxiety in spite of a most unusually dry season. After the start of hostilities new wells had been dug round Singapore Town but about the middle of January the digging of them had been stopped at the instigation of the Civil Health Authorities. Measures for strict water economy had also been introduced. The necessity for such economy was constantly kept before the public by publicity in the Press, by posters and by police action.

319. *Ammunition.* – There had been heavy expenditure of field and light antiaircraft ammunition in the series of battles on the mainland. Our stocks in these categories had never been very satisfactory and now began to give rise to some anxiety. Apart from this the situation was satisfactory.

320. *Petrol and Oil.* – As regards petrol and lubricating oils we still had the large dumps on Singapore Island and some smaller ones in Johore. The civil supplies, however, were getting low owing to the loss of their large depots on the mainland.

321. *Transport.* – A considerable amount of civil transport had been requisitioned, especially in the Northern area, to supplement military resources. Vehicles now also became available owing to the enforced closing of business enterprises. In consequence the transport problem at this stage presented no great difficulty.

322. *Medical.* – The need for increased hospital accommodation in the Johore and Singapore areas now began to make itself felt. All the hospitals in North and Central Malaya and the large Australian Base Hospital at Malacca had had to be cleared. The Alexandra Military Hospital was full and some overflow branch hospitals for the less serious cases had been established in private houses under the pre-war scheme. New buildings had to be taken over. Included among these was a wing of the large new civil hospital at Johore Bahru.

323. Sick and wounded, not likely to be fit for duty within two months, were earmarked for evacuation. These, except acute cases, and those requiring special or constant nursing, were evacuated to the United Kingdom and India by ordinary passenger ship. Both the War Office and Australia had been approached with a view to provision of

hospital ship accommodation, but owing to the needs of other theatres of war, no final arrangements could be made and no ship could be promised. With the help of the Naval authorities, however, the “Wu Sueh”, a Yangtze river boat of 3,400 tons and 5 feet draught, had some time previously been bought and re-designed as a hospital ship. She was not considered capable of making an ocean voyage (though later she did so) but it was the best that could be done and it would at any rate provide transport to the Dutch East Indies.

324. *Accommodation.* – Accommodation on Singapore Island was becoming very congested. It was clearly impracticable to prohibit the entry of European civilians from the mainland. It was equally impossible to prohibit the entry of influential Asiatics whose lives would be at stake if they fell into Japanese hands. In consequence, though measures were taken to prevent the mass influx of refugees from Johore, the population of Singapore Island increased very greatly during January.

325. *Railway.* – As a result of the rapid withdrawal, great congestion had occurred on the railway. In particular there were insufficient sidings in the southern section of the railway to accommodate the rolling stock. An effort was made to solve this difficulty by building new sidings in South Johore and on Singapore Island where rolling stock not actually in use could be parked. Unfortunately they were not ready for use in time. Consequently, when the withdrawal through Central Johore took place, thirteen fully laden trains had to be abandoned on the Malacca branch. Efforts to destroy them by air attack were only partially successful. Included in the loads of these trains was a large consignment of maps of Singapore Island which had been printed to a special order by the Malayan Survey at Kuala Lumpur. The lack of these maps was to prove a great handicap at a later date. It is not known what, if any, use the Japanese made of them.

356. *Docks.* – The Japanese Air Force had not yet started bombing the Docks at Singapore and work there was proceeding normally up to the middle of January.

327. *Labour.* – (See [Section XXX](#)). – There had been little improvement in the situation as regards civil labour. The workers still disappeared as soon as any bombs fell near them and usually remained absent for some days. This applied particularly to the aerodromes upon which the Japanese Air Force was now making daily attacks.

328. *Man-Power.* – A number of European civilians, both official and unofficial, had now become available for duty. Their names were registered with the Controller of Man-Power to whom applications were made both by the Services and by the Civil Departments. Those who had technical knowledge, of whom there were many, were employed as far as possible where their knowledge could be utilized. Some of the older men were employed in Government Departments or in the Passive Air Defence Organization which needed strengthening. A number of the younger men were commissioned in the Services. Some specially selected officers were posted direct to Indian Army Units in spite of their lack of knowledge of the language as it was considered essential to strengthen the European element in those units. Others were attached to

combatant units as interpreters and advisers on local conditions.

329. *Supplies in Forward Areas.* – The tactics adopted by the enemy of striking at our communications, coupled with the complete lack of transport aircraft, forced us to modify the general principle of keeping supplies in forward areas mobile. I therefore directed that 7 days' reserve of food, ammunition and other essential stores were to be maintained at all times by forces whose communications might be in danger of attack.

SECTION XXXVI. – REINFORCEMENTS.

330. As has already been stated ([Section XXXIII](#)), the 45 Indian Infantry Brigade with attached troops and an Indian Pioneer Battalion had arrived at Singapore on the 3rd January. On the 13th January an important convoy reached Singapore safely bringing the following formations and units:-

53 British Infantry Brigade Group of the 18 British Division.

One Heavy British Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

One Light British Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

One British Anti-Tank Regiment.

50 Hurricane Fighters with their crews.

The transports included several large American liners which were discharged with the utmost despatch and left again without delay.

331. The reception and protection of this and subsequent convoys were combined operations of considerable magnitude. The Navy was responsible for routeing and docking them and for the provision of naval escort vessels, the Air Force for providing aerial protection from the Banka Straits northwards, and the Army for the provision of ground anti-aircraft protection from the time they reached Singapore till the time they left and for the rapid disembarkation of personnel and discharge of cargoes. Each convoy presented separate problems which had to be carefully studied before plans could be formulated. In all three Services the preservation of the utmost secrecy was insisted upon. It was due to this that commanders in the forward areas were sometimes unable to appreciate the broader aspects of strategical plans. It stands to the credit of all three Services that only one ship in convoy was sunk before reaching Singapore.

332. The 53 Infantry Brigade Group had left the United Kingdom in October bound for the Middle East and had been diverted off the east coast of Africa. The voyage had lasted exactly eleven weeks. On arrival the troops were healthy but soft. In addition, a great deal of new equipment had been issued shortly before embarkation with which there had been no time to train. The Brigade had had no experience of bush warfare conditions. It arrived without its guns and transport, but it was found possible to replace these

temporarily from local reserves. It was accommodated in the first instance on Singapore Island, where I had hoped to be able to give it a short time to become acclimatized, but the swift march of events made this impossible. On the 14th January orders were issued for:-

(a) One battalion of the Brigade to move to Jemaluang as soon as ready to relieve a battalion of the 22 Australian Infantry Brigade which would then be at the disposal of Westforce,

(b) The remainder of the Brigade to be prepared to move as soon as ready to either (i) Mersing in relief of the 22 Australian Infantry Brigade, or (ii) Labis, to come under orders of Westforce. Reconnaissances of the Mersing area were to be carried out at once.

333. On the 14th and 15th January the detachment of Dutch Marechaussees (See [Section XXXI](#)) reached Singapore by air from the Netherlands East Indies. This detachment, the strength of which was about 80 all told, consisted of native troops from the N.E.I. with European officers. They were specially trained in jungle guerilla warfare. Their despatch to Malaya provided another proof of the ready co-operation of our Dutch Allies in this Far Eastern war.

After arrival the Marechausses concentrated in the Labis area of North Johore and, after the Japanese advance, operated against their communications in that district. During the latter half of January they had considerable success killing a number of Japanese and doing material damage. Later, however, they experienced difficulties from lack of food and from the unreliability of some elements of the local population. Rather more than half the detachment eventually made its way to Sumatra.

334. The Hurricane Fighters arrived crated, but were unpacked and assembled with the utmost despatch by the R.A.F. They were in the air within a few days of their arrival. These machines were not the most modern type of Hurricane. Most of the twenty-four pilots had previously seen active service, but had been drawn from several different units.

335. As regards the future, another Indian Infantry Brigade, an Australian Machine Gun Battalion and some Indian and Australian reinforcements were expected within the next ten days and the remainder of the 18 British Division towards the end of the month.

SECTION XXXVII. – THE STRATEGICAL SITUATION, 15TH JANUARY, 1942.

336 Our object remained as before, i.e., the Defence of the Naval Base.

337. *Army.* – We knew that on the west coast the enemy had two divisions in front line. From the manner in which they were able to maintain the momentum of the attack we thought that they had the equivalent of two divisions in reserve with which they were able

to effect regular reliefs of their front line troops.

There was little evidence of what troops the enemy might have on the East Coast, but we knew it was a minimum of one division.

In addition the enemy was known to have in Indo-China a formation trained in air-borne landings and he was believed to have there at least two divisions in reserve which might be employed in Malaya or elsewhere.

We estimated therefore that the enemy had at his disposal, a minimum of seven divisions with a formation of air-borne troops. His land forces included an armoured component. Our forces were approximately as under:-

Eastforce. – One Brigade Group at full strength.

Westforce. – The equivalent of one strong division.

11 Indian Division. – The equivalent of about 1½ brigade groups.

Singapore Fortress. – Two weak Infantry Brigades and the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force.

Fixed Defences at full strength.

Anti-Aircraft Defences. – At full strength.

Command Reserve. – One Brigade Group.

This gave a total of approximately three divisions with Fixed and Anti-Aircraft Defences. In addition we might expect to receive by the end of the month the equivalent of one additional division and a number of reinforcements.

338. *Air.* – Before the arrival of the Hurricanes (See [Section XXXVI](#)) our Air resources had sunk to a very low level. It had not been possible to replace the daily losses and, owing to the length and dangers of the route, not more than half of the reinforcing aircraft which had been despatched to Malaya by land route had reached their destination. In consequence, there were seldom a dozen aircraft, and often considerably less, available for attacks on selected targets. The A.O.C. did his utmost with his limited resources to meet the Army requirements but it was practically impossible to give any effective support to troops in the forward areas.

The Japanese Air Force on the other hand had been able to give continuous support to their troops in the forward areas and to their sea-borne landings on the West Coast. They had also carried out a series of attacks against the Kluang aerodrome in Central Johore. During the first ten days of the month there had been nightly attacks against targets, generally aerodromes, in the Singapore area. From the 10th January onwards these attacks were usually delivered by day as the Japanese were then able to escort their bombers with fighters based presumably on Kuantan. On the 12th January three attacks were made on the Singapore aerodromes by a total of 122 aircraft while on

the same day our photographic reconnaissance recorded 200 enemy aircraft on aerodromes in Malaya excluding those in Kelantan.

339. *Naval.* – The enemy continued to exercise complete control of the waters east of Malaya. Off the West Coast his coastal vessels were able to move freely under air protection. We felt, however, that these coastal operations would become more difficult for him as he moved further south and as the length of the coastline to be watched by our forces decreased.

340. *Topographical.* – Broadly speaking, the Western area of Johore is much more developed than are the Central and Eastern areas.

In the eastern area the Mersing and Jemaluang districts are for the most part under rubber plantations, but south of the Jemaluang – Kahang road there is a wide belt of untouched jungle passable only for infantry without wheeled transport. On the east coast there are numerous creeks and waterways which give access to the interior.

In the central area east of the railway the country is broken and hilly and has been less developed. Communications are poor.

The west coast area has, except for a few swamps and patches of jungle, been extensively developed. It is mostly covered by rubber plantations, though there are also cocoanut, pineapple and other plantations. Through it ran the railway, the main trunk road and also a coastal road. The large rivers at Muar and Batu Pahat are crossed by ferry only. Along the coastal belt the country is low-lying and swampy. In the Batu Pahat district there had before the war been extensive Japanese-owned estates.

341. *Communications.* – The greatly increased length of the Japanese communications must without a doubt have complicated their supply and maintenance problems. They had behind them a large number of broken bridges both on the roads and the railway. We also hoped that the guerilla bands which had been organized to attack their communications would soon be having effect. To offset these difficulties, however, the Japanese had control of the sea and of the air and were known to be making use of these elements.

Our own communications were now getting shorter but they were constantly subject to enemy air attack.

342. *Aerodromes.* – The large modern aerodrome at Kluang and the unfinished aerodrome at Kahang would be of great value to the enemy if they fell into his hands. Experience had shown that demolitions could not deny an aerodrome to the enemy for more than a few days. The aerodrome near Batu Pahat was a smaller one and suitable only for light and medium aircraft.

343. *Morale.* – The fighting qualities of some of our troops had naturally been affected by the long and continuous withdrawals and by the enemy's superiority in certain

types of modern armament. This was particularly the case with some of the Indian infantry who had up to date borne the brunt of the front line fighting. On the other hand, the A.I.F. were fresh and comparatively well trained and we had two recently arrived brigade groups which had not yet been in action.

344. *Political.* – The State of Johore was an Unfederated Malay State bound to us by treaty. It maintained at its own expense a small military force and had in the past made a generous contribution to Imperial Defence. These factors made it politically desirable that we should do our utmost to hold as much of that State as possible.

345. *The Japanese Course of Action.* – It was clear that the Japanese intended to press on as fast as possible down the West Coast. It seemed probable also that a landing would soon be attempted on the east coast of Johore, probably in the Mersing area, from where the enemy could either develop another thrust towards Singapore or open the lateral road to Kluang. A direct sea-borne attack on Singapore was still, as before, a possibility, though it seemed probable that this, if contemplated, would be deferred until it could be combined with an attack from the landward side. Finally, there was the possibility of an airborne landing either in Johore or direct on to Singapore Island.

346. *Our Own Course of Action.* – In order to attain our object it was necessary that we should continue to fight the enemy on the mainland. In view of the disparity in strength between the Japanese and ourselves the safe arrival of our expected reinforcements remained of primary importance. We estimated that the most important formation, the 18 British Division, could not be disembarked and deployed on the mainland before the end of the first week in February at the earliest, i.e., more than three weeks ahead.

Our problem was greatly influenced by the fact that the road Jemaluang – Kluang – Batu Pahat is the only direct lateral communication in Johore and also by the fact that the newly constructed aerodromes of Kahang and Kluang were situated on this road. It was obviously necessary to fight as long as we could north of this vitally important road.

It was therefore decided to deny to the enemy the line Mersing – Segamat – Muar. An outline of the plan to put this decision into effect has already been given in [Section XXXIV](#).

SECTION XXXVIII. – THE JOHORE OPERATIONS, 14TH-26TH JANUARY, 1942.

347. *The Gemas Ambush.* – North of Segamat the Commander Westforce had disposed the 27 Australian Brigade Group and the 8 Indian Brigade Group astride the main road and railway with one battalion (the 2/30 Australian Bn.) forward in an ambush position west of Gemas. The 22 Indian Brigade Group was similarly disposed in depth astride the Malacca

– Segamat road with the forward battalion about the Jementah cross roads. The 2 Loyals, withdrawn from the Singapore garrison, was in reserve and responsible for the local defence of Segamat. Major-General Barstow, the Commander 9 Indian Division, was senior officer on the Segamat front and, under his influence, an excellent spirit of co-operation quickly grew up between British, Australian and Indian troops.

The ambush laid by the 2/30 Bn. (Lieut.-Colonel Gallagher) was very carefully prepared. The forward company covered 700 yards of road immediately east of the River Gemencheh and was 3 miles in front of the main battalion position. The troops were concealed in thick jungle bordering the road. At 1600 hrs on the 14th January the leading enemy troops appeared. By 1620 hrs. about 250 cyclists had passed through towards the main position, 500 cyclists were in the ambush and another 500 were seen approaching. At this moment the bridge was blown and fire opened. Some 400/500 of the enemy were killed before the company withdrew. More would have been killed had not the enemy cut the artillery telephone line.

By 1000 hrs. the following morning the enemy were in contact with the main battalion position. Attack and counter-attack went on throughout the day in the course of which more of the enemy troops were killed and 8 or 9 tanks destroyed. Our own losses were under 70. During the night the battalion fell back on to the main position.

The R.A.F. co-operated gallantly in this action. A scratch force – all that was available – of Glen Martins, Wirraways, Vildbeeste and Buffalos attacked enemy columns approaching Gemas and headquarters at Tampin and did some damage.

The ambush of Gemas provides an excellent example of the success that will often attend such tactics in jungle country. But fresh and reasonably well trained troops are required and these in the Malayan campaign were seldom available.

348. *The Battle of Muar.* – The town of Muar (Bandar Maharani on some maps) is situated on the south bank of the Muar River a short distance from its mouth. The River Muar is here about 600 yards wide and is unbridged below the main North/South trunk road. In its long course between the main road and the sea the river is extremely tortuous, especially in its lower reaches in which it winds through low-lying and swampy country. Along the south bank of the river for some 20 miles inland from Muar there stretches a belt of estates with fairly numerous roads and tracks. The defence of this sector was entrusted to the newly arrived 45 Indian Infantry Brigade, to which was attached a battery of Australian field artillery. The Brigade was disposed with two battalions forward on the line of the river, one between the sea and Jorak and the other between Jorak and Lenga, and one battalion in reserve in the Bakri area with patrols watching the coast at Parit Jawa. The plan envisaged a mobile defence using fighting patrols to attack the enemy. Unfortunately each of the forward battalions was ordered to push forward two companies north of the river to harass and delay the enemy. In view of the weakness of the force available this was undoubtedly a tactical error which resulted in a great dispersion of

force.

349. The enemy's air offensive against Muar started on the 11th January. The bombing of the town, as in other places, started a general exodus and among those who left were the ferrymen. Nearly all the Asiatic employees of the waterworks and power station also deserted.

350. By the morning of the 15th the enemy had reached the north bank of the river, though no information of their approach had been received from the forward troops. In the afternoon a number of boats were seen off the mouth of the River Muar and a small party landed on the coast between Muar and Batu Pahat. Early the following morning another small force landed at the lighthouse west of Batu Pahat where it was engaged by our troops.

351. In order to meet this threat to Westforce communications the boundary between Westforce and 3 Indian Corps was amended to read as follows:-

“all inclusive 3 Indian Corps Road Kluang – Ayer Hitam – Yong Peng – Batu Pahat” thus making the task of protecting Westforce communications the responsibility of the Commander 3 Indian Corps.

At 1655 hrs. on the 16th January after visiting commanders in the forward area, I placed the 53 British Infantry Brigade under orders of the Commander 3 Indian Corps and ordered it to move during the following night to the Ayer Hitam area. The Commander 3 Indian Corps placed this brigade under the 11 Indian Division. One battalion (6 R. Norfolk) was immediately sent to hold the defile East of Bukit Payong, a dominating feature some 11 miles west of Yong Peng, with a detachment at Parit Sulong Bridge some 5 miles further on. One battalion (2 Cambridgeshire) was sent to Batu Pahat and one (5 R. Norfolk) was held in reserve at Ayer Hitam.

352. At about 0200 hrs. 16th January the leading Japanese troops crossed the River Muar at a point a few miles up-stream from the town and by 0900 hrs. had reached the road and established a block 2 miles east of Muar. During the morning some sharp fighting took place in this area. At 1300 hrs. a further collection of barges or landing craft appeared off Muar, some of which were sunk by our artillery fire. Continuous fighting went on throughout the afternoon in the outskirts of the town. By the evening of the 16th all troops of the 45 Brigade south of the river, except for the right forward battalion, were concentrated in the Bakri area and the Brigade Commander was planning a counter-attack to recapture Muar.

Early on the 17th January the Commander Westforce withdrew the 2/29 Bn. A.I.F. from the Segamat front and despatched it to Bakri to meet the threat which was now developing. It arrived in the afternoon.

353. The enemy's attack from Muar, though it had not yet been possible to assess the full strength of it, obviously constituted a very real threat to Westforce's

communications in the Yong Peng area, for if the enemy could reach the road there the whole of the Segamat force would be cut off. I discussed the situation with the Commander Westforce and the Commander 11 Indian Division at Rear Headquarters Westforce at 1200 hrs. 17th January. We were loth to order an immediate withdrawal from Segamat which we thought would be damaging to morale and decided to strengthen the Yong Peng – Muar front by every means at our disposal. I arranged to make available immediately the 2/19 Australian Battalion from Jemaluang, relieving it temporarily by the reserve battalion of the 53 Brigade.

354. Early on the morning 18th January the 45 Indian Infantry Brigade, with the 2/29 Australian Battalion attached, was strongly attacked by the enemy in its perimeter position west of Bakri. Nine enemy tanks were destroyed by the Australian anti-tank guns and tank hunting platoons. The enemy cut the road between this force and Brigade Headquarters situated a short distance to the east but with the arrival of the 2/19 Australian Battalion the situation was restored. In the evening the Japanese again attacked heavily but were repulsed.

On the afternoon of the 18th the enemy landed a strong force on the coast a few miles north of Batu Pahat.

355. Our Intelligence Service on this day reported that the Japanese were advancing with two divisions in front line, a Division of the Imperial Guards being in the Muar area and the 5 Division on the main road. The latter was a crack division which was known to have been specially trained in landing operations. The full extent of the threat from Muar now became clear. I felt that our chances of holding up this thrust for any length of time were not great and that a withdrawal from Segamat would sooner or later be forced upon us. I therefore approved a proposal by the Commander Westforce on the evening 18th January for an immediate withdrawal behind the River Segamat as a preparatory step to a further withdrawal should such become necessary.

356. At the same time, by agreement with the Commander Westforce, I placed the whole of the Muar front temporarily under the Commander 3 Indian Corps. My reasons for this were:-

(a) I thought it difficult for the Commander Westforce with his small staff to give the close attention to the Muar front which the dangerous situation there demanded as well as controlling the operations on the Segamat front some 70 miles distant.

(b) It would obviously be necessary to build up a supporting front west of Yong Peng in order to keep open communications both with the Muar and Segamat forces. This could only be done by troops at that time under command of 3 Indian Corps.

357. On the morning of the 19th January very heavy fighting again developed in the Bakri area. The enemy again struck at our communications destroying some transport which was parked in rear of the defensive position and blocked the road. About midday the right

forward battalion of the 45 Brigade (4/9 Jats) which had remained detached was ambushed when rejoining the main force and suffered heavily. Brigade Headquarters was practically wiped out by a bomb.

The Commander 53 British Brigade was now made responsible for the Bukit Payong – Yong Peng area, under 11 Indian Division, having been relieved of his responsibility for Batu Pahat. The 3/16 Punjab Regt of 11 Indian Division was placed under his orders.

358. At 1420 hrs. 19th January I held a conference at Yong Peng at which the Commanders 3 Indian Corps, Westforce, 11 Indian Division and 53 British Infantry Brigade were present. The following orders were issued:-

(a) The 53 Brigade Group to hold a position from the bridge at Parit Sulong to the high ground S.E. of the junction of the Yong Peng – Muar and Yong Peng – Batu Pahat roads.

(b) The 45 Brigade Group to be ordered to withdraw at once through the 53 Brigade Group to a position west of Yong Peng.

(c) The Segamat Force to continue its with-withdrawal.

(d) The 22 Indian Infantry Brigade, on its arrival at Yong Peng on the night 20th-21st January from the Segamat front, to be at the disposal of 11 Indian Division.

359. Events, however, anticipated the implementation of this plan, for on the afternoon of the 19th January an enemy force attacked and captured the defile east of Bukit Payong and later occupied the bridge at Parit Sulong. An attempt the following morning to recapture the defile by counter-attack was only partially successful, and eventually our troops took up a defensive position at the west end of a causeway which crossed a marshy area a little further east.

360. In accordance with the orders to withdraw, sent by W/T from Westforce which was the only means of communication then open, the Muar Force started to concentrate on the evening of 19th January but was attacked from all sides and suffered heavily. Early on the 20th the withdrawal started, the force being organised into seven company groups. The road, which passed through miles of swampy country, had been blocked in many places. Each block had to be cleared in turn and some of the fiercest and most terrific fighting of the whole campaign took place on this day, our troops, harassed on all sides, repeatedly charging with the bayonet, and the Japanese Guards fighting with their traditional fanaticism. It was not till 0600 hrs., 21st January, that the head of the column reached the bridge at Parit Sulong to find it held by the enemy.

361. Early in the withdrawal the Commander 45 Indian Brigade (Brigadier Duncan) was killed while leading a bayonet charge. He had set a magnificent example of courage and fortitude and can in no way be held responsible for the disaster which overtook his untrained brigade. The command of the force devolved upon Lt.-Col.

Anderson A.I.F., who for his fine leadership was awarded the Victoria Cross.

362. At 0833 hrs. 21st January I ordered the Commander Westforce to assume command of all troops on the Yong Peng – Muar road at a time to be arranged direct with the Commander 11 Indian Division. The reasons for this change in command were as under:-

(a) The movements of the Segamat and Muar Forces now required very careful co-ordination.

(b) The shortening of communications now made it possible for the Commander Westforce to control both forces.

(c) The only possibility of communication with the Muar Force was by W/T from Headquarters Westforce.

363. At 1230 hrs. 21st January I held another conference at Yong Peng. The decisions reached at this conference, which concerned chiefly the organization for future operations, will be recorded later. The Commander Westforce reported, however, that he was organizing a counter-attack with 2 Loyals, withdrawn from the Segamat front, to recapture the Bukit Payong feature with the object subsequently of re-opening communications to the Muar Force. To this project I gave my approval. That it was not subsequently carried out was due partly to delay in the provision of transport for the move forward of the 2 Loyals and partly to the difficulty of providing artillery support. Having studied the problem carefully I am now of the opinion that the chances of a single battalion being able to advance 7 miles through that type of country and relieve the Muar Force in the time available were remote. The remaining infantry in the Yong Peng force were by that time too exhausted to be able to take a useful part in the operation.

364. Throughout the 21st January desperate efforts were made by the Muar Force to force the river crossing at Parit Sulong. But the bridge was strongly held and the attacks were repulsed. In the rear a new threat appeared in the shape of heavy tanks, several of which were destroyed by anti-tank guns and tank-hunting parties. By nightfall, however, the position held had become very contracted. The following morning food and medical supplies were dropped by three aircraft from Singapore, but at 0900 hrs. the Commander Muar Force reluctantly gave the order for all guns, vehicles and heavy weapons to be destroyed, for the wounded to be left behind in charge of volunteers and for all who could walk to make their way through the jungle to Yong Peng.

Eventually some 550 Australian troops and some 400 Indian troops rejoined. I regret to have to record that the wounded who were left behind were, almost without exception, subsequently massacred by the Japanese.

365. The 45 Indian Infantry Brigade ceased to exist. Those killed included the Brigade Commander, every battalion commander and second-in-command and two of the three adjutants. Only one or two of the surviving British officers had more than a few

months' service. This brigade had never been fit for employment in a theatre of war. It was not that there was anything wrong with the raw material but simply that it was raw. It was the price of our unpreparedness for war and over-rapid expansion.

366. Throughout the Battle of Muar the Navy and Air Force did their utmost to help us, the former by sending gunboats nightly to bombard the Muar area and the latter by mobilizing all possible resources, however antiquated, to attack the enemy.

367. The Battle of Muar, which lasted six days, was one of the most sanguinary of the Malayan campaign. Our small untried force, in spite of its handicaps, had held at bay a division of the Japanese Imperial Guards and by doing so had saved the Segamat Force which would otherwise inevitably have been lost.

368. *The Withdrawal from Segamat.* – On the afternoon of the 18th January the enemy attacked with tanks near the main road north of Batu Anam but were repulsed. During the night, in accordance with the decision previously recorded, the 9 Indian Division fell back behind the line of the River Muar and the 27 Australian Brigade Group behind the River Segamat.

During the night 19th/20th January the 9 Indian Division was withdrawn south of the River Segamat to the Tenang area. All the big bridges over the Rivers Muar and Segamat were destroyed.

During the night 20th/21st January the 27 Australian Brigade Group was withdrawn by M.T. from the line of the River Segamat and fell back direct to Yong Peng, where it took up positions covering the vital road junction. The 9 Indian Division moved one brigade group to the Labis area and one to Kampong Bahru. On the afternoon of the 21st January the forward troops of the 22 Indian Brigade successfully ambushed the leading Japanese troops moving down the main road. Our troops, having got used to this novel form of warfare, were now displaying more cunning.

During the night 21st/22nd January the 22 Indian Brigade Group less one battalion (R. Garhwal Rifles) moved by M.T. to the Kluang area, the R. Garhwal Rifles marching down the railway to the Paloh area. The 8 Brigade Group was in position astride the main road some 12 miles south of Labis where the enemy made contact early on the 22nd January. Fighting continued on this front throughout the day. During the following night the 8 Brigade Group fell back behind the River Gerchang some 4 miles north of Yong Peng, a strong position where further fighting took place on the 23rd. This day was also remarkable for intense enemy air activity, their reconnaissance and ground-strafting aircraft often flying as low as 100 feet. At midnight 23rd/24th January the rearguards from both the Segamat and Muar fronts passed through Yong Peng.

369. The extrication of the Segamat Force from its perilous position was a matter for considerable satisfaction. The whole of the Segamat – Muar operations required the most careful handling by all commanders and quick compliance with orders by all

formations and units. They imposed a great strain on commanders and staffs, in illustration of which I may mention that during the twenty-five days ending 23rd January I motored over 2,500 miles and held numerous conferences in the forward areas besides attending War Council meetings and working late into the night at my Headquarters at Singapore.

370. *Plans for the Defence of Central Johore.* – At the Conference held south of Yong Peng at 12.30 hrs. 21st January (see above) it was decided that, after withdrawal from Yong Peng, our forces would be re-organized as under:-

Eastforce. – All troops in the Mersing and Kahang area under command of an officer to be detailed by the Commander 3 Indian Corps.

Role. – To hold Jemaluang with detachments forward in the Mersing area.

Westforce. – 9 Indian Division and A.I.F. less 22 Australian Brigade Group under command of Major-General Gordon Bennett.

Role. – To hold the area exclusive Yong Peng – inclusive Kluang – Ayer Hitam.

11 Indian Division. – 53 British Brigade Group when released from Westforce.

6/15 Brigade Group of two battalions etc.

28 Indian Brigade Group, under command of Major-General Key.

Role. – To hold the Batu Pahat area and operate on the West Coast road.

371. At a conference held at Rengam on the morning of the 23rd January I decided that Westforce would come under command of 3 Indian Corps as soon as the last troops had been withdrawn south of the Yong Peng road junction. The Commander 3 Indian Corps would then command all troops in Johore except those anti-aircraft defences and administrative units under Headquarters Malaya command and the Pengerang Defences under Comdr. Singapore Fortress.

I directed that the general line Jemaluang – Kluang – Ayer Hitam – Batu Pahat would be held and that there would be no withdrawal from this line without my permission.

372. In this connection I cabled to the Supreme Commander South-West Pacific on the 24th January as under:-

“I want to be able to hold line of road Kluang – Batu Pahat for another 24 hours at least as positions further south are NOT good Hope you will press for continuous attacks by Fortress bombers on Kuala Lumpur and Kuantan aerodromes. I feel that if we can drive back his fighters we can then deal with his bombers.”

On the 25th January I received the following telegram from the Supreme Commander South-West Pacific:-

“Recent reports of heavy fighting on the Muar front show what determined resistance your

troops are making against odds. You have not much ground behind you and this resistance is necessary and well timed. I have no doubt that troops have inflicted severe casualties on the enemy. Well done.”

373. The denial of the line of aerodromes in Central Johore to the enemy until the 18 British Division had safely arrived was now of primary importance. It was clear that the crisis of the campaign had arrived.

A copy of Malaya Command Operation Instruction No. 35 issued on the 23rd January, 1942 is attached as [Appendix F](#) to this dispatch.

374. *The Batu Pahat Operations.* – Batu Pahat was a small coastal port of the same type as Muar. The town lies on the south bank of an estuary some seven miles from the coast. The estuary was crossed by a road ferry. Batu Pahat is also linked by good roads with Yong Peng to the North, Ayer Hitam (20 miles away) to the East, and Pontian Kechil (46 miles away) to the South. The Air landing-ground was at Koris, 7 miles south of Batu Pahat. South of that the road runs within 2 or 3 miles of the sea. The country bordering the road and between it and the sea consists mostly of mangrove and cocoanut plantations. To an enemy possessing command of the sea this route was accessible at any point and indicated the necessity for holding both Batu Pahat and Pontian Kechil for the protection of the main L. of C. 20 miles inland.

Batu Pahat is dominated by the jungle-covered Bukit Banang which lies to the south of the town. Into this area the Japanese troops who had landed at the lighthouse on the 16th January (see above) had disappeared.

375. By the evening of the 19th January the 6/15 Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Challen) had taken over responsibility for the Batu Pahat area with the following troops under command:-

The British Battalion

2 Cambridgeshire

One Company 2 Malay Battalion

One battery 155 Field Regt. (4 guns)

11 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery.

Administrative Units.

Batu Pahat was now also used as a base for the Royal Naval West Coast Flotilla.

The task allotted to the Commander Batu Pahat Force was to hold the town and to keep open the road to Ayer Hitam. To assist in the latter task the 5 R. Norfolk Regt., whose withdrawal from Jemaluang I had authorised, was to co-operate, working from the Ayer Hitam end.

376. During the 22nd and 23rd January skirmishes took place with enemy detachments on the Batu Pahat – Ayer Hitam road, as a result of which the road was finally closed on the evening of the 23rd January. 5 R. Norfolks were then despatched to Batu Pahat by M.T. moving south via Pontian Kechil. They arrived on the morning of the 24th January and came under orders of the Commander Batu Pahat Force.

In the Bukit Banang area also the enemy had become active and fighting developed in the gun position area. The enemy troops here were supplied with food and ammunition from the air.

377. On the evening 23rd January the Commander Batu Pahat Force, being unable to communicate with higher authority owing to a breakdown in W/T, commenced to withdraw to Senggarang but later, communications having been restored, he was instructed to make a further effort to hold Batu Pahat with the aid of 5 R. Norfolks due to arrive the following morning. Throughout the 24th fighting continued in the town, but efforts to clear Hill 127 S.E. of Batu Pahat the following morning were only partially successful. On the morning of the 25th the enemy attacking the town were reinforced by fresh troops who arrived in lorries. The Commander Batu Pahat Force reported the situation, expressing a doubt as to his ability to hold the town much longer.

378. On the same day a determined attempt was made by the Commander 11 Indian Division to support the Batu Pahat Force with the 53 Brigade Group, now released from Yong Peng. The Group, which now included two weak infantry battalions only, was ordered to occupy Benut, Rengit and Senggarang and pass through a supply column to Batu Pahat. As the Group moved forward enemy troops, who had obviously moved down east of the road, occupied the road at various points. Some of the leading troops got through to join the Batu Pahat Force but by the evening the road between Senggarang and Rengit was held by the enemy while further south the road was under fire at several different places.

379. Before the war the Japanese held large commercial interests in the Batu Pahat area and had a complete and detailed knowledge of the country. They put this knowledge to good use during the operations. There were also demonstrations of pro-Japanese sympathies in Batu Pahat itself.

380. At 1515 hours 25th January I held a conference at Rear Headquarters Westforce near Kulai. The Commanders 3 Indian Corps, Westforce and 11 Indian Division were present. The only matter discussed at this conference was the immediate policy for the conduct of operations. All were agreed that an immediate withdrawal from Batu Pahat was necessary and that, as a result of this, the other columns should be withdrawn from the line Jemaluang – Kluang – Ayer Hitam. I instructed the Commander 3 Indian Corps, who was responsible for the whole of these operations, to issue orders accordingly and to co-ordinate the action of the various columns. A copy of the Minutes of this conference are attached as [Appendix "G"](#) to this Despatch.

381. The Batu Pahat Force withdrew during the night 25th/26th January and reached Senggarang at dawn on the 26th where it found the road blocked. Repeated attempts made throughout the day to force the block and open the road were unsuccessful. Here again as elsewhere the exhaustion of the troops after several days and nights continuous operations in conditions to which they were not acclimatized told its tale.

In the meantime, the Commander 11 Indian Division had organized a mechanized column, including armoured cars and carriers, at Benut and ordered it forward to the relief of the Batu Pahat Force. Many road blocks and ambushes were encountered and the column was broken up into small parties each fighting on its own. Only one carrier, that of the column commander, eventually got through.

In the evening the Commander Batu Pahat Force decided that there was no longer any possibility of the brigade fighting its way out as a formation and adhering to the timetable which he had been given. He therefore gave orders for units to make their way to Benut on foot by a route on the coastal flank of the road. A chaplain and personnel of the Royal Army Medical Corps voluntarily remained behind with the wounded who on this occasion were not molested by the Japanese.

382. Looked at in retrospect, it seems that, owing largely to the uncertainty of the communications, the authority to withdraw from Batu Pahat was delayed for 24 hours too long. When the authority was given, the Force was given a task which, in the existing circumstances, was beyond its powers.

383. *The Kluang – Ayer Hitam Operations.* – Early on the morning of the 24th January the leading Japanese troops were approaching the aerodrome and town of Kluang, which were then being held by the 22 Indian Brigade Group with the 8 Brigade Group in reserve at Rengam. The Commander 9 Indian Division ordered the 8 Brigade Group to move up and relieve the 22 Brigade Group so as to free the latter for a counter-attack. In accordance with this plan the 5/11 Sikhs moved by a circuitous route on the left flank, bivouacked for the night, and the following day fought a highly successful action in the course of which they routed the enemy at the point of the bayonet and killed and wounded several hundreds of them.

During the night 25th/26th January, in accordance with the general plan of withdrawal, the 22 Brigade Group fell back to a position covering Rengam while the 8 Brigade Group remained in the Kluang area.

On the front north of Ayer Hitam the enemy made contact again on the 25th and fighting went on throughout the day. Our leading troops (2 Loyals) held their ground and inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy who again proved their ability to cross what had seemed impassable ground and again offered exceptional targets to our troops by disregarding normal field precautions.

During the following night our troops on this front fell back through the 2

Gordons who were in position at milestone 49. I had relieved this battalion from garrison duties at Penggerang and placed it under orders of the Commander Westforce in replacement of 2 Loyals who were now withdrawn to Singapore.

384. *The East Coast Operations.* – Mersing, 100 miles from Singapore on the N.E. Coast of Johore, had long been regarded as the back-door to Singapore Fortress, particularly since the completion of the road Kota Tinggi – Jemaluang. The beaches in the Mersing area are suitable for landings, though not ideal, since sandbanks and shoals extend for about 3 miles from the coast. The swampy and tortuous courses of the Endau River and its tributaries are navigable by shallow draught vessels as far as the Jemaluang – Kluang road in the vicinity of Kahang, where was situated the modern landing-ground prepared by the R.A.F. Plans for the defence of Mersing, therefore, had to take into account the possibility of being outflanked by enemy penetration up this river system from Endau.

The Mersing area was strongly defended. It was covered by a large number of anti-tank and anti-personnel mines, though the effective life of these in the humid climate of Malaya is limited.

385. On the 14th January, when contact was first made on this front, Eastforce (Brigadier Taylor) was composed of:-

22 Australian Brigade Group.

2/17 Dogras (released from the Singapore Garrison).

Detachments of the Johore Military Forces.

Administrative Units.

It was disposed with two battalions holding the Mersing area with detachments forward at Endau, one battalion at Jemaluang, and one (2/17 Dogras) watching the long and vulnerable communications back to Kota Tinggi. On the night 17th/18th January, as has been recorded, the Jemaluang battalion was transferred to the Muar area, but later a weak Indian battalion was placed under command for defence of the Kahang aerodrome, and also an anti-aircraft and an anti-tank troop.

386. On the 14th January contact was made with an enemy force moving down the coast from Kuantan at Pontian north of the River Endau. After some patrol encounters our troops fell back behind the River Endau. The loss of the battalion from Jemaluang on the 17th/18th January caused some re-adjustment of the defences as a result of which the Endau detachment was withdrawn and the road between Endau and Mersing heavily cratered.

387. On the 21st January an enemy force approaching Mersing from the North was ambushed by our fighting patrols and suffered heavy casualties. On that day, in accordance with decisions taken at the Yong Peng Conference (see above) the Commander

Eastforce was given the role of holding Jemaluang with detachments forward in the Mersing area. On the 22nd a Japanese attempt to cross the river at Mersing was repulsed with heavy loss. During the night 22nd/23rd January one battalion (2/18 Battalion A.I.F.) with supporting arms was withdrawn to the Nithsdale Estate between Mersing and Jemaluang, the forward troops remaining in the Mersing area.

On the 23rd a naval convoy was sighted between Singgora and Mersing moving south.

388. At 0745 hours on the 26th January our air reconnaissances reported two transports and some smaller craft escorted by two cruisers and twelve destroyers closing the shore at Endau. This convoy was twice attacked during the day by Hudson, Albacores and Vickers Vildebeeste aircraft escorted by Hurricanes and Buffalos. Each time a large force of Japanese Navy Zero fighters operating from Kuantan was met and there was much air fighting. A minimum of 13 enemy fighters were destroyed while we lost 11 Vickers Videlbeeste, 2 Hurricanes and 1 Buffalo. Both enemy transports were hit, but the landing was not prevented. Our Air Striking Force in Malaya, even such as it was, had now vanished. On the night 26th/27th January H.M. Australian destroyer "Vampire" and H.M.S. "Thanet" were sent to sweep up the coast and attack the Japanese transports. Off Endau they fell in with and engaged three destroyers and a cruiser. The "Thanet" was sunk and a Japanese destroyer severely damaged.

389. The fresh enemy troops advanced rapidly from Endau and at midnight 26th/27th January their leading battalion marched into an ambush which had been prepared for them in the Nithsdale Estate. There was confused and bitter hand-to-hand fighting during the night, in the course of which over 300 of the enemy were killed while our losses in killed, wounded and missing were less than 100. Our ambush troops then fell back through the Jemaluang position.

SECTION XXXIX. – THE WITHDRAWAL TO SINGAPORE ISLAND 27TH-31ST JANUARY, 1942.

390. *The Plan.* – On the 27th January I received a telegram from the Supreme Commander South West Pacific giving me discretion to withdraw to Singapore Island if I considered it advisable. On that day the full significance of the dispersal of the Batu Pahat Force and the opening to the enemy of the West Coast road became apparent. Our remaining troops on that road were not strong enough to stop the enemy's advance for long and there were no reserves available. The 18 British Division had not yet arrived. I felt that any further delay might result in the loss of the whole of our forces on the mainland. I therefore decided to authorise a withdrawal to Singapore Island, even though this meant failure to achieve our object of protecting the Naval Base. I accordingly approved a plan which was already being worked out by the Commander 3 Indian Corps for this withdrawal.

391. In anticipation of such a withdrawal certain preliminary steps had already been taken, among which were the following:-

- (a) An outline withdrawal plan had been issued on the 24th January.
- (b) Orders had been given to begin thinning out the Anti-Aircraft guns and searchlights from South Johore.
- (c) The Rear-Admiral Malaya had been requested to arrange for all craft on the north shores of the Straits of Johore to be either sunk or removed to the south shores of Singapore Island.
- (d) Arrangements had been made to insert explosives under the Causeway and to destroy the lock at the north end of the Causeway.
- (e) The organization of the defences of Singapore Island had been planned.

392. The Plan, which was approved at a conference held at Headquarters 3 Indian Corps at Johore Bahru on the 28th January, was in outline as under:-

- (a) A co-ordinated withdrawal to take place simultaneously on all four routes.
- (b) The final withdrawal to the Island to be on the night 30th-31st January.
- (c) The final withdrawal through the Johore Bahru area to be carried out rapidly in M.T.
- (d) All withdrawals to be carried out by night in accordance with a pre-arranged programme.
- (e) Anti-aircraft defence to be arranged for the protection of all bottle-necks. In particular, the maximum anti-aircraft defence to be concentrated for the protection of troops moving over the Causeway.
- (f) An Outer and Inner Bridgehead to be organized for the ground defence of the Causeway. Three battalions with supporting arms under Brigadier Taylor were allotted for the defence of the Outer Bridgehead and one battalion (2 Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders) under Lt.-Col. Stewart for the defence of the Inner Bridgehead.

393. *Eastforce*. – The withdrawal of Eastforce was carried out according to plan without enemy interference. The final withdrawal took place in M.T. from Kota Tinggi.

394. *11 Indian Divison*. – Of the Batu Pahat Force, one contingent moved east of the road and reached Benut on the night 27th–28th January. The remainder, comprising about 2,000 officers and men, reached the sea at the mouth of the River Ponggor. From here they were evacuated during four successive nights by the Royal Navy and taken to Singapore. The operation was a most difficult one and reflected the greatest credit on all ranks of the Royal Navy engaged in it.

Benut was occupied by the enemy on the morning of the 28th January but our successful demolitions on this road slowed up his advance. In the evening there was

contact north of Pontian Besar. On the 29th there were patrol encounters in the Gunong Pulai Reservoir area where a strong position had been prepared. By midnight 30th–31st January the head of the main 11 Indian Division column was following Eastforce across the Causeway, leaving only Westforce to be withdrawn through the bridgehead.

395. *Westforce*. – On the main road and railway front the enemy followed up our withdrawal energetically and much fighting took place. The withdrawal of the two columns required most careful co-ordination. There was little rest for the troops who were constantly fighting by day and moving back by night. The enemy aircraft were particularly active on this front reconnoitring, bombing and machine-gunning. Our own troops received very little assistance from the air.

Astride the main road a number of local engagements were fought by the 27 Australian Brigade Group with 2 Gordons under command and many casualties were inflicted on the enemy by local counter-attacks.

On the railway front disaster overtook the 9 Indian Division on the 28th January. A wide gap developed in the Layang Layang area between the 22 Indian Infantry Brigade, which was forward, and the 8 Indian Infantry Brigade which was supporting it. Into this gap enemy troops penetrated having moved round the eastern flank by estate roads. The Divisional Commander (Major-General Barstow), while moving up the railway to visit the forward brigade, was ambushed by the enemy and there is little doubt that he was killed. He was a gallant and gifted officer and his loss was a severe blow. The 22 Brigade, in an endeavour to rejoin the division, moved through the jungle west of the railway. Some parties of the enemy were met and dispersed, the 5/11 Sikhs again distinguishing themselves, but the dense jungle proved too much for the troops who were hampered by having to carry a number of wounded. In spite of a continuous march of three days and nights they were unable to catch up and efforts to locate them by ground and air patrols failed. The final withdrawal was postponed as long as possible in an effort to recover this brigade but without success, and arrangements were made to ferry them across the Straits from a point east of Johore Bahru. Eventually only about 100 were saved in this way. The remainder were captured in the neighbourhood of Johore Bahru on the 1st February.

The final withdrawal on the night 30th–31st January was carried out without incident and with little interference from the enemy's Air Force. At 0815 hrs. 31st January all troops had been withdrawn and a gap of 70 feet was blown in the Causeway.

396. The operation of withdrawing the whole force through the bottle-neck of Johore Bahru and over the Causeway with the enemy holding complete control in the air had been an anxious one. In spite of the severe losses which we had suffered on the mainland, the successful accomplishment of this operation was a matter for much satisfaction.

SECTION XL. – AIR OPERATIONS, 14TH-31ST JANUARY,

397. During this period the Japanese Air Striking Force concentrated their attacks chiefly on the aerodromes on Singapore Island. Some attacks also were made on the Naval Base and the Docks area and some bombs fell in the Town area. On several days the civilian casualties ran into several hundreds. The attacks were usually carried out in daylight by formations of 27 Bomber aircraft escorted by fighters. The maximum number of aircraft which attacked the Singapore area in any one day was 127. Our Anti-Aircraft Defence system had naturally been weakened by the loss of the outer part of the area covered by the warning system. Nevertheless, with the aid of the radar sets, it was still found possible in most cases to obtain some warning of attack though rarely enough for our fighters to carry out effective interception. There was much air fighting, especially on the 22nd January when the losses on each side were estimated to be about a dozen.

398. There was unfortunately no improvement as regards the labour conditions on the aerodromes. The civilian workers continued to disappear whenever an air attack took place and usually remained absent for some days. In consequence, one or more of the aerodromes on Singapore Island were almost invariably out of use.

399. In the forward areas, the enemy aircraft co-operated effectively with their ground forces by reconnaissances, by attacks on our troops and transport, and by dropping supplies on isolated parties. On our side, as before, we were able to give our forward troops very little air support, but we were now able to provide increased protection against low-flying attacks with our ground anti-aircraft defences.

400. During this period the Singapore Air Defence Organization was severely tested. On the whole the organization for the control of the Active Air Defence, which had been worked out in the latter part of 1941, worked very satisfactorily. The fire control of the Anti-Aircraft Heavy Artillery also worked smoothly, but the height of not less than 20,000 feet at which the enemy air formations invariably flew tended to decrease the effectiveness of our anti-aircraft fire. Nevertheless, casualties were inflicted on the air formations, though these were difficult to assess, and some of the formations were broken up.

As regards Passive Air Defence, some modifications in the system were introduced to avoid the waste of valuable time which took place during periods of Air Raid Warnings.

401. On our side, great hopes had been placed in the Hurricane Fighters which reached Singapore on the 13th January. (See [Section XXXVI](#)). It was hoped that the superior quality of these machines might enable us to regain at least some measure of air superiority over the Japanese. Such, however, did not prove to be the case. In the first place the machines, which were not of the most modern type, did not prove to be superior to the Japanese Navy Zero Fighters. Secondly, the pilots lacked knowledge of the Malayan

climatic and geographical conditions. As with the Army reinforcements, there was no time to accustom them to the local conditions. As a result, several of these Hurricanes were lost daily, some being brought down in battle, some accidentally lost, while a few were destroyed or damaged on the ground.

402. Our Bomber and Reconnaissance machines also continued to be a wasting asset. All available aircraft, including the torpedo bombers, were used for daily East and West Coast reconnaissances, for reconnaissance of the roads behind the enemy lines and for attacks on enemy aerodromes and troop concentrations. These attacks, however, were so weak that comparatively little damage could be done. By the 26th January our Air Striking Force in Malaya had, as recorded in [Section XXXVIII](#), to all intents and purposes ceased to exist. A few attacks were made late in January on enemy aerodromes by Blenheims from Sumatra and Flying Fortresses from Java, but they were not heavy enough to affect the scale of the Japanese air effort.

403. I wish here to pay tribute to the gallant air crews who throughout the later stages of the Malayan campaign went unflinchingly to almost certain death in obsolete aircraft which should have been replaced many years before, and also to those members of the Malayan

Volunteer Air Force who, with no protection of any sort, continued to carry out reconnaissances in Moths and other light aircraft with complete disregard for their own safety.

404. On the 26th January I telegraphed to the Supreme Commander South-West Pacific as under:-

“With our depleted strength it is difficult to withstand the enemy’s ground pressure combined with continuous and practically unopposed air activity. We are fighting all the way but may be driven back into the island within a week. We shall then be subjected to a very heavy scale of air attack unless we can maintain sufficient fighters on the island and drive enemy from Southern Malaya aerodromes. I know that you are doing everything possible to reduce enemy air strength which is at present the dominating factor.”

405. On the 30th January, 1942, it was decided to withdraw the whole of our Air Force, except one fighter squadron, to bases in the Netherlands East Indies. This decision was made by the Supreme Commander South-West Pacific after consultation with the Air Officer Commanding Far East. At my urgent request, one fighter squadron was left at Singapore. Some heavy and light anti-aircraft artillery was also despatched from Singapore to Sumatra. Certain preliminary steps had already been taken in anticipation of these moves. Unfortunately several ships carrying Air Force equipment were sunk before reaching their destination.

SECTION XLI. – FURTHER REINFORCEMENTS.

406. *Royal Navy.* – It was now known that it was not intended to send any additional naval forces to Malayan waters. It was also known that a small British fleet was assembling at Ceylon for operations in the eastern waters of the Indian Ocean, that a strong American fleet was assembling in the South Pacific with a view to keeping open communications with Australia, and that some British (including Australian) and American ships were concentrating with the Dutch Fleet for the defence of Java, which was already being threatened by a Japanese thrust south of Borneo. Detachments of Royal Marine survivors from H.M.Ss. “Prince of Wales” and “Repulse” had joined up with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.

407. *Army.* – The following reinforcements reached Singapore during the latter half of January.

On or about the 22nd January. – The 44 Indian Infantry Brigade with attached troops and 7,000 Indian reinforcements. The 44 Brigade was a sister brigade to the 45 Brigade which had fought at Muar. It was equally raw and only semi-trained. It was commanded by Brigadier Ballantine. With a view to giving it an opportunity for further training, I decided to retain it on Singapore Island and allotted it accommodation in the south-western area.

The 7,000 Indian reinforcements were extremely raw and untrained and included very few non-commissioned officers or even potential leaders which were so badly needed in our Indian units. After consultation with the Commander 3 Indian Corps I decided that it would be unwise to draft more than a proportion of these to the Indian units. The remainder were retained at the reinforcement camps for further training.

24th January. – An Australian Machine-Gun Battalion and about 2,000 Australian Reinforcements. As the terrain on the mainland was not suitable for machine-guns, the Machine-Gun Battalion was allotted accommodation in the Naval Base area and ordered to prepare machine-gun positions on the north coast of the island.

Many of the 2,000 Australian reinforcements had only had a few weeks’ training. They had not been in the Army long enough to learn true discipline.

29th January. – The 18 British Division (Major-General M. Beckwith-Smith) less 53 Infantry Brigade Group and Machine-Gun, Reconnaissance, Anti-Tank and other units. These, with exception of the 53 Brigade Group already arrived, were due in a later convoy. This division had left the United Kingdom the previous October for the Middle East. It had been diverted off the East Coast of Africa to India where it had spent a fortnight. It was a war division which had not previously been overseas. On arrival it was fit but soft. It was accommodated on Singapore Island. I decided to hold it initially in Command Reserve. It was ordered to carry out reconnaissances of (a) the northern area of Singapore Island in detail (b) communications in the western area.

In the same convoy arrived a Light Tank Squadron from India, the only tanks ever

to reach Malaya. The tanks, which were obsolescent, had been collected from training establishments etc. in India. On arrival several of them had to be taken into workshops for overhaul before they could take the field.

Apart from the above no other early reinforcements were expected. It was, however, forecast that an Armoured Brigade might arrive in the Far East early in March. In reply to an enquiry from the Supreme Commander, South-West Pacific, I stated that "A Cruiser Regt. might well be required to deal with tanks landed on beaches, besides having a great moral effect" and suggested that the destination of one cruiser regiment should be left for decision at a later date when we should know the situation more clearly.

408. *Air.* – Towards the end of January 48 Hurricane Fighters were flown off an Aircraft Carrier west of Java. Of these one squadron was based on the Singapore aerodromes. The remainder went to the Netherlands East Indies. These were modern aircraft with only a small proportion of trained and experienced pilots.

SECTION XLII. – IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SCORCHED EARTH POLICY.

409. The measures decided on under the Scorched Earth Policy have already been explained in [Section XXVII](#). These measures were carried out as far as circumstances would permit but the rapidity of the withdrawal made it impossible to ensure that all destruction was executed as planned. It would be idle for me to attempt to assess the success of the Scorched Earth Policy other than in general terms, as undoubtedly a great deal more information is now in possession of those who have returned to Malaya than is known to me. It was known, however, that the thoroughness with which denial was carried out varied in different areas, though it is probably true to say that, taken as a whole, the work was carried out as efficiently as might be expected in the prevailing conditions.

410. As regards rice stocks, it was impossible to burn them and there was not sufficient transport to remove them. In many districts they were thrown open to the people who were invited to take what they required.

411. The attempts to remove or destroy coastal craft were only very partially successful. Some owners whose livelihood depended on them preferred to hide them or to sink them temporarily in the creeks and rivers.

412. As a means of transport the Japanese troops made great use of bicycles which in peace time are widely used throughout Malaya. The removal or destruction of these presented an insurmountable problem except where ample time was available as on the east coast of Johore.

413. Both road and railway bridges were systematically destroyed as the withdrawal continued. It is estimated that some 300 bridges in all were destroyed in

varying degree. The rapidity with which the Japanese made temporary repairs was remarkable, even allowing for the fact that in most cases ample material was available near the bridge site.

414. About the 20th January I received a telegram from the War Office asking for a personal assurance that, if the worst came to the worst, nothing of military value would be left intact for the enemy on Singapore Island. This was a big problem in view of the military and civil equipment and reserve stocks of all sorts which existed on the island. After careful consideration, it was clear to me that no guarantee could be given. Some of the equipment, such as coast defence guns, could in any case only be destroyed at the last minute. One of the main ammunition depots was within a short distance of the military hospital and nobody could be certain what the effect of the demolition of such a depot would be. Civil equipment and stocks would be required as long as Singapore was being held. I therefore replied to the effect that I would make all possible arrangements to ensure that, in case of necessity, the destruction of everything of military value should be carried out, but that I could not guarantee that this would in fact be done.

415. A Committee, comprising representatives of the three Services, was then set up to examine this subject in detail and to draw up plans as far as the Services were concerned. These plans clearly allocated the responsibility for executing each demolition. This work, which proved to be of some magnitude, placed a further burden on the already over-worked staff of Headquarters Malaya Command.

416. The Director General of Civil Defence was made responsible for the organization of civil demolitions on Singapore Island. The planning of these demolitions proved to be a difficult and delicate work. The plans were made with the utmost secrecy. Nevertheless, as was almost inevitable, information leaked out. This gave rise to the wildest rumours, including stories of immediate evacuation, which were damaging to morale.

SECTION XLIII. – IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EVACUATION POLICY.

417. The policy as regards the evacuation of women and children and the measures taken to carry out this policy have already been explained in [Section XXVIII](#). The arrangements worked smoothly and by the end of January only comparatively few European women and children remained on Singapore Island. The majority of those who did remain were engaged on important war work. Practically all ships returning from Singapore to destinations within the British Empire had carried their complement of women and children. In some cases, as had been foreseen, the departure of European women, especially those engaged in the Civil Defence Services, had given rise to adverse comment on the part of the Eurasians and Asiatics.

In the end some 300 European women were interned in Singapore.

418. The difficulty as regards Asiatics was to find a country willing to accept them. There were no sailings to the China coast and ships to India were not very large or frequent at that time. Eventually Australia agreed to accept 1,500 Chinese and a number were sent to Ceylon.

419. Our task being to protect the Naval Base, there was obviously no question of evacuating the Army even if shipping had been available, which in fact was not the case. I refused to allow any discussion of the question of evacuation.

I approved, however, of secret arrangements being made with the Dutch Authorities for the preparation of a route across Sumatra for the use of individuals or small parties who might for one reason or another be given permission to leave Singapore. I refused, however, to allow information of the arrangements made to be circulated among the troops as I feared that any talk of evacuation would cause a loss of confidence both among the troops and among the civil population.

PART III.

THE BATTLE OF SINGAPORE.

SECTION XLIV. – TOPOGRAPHICAL AND CLIMATIC CONDITIONS

420. The Island of Singapore is oblong in shape with a maximum length from east to west of 27 miles and a maximum width from north to south of 13 miles. It is separated from the mainland of Malaya by the Straits of Johore across which is a causeway 1,100 yards long. The Straits west of the causeway, which are the narrower, vary in width from 600 to 2,000 yards. They are navigable at high water for small medium draught vessels, though the channel is narrow and tortuous. East of the causeway the Straits vary in width from 1,100 to about 5,000 yards and are navigable for the biggest vessels afloat as far as the Naval Base. In the middle of these Straits at their widest point lies the Island of Pulau Ubin, with a length of 4½ miles and a width of 1½ miles. This island is marshy in the centre and is developed in a few areas only. To the east of Pulau Ubin is the mouth of the River Johore. This river, which is navigable for light craft as far as Kota Tinggi, gives access to the main Johore Bahru – Mersing road. Covering the mouth of the River Johore is the Island of Tekong. A few miles east of Tekong lies Pengerang Hill at the southern tip of the Johore mainland.

421. Immediately south of Singapore Island and separated from it by the waters of Keppel Harbour lie the Islands of Blakang Mati and Pulau Brani. The former, 2½ miles in length and 1¼ miles in breadth, was a military reserve.

422. Three miles south-west of Blakang Mati lies Pulau Bukum, 1¾ miles long by ½ mile wide, where was situated the Asiatic Petroleum Company's main reserves of naval fuel, petrol and lubricating oils. Further to the west and separated from the south-west coast of Singapore Island by only a narrow channel lie the Sembilan Islands, a group of low-lying islands of varying size inhabited only by Malay fishermen.

423. South of Singapore Island, and not very far from it, is the Rhio Archipelago Group of Islands of the Netherlands East Indies, while to the west lies Sumatra. The Island of Singapore is approached by four main channels – the Malacca Straits to the west, the Durian and Rhio Straits to the south, and the main channel between South-East Johore and Dutch territory to the east.

424. The town of Singapore is situated in the south of the Island and extends for some 6 miles along the water front with a depth of about 1½ miles. Immediately north of it is an extensive residential area covering several square miles of country. The town is divided into two portions by the River Singapore, a muddy tidal waterway crossed by fine

modern bridges. On either side of this waterway are the public buildings and the main shopping and business centres. Further west lies the extensive Docks area. The population of Singapore Town in peace-time was in the neighbourhood of 550,000 but by the end of January, 1942, it was probably nearer a million.

425. From Singapore Town main roads radiate in all directions. The principal is that known as the Bukit Timah Road which, crossing to the mainland by the causeway, becomes the main artery to the north. Other important roads are the Thomson Road, a narrow winding road running out to the Naval Base, the Serangoon Road, a good broad highway running north-eastwards and eventually leading to the Seletar Air Base, and the road which runs due east to the military cantonment at Changi. In addition to these, good roads follow the coast line for several miles in each direction from Singapore Town.

426. Although the Island is thickly populated there are few places of any size outside Singapore Town itself. The most noteworthy are the townships or large villages of Paya Lebar on the Serangoon Road, Nee Soon on the Thomson Road, and Bukit Timah on the Main (Bukit Timah) Road. These lie at important junctions where lateral roads join or cross the roads mentioned above.

427. The only hill features of importance on Singapore Island are (a) The Bukit Timah group of hills which lie just north of the village of that name and from which an extensive view can be obtained over the greater part of the Island, (b) Bukit Mandai, some 3 miles north of Bukit Timah, from which a good view can be obtained over the Straits and Johore Bahru, and (c) The Pasir Panjang Ridge, 4 miles in length, running from Pasir Panjang Village to the western outskirts of Singapore Town. From this ridge an extensive view can be obtained over the western approaches to Singapore and also over the country to the north. In the west of the Island there are other minor hill features.

428. Apart from the built-up areas, Singapore Island like the rest of Malaya is thickly covered by rubber and other plantations, while on the northern and western coasts there are extensive mangrove swamps. These swamps had of recent years, owing to extensive irrigation works, lost much of their value as a military obstacle.

429. In the centre of the Island lie the important MacRitchie, Peirce and Seletar reservoirs and the Municipal Catchment area, a large jungle area traversed only by a few tracks. To the north the Naval Base reservation covers a large tract of country.

430. Visibility is everywhere restricted. Even from the hill features referred to above little detail can be seen of ground objects.

431. The climate of Singapore, though not unhealthy for most people once they become acclimatized, is damp and enervating. Seasonal changes are slight, though during the period of the north-east monsoon (October-March) the weather is slightly cooler than during the rest of the year. The excessive moisture, however, prevents high temperatures. Rainfall is normally high and spread fairly evenly throughout the year, mostly in the form

of thunder-storms. It seldom rains at night. During the period of the Malayan campaign, however, the weather in Singapore was exceptionally dry.

SECTION XLV. – THE SINGAPORE FORTRESS.

432. Before explaining the plans for the defence of Singapore Fortress an outline of the organization for defence as it existed before the withdrawal from the mainland must be given.

The Singapore Fortress area, as previously explained, comprised the Island of Singapore, the adjoining islands and the Pengerang area in South Johore. It was not a fortress in the old sense of the term. It was rather a large defended and inhabited area, with a maximum length of about 35 miles and a maximum width of about 15 miles, which included the large town of Singapore.

The organization for defence can be divided broadly into three categories: (a) The Fixed Defences, which included both guns and search-lights; (b) The Beach Defences, and (c) The Anti-Aircraft Defences. The first two categories were under the command of the Commander, Singapore Fortress (Major-General Keith Simmons). The third, for reasons which have already been explained in [Section VI](#), were directly under me through the Commander, Anti-Aircraft Defences (Brigadier Wildey), though their action during operations was co-ordinated with that of the fighter aircraft by Group Captain Rice, R.A.F. The Headquarters of Singapore Fortress were at Fort Canning.

433. *The Fixed Defences.* – As stated in [Section VI](#), the Fixed Defences were divided into two Fire Commands, i.e. the Changi Fire Command which covered the approaches to the Naval Base, and the Faber Fire Command which covered the approaches to Keppel Harbour and to the western channel of the Johore Straits. In each Fire Command was one 15 in. and one 9.2 in. battery and a number of 6 in. batteries; also searchlights and smaller equipments.

There was an elaborate system of buried cable communications linking headquarters with batteries and lights. Observation of fire was either from Observation Posts which had been constructed at points of vantage along the coast or from aircraft. An Anti-Aircraft Co-operation Flight was maintained by the Royal Air Force for this purpose.

After the Japanese landed in Malaya arrangements were made by which fire from the fixed armament could be brought to bear quickly on a limited number of localities selected as likely landing places for an enemy force attacking the sea-front of the Fortress of Singapore. This involved little difficulty.

As the Japanese advanced southwards, it became evident that the anti-ship guns must be prepared to engage targets on the land front of Singapore. Such a requirement was not easy to meet. The chief difficulties were-

(a) Only a limited number of guns were available, the remainder being ruled out either from lack of range or on account of limited bearing.

(b) The guns most likely to be available were the 15 in. guns (Forts Johore and Buona Vista) and the 9.2 in. guns on Blakang Mati (Fort Connaught), but the 9.2 in. guns only had about 30 rounds each of H.E. ammunition while the 15 in. guns had none at all.

(c) Observation of fire was likely to be difficult as the topography was highly unfavourable to ground observation, while air observation would not be available in view of the local superiority of the Japanese Air Force.

Nevertheless, an improvised but workable counter-bombardment organization was built up and fields of fire were cleared. A demand was made for more ammunition suitable for engaging land targets, but it did not arrive in time.

During January the Fixed Defences suffered some casualties from air bombing.

434. *The Beach Defences.* – The Beach Defences were designed to protect the Islands of Singapore and Blakang Mati, Pulau Brani and the Pengerang area in South Johore from a sea-borne attack. On Singapore Island they extended along the South Coast from Pasir Panjang to Changi, a distance of 20 miles. Concrete pill-boxes for machine guns and light automatics had been constructed at intervals of about 600 yards along the beaches. There were also a few 18-pounder field guns. The defences were well equipped with beach lights.

The material defences comprised anti-boat, anti-tank and anti-personnel defences. They included timber-scaffolding, timber tank obstacles, mines and barbed wire.

Two switch lines had been partially prepared to protect the centre of the Island from enemy landings in the east and west of the Island respectively. The eastern line, known as the Serangoon Line, was sited between the Civil Airport at Kallang and Paya Lebar. The western line filled the gap between the Rivers Kranji and Jurong. In addition, the western front of the Changi area had been wired.

435. Prior to the outbreak of hostilities with Japan no defences had been constructed on the northern or western shores of Singapore Island. This has been imputed in some quarters to a lack of foresight on the part of successive General Officers Commanding. It has, however, perhaps not been fully realised that the object of the defence was not to hold Singapore Island, but to protect the Naval Base. To do this it was necessary at least to prevent the enemy bringing that base under observed fire and also, as far as possible, to keep the enemy out of close bombing range. Such resources, financial and material, as had been available had therefore been applied to the preparation of defences at a distance from Singapore, beginning with the Mersing area and subsequently extending further north. On the eastern front defences had been constructed as far back as Kota Tinggi. Major-General Dobbie, the then G.O.C., had intended these defences to be part of an extensive system covering the Naval Base. The estimate of cost was, however,

so ruthlessly cut down by the War Office that the defences were never completed. The financial restrictions under which defence work in Malaya was carried out have already been explained in [Section V](#). Finally, all defence works were incorporated in the Defence Scheme Malaya which was subject to approval by the Committee of Imperial Defence and subsequently by the Chiefs of Staff Committee.

436. Not long after the commencement of the Malayan campaign it became apparent that we might be driven back to Johore or even to Singapore Island. On the 23rd December I therefore issued orders as under to the Commander, Singapore Fortress. (See [Appendix 'C'](#)):-

“The Commander, Singapore Fortress will arrange for reconnaissance of the north shore of Singapore Island to select positions for the defence of possible landing places.”

Early in January orders were given that the preparation of the defences of the northern part of Singapore Island was to be undertaken at once as an urgent measure.

Labour difficulties, however, then intervened. All the troops on Singapore Island had their allotted tasks in manning the defences, and the military labour companies, of which for reasons already explained there were only three, were fully employed on administrative work. Civil labour, from the beginning of January onwards, failed to an increasing extent as the bombing became heavier. I had, as previously stated, agreed to give priority to the Air Force for this labour for work on the aerodrome's and new air strips. The Air Force seldom got enough and there was none available for our defence works. In fact, I had to make available men from the Reinforcement camps for work on the aerodromes.

As regards material, priority was given to the forward areas and a great deal of engineer material was lost at Batu Anam, at Kota Tinggi and elsewhere. There was a general shortage at this time of steel rods for making reinforced concrete.

Nevertheless, a great deal of work was done. The defences were planned in skeleton as it was not known what the strength of the garrison would be. Sites for the forward defended localities and for reserves were selected. Artillery observation posts and gun positions were reconnoitred and selected. Locations of formation headquarters were fixed and communications arranged. Machine gun positions were constructed. The 44 Indian Infantry

Brigade worked in its area. Oil obstacles and depth charges were placed in creeks which appeared to be likely landing places. All available spare searchlights and Lyon lights were collected and made available. Anti-tank obstacles were constructed and made available.

437. On the 23rd January I issued a secret letter to formation commanders giving an outline of the plans for the defence of the Island, from which the following is an extract:-

Policy for Defence.-

The northern and western shores of the Island are too intersected with creeks and mangroves for any recognized form of beach defence.

The general plan in each area will therefore include small defended localities to cover known approaches, such as rivers, creeks and roads to the coast or tracks along which vehicles can travel.

These localities will be supported by mobile reserves in suitable assembly areas, from which they can operate against enemy parties seeking to infiltrate near these communications or in the intervening country.

The essential requirements of these assembly positions will be concealment from air and ground observation. Slit trenches, shallow and narrow, will be dug.

The covering positions should, where possible, conform to these requirements but must be sited to cover the approaches with fire.

Preparation of Defence-

The present Fortress Commander, Major-General F. Keith Simmons, will be responsible for developing the above outline plan. For this purpose, a special staff will be appointed under him. The senior officer of this staff will be Brigadier A.C. Paris. Commanders 3 Indian Corps and A.I.F. will each detail a selected senior officer to report to Brigadier A. C. Paris at Fortress Headquarters as soon as possible to work on his staff.

A sketch map was attached which showed formation and unit boundaries, sites selected for foremost defended localities and reserves, etc.

438. *The Anti-Aircraft Defences.* – These defences had been sited in accordance with a War Office Plan which was designed eventually to cover the Naval Base, Keppel Harbour and Seletar and Tengah aerodromes, but the lay-out was not scheduled to be completed earlier than the middle of 1942. It was, moreover, based on a lower density than had been found necessary in the defence of London during the German air raids. Sembawang and Kallang aerodromes were given some measure of protection by the defences of the Naval Base and Keppel Harbour respectively. Similarly, Singapore Town and the Base Supply and Ordnance Depots at Alexandra were partly protected.

Towards the end of January all the guns and searchlights from Johore had been withdrawn on to Singapore Island. One Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment (less one battery) and one Light Anti-Aircraft Battery were despatched to Sumatra for the defence of aerodromes. There remained for the defence of the Singapore Fortress area four Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiments plus one battery, two Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments less one battery, and one Searchlight Regiment.

The Anti-Aircraft Defence Headquarters were at Fort Canning and were linked by

telephone to the Fighters Operations Room at Kallang.

With the withdrawal from the mainland the Anti-Aircraft Defences were deprived of the help of the Warning System which had been carefully built up. Their efficiency was thereby reduced though the G.L. sets proved of great benefit.

439. Singapore was not a Fortress. It comprised a large area of land and water with strong anti-ship defences, reasonably strong anti-aircraft defences, but weak infantry defences and no tanks. The coasts facing the Straits of Johore were, when war broke out, completely undefended for reasons which have been explained above. From time to time exaggerated statements had appeared in the Press as to the strength of the Singapore defences. It is probable that, as a result partly of these statements, the public believed the defences to be stronger than they really were. It is certain that the troops retiring from the mainland, many of whom had never seen Singapore before, were disappointed not to find the immensely strong fortress which they had pictured.

SECTION XLVI. – THE ADMINISTRATIVE SITUATION 31ST JANUARY, 1942.

440. *Reserve Stocks – General.* – As explained in [Section IX](#), the policy adopted by the Army as regards reserve stocks on Singapore Island had been one of dispersion. This was done partly to minimise the loss from air attack and partly owing to lack of accommodation in the Singapore Town area, a situation which became more and more aggravated as refugees poured in from the north. Some of the biggest dumps and depots outside the Town area were adjacent to the Bukit Timah and Thomson roads, where they were easy of access. This fact had a big influence on the operations which subsequently took place on Singapore Island. The civil stocks, on the other hand, were mostly in the Town area, where some large godowns had been taken over for the purpose. A large stock of rice was, however, stored between the River Kranji and the Causeway.

441. *Food.* – It is difficult to state with any accuracy what food reserves were available on Singapore Island at the end of January but there was probably not less than three months' supply for both troops and civilians, European and Asiatic.

The Main Military Supply Depot for Malaya had been established on the main road just east of Bukit Timah Village. At the Bukit Timah Racecourse a little further east was a large dump of foodstuffs which had been backloaded from the mainland. Other dumps had been established at Bukit Panjang Village, on the Jurong Road, at Changi, at Alexandra and in the Singapore Town area. A limited supply of fresh meat was held in cold storage at Alexandra and at Bukit Timah. There was a large supply of attah for the Indian troops at Bidadari on the Serangoon road.

The majority of the Civil Government's reserves of rice and other foodstuffs for

the Asiatic population was held in the Singapore Town area. For the Europeans fresh meat was held in cold storage in Orchard Road, the main thoroughfare leading from the Town to the residential area. Finally, the Bali cattle, which had been purchased from the Netherlands East Indies and which had been grazed in Johore, had been driven back on to Singapore Island. With a view to dispersing the civil reserves, the population had been allowed to purchase and remove to their own houses limited quantities of rice. A modified form of rationing for certain European foodstuffs was in force.

442. *Water.* – After the Japanese captured the main source of Singapore's water supply at Gunong Pulai in South Johore on the 27th January the Island was dependent on water from the reservoirs. The water level in these reservoirs was rather lower than usual owing to the abnormally dry season. Nevertheless, there was with care an adequate supply even for the greatly increased population of Singapore Island. The measures taken to economise water have already been explained in [Section XXXV](#). The two pumping stations, the one at Woodleigh 1½ miles S.W. of Paya Lebar Village on the Serangoon road and the other in Mackenzie road east of Government House, were both working at full pressure. Up to the end of January breaks in the mains due to air bombardment had been successfully dealt with. The civil staff of the Municipal Water Engineer had been augmented by European Volunteers, most of whom were refugees from the mainland.

The garrisons of Blakang Mati, Tekong and Pengerang were dependent on local supplies.

443. *Ammunition.* – The ammunition situation was on the whole satisfactory except as regards the 25-pounder field guns (for which we had about 1,500 rounds per gun), the Bofors Light Anti-Aircraft and some categories of mortar ammunition.

The two magazines which had been originally constructed were at Changi and at Alexandra (west of Singapore Town). These were bombproof and contained all types of ammunition. There was also a small magazine at Pulau Brani, and one at Fort Canning which contained S.A.A. only. Under the dispersion policy a large shell-proof magazine had been constructed on the east bank of the River Kranji and dumps had been formed in the Nee Soon area, on the Bukit Timah Rifle Range, near the MacRitchie Reservoir, in the Paya Lebar area and elsewhere.

In addition to these reserve stocks, the normal scales of equipment ammunition were of course maintained at the battery positions in the case of the Fixed Defences and with field echelons.

444. *Petrol and Oil.* – As previously stated, it had been found impracticable to backload much of the unconsumed petrol from the mainland owing to lack of transport and the bulkiness of the petrol drums. Nevertheless, there were considerable Army reserves on Singapore Island.

The Main Reserve Depot was near the Bukit Timah Road a little east of the

Racecourse. The Reserve Depot was just east of Bukit Timah Village. There were other dumps at Bukit Panjang Village, near the Thomson road, and in the Alexandra area.

The Main Reserve for the Royal Air Force was held in underground tanks at Woodlands just south of the causeway. There were also large reserves at Seletar and at the other aerodromes. There were other small dumps of aviation petrol dispersed about the Island.

The Civil Government held no petrol reserves. Considerable stocks were however held by the Asiatic Petroleum Company at Kranji and at Pasir Panjang. The main reserve stocks of that company were on Pulau Bukum.

445. *Fuel Oil.* – The Naval Fuel Oil Reserves were stored in three groups of large tanks, situated at the Naval Base, at Kranji just west of the Bukit Timah road and at Normanton just west of the Alexandra area. In addition there were very large reserves on Pulau Bukum.

446. *Transport.* – There was now a superfluity of transport, both military and civil, on Singapore Island and serious traffic blocks began to develop. To ease the situation all military transport no longer required was parked on the open spaces, while restrictions were placed on the use of civil transport. These measures had an immediate effect in reducing the number of vehicles on the roads.

447. *Medical.* – Accommodation for all hospitals withdrawn from the mainland had with difficulty been found in the Singapore Town area, where there was naturally much congestion. The Alexandra Military Hospital remained the main hospital for British troops, as did the Tyersall Park Hospital in the Tanglin area for Indian troops. The Australian Base

Hospital evacuated from Malacca was accommodated in a school on the northern outskirts of Singapore Town. Temporary hospitals were formed at Changi, in St. Patrick's School, in the lower part of the Cathay building and, later on, on the lower floors of the Secretariat and of the Municipal Offices, at the Singapore Club and at the Cricket Club.

There were good reserves of medical stores at Tanglin.

As regards the Civil Medical Services, the Main Civil Hospital and a number of other hospitals in the Singapore area were still in full use.

448. *Ordnance.* – The Main Army Ordnance Depot was at Alexandra, with large Sub-Depots at Nee Soon and in the Singapore Town area. That of the Royal Air Force was at Seletar.

449. *Naval Stores.* – At the Naval Base were held large quantities of stores of all descriptions for the use of the Royal Navy.

450. *Docks.* – As a result of the Japanese air raids on the Singapore Docks, labour

difficulties, similar to those which had been experienced elsewhere, developed towards the end of January. The Asiatic labourers, who were in the regular employ of the Singapore Harbour Board and most of whom occupied quarters adjoining the Docks, disappeared as the air raids became more intense, with the result that ships bringing military stores had to be unloaded by military personnel.

SECTION XLVII. – APPRECIATION OF THE SITUATION, 31ST JANUARY, 1942.

451. *Object.* – As the Naval Base was now under observed artillery and small arms fire and within close range of enemy aircraft to which we could offer only limited opposition, we had clearly failed to achieve our object of protecting that base. From now onward our object was to hold Singapore.

452. *Naval.* – On the sea the Japanese retained complete control of the waters east of Malaya. With Borneo in their hands it was probable also that their naval forces would rapidly extend their control westwards and south-westwards towards South Sumatra.

On the west coast of Malaya no Japanese warships had yet penetrated to the Straits of Malacca but their coastal craft could move with impunity under cover of their aircraft. In addition to captured coastal craft it was now clear that the Japanese had succeeded in transferring to the west coast some of their own landing craft.

453. *Air.* – In the air the Japanese enjoyed almost complete supremacy, the only Air Forces we had available in Malaya at this stage being the one squadron of Hurricane Fighters and a small number of Buffaloes.

All the aerodromes, except that at Kallang, were under observed artillery fire and some of them were under small arms fire.

454. *Army.* – It was estimated that the Japanese could probably deploy three divisions against Singapore Island, i.e., the Guards and 5 Division, or their replacements, from the west coast and one division from the east coast. These, if up to strength, would give a total of about 60,000 men. Behind these it was reasonable to expect that they had local reserves in Malaya and they also probably still had a General Reserve in Indo-China or elsewhere of one or two divisions. It was estimated, therefore, that they probably had available for operations against Singapore a total strength of seven or eight divisions. They were known in addition to have tank units and a formation of air-borne troops.

As regards our own strength, I have no official figures available now, but I believe it to have been in the neighbourhood of 85,000, i.e., the equivalent of four weak divisions with a large number of Base and other administrative troops. Included in this figure were units of non-combatant Corps, i.e., the Royal Army Medical Corps and the Pioneer and Labour Units, and men for whom no arms could be provided. Probably about 70,000 of

the total were armed and equipped. A large number of these were very inadequately trained. Some of the reinforcements indeed were so untrained that it had been deemed unwise to draft them to units and they remained in the Reinforcement Camps.

We hoped to get reinforcements totalling about 2,500 early in February.

455. As regards equipment, the enemy had complete superiority in tanks as we still only had a few obsolescent light tanks available. We were, however, reasonably well equipped with anti-tank guns and still had a good number of Bren gun carriers and armoured cars. Our coast artillery was strong and our field artillery was equal if not superior to that of the enemy though our ammunition reserve was limited. The Japanese had a good infantry gun and their troops were well trained in the use of the mortar which was a better weapon than our own. We had two fully equipped machine-gun battalions, but few units even approached establishment in light automatics, mortars or Thompson sub-machine guns owing to heavy losses in the fighting on the mainland. There were comparatively few anti-tank rifles.

456. *Topography.* – The comparative narrowness of the western channel of the Johore Straits and the fact that the main west coast land communications led to that front made it appear probable that the main Japanese attack would develop from the west. There was also the possibility of an approach via the Malacca Straits to the south-west sector of Singapore Island. Another possible avenue of approach which could not be neglected was from Kota Tinggi via the River Johore leading to Tekong Island and the Changi area.

Should the enemy succeed in getting a footing on Singapore Island, the offensive and infiltration tactics which he would certainly adopt would be favoured by the lack of ground observation.

457. *Communications.* – The Japanese land communications were now very long and vulnerable and exposed to the harassing tactics of the various parties which had been left behind on the mainland for that purpose. Many bridges had been destroyed. On the other hand by making use of the sea and by landing troops and material at Mersing or at one of the small west coast ports the enemy could to some extent overcome the difficulties of these long communications.

South of Singapore, our own communications were now very precarious as a result of the Japanese advance towards South Sumatra and Java.

The coast-line of Singapore Island, Blakang Mati and Pulau Brani measured 72 miles. In addition to this there was the Island of Tekong and the Pengerang Defended area. This was a long frontage to defend with the forces at our disposal.

458. *Morale.* – As is usual after all long withdrawals, our troops who had fought on the mainland were suffering from exhaustion and from lack of sleep. Their confidence had been shaken by the enemy's naval and air supremacy and by his great superiority in armoured fighting vehicles.

The fact that the Naval Base had ceased to be of use to us and the evacuation of the Air Force except for one fighter squadron, necessary as it may have been, were factors which had a most adverse effect on the morale both of the troops and of the civil population. It was understandable that some among the troops should begin to think of their own homes overseas, which were now being directly threatened.

459. *Japanese Plan.* – I anticipated that the enemy would be certain to launch an attack against Singapore Island as early as possible in order to free troops and aircraft for operations elsewhere and to open sea communications to the Indian Ocean. He would certainly attack from the mainland but he might also simultaneously with this launch a sea-borne and/or an air-borne attack. I expected the attack to develop from the west, combined perhaps with a sea-borne attack via the Straits of Malacca. I thought it probable that another force would come down the Johore River to attack either Tekong Island or Changi.

If a direct sea-borne attack was undertaken this would probably be directed against the south coast east of Singapore Town, while the objectives of an air-borne attack would probably be the aerodromes.

I estimated that it would take the enemy at least a week to prepare his attack and that we must therefore be ready to meet this attack any time after the first week in February.

460. *Plan of Defence.* – The following two alternatives were, broadly speaking, open to us:-

- (a) To endeavour to prevent the enemy landing or, if he succeeded in landing, to stop him near the beaches and destroy him or drive him out by counter-attack, or
- (b) To hold the coast-line thinly and retain large reserves with a view to fighting a battle on Singapore Island.

The disadvantage of (a) was that it was not possible with the forces at our disposal, owing to the extent of the coast-line, to build up a really strong coastal, defence. On the other hand, as regards (b) there was a lack of depth in which to fight a defensive battle on Singapore Island in front of the vital town area. The Naval and Air Bases, depots, dumps and other installations were dispersed all over the Island and some of them would certainly be lost if the enemy was allowed to get a footing on the Island. Further, the close nature of the country and the short visibility would favour the enemy who would be sure to adopt aggressive tactics. Finally, the moral effect of a successful enemy landing would be bad both on the troops and on the civil population.

For these reasons alternative (a) was adopted.

461. There was then the problem of the Pengerang area and the outlying islands. If the Fixed Defences organization was to be retained in its entirety, and it seemed essential

that it should be, it was necessary to hold both the Pengerang area and most of the islands. Pengerang was already garrisoned by an Indian State Forces unit in addition to the personnel of the Fixed Defences located there. The Island of Tekong had become, as has been explained, very vulnerable to attack from the River Johore. If retained, it must be provided with an infantry garrison. Pulau Ubin was not required for the Fixed Defences but it formed a screen behind which the enemy might assemble an attacking force. It was therefore of importance for observation purposes, but its size made it impossible to hold it in strength without greatly weakening the Changi defences behind it. I decided to establish observation posts on it only. The Island of Blakang Mati and Pulau Brani were required for the Fixed Defences. It was necessary to hold Pulau Bukum as long as the large oil reserves on that island remained intact.

The Sembilan Islands presented a difficult problem. They were not required for observation purposes as there was better observation to seaward from the higher ground on Singapore Island behind them. To hold them in strength would involve a dispersion of force which we could not afford. I decided therefore to rely on denying them to the enemy by fire.

462. *Outline Plan.* – The Plan of Defence in outline was therefore as follows:-

- (a) Every endeavour to be made to prevent the enemy landing or, if he succeeded in landing, to stop him near the beaches and destroy him or drive him out by counter-attack,
- (b) The defence of Singapore Island, other than the Anti-Aircraft Defences, to be organized into three areas (i) Northern Area (ii) Southern Area corresponding approximately to the South Coast Defences already held by the Singapore Fortress and to include the Fixed Defences (except the Pasir Laba Battery) (iii) Western Area (including the Pasir Laba Battery).

The Anti-Aircraft Defences to remain directly under Headquarters Malaya Command.

- (c) The G.O.C. Malaya to hold a small central reserve. Each Area Commander to hold a reserve and to be prepared to send one battalion immediately to assist other Areas as required.

- (d) The action of the artillery to be co-ordinated by a Brigadier Royal Artillery appointed for the purpose.

- (e) Pengerang area to be held. No change to be made in the garrison.

The Island of Tekong to be held and provided with an infantry garrison of one battalion.

Observation posts with small escorts to be established on Pulau Ubin.

The Island of Blakang Mati and Pulau Brani to be held and to be provided with machine gun defence.

The Island of Pulau Bukum to be held and provided with a small garrison.

All inhabitants to be cleared off the Sembilan Islands, which would then be denied to the enemy by fire from Singapore Island.

(f) A belt $\frac{1}{2}$ mile deep on the northern and western coasts of Singapore Island to be cleared of inhabitants.

(g) The Royal Navy to patrol the approaches to the Singapore Fortress from seaward and to co-operate with area commanders in the defence of their coast-line.

(h) The Royal Air Force to (i) co-operate in the defence of the Fortress and (ii) reconnoitre the land approaches from the mainland.

SECTION XLVIII. – THE DEFENCE PLAN.

463. As a result of the loss of the 22 Indian Infantry Brigade, (see [Section XXXIX](#)), the 9 Indian Division, which had never had more than two infantry brigades, now had only one weak infantry brigade, Its Commander also had been lost. In these circumstances it was decided that the 11 Indian Division should absorb what remained of the 9 Indian Division. In consequence it became necessary to include the 18 British Division in the 3 Indian Corps at once instead of at a later date as had been intended.

464. The Intention was to hold the Singapore Fortress area.

465. The essence of the defence was that the enemy must be prevented from landing or, if he succeeded in landing, that he must be stopped near the beaches and destroyed or driven out by counter-attack.

For this purpose the defences were organized into three areas (Northern, Southern and Western) and the Anti-Aircraft Defences. The boundaries of areas and the garrisons allotted to them were as under:-

Northern Area. – Exclusive Changi – inclusive Paya Lebar Village – exclusive Peirce Reservoir to 76 Grid Line – thence due north to exclusive the Causeway.

Commander. – Lt.-Gen. Sir Lewis Heath, Commander 3 Indian Corps.

Troops. – 3 Indian Corps, now consisting of 11 Indian and 18 British Divisions with Corps troops.

Southern Area. – Inclusive Changi – exclusive Paya Lebar Village – inclusive Singapore Town and the coastal area west of it as far as inclusive the River Jurong: also Pengerang, the Islands of Tekong and Blakang Mati, Pulau Brani and Pulau Bukum.

Commander. – Major-Gen. F. Keith Simmons.

Troops. – Fixed Defences, 1 and 2 Malaya Infantry Brigades, Straits Settlements Volunteer Force, and Fortress Troops.

Western Area. – Inclusive Woodlands – inclusive Bukit Timah Village – inclusive Kg. S. Jurong – exclusive River Jurong.

Commander. – Maj.-Gen. Gordon Bennett, Commander A.I.F.

Troops. – The Australian Imperial Force and the 44 Indian Infantry Brigade, with attached troops.

Reserve Area. – The remainder of Singapore Island.

In Command Reserve. – 12 Indian Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Paris).

At a later date the boundary between Northern and Southern Areas was adjusted to read “The Tampines River inclusive to Northern Area”.

Commanders Northern and Western Areas were ordered to hold one infantry battalion at one hour's notice at night to move to the support of other areas as required.

Artillery was allotted and its action co-ordinated by the Acting Brigadier Royal Artillery, Headquarters Malaya Command. The inner line of the Defensive Fire Zone was approximately 200 yards in front of the Foremost Defended Localities. Owing to an anticipated shortage of 25-pounder ammunition, normal harassing fire was restricted but could be increased on application in special circumstances.

The lay-out of the Anti-Aircraft Defences was re-organised by the Commander Anti-Aircraft Defences, special protection now being given to the Docks area.

467. The Pengerang area was garrisoned by the personnel of the Fixed Defences and one Indian State Forces battalion.

The Island of Tekong was garrisoned by the personnel of the Fixed Defences and the 2/17 Dogras.

The Island of Blakang Mati and Pulau Brani were garrisoned by the personnel of the Fixed Defences and a machine gun unit formed from the European personnel of the Federated Malay States Volunteers.

Pulau Bukom was garrisoned by a detachment of the Independent Company.

On Pulau Ubin Northern and Southern Areas each established observation posts with small infantry escorts. The orders to these escorts were to resist minor enterprises but to withdraw in face of an enemy landing in strength. They were also to obtain information of enemy movements.

The Commander Western Area was responsible for denying the Sembilan Islands to the enemy by fire.

468. The personnel of all combatant administrative units were organized for the defence of their respective establishments under the direction of Brigadier Moir, late Commander F.M.S.V.F.

469. A force of Chinese Irregulars which had been operating on the mainland under command of Lt.-Col. J.D. Dalley was now expanded and became known as Dalforce. Owing to lack of weapons it could only be partially armed. Detachments of this force were placed under orders of Area Commanders with the object of (a) patrolling the swampy areas where landings might take place (b) acting as a nucleus of fighting patrols sent to operate on the mainland.

470. Orders were issued for officers' patrols to be sent across the Straits regularly into South Johore to reconnoitre the enemy's dispositions and ascertain his intentions.

471. Work was continued on the Serangoon and Jurong Switch lines (see [Section XLV](#)).

472. In view of an anticipated air-borne landing similar to those which had been so effective in Crete special steps were taken for the defence of aerodromes. In particular the Seletar and Sembawang aerodromes were strongly defended. Instructions were issued as to the form such airborne landings might take and the best methods of countering them.

473. The Rear-Admiral Malaya arranged for naval craft to patrol the sea approaches to Singapore Island. Local naval craft were also made available for inshore patrol work as required by Area Commanders. Naval Liaison officers were attached to the headquarters of each Area.

474. The tasks allotted to the Royal Air Force Fighter Squadron were, firstly, to co-operate with the ground defences in the protection of the Singapore Fortress area against attacks by hostile aircraft and, secondly, to reconnoitre the main arteries of communications in South Johore with a view to ascertaining the area of the enemy's concentrations. This squadron was now based on the Civil Airport at Kallang.

475. On the administrative side, certain changes were made. The duties of Martial Law Administrator passed from the Commander, Singapore Fortress, to the G.O.C., Malaya. All Army field units were ordered to hold seven days' reserve rations in addition to the emergency ration, as a reserve in case they should find themselves cut off from the normal supply. To economise petrol and avoid traffic congestion only those vehicles actually required were to be kept in use. All others were to be parked in the open spaces about Singapore Town.

All ships and small craft under control of the Royal Navy were now based on Singapore Harbour instead of on the Naval Base.

476. The Operational Headquarters Malaya Command remained at Sime Road with Administrative Headquarters at Fort Canning. The Headquarters Royal Navy and Royal Air Force were also at Sime Road.

477. The dispositions adopted by the Area Commanders and their subordinates were in outline as under:-

Northern Area.-

Right. – 18 British Division (Major-Gen. Beckwith Smith) less 53 Brigade Group.

This Division had the 54 Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Backhouse) on the right and 55 Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Massy Beresford) on the left.

Left. – 11 Indian Division (Major-Gen. Key).

This Division had the 6/15 Indian Infantry Brigade (Lt.-Col. Morrison) on the right, and the 28 Indian Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Selby) on the left. The 8 Indian Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Trott) was in divisional reserve. The 6/15 Brigade was after a few days relieved by the 53 British Infantry Brigade from Area reserve and went into reserve.

Reserve. – 53 British Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Duke), later relieved by the 6/15 Brigade. To re-equip the 53 Brigade a large number of weapons had to be withdrawn from the remainder of 18 Division as there were now few in reserve.

Southern Area.-

Right. – I Malaya Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Williams) with attached troops.

Centre. – *The Singapore Town Area.* – The Straits Settlements Volunteer Force (Col. Grimwood).

Left. – Exclusive Singapore Civil Airport to inclusive Changi and also including Pengerang Area and Tekong Island, 2 Malaya Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Fraser).

Western Area.-

Right. – 27 Australian Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Maxwell) less one battalion.

Centre. – 22 Australian Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Taylor).

Left. – 44 Indian Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Ballantine).

Reserve. – One battalion 27 Australian Infantry Brigade, plus one machine gun company and detachments from administrative and reinforcement units.

478. *The Spirit of Attack.* – The following is an extract from an Instruction issued to all formation Commanders on the 3rd February:-

“All ranks must be imbued with the spirit of the attack. It is no good waiting for the Japanese to attack first. The endeavour of every soldier must be to locate the enemy and, having located him, to close with him.”

SECTION XLIX. – THE PERIOD OF PREPARATION 31ST JANUARY-8TH FEBRUARY, 1942.

479. *Public Announcement.* I published an announcement which stated that the Battle for

Malaya had concluded and that the Battle for Singapore was now beginning and called upon all ranks and all civilians to play their part in the defence of Singapore. A copy of this announcement is attached as [Appendix “H”](#) to this Despatch.

480. *The Far East War Council.* – The Council, under the chairmanship of the Governor, continued to meet at 0900 hrs. daily at the house of the Secretary, Mr. Dawson.

481. *Withdrawals to the Netherlands East Indies.* – In accordance with instructions received from the Supreme Commander South-West Pacific certain units and individuals were despatched to the Netherlands East Indies. The units included an Australian Motor Transport Company and certain Anti-Aircraft units. Among the individuals were senior officers required for Headquarters South-West Pacific and technicians no longer required at Singapore. I was also instructed by the Supreme Commander South-West Pacific, in view of the shortage of trained staff officers both in the N.E.I. and in India, to evacuate to the N.E.I. all staff officers who were no longer required and in particular to consider whether I could now dispense with any of the Indian Army formation headquarters in view of the reduction of the fighting strengths of those formations.

Some mechanical transport destined for Singapore was also retained in the N.E.I. or returned there without being discharged from the ships.

482. *Re-Organization of Formations and Units.* – As a result of two months of almost continuous day and night operations on the mainland, it was only to be expected that a great deal of re-organization had now become necessary in almost all formations. This was especially the case in the 3 Indian Corps which had borne the brunt of the fighting. The absorption of the 9 by the 11 Indian Division has already been recorded. In addition, the weaker formations and units were now strengthened by the appointment of new Commanders, by the transfer of personnel, by the appointment of newly commissioned officers and by returning junior staff officers to duty. In spite of these measures, the fighting efficiency of many units, as a result of their initial dilution and of the heavy losses which they had suffered, was far from what could have been desired. This was an unpleasant but unavoidable fact which had to be faced.

Lt.-Col. Coates, G.S.O.I. 9 Indian Division, was appointed Commander of the 6/15 Indian Infantry Brigade in place of Brigadier Challen who was missing after the west coast operations. Col. Trott was appointed to command the 8 Indian Infantry Brigade.

As Headquarters Malaya Command was, in the peculiar circumstances prevailing, now dealing direct with divisions in matters concerning Artillery, Supply and Transport, Ordnance and Medical Services, I authorized a reduction of the administrative staff of Headquarters 3 Indian Corps to conform with the new conditions. Unfortunately there was no opportunity for evacuating the surplus personnel before the Japanese attack started.

The Australian units which had suffered such heavy casualties in the Muar area

had now been re-organized and brought up to strength with new drafts many of which were, as has been stated, lacking in training and experience.

483. *Preparation of Defences.* – The preparation of the defences could now be continued by the troops who were to occupy them. Most of the work on the forward defences had to be done by night as they were directly under enemy observation by day. In most areas it was found desirable to withdraw the garrisons from the Foremost Defended Localities by day, leaving only observation posts, and to re-occupy them at night.

All civilians, except those employed on work for the Fighting Services, were evacuated from the northern and western coastal belts. In view of the congestion which already existed in other parts of the Island this was no easy problem.

484. *Arrival of Reinforcements.* – Early on the morning of the 5th February a convoy of four ships bringing the Reconnaissance, Machine Gun, Anti-tank and certain administrative units of the 18 Division and some Indian troops approached the Singapore area, At about 1100 hrs., when the leading ships were close to Singapore and the slowest ship, the “Empress of Asia”, was south-west of the Sembilan Islands, the convoy was attacked by enemy dive-bombers. The “Empress of Asia” received several direct hits and soon began to sink. All the troops had to take to the water owing to fire on the ship. Some acts of great gallantry were performed, especially by members of the hospital staff. Rescues were quickly effected by the Royal Navy. The loss of life fortunately was small, but nearly all weapons and equipment on board were lost and the ship became a total wreck. Owing to heavy air attacks on the Docks area, some of the vehicles and heavy stores were not discharged from the other ships which left again the following night.

It thus happened that some of these units landed without their equipment. They were re-equipped as far as possible with small arms and fought thereafter as infantry. They joined the 18 Division reserve.

485. *The Scorched Earth Policy.* – Very careful plans were made for the implementation of the Scorched Earth Policy. As far as the fighting Services were concerned, the policy briefly was that the authority responsible for the dump, depot or establishment concerned would be responsible for the preparation and execution of denial schemes. As regards the orders to put the schemes into effect, I reserved to myself the responsibility for giving the order if time permitted, but, to provide against the contingency of this not being possible, I laid down that there must always be on the spot day and night sufficient personnel with a reliable Commander who would in the last resort and failing any orders act on his own initiative to ensure that the policy of His Majesty’s Government was carried out.

A copy of the Instructions issued in this connection is attached as [Appendix “J”](#) to this Despatch.

As regards the Naval Base area, it was arranged that the Rear-Admiral, Malaya,

should confer direct with the Commander 11 Indian Division as regards any assistance he might require for the implementation of the Scorched Earth Policy.

The Director General of Civil Defence became responsible for the implementation of the policy as far as civil installations were concerned.

486. *Civil Defence.* – The withdrawal of the Air Force, except for one fighter squadron, and the evacuation of the Naval Base had a bad moral effect on certain sections of the civil population. Rumours were circulated that Singapore was not to be defended. In an endeavour to restore confidence, I published a statement in the Singapore newspapers making our intention clear. (See [Appendix “H”](#).) I also gave an interview to representatives of the Press on the 5th February and on the evening of the same day received a deputation of the leading members of the Unofficial European community. At both these interviews I explained the reasons for the withdrawal of the Air Force, stressed the strategical importance of Singapore and made it clear that our intention was to defend it to the best of our ability.

On the 2nd February a Chinese District Watch Force was formed whose duties, among others, were (a) to assist in arresting looters, hooligans, etc., (b) to assist in calming the populace, (c) to advise the populace to resume business after alerts, (d) to assist in food distribution. By this time the Communist element was taking a major part in the Chinese war effort.

Civil labour continued to be a great difficulty. The Docks at this time were being worked chiefly by military labour assisted by some civilians. In other areas also labour was disappearing.

487. *Operations.* – The operations during this period consisted chiefly of air attacks and of artillery and patrol activities.

The attacks of the Japanese Air Force were directed mainly against the Singapore Docks and the Kallang aerodrome, but attacks were also made on the Changi area on certain of the Fixed Defences and on the Singapore Town area. Attacks on the Johore 15 in. Battery did little damage. Our ground defences succeeded in preventing the enemy aircraft from flying low, while the fighters attacked them as opportunity offered.

The Japanese artillery adopted harassing tactics, batteries becoming active in the plantations north of Pulau Ubin and on the high ground east and west of Johore Bahru. One battery, with a specially long range of about 24,000 yards, shelled the Government House area from near Johore Bahru. A balloon section was brought forward to the high ground above Johore Bahru to assist in the observation of this artillery fire. Our artillery replied with counter-bombardment and harassing fire within the limits laid down. The observation posts on Pulau Ubin proved of great service but had to be withdrawn when enemy troops occupied the island early on the 8th February.

On all fronts our night patrols crossed the Straits and reconnoitred the enemy

dispositions. Two of the A.I.F. patrols which returned on the night 7th-8th February, after being in enemy territory over 24 hours, reported that on the 7th February large enemy reinforcements had arrived in the rubber plantations opposite the western shores of Singapore Island between the Rivers Malayu and Perepat.

488. At 0930 hrs. on the 6th February our air reconnaissance sent out from Palembang in Sumatra reported one cruiser, four destroyers and four merchant ships at anchor in the Anambas Islands some 250 miles north-east of Singapore. We concluded that this was a seaborne force assembling for an attack either on Singapore or on some objective in the N.E.I.

SECTION L. – COMMENCEMENT OF THE JAPANESE ATTACK ON SINGAPORE ISLAND. 8TH-9TH FEBRUARY, 1942.

489. At about 1330 hrs. on the 8th February, heavy artillery fire opened on the fronts of the 22 Australian and 44 Indian Brigade Groups following lighter shelling during the morning. Forward defences, headquarters and communications received special attention. After a lull at sunset the bombardment continued with increased intensity. It was apparent that the enemy had greatly strengthened his artillery during the previous week, the bombardment being reminiscent of that during the World War I. Casualties to personnel were, however, not heavy owing to the protection afforded by slit trenches, but cable communications were cut and damage was done to searchlight and other equipment.

490. The 22 Australian Infantry Brigade was disposed on a three battalion front, each battalion finding its own reserves. The Brigade front, which stretched from the River Kranji on the right to the River Berih on the left measured 16,000 yards. In rear of the position there is a comparatively narrow neck of about 3,000 yards where the headwaters of the Rivers Kranji and Berih nearly join. The problem was whether to allow the enemy to land unopposed and to endeavour to stop him on this neck or to hold forward positions near the coast with a view to attacking the enemy when he was most vulnerable, i.e., when he was crossing the Straits and landing on the shores of the Island. In accordance with the general policy laid down by Headquarters Malaya Command the forward positions were occupied.

The 2/20 Battalion A.I.F. with a company of Dalforce attached was on the right on a front of 8,000 yards between the River Kranji and Sarimbun Island. The 2/18 Battalion V.I.F. was in the centre on a front of 4,000 yards between Sarimbun Island and Murai Point. The 2/19 Battalion which had absorbed a large number of reinforcements since its heavy losses at Muar, was on the left on a front of 4,000 yards between Murai Point and the River Berih. There was a machine gun company distributed along the front. The Brigade was covered by Australian Field Artillery, the total number of guns which could

bear on this front being about 30.

I have no record of the orders issued by the Commander 22 Australian Infantry Brigade, but it appears they were to the effect that the forward troops if overrun were to fall back successively to company and battalion perimeter positions.

491. The first landings took place at about 2045 hrs. 8th February and very soon the whole of the front between the River Buloh on the right of the 2/20 Battalion and the right company of the 2/19 Battalion was being attacked. Some craft also attempted to enter the mouth of the River Berih but were driven off. The troops which formed the first flight of the attacking force were conveyed across the Straits in special armoured landing craft. Successive flights came in more vulnerable types of craft. These landing craft were available in very large numbers, as many as 40-50 appearing on the front of one of the forward companies in the first flight. Each landing craft carried 40 men. It is now known that two divisions, the 18th right and 5th left, took part in this attack. It has been ascertained from Japanese sources that 13,000 troops landed during the night and a further, 10,000 soon after dawn, so that our defending troops were heavily outnumbered. The landing craft emerged from the rivers opposite the north-western and western shores of Singapore Island. It is now known that the Japanese carried them overland by road from Pontian Kechil on the west coast of Johore. There can be no doubt that preparations for this attack on Singapore Island had been made a long time before the war started.

492. The enemy landing craft in the first flight were in many cases sunk or beaten off by the Forward Defended Localities and the machine guns, but they were quickly followed by others and the enemy succeeded in landing at many points. Very heavy, and, in many areas, fierce hand-to-hand fighting developed. Some of the machine guns continued fighting until their ammunition was practically exhausted. Unfortunately, it appears that the S.O.S. calls for artillery support were not answered until some time after the attack started. This was due partly to the inadequacy of Verey Light signals in that close country, partly to the severing of cable communications by the enemy's bombardment and partly to a failure to make full use of W/T. When the artillery fire did come down, however, it was maintained, within the limits of the resources available, at a high level throughout the night and must have done considerable damage.

There was also a failure to make proper use of the beach searchlights for reasons which it has not been possible to ascertain. This disadvantage was, however, countered to some extent by the illumination provided by burning ammunition barges.

493. The strongest enemy attack was directed from the west up the banks of the River Murai with Ama Keng Village, the key point lying between the headwaters of the River Kranji and the River Berih, as its objective. In this area a wedge was driven between the 2/18 and 2/19 Battalions A.I.F.

494. At about midnight the commanders of the three battalions, in accordance with

their instructions as outlined above, ordered the forward troops to withdraw into battalion perimeters. The 2/20 Battalion on the right concentrated in a position about the Namazie Estate, but the 2/18 Battalion was too closely engaged with the enemy and only a small proportion of them reached their perimeter at Ama Keng Village. A similar fate befell the 2/19 Battalion on the left. At about 0900 hrs. the commander of the 2/20 Battalion ordered a withdrawal to the Ama Keng Village area where he hoped to join up with the 2/18 Battalion, but found it occupied by the enemy.

495. The plan for the forward troops to fall back to battalion perimeter positions was contrary to the policy laid down by Headquarters Malaya Command and, in my opinion, involved an operation which was too difficult in the middle of a night battle which was being fought fiercely at close quarters. As a result of it there was much confusion and disorganization, groups of men becoming detached and lost in the close country. Some were collected and taken back to the Base Depot where they were refitted and reorganized. Others made their way to Singapore Town. The 22 Australian Infantry Brigade, however, did not cease to exist – on the contrary it continued to fight well later on as will be seen – and it would be very wrong to judge the performance of the A.I.F. by these stragglers. The action of these men must be judged in relation to the existing conditions. They were not long-service soldiers and discipline was not deep-rooted. They had volunteered for service and had been sent to Malaya to defend the Naval Base. The Naval Base was no longer of any use, but Australia, their homeland, was being threatened. Many of them belonged to units which, after heavy casualties on the mainland, had been reorganized but had had no time to regain their full fighting efficiency. They had fought well throughout a long night against heavy odds and were exhausted. This is the true picture and should be judged on its merits. Active and effective measures were quickly taken by Headquarters Malaya Command and by Headquarters A.I.F. to deal with the situation by means of reinforced stragglers' posts and officers' patrols in the Town area.

496. Shortly after midnight the Commander Western Area ordered the 2/29 Battalion A.I.F. from Area reserve to move up to the Tengah area and come under the orders of the Commander 22 Australian Infantry Brigade with a view to a counterattack. It reached Tengah about 0600 hrs, and preparations for a counter-attack to recapture Ama Keng Village were put in hand. The enemy, however, who had by now been strongly reinforced, anticipated this move by continuing his offensive tactics and by 0800 hrs. he was attacking the Tengah aerodrome.

497. At 0700 hrs. the Pasir Laba 6 in. Coast Defence Battery was attacked by dive-bombers and both guns put out of action, many of the crew being killed and wounded.

498. At 0830 hrs. 9th February, it having by then become apparent that no attack was likely to develop against the Northern area, I ordered the Command Reserve (12 Indian Infantry Brigade) to move at once to the Bukit Panjang – Keat Hong Village area

where it would come under command Western Area. This so-called brigade now consisted only of the 2 Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, 350 strong, of which, 150 were Royal Marines, and one Indian Battalion 400 strong. On arrival about mid-day it took up a defensive position astride the road just west of Keat Hong Village in the right sector of the Kranji – Jurong Line.

499. At 1100 hrs., with a view to forming a new Command Reserve, I ordered the Commander, 3 Indian Corps to put his reserve, the 6/15 Indian Infantry Brigade, at one hour's notice and not to use it without reference to me.

500. In the middle of the day there was a lull in the fighting which had been focused chiefly round the Tengah aerodrome. Early in the afternoon I discussed the situation with the Commander Western Area at his headquarters near Bukit Timah Village. A decision had to be taken with regard to the 44 Brigade Group which was still holding its positions on the southwest coast of Singapore Island and whose only line of communication along the Jurong road was now being threatened. The possibility of using this brigade to attack the right flank of the enemy's penetration was considered but dismissed as being impracticable owing to the dispersion of the brigade in its defensive positions. The following decisions were then taken:-

(a) The 27 Australian Brigade Group should continue to hold the Causeway and maintain its position east of the River Kranji.

(b) That we should now concentrate on holding the Kranji – Jurong Switch Line.

(c) That to assist in holding this line the 44 Brigade Group should be withdrawn at once from its coast defence positions and take up a defensive position on the left of the line astride the Jurong road.

(d) That the 6/15 Brigade from the Northern Area should be moved as soon as possible to a rendezvous on the Bukit Timah road with its head at the Racecourse where it would come under the orders of the Commander Western Area.

501. The enemy's thrust now exercised a very serious threat to our depots and dumps along the Bukit Timah road, especially to the large Kranji ammunition magazine and to the vital food and petrol dumps east of Bukit Timah Village and in the Racecourse area. I impressed upon the Commander Western Area the great importance of covering the area in which these depots and dumps were located.

502. It now became necessary to formulate a plan for the eventuality that the enemy's advance down the Bukit Timah road might force us to withdraw our troops from the other parts of Singapore Island. There seemed to be two alternatives, either (a) to fall back to the east part of the Island and hold the Changi area or (b) to concentrate for the defence of Singapore Town. We were not strong enough to hold both areas. The most important considerations were the location of the water reservoirs, the location of our main dumps and depots and of our hospitals and the fact that the Civil Government and

the bulk of the civil population were still in Singapore Town. I decided that, in the eventuality under consideration, we would concentrate on holding a perimeter round the Singapore Town area and the outlying islands, even though that meant the loss of the Changi defences. As regards the Fixed Defences, the experience at Pasir Laba that morning had suggested that these would not long remain in action if the enemy concentrated his dive-bombers on them.

The plan in outline was to hold a perimeter which would include the Kallang aerodrome, the MacRitchie and Peirce Reservoirs and the Bukit Timah depots area. It was given out verbally to the Commanders Northern and Southern Areas on the evening 9th February and issued as a Secret and Personal Instruction to Senior Commanders and Staff Officers at 0050 hrs. 10th February. It was issued in order that responsible senior officers might know my intentions in case the situation developed too rapidly for further orders to be issued. A copy of the Instruction is attached as [Appendix K](#) to this Despatch.

503. During the evening 9th February the enemy's artillery concentrated on the area held by 27 Australian Brigade. This brigade, on orders from the Commander Western area, had modified its dispositions to guard against the threat to its left rear. At about 1930 hrs. the enemy attacked on a front between the Causeway and the River Kranji. Again a large number of his landing craft were knocked out by artillery and machine gun fire but again he succeeded in getting a footing. Fighting went on in this area until midnight.

504. At midnight 9th/10th February after a day of very heavy fighting the position was approximately as under:-

Causeway Sector. – The enemy had effected a landing west of the Causeway and confused fighting was going on.

Kranyi – Jurong Sector. – The 12 Brigade were still astride the road west of Keat Hong Village with troops of the 22 Australian Brigade in front of them near Bulim Village. The 44 Brigade Group was occupying a position astride the Jurong road near the headwaters of the River Jurong, having driven off some Japanese troops who had cut the road east of Jurong Village.

River Jurong Sector. – The 2 Malay Battalion of the I Malaya Infantry Brigade (Southern Area) was on the line of the River Jurong with forward troops west of the river.

Other Fronts. – Except for some artillery harassing fire there had been no activity on the other fronts.

Reserve. – The 6/15 Brigade was assembling in the Racecourse area.

505. Throughout the day the Hurricane fighters had been in the air almost continuously, as had indeed been the case during the whole of the previous week. They had inflicted casualties on the enemy aircraft and sustained some themselves. This one weak squadron fought gallantly against the Japanese Air Force. With the loss of Tengah, the aerodrome at

Kallang was the only one now serviceable. The A.O.C. with my consent decided to withdraw what remained of the fighter squadron to a base in the Netherlands East Indies intending to use Kallang as an advanced landing ground only. In the event no British aircraft were seen again over Singapore.

506. Under cover of darkness on the night 9th/10th February a naval force of three fast armed patrol vessels (Fairmiles) entered the western channel of the Johore Straits with the object of disrupting the enemy's communications and sinking some of his landing craft. A few small craft were sunk but no other vessels were seen and the force had to withdraw without further success.

The Far East War Council met on the 9th February but no meetings were held on subsequent days.

SECTION LI. – EVENTS OF THE 10TH FEBRUARY, 1942.

507. Shortly after midnight 9th/10th February, his left battalion having been forced back from the beaches, the Commander 27 Australian Infantry Brigade issued orders for his brigade to withdraw to positions north and south of Bukit Mandai. This movement was successfully carried out before dawn. It had the effect, however, of leaving open the vital position overlooking the Causeway and exposing the left flank of 11 Indian Division. The enemy was not slow to occupy the hill south of the Causeway.

508. The 6/15 Brigade, the leading battalion of which arrived at its rendezvous on the Bukit Timah Road at about midnight 9th/10th February, was immediately ordered forward by the Commander Western Area to a position north of the Jurong road near the headwaters of the River Jurong and some 4 miles west of Bukit Timah Village. This position it reached and occupied, after a tedious march owing to the congested road, at about 0430 hours.

By dawn the 44 Brigade was in position on the left of the 6/15 Brigade and south of the Jurong road.

509. The 22 Brigade was still in the Bulim area where it had been since mid-day on the 9th and was ordered by the Commander Western Area to fall back at 0600 hours to fill in the gap in the Kranji – Jurong Line between the 12 and 6/15 Brigades. This movement commenced according to plan but, partly owing to the Brigade Commander losing touch with his units, and partly owing to a misunderstanding of an order received by him from the Commander Western Area, the brigade became scattered and only a part of it took up its allotted position. The remainder occupied a position south of Bukit Timah Village.

510. As previously stated the Kranji – Jurong Line had been selected and partially prepared in peace-time as a Switch Line to protect the centre of the Island against an

attack from the west. A wide belt had been cleared of trees and undergrowth between the two rivers. It was a naturally strong position but the defences had not been completed.

511. By 0730 hours a strong attack had developed against the 12 Brigade holding the right of the position and later the attack spread southwards. Our troops were forced back to positions covering Bukit Panjang Village and Bukit Panjang to the south of it and further south to a position astride the Jurong road covering Bukit Timah Village. A wide gap developed between the left of the 12 Brigade and the right of the 6/15 Brigade.

512. On the left of the Northern Area the Commander 11 Indian Division, finding his left flank exposed, ordered the 8 Brigade from divisional reserve to move westwards and re-occupy the high ground south of the Causeway. This it succeeded in doing by about 1000 hours. A little later a battalion of the 8 Brigade attacked and re-captured Hill 95 overlooking the Causeway.

513. During the morning I ordered the Commander Northern Area to despatch a force of three infantry battalions as soon as possible from his Area to a rendezvous east of the Racecourse to come under the orders of the Commander Western Area. This force was drawn from the 18 British Division. It was commanded by Lt.-Col. Thomas, Commander of the Machine-Gun Battalion, and became known as "Tom Force." As the 18 Division was still holding a front line sector and at this time had only two brigades under command, it was not possible, regrettable as it was, to send a composite formation.

514. After visiting Headquarters 3 Indian Corps and 11 Indian Division I returned again to Headquarters Western Area at 1430 hours and instructed the Area Commander to recapture the Kranji – Jurong Switch Line which I looked upon as vital for the defence of the important Bukit Timah area where so many of our main depots were located.

515. The orders issued by the Commander Western Area for the counter-attack provided for an advance in three phases as under:

- (a) To secure by 1800 hours 10th February the Bukit Panjang and Bukit Gombok features.
- (b) To secure by 0900 hours 11th February a line from a point east of Keat Hong Village to Ulu Pandan.
- (c) To re-establish by 1800 hours 11th February the Kranji – Jurong Switch Line.

The first advance involved only a slight re-adjustment of the line and was effected without difficulty. An enemy attack and penetration during the night, however, prevented the fulfilment of the remainder of the plan, which subsequently had to be cancelled.

516. At the same conference I decided, after consultation with the Commander Western Area, who had no ground communication with the 27 Australian Infantry Brigade, to place that brigade temporarily under command 11 Indian Division, through whose area its communications now ran.

517. On the front of the I Malaya Brigade, the forward troops of the 2 Malay Battalion were attacked and driven back east of the River Jurong.

518. Early in the afternoon the Commanding Officer of a battalion of the 44 Indian Infantry Brigade, which had been attacked, asked for and obtained permission to make adjustments in his dispositions. Troops of the other battalions, seeing this movement, started moving themselves and, before the Brigade Commander could regain control, the whole brigade had reached the village of Pasir Panjang 4 miles away. Here the brigade was re-assembled and marched back in good order, tired but not demoralized, to a position, one mile south of Bukit Timah Village. This incident is recorded to illustrate the unreliability of semi-trained and inexperienced troops in critical situations such as that which then existed. It was not a question of fear or cowardice. It resulted rather from bewilderment in conditions which were entirely strange to these raw and untried troops. Such incidents, however, make the conduct of a battle difficult if not impossible.

519. On receipt of information that the enemy were approaching Bukit Timah Village I gave orders for the Reserve Petrol Depot, situated just east of the village, to be destroyed at 1800 hours. These orders were duly carried out.

520. By dusk the 12 Brigade was in position astride the main road south of Bukit Panjang Village where at about 2015 hours it was attacked by enemy tanks closely supported by infantry. The tanks broke through and proceeded south towards Bukit Timah Village but were held up for a time by the 2/29 Battalion A.I.F. and other troops. About 40 tanks were used in this attack.

521. One more infantry battalion (5 Bedfs and Herts) was withdrawn from the Northern Area, and at 2200 hours 10th February was placed under orders of the Commander Southern Area with instructions to proceed to a rendezvous designated by him.

522. The Supreme Commander South-West Pacific arrived at Singapore early on 10th February and left late at night. During the day he visited all formation commanders. Before leaving he issued orders to the effect that Singapore must be held to the last. These orders I passed on to all ranks.

523. During this and subsequent days enemy aircraft were very active over the forward areas and over Singapore Town. They were now unopposed except for antiaircraft and small arms fire.

SECTION LII. – EVENTS OF THE 11th FEBRUARY, 1942.

524. At 0630 hrs. 11th February Tom Force moved forward astride the Bukit Timah Road with orders to re-capture Bukit Timah Village which was then in possession of the enemy. On reaching the line of the railway, however, the leading troops came under small arms

fire and were held up. On the right contact was made in the thick country astride the pipe line east of the Bukit Timah Rifle Range where close-range fighting developed. The front stabilized on this general line for the rest of the morning.

525. During the night there was a great deal of mortar and patrol activity on the Jurong Road front and by 0830 hrs. the enemy was attacking this position in rear from the direction of Bukit Timah Village. The 6/15 Brigade and other troops on this front fell back south-eastwards towards Reformatory Road south of Bukit Timah Village. The orders, however, did not reach one battalion of the 6/15 Brigade which was left behind.

By mid-day the front ran approximately from the hills east of the Bukit Timah Rifle Range on the right, along the line of the railway, then forward to the junction of Ulu Pandan and Reformatory roads and then south to a point on the coast north of Pasir Panjang Village.

526. By 0700 hrs. it had become clear that a dangerous gap existed between the MacRitchie Reservoir and the Racecourse which was not held by any of our troops. As a temporary measure I ordered a composite unit from the Reinforcement Camp to move up immediately and take up a position at the west end of the Golf Course. Later a troop of our light tanks pushed further west as far as Swiss Rifle Club Hill.

At the same time I ordered the Commander Northern Area to take over responsibility for this sector of the front as far left as a line exclusive Racecourse – Bukit Timah Road, and I ordered the 2 Gordons to move immediately from Changi to the Tanglin area and to come under orders of the Commander Western Area.

527. At 0745 hrs. 11th February Advanced Headquarters Malaya Command closed at Sime Road, which was now closely threatened, and moved to Fort Canning.

528. At about 0800 hrs. the Main Reserve Petrol Depot east of the Racecourse was set on fire by enemy action and destroyed.

529. During the morning a letter from Lieut.-General Yamashita, Commander-in-Chief of the Japanese Army, was dropped from an aeroplane calling upon me to surrender the fortress. I made no reply to this and reported to Headquarters, South-West Pacific Command as under:-

“Have received letter from Commander of Japanese Army asking for surrender of fortress. Letter was dropped by air. Have no means of dropping message so do NOT propose to make reply which would of course in any case be negative.”

530. To meet the threat developing from the west, the Commander Northern Area decided to withdraw units from the beaches held by the 18 British Division and organized a force under Brigadier Massy Beresford, known as “Massy Force.” It consisted of three infantry battalions, a light tank squadron, a battery of artillery and a detachment of mechanized cavalry. It was given the dual task of (a) securing the pumping stations at the eastern ends

of the Peirce and MacRitchie Reservoirs, and (b)filling the gap between the MacRitchie Reservoir and the right of Tom Force. Later in the day, the second task became the more important, but strong patrols were maintained between the two reservoirs to prevent infiltration. Units of the force were moved into position as they reached the rendezvous east of MacRitchie Reservoir.

531. During the morning a strong enemy attack developed against the 22 Australian Infantry Brigade, now reduced to a few hundred men only, which was in position north of the junction of the Reformatory and Ulu Pandan roads (about one mile south of Bukit Timah Village). Fierce fighting went on in this area throughout the day during which the brigade held its ground most gallantly in face of infantry attacks supported by aerial bombing, artillery, mortar and small arms fire.

532. Further to the south the enemy penetrated as far as the Buona Vista 15 in. Battery which was destroyed, the crew subsequently fighting as infantry.

533. During the evening 11th February Tom Force, which was on a very extended front, was withdrawn to more concentrated positions astride the Bukit Timah Road with the right battalion in the Racecourse area and the left south of Racecourse Village. The gap between Tom Force and the right of the 22 Brigade was filled by an Australian battalion and later by 2 Gordons.

534. In the Causeway sector there was no change in the situation during the morning. Our artillery succeeded in keeping the gap in the Causeway open and at the same time inflicted numerous casualties on enemy parties trying to repair it.

A project to recapture Bukit Panjang Village with the 27 Australian Brigade Group, in order to ease the pressure on the Bukit Timah front, proved abortive. That Group was at this time too dispersed for any co-ordinated action.

During the day enemy troops penetrated between the 28 and 8 Brigades towards Nee Soon Village and at 1600 hrs. the Commander 11 Indian Division was instructed by the Commander Northern Area that his task now was to protect the left flank of the 18 British Division by holding a line from the River Seletar to Peirce Reservoir. He was to take immediate steps to put this plan into effect.

During the night 11th-12th February 11 Indian Division fell back to the line River Sim pang – Sim pang Village – inclusive Sembawang aerodrome – inclusive Seletar Reservoir.

535. The following inter-formation boundaries were fixed as from 2359 hrs. 11th February:

(a) *Between Northern Area and Western Area.* – The River Namly south of the Bukit Timah Road. Tom Force passed from command A.I.F. to command Massy Force.

(b) *Between Western Area and Southern Area.* – Inclusive to Western Area the Ulu Pandan

Road.

536. During the period 9th–11th February the Johore 15 in. Battery and the Connaught 9.2 in. Battery had co-operated by shelling the Tengah, Johore Bahru and, later, the Bukit Timah Village areas. The fire, most of which was with A.P. shells, could of course not be observed but from reports subsequently received it is believed that heavy casualties were inflicted on the enemy by these guns.

537. The loss of the food and petrol depots and dumps in the Bukit Timah area, in spite of all our efforts to hold them, was a very serious blow. We now only had about 14 days' military food supplies in the depots which remained under our control. As regards petrol, so little now remained that I issued an order that no further supplies, either Army, Air Force or Civil, must be destroyed without my permission.

538. The Indian Base Hospital at Tyersall was set on fire by enemy action and practically burnt out. There were a large number of casualties among the patients.

SECTION LIII. – EVENTS OF THE 12TH FEBRUARY, 1942.

539. Thursday the 12th February was a day of heavy fighting on the whole front. The enemy, who had now been greatly reinforced, launched strong attacks at several different points.

At about 0900 hrs. the enemy attacked with tanks on the Bukit Timah road front and almost reached the Chinese High School area before they were stopped. As happened so often in Malaya, our commanders experienced great difficulty in controlling their units in the thick country. Strengths underwent rapid changes as sub-units became detached and later rejoined. The Commander Massy Force finally stabilized the front on the general line MacRitchie Reservoir – Adam Road – Farrer Road. To relieve the pressure on this front I ordered the Commander Western Area to organize an attack from the south against the enemy's flank in the Racecourse Village area. The Johore 15 in. Battery also engaged targets on this front.

540. After visiting the front on the Bukit Timah road area I formed the opinion that there was a very real danger that the enemy would break through on that front into Singapore Town. After consultation with the Commander Northern Area I decided that the time had come to organize a close perimeter defence round Singapore Town itself. This defence must, however, include the sources of the vital water supply. This plan involved the withdrawal of all troops from the beach defences on the north side of the Island and also from the Changi area with a consequent loss of the Changi Coast Defences. Accordingly, I instructed the Commander Northern Area to withdraw the 11 Indian and the remainder of the 18 British Division from the beach defences, to select and occupy a position covering the water supply and linking up on the right with Southern Area north east of the Kallang aerodrome, and to appoint the Commander 18 British Division to take

over responsibility for the front now held by Massy Force. I also instructed the Commander Southern Area to make all preparations to withdraw from the Changi area and the beaches east of Kallang as soon as he received orders to do so. I informed the Governor of the dangerous situation which was developing on the Bukit Timah road front. He ordered the destruction of the broadcasting station and took certain steps to reduce the stocks of currency notes held by the Treasury.

541. At about 1000 hrs. the Japanese Imperial Guards made a determined attack, supported by tanks, in the Nee Soon Village area, but were held west of the village by units of the 8 and 28 Brigades. Early in the afternoon the 53 Brigade, on withdrawal from the beaches, took up a position astride Thomson road a little south of Nee Soon Village and later in the day the remainder of the 11 Indian Division passed through it.

542. Throughout the day the 22 Australian Brigade Group continued to hold its advanced position in the Pandan area in spite of all attempts by the enemy to dislodge it. There was a lot of fighting at close quarters. Towards the evening, however, the enemy effected a deep penetration south of the position held by this brigade. The brigade was withdrawn undercover of darkness to the Holland Village area. It had fought a gallant action for 48 hours and done much to hold up the enemy's advance in this area.

543. Further south the enemy concentrated during the day on the front of the 44 Brigade and the I Malaya Brigade, fresh troops being brought up by M.T. Several enemy attacks were repulsed. After dark the front was adjusted to conform with the situation on the right and ran from the Tanglin Halt area to Pasir Panjang Village.

544. At 2030 hrs., in consequence of information which I had received, I ordered the demolition of all the Changi defences and the withdrawal during the night 12/13th February of all troops from the Changi area and from the south-east coast to the Singapore defences. These orders were duly executed.

545. The general line of the perimeter defences included Kallang aerodrome – Woodleigh Pumping Station (one mile south-west of Paya Lebar Village) – east end of MacRitchie Reservoir – Adam Road – Farrer Road – Tanglin Halt – The Gap and thence to the sea west of Buona Vista Village. The Commander Northern Area was, however, instructed to delay the withdrawal on the Thomson road front to give time for certain dumps in that area to be cleared.

546. During the day the Japanese aircraft and artillery were both active, an observation balloon being moved to the western end of Singapore Island. The Town area came in for much attention and there were a large number of casualties.

547. The administrative situation now began to cause great anxiety. As a result of the further withdrawals the military food reserves under our control were now sufficient for only about seven days' consumption. In addition to this there were the reserves, varying in quantity, held by units and the civil food reserves. We still had adequate ammunition

reserves except as regards 25-pounder, Bofors and mortar ammunition. As regards petrol, except for the Asiatic Petroleum Company's reserves on Pulau Bukum, we only had one small dump and what was in vehicle tanks.

Pearl's Hill water reservoir was empty and the Fort Canning Reservoir began to lose water rapidly. In the Town area breaks in the mains from bombing and shelling began to gain steadily over repairs, with the result that from the 12th February pressure failed seriously and water at low pressure was only available at certain street and ground floor levels. Special water carrying parties were organized. On the 12th February Royal Engineer personnel and military transport were called in by the Director General of Civil Defence to assist the civil staff. For some time past certain Royal Engineer Officers, Warrant and Non-Commissioned Officers, had been understudying Public Utility Services so as to be able to assist should need arise.

SECTION LIV. – EVENTS OF THE 13TH FEBRUARY, 1942.

548. The main Japanese offensive during the 13th February developed along the Pasir Panjang Ridge on the left of our position. Here the Japanese 18 Division, which had fought in the Mersing area and later taken part in the initial attack against Singapore Island, came into action. After two hours of heavy shelling and mortaring it attacked the Malay Regiment which was holding this feature. The latter fought magnificently but suffered heavy casualties and by the afternoon the enemy had reached The Gap, a dominating position where the Buona Vista Road crosses the ridge. Further north the enemy also gained a local success. After dark our forward troops fell back under orders to positions covering the important Alexandra area in which was situated the Main Ordnance Depot, the Alexandra Ammunition Magazine, the Military Hospital and other installations.

549. In the Tyersall – Tanglin area the Commander A.I.F. (Western Area) had organized an all-round perimeter defence into which most of the units of the A.I.F., including all surplus personnel of administrative units, had been drawn. There was only minor activity on this front during the day.

550. On the Northern Area front the 53 Brigade Group fell back under pressure during the day along the Thomson road, and by the evening had taken up the position allotted to it north of Braddell road and east of Thomson road. Here it reverted to the command of the 18 British Division which now had its three brigades in line, 53rd on the right, 55th in the centre and 54th on the left. The Division was now on a five mile front and there had been much mixing of units as a result of the piecemeal way in which they had necessarily been withdrawn from the beach defences.

On the right of the 18 British Division was the 11 Indian Division holding a position astride the Serangoon road south of Paya Lebar and with its right in touch with the Southern Area eastern defences which included the Kallang aerodrome where some

pre-war defences had been constructed.

551. Southern Area still held the beach defences in the Singapore Town area, and also Pulau Brani and Pulau Bukom, Blakang Mati, Tekong and the Pengerang Area. I gave orders for the infantry battalion on Tekong Island, which had not been engaged, to be withdrawn during the night 13th-14th February for employment on Singapore Island.

552. On the morning of the 13th February the Rear-Admiral Malaya decided to sail all the remaining ships and sea-going craft to Java during the night 13th-14th February and to leave Singapore himself. There was accommodation on these ships and small craft for about 3,000 persons in all, in addition to the crews. It was the last opportunity that could be foreseen for any organized parties to leave Singapore. At a meeting held by the Rear-Admiral the vacancies were divided between the Services and the Civil Government. One thousand eight hundred vacancies were allotted to the Army.

As a result of the above decision the move of the battalion from Tekong Island to Singapore referred to above had to be cancelled.

553. At 1400 hours I held a conference at Fort Canning. The following were present:-

The Commanders Northern and Southern Areas, A.I.F., 11 Indian Division and 18 British Division, and Anti-Aircraft Defences.

The Brigadier General Staff Headquarters Malaya Command.

The Brigadier i/c Administration Headquarters Malaya Command.

At this conference the future conduct of the operations was discussed. I indicated that I hoped to organize a counter-attack shortly to relieve the pressure on the defences. All formation commanders were agreed that, owing to the exhaustion of the troops, a counter-attack would have no chance of success at that time. After hearing the views put forward by subordinate commanders I gave orders for the defence of Singapore to be continued.

554. The conference then discussed the allotment of Army vacancies for evacuation the following night. I decided that:-

(a) All female members of the Military Nursing Service should be sent. This decision was taken as a result of a report from G.H.Q. South-West Pacific on the treatment of nurses by the Japanese after the capitulation of Hong Kong.

(b) Trained staff officers and technicians no longer required at Singapore could be sent at the discretion of formation commanders. The decision as regards trained staff officers was made in accordance with instructions received from G.H.Q. South West Pacific that any surplus were to be evacuated as they were badly needed both in Java and in India. Technicians were evacuated to avoid them falling into the hands of the Japanese who, there was reason to suppose, would have endeavoured to extract information from them.

As time was short vacancies were immediately sub-allotted to formations with instructions that they need not necessarily be filled.

555. As a result of the views put forward at the conference I formed the opinion that the situation was undoubtedly grave but was not hopeless. Our defence was now very fully stretched and it was not possible to relieve the troops in the forward areas who were becoming exhausted as a result of the continual day and night operations. The interests of the civil population, which was estimated at that time to number nearly one million, could not in my view be entirely disregarded. As so many and vast Imperial interests were involved I felt it my duty to report the situation fully and candidly as I saw it to the Supreme Commander South-West Pacific. I believe that in such circumstances it is equally wrong to give an over-optimistic view as it is to give one which is unduly pessimistic. As some misleading statements have been made as to the purport of the telegram which I sent to the Supreme Commander South-West Pacific on that day I quote below the final paragraph:-

“Your instructions of 10th February (see [Section LI](#)) are being carried out but in above circumstances would you consider giving me wider discretionary powers.”

In his reply the Supreme Commander South-West Pacific made it clear that, while he fully appreciated our situation, continued action was essential and instructed me to continue to inflict the maximum damage on the enemy for as long as possible.

556. Throughout the 13th February both the Japanese aircraft and artillery were active. About midday there was a particularly heavy and accurate air attack on the Orchard road area, the main thoroughfare connecting Singapore Town with the Tanglin area. The Alexandra Ammunition Magazine came under shell and mortar fire and at midnight deliveries had to be temporarily suspended owing to fires. Our own artillery was also active throughout the day. Most of the field artillery was now sited on open spaces in the Singapore Town area. All remaining batteries in the Faber Fire Command of the Fixed Defences came into action and themselves came under enemy artillery fire. A number of enemy planes were shot down by our anti-aircraft defences.

557. On this day the Rear-Admiral Malaya, after consultation with me, gave orders for the destruction of the large oil stocks on Pulau Bukum. These comprised both naval fuel and lubricating oils and the Asiatic Petroleum Company's petrol reserves. I had previously opposed the destruction of these stocks on account of the adverse moral effect which I anticipated it would have on both the troops and the civil population. I now informed the Rear-Admiral Malaya that, though I would do my utmost to prevent the enemy seizing Pulau Bukum, I could no longer guarantee the security of the stocks there. The Rear-Admiral who was personally responsible for the destruction of the naval stocks, felt that he could not risk further delay. The demolition was carried out that afternoon. It was partially, though not entirely, successful.

558. The effect of the collapse of civil labour now began to make itself more and more felt. At the Docks all civil labour had disappeared and the Harbour Board Staff was no longer in control. In the Town area debris from the bombing and shelling remained untouched, the dead remained unburied and water ran to waste from the mains from lack of labour to clear the demolished buildings.

559. In the afternoon the Governor moved his headquarters from Government House to the Singapore Club in the centre of Singapore Town.

560. I regret to have to report that the flotilla of small ships and other light craft which, as stated above, left Singapore on the night 13th-14th February encountered a Japanese naval force in the approaches to the Banka Straits. It was attacked by light naval craft and by aircraft. Many ships and other craft were sunk or disabled and there was considerable loss of life. Others were wounded or were forced ashore and were subsequently captured.

Included in this flotilla was a patrol boat on which were the Rear-Admiral Malaya and his party and the Air Officer Commanding Far East. This boat was driven ashore on a deserted island by a Japanese destroyer and its engines dismantled. After some weeks on the Island the Rear-Admiral and the Air Officer Commanding Far East both died.

I wish here to pay a special tribute to the loyalty of Air Vice-Marshal Pulford, the Air Officer Commanding Far East. Though at liberty to leave Singapore at any time on or after the 5th February he preferred, from a sense of duty and of personal friendship to myself, to remain there until the 13th February and would have remained longer had I wished him to do so. This gallant officer's self-sacrifice cost him his life.

SECTION LV. – EVENTS OF THE 14TH FEBRUARY, 1942.

561. During the day the Japanese renewed their attacks. Their main thrust was again made against the western front of the Southern Area. Here very heavy fighting at close quarters went on throughout the day in which the Loyal Regt. and the Malay Regt. especially distinguished themselves. By the end of the day our troops had been driven back by the weight of the attack to the line Alexandra – Gillman Barracks – Keppel Golf Course. Further north the enemy reached the Alexandra Hospital area but were prevented from making further progress by the 5 Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regt. and a composite Royal Engineer Unit. The 44 Brigade took up a position on the line of the Tanglin road in the Mount Echo area.

Japanese troops entered the Alexandra Military Hospital and attacked some of the staff and patients. Later many of the staff and patients were removed from the hospital by the Japanese and were massacred in cold blood.

562. On the A.I.F. front there was little activity, though some bodies of the enemy

moving down the railway were engaged by artillery and small arms fire and dispersed.

563. On the front of the 18 British Division the 1 Cambridgeshire Regt. continued to hold its position west of Adam road where it had shown great determination in resisting enemy attacks during the last two days. To the right of this battalion the enemy developed a strong attack, supported by artillery and tanks, at about 1800 hrs. and succeeded in advancing nearly a mile until they were held up by defences on the line of the Mount Pleasant road. A deep dent in our line was thus created.

At the junction of Braddell and Thomson roads east of the MacRitchie Reservoir the enemy gained some ground but was driven back again by counter-attack. Further to the right, the left flank of the 53 Brigade was driven back south of Braddell road, but the right flank succeeded in maintaining its positions north of the road.

On the Serangoon road front the enemy attacked strongly from the direction of Paya Lebar Village but was stopped by units of the 11 Indian Division after advancing to within a few hundred yards of the vital Woodleigh Pumping Station.

564. On the eastern front of the Southern Area there were some local engagements between troops of the I Manchester Regt. and enemy detachments.

565. During the day there was fairly heavy shelling of selected areas by the enemy artillery which now had the advantage of observation from the Bukit Timah hills. Our own field artillery with due regard for ammunition economy, replied whenever suitable targets presented themselves.

566. Several enemy aircraft were again brought down by our anti-aircraft guns but casualties in the Town area were heavy.

567. Early in the morning of the 14th February a new and serious situation developed when the Municipal Water Engineer (Mr. Murnane) reported to the Director General of Civil Defence that he considered a complete failure of the water supply was imminent. In consequence of this report I held a conference at the Municipal Offices at about 1000 hrs., at which the following were present:-

The Director General of Civil Defence

The Chairman of the Municipality (Mr. Rayman)

The Municipal Water Engineer.

The Municipal Water Engineer reported that, owing to breaks in the water mains and pipes as a result of bombing and shelling, a heavy loss of water was going on; that, though both pumping stations were still working, well over half the water was being lost; that all civil labour had disappeared and that it was difficult to get repairs done. He estimated that the water supply would last for 48 hours at the outside and that it might only last for 24 hours. Various methods of dealing with the situation were considered, but the only practical one

seemed to be to effect repairs quicker than the mains and pipes could be broken. I therefore ordered additional Royal Engineer assistance, but this could not be provided till the afternoon owing to the fact that all available Royal Engineer personnel were at that time fighting as combatant troops. I arranged another meeting for the evening.

568. At about 1030 hours I met the Governor at the Singapore Club. The Colonial Secretary (Mr. Fraser) was also present. The Governor stressed the dangers which would result if Singapore with its large population was suddenly deprived of its water supply. I informed the Governor that I intended to go on fighting as long as we could, as I did not consider that the water situation, though undoubtedly serious, had yet rendered the further defence of Singapore impossible. I arranged to visit the Governor again in the evening after a further review of the situation. It was agreed that the Governor would report the situation fully to the Colonial Office and that I would report it to the Supreme Commander South-West Pacific. This I did adding that I was watching the situation and fighting on but that I might find it necessary to take an immediate decision.

569. The Supreme Commander South-West Pacific in his reply said:-

“In all places where sufficiency of water exists for troops they must go on fighting.” and in a later telegram he said:- “Your gallant stand is serving purpose and must be continued to limit of endurance.”

570. At about 1700 hours, after visiting formation headquarters of the 18 British and 11 Indian Divisions, I held another conference at the Municipal Offices. The same officials were present as at the morning conference. The Municipal Water Engineer reported that the position was very slightly better. I instructed the Director-General of Civil Defence to forward to my Headquarters by 0700 hours the following morning an accurate forecast of the water situation as it appeared at that time.

I subsequently reported the situation to the Governor at the Singapore Club.

571. It may not be out of place here to give some description of the conditions which existed in Singapore Town on the 14th February.

The Secretariat and other Government offices were operating on a skeleton basis only. The only newspaper being published was a Government controlled single sheet newspaper of which free issues were made. Practically all offices, business houses and shops were closed. The lower floor of many of the large buildings, including the Secretariat, the Municipal Offices, the Singapore Club and the Cathay building had been taken over as temporary military hospitals and were already full. The Asiatic population with few exceptions was apathetic. There were few people on the streets and public services were practically at a standstill. The Civil Hospitals were working to capacity. Those on the higher levels, including the General Hospital, were without water on the 14th February and special water-carrying parties had to be organized. This applied also to some of the military hospitals. The St. James Electric Power Plant, situated in the Keppel

Harbour area, was still working but it was now directly threatened as the enemy were within one mile of it. The Peirce and MacRitchie water reservoirs were in enemy hands although water, whether by design or oversight, continued to flow to the pumping stations. The enemy were within a few hundred yards of the Woodleigh Pumping Station.

SECTION LVI. – EVENTS OF THE 15TH FEBRUARY, 1942.

572. During the night 14th-15th February enemy infantry infiltrated on all sectors of the 18 British Division front and also succeeded in getting a footing on the Mount Pleasant Ridge. The lack of an organized reserve made it difficult to deal with these pockets of penetration. Nevertheless, local counter-attacks were staged which regained some of the lost positions on the Mount Pleasant Ridge.

573. On the extreme left of our position the enemy renewed his attacks with vigour and some bitter fighting ensued on the front of the I Malaya Infantry Brigade. Heavy casualties were inflicted and suffered, the 2 Loyal Regt., which bore the brunt of the fighting, at this time totalling only about 130 fighting men. Eventually the line fell back to the east end of the Alexandra Depots area – Mount Washington – east end of the Keppel Golf Links.

574. The morning report on the water situation from the Director General of Civil Defence (see [Section LV](#)) showed a serious deterioration. The D.G.C.D. summed up the situation by saying that he anticipated that the water supply would not last more than another 24 hours. On receipt of this report I instructed him to:-

(a) Attend a Commanders' conference which was scheduled to take place at 0930 hrs. that morning.

(b) In the meantime, confirm the situation with the officials of the Municipality.

575. At 0930 hrs. the Senior Commanders' Conference met at Fort Canning. The following were present:-

The Commanders Northern and Southern Areas, A.I.F. and Anti-Aircraft Defences.

The Brigadier Royal Artillery.

The Brigadier General Staff, the Brigadier i/c Administration and the Deputy

Adjutant General Headquarters Malaya Command.

The Director General of Civil Defence.

The Inspector General of Police Straits Settlements.

A Staff Officer Northern Area.

The formation Commanders reported verbally on the tactical situation in their respective areas.

I then gave a summary of the administrative situation in accordance with reports received that morning. The Director-General of Civil Defence, in reply to enquiry, repeated that the water position was critical, that the rate of breakage of mains and pipes exceeded repair, and that the meagre water supply still available could not now be guaranteed for more than about 24 hours; further, that if total failure took place it would at the best take several days to obtain pipewater again.

The general situation as regards food was that the military food reserves under our control had now been reduced to a few days, though there were large reserves in the Bukit Timah area then under Japanese control. There were also civil supplies.

There were adequate reserves of small arms ammunition, but 25-pounder field gun ammunition was very short and the reserves of Light Anti-Aircraft (Bofors) ammunition were almost exhausted. The Alexandra magazine was practically in the front line and fires had prevented any ammunition being withdrawn from there the previous day.

As regards petrol, the only petrol which now remained, apart from one small dump, was what was in vehicle tanks.

576. A discussion on the general situation followed. The danger of the water situation, particularly as it affected the Indian troops and the vast civil population, was stressed. There was also the danger of a break-through into the crowded Town area if the Japanese delivered another determined attack. It was clearly no good remaining on the defensive as we were. As I viewed the situation, the alternatives were either (a) to counter-attack immediately to regain control of the reservoirs and of the military food depots and to drive back the enemy's artillery with a view to reducing the damage to the water supply system, or (b) to capitulate immediately. Formation Commanders were unanimously of the opinion that in the existing circumstances a counter-attack was impracticable.

I could see no immediate solution for the critical water situation and decided to capitulate. The other members of the conference concurred unanimously with this decision.

577. A discussion on the method of implementing the decision followed. It was decided that a joint military and civil deputation should proceed into the Japanese lines as soon as possible and that it should consist of the Deputy Adjutant General, the Colonial Secretary and an Interpreter. The deputation was instructed (a) to propose to the Japanese a cessation of hostilities as from 1600 hrs. 15th February, (b) to invite a Japanese deputation to visit Singapore to discuss terms. This procedure was in accordance with an arrangement previously made with the Governor in anticipation of an emergency arising.

578. Orders were issued for the destruction before 1600 hrs. of all secret and technical equipment, ciphers, codes, secret documents and guns. It was deemed inadvisable at this stage to destroy personal weapons in case the Japanese should not agree to a cessation of hostilities or should attack before an agreement had been reached.

579. At about 1145 hrs. I reported to the Governor at the Singapore Club.

580. The following is an extract from a telegram received from the Supreme Commander South-West Pacific on the morning of the 15th February:-

“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.”

In reply to the above I notified him of the decision to cease hostilities.

581. In the afternoon the deputation returned with instructions that I was to proceed personally with my staff to a given rendezvous. The meeting with the Japanese Commander (Lt. Gen. Yamashita) took place in the Ford Factory north of Bukit Timah Village. There is not, and never has been, any copy of the terms of surrender in my possession. As far as my recollection goes, only one copy was produced by the Japanese and this was retained by them. Certainly no copy was handed to me. The actual terms of surrender cannot therefore be recorded accurately. The main conditions were, as far as my memory goes, as under:-

(a) There must be an unconditional surrender of all Military Forces (Army, Navy and Air Force) in the Singapore area.

(b) Hostilities to cease at 2030 hrs. British time, i.e. 2200 hrs. Japanese time.

(c) All troops to remain in positions occupied at the time of cessation of hostilities pending further orders.

(d) All weapons, military equipment, ships, aeroplanes and secret documents to be handed over to the Japanese Army intact.

(e) In order to prevent looting and other disorders in Singapore Town during the temporary withdrawal of all armed forces, a force of 100 British armed men to be left temporarily in the Town area until relieved by the Japanese.

As regards paragraph (d) above I informed the Japanese Commander that there were no ships or aeroplanes in the Singapore area, and that the heavier types of weapons and some of the military equipment and all secret documents had already been destroyed under my orders. This he accepted.

582. Orders for the cessation of hostilities were issued to all formation Commanders soon after 1900 hrs. Hostilities finally ceased at 2030 hrs., 15th February, British time.

583. The general line of our foremost positions at the cessation of hostilities was from right to left as under:-

All inclusive the Kallang Aerodrome (Civil Airport) – The Tarlat Air Strip – The Junction of the Serangoon and Braddell roads – The Junction of Braddell and Thomson roads – The Broadcasting Station – Bukit Brown – Adam road–Raffles College area – Tyersall area – Tanglin area – Mount Echo – The Biscuit Factory – The Alexandra Ammunition Magazine – Mount Washington – The eastern end of the Keppel Golf Links.

We also held Blakang Mati, Pulau Brani, Tekong and the Pengerang area.

584. Japanese troops entered Singapore Town on the morning of the 16th February. There was a military demonstration in which 175 Medium and Light Tanks took part. The majority of the Japanese troops, however, were retained outside the Town area.

585. After the cessation of hostilities it was 5½ days, with engineers and water parties working at full pressure, before water again reached the lower areas of Singapore Town, which had been deprived of it, and the first floor of buildings in the lowest areas. It was 10 days before water again reached the General Hospital and many other buildings on the higher levels.

SECTION LVII. – IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SCORCHED EARTH POLICY ON SINGAPORE ISLAND.

586. The plans for the implementation of the Scorched Earth Policy on Singapore Island have already been explained in [Section XLII](#) and [Appendix J](#). It was an operation of war, the planning and execution of which took up much time and required constant attention. To fight and destroy simultaneously is in my opinion one of the most difficult things which commanders and troops can be called upon to do. Hoping, as we did, that we should be able to stop the enemy and make use of our material resources we naturally delayed the demolition work for as long as possible. In this respect the problem differed widely from that in a premeditated withdrawal carried out on a time programme. As stated in [Appendix J](#) I reserved to myself the responsibility of ordering the various schemes to be put into effect whenever time permitted. In most cases, though not all, it was possible to do this and it was in fact done. As in the case of the mainland, it would be idle for me to attempt to assess the success of the Scorched Earth Policy on Singapore Island other than in general terms. In some cases the Policy could not for various reasons be implemented. It is natural also that, in the turmoil of operations, demolitions, most of which must necessarily be put into effect at the last minute, should not in all cases be as effective as would otherwise be the case. Nevertheless, a general picture of the implementation of the Scorched Earth Policy may be given.

587. *Army. – Fixed Defences.* – It is believed that all the guns and other vital equipment of the Fixed Defences were damaged in such a way that it would be impossible for the Japanese to make further use of them.

Anti-Aircraft Defences. – With only a few exceptions the guns and the searchlights were effectively destroyed. Subsequent attempts by the Japanese to obtain assistance for the repair of guns were refused.

Field Armament. – The great majority, though not all, of the field and anti-tank guns were rendered unserviceable. In the case of the small arms, however, it was inadvisable to destroy these before the capitulation had been accepted by the enemy while later it was against the terms agreed upon. In consequence, it is probable that only a proportion of the small arms were rendered unserviceable.

Secret and Technical Equipment, Secret Documents etc. – These were, as far as is known, successfully destroyed.

Ammunition. – There is no doubt that considerable stocks of ammunition fell into the hands of the enemy. The large Alexandra Magazine was left intact for reasons which have already been explained, i.e. that it could not with safety be destroyed owing to its proximity to the Military Hospital. The demolition of the Changi Magazine was partially successful, a second effort being made by the Royal Engineers the day after the evacuation of the area. Other stocks were left intact in dumps which were overrun in the course of the fighting, especially at Kranji, Nee Soon and on the Bukit Timah Rifle Range.

Petrol. – The only petrol which fell into the enemy's hands on Singapore Island was the contents of a few small dumps and what was left in vehicle tanks.

588. *Royal Navy.* – The machinery of the Graving Dock at the Naval Base was destroyed.

The Floating Dock was sunk.

I am not in a position to report on the other installations for which the Royal Navy was responsible except as regards the Normanton Group of Oil Tanks: Owing to the proximity of these tanks to the Alexandra Military Hospital the Rear-Admiral Malaya, after consultation with me, issued orders that only the eight most westerly tanks of the group should be destroyed.

589. *Royal Air Force.* – Owing to the withdrawal of Royal Air Force personnel from Singapore Island the responsibility for destroying many of their scattered dumps devolved upon the Army. Though some small dumps were overrun in the course of the operations and fell into enemy hands, it is believed that the bulk of the aviation petrol was successfully destroyed or otherwise disposed of.

The Main Reserve Dump of aircraft bombs was also destroyed.

590. *Civil.* – The application of the Scorched Earth Policy to property owned by the civil government, by public bodies, and by firms and private individuals was carefully organized by the Director General of Civil Defence who was assisted by selected officers of the Public Works Department. The work on denial of machinery, plant and liquor

continued throughout the 24 hours for the last week. The machinery and plant belonging to firms with British managers were, with a few exceptions, effectively destroyed in spite of the reluctance on the part of some firms to acquiesce in the proceedings. Those belonging to Asiatic firms were, however, not destroyed. All the reserve stocks of spirits and liqueurs were destroyed. All railway engines were rendered unserviceable by the removal of vital parts. The plant and machinery in the modern well-equipped workshops of the Singapore Harbour Board were destroyed.

591. As on the mainland, morale was affected very adversely by the implementation of the Scorched Earth Policy. Fighting and destruction do not go hand-in-hand together. In particular, the effect of burning oil should be recorded. The smoke rises in great black clouds and numberless particles are deposited far and wide over the countryside. These blacken everything with which they come in contact including human beings, who are also blackened from contact with the oil-soaked foliage. A soldier's self-respect and in some cases his morale are adversely affected.

592. To sum up, the Japanese undoubtedly obtained on Singapore Island some war material which was of value to them in their war effort. In view of the large quantities of weapons, military equipment and war stores of all natures concentrated there this was inevitable. Nevertheless, taking into account the difficulties which had to be faced and the strain, both mental and physical, under which all concerned were working, the implementation of the Scorched Earth Policy was, in my opinion, as effective as could reasonably have been expected.

593. In conclusion, it may not be out of place to stress once again the difference between the application of a Scorched Earth Policy in defence of a nation's homeland and its application in a distant land inhabited by Asiatic peoples where the property to be destroyed has been built up laboriously over the years by Government or by private enterprise and where in many cases those responsible for the implementation of the Policy have themselves in the past been the leaders of progress in their respective spheres. In this latter case some account must be taken of human nature.

PART IV.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.

SECTION LVIII. – THE DEFENCE PLAN.

594. The object of the defence, in accordance with instructions received, was the protection of the Singapore Naval Base.

595. The tense political atmosphere which prevailed in Europe following the advent of the Hitler regime and the rapidly increasing range and power of air forces were two factors which had profound influences on the problem of defence.

So long as it was certain that a strong and balanced British fleet could, when required, be despatched to the Far East and that it would be able on arrival there to control the sea communications leading to Malaya, the task of the local defence was to ensure the security of the Naval Base for a limited period only. Conversely a Japanese attacking force, if it was to be successful, would have had to capture the base within that limited period. The nearest Japanese base was then 1,800 miles from Singapore and the Japanese would not have had time to establish an advanced base from which they could develop deliberate operations.

They would therefore have had to rely on some form of “coup-de-main” attack with forces of limited size.

The effect, however, of the uncertainty as to whether a strong British fleet would in fact be able to sail for the Far East was that the Japanese could, without incurring undue risk, undertake a more deliberate form of operation with very much stronger forces. In other words, they could establish bases in North Malaya and in South Thailand from which they could develop operations by land, sea and air. The Naval Base at Singapore, which is only 400 miles from the Malaya – Thailand frontier, would thus become exposed to a heavy scale of air attack. To avoid this, and also to enable our own air forces to reach out and strike at the approaching enemy convoys as far from the shores of Malaya as possible, it became necessary to hold the whole of Malaya and not only Singapore and the adjoining islands with part of Johore.

596. This change in the problem of defence was fully appreciated by the General Officer Commanding Malaya in 1937 and was set forth in a document which, as General Staff Officer 1st Grade Malaya, I personally prepared in accordance with his instructions.

This document was sent to the War Office. It asked, among other things, for substantial increases in the air forces and in the local naval craft and for more infantry. It seems, however, that the change in the situation was not as fully appreciated at Home as it was in Malaya, or it may have been that lack of resources of man-power, material and money, made it impossible to comply with the recommendations made. In any case, it was not until 1940 that official approval was given to the policy of holding the whole of Malaya.

597. The fall of France in 1940 and the subsequent occupation of French Indo China by the Japanese again altered radically our problem of defence. Our potential enemy was now within easy striking range (400 miles) of North Malaya and within what was at that time comparatively long-distance air striking range (700 miles) of Singapore itself. Moreover, he now had an advanced base at which he could assemble a strong invasion force without interference. Thereafter such reinforcements as could be made available were sent to Malaya but, in view of our commitments elsewhere, these were not as large as were required.

598. In the autumn of 1940, when it had become apparent that we were not in a position to send a fleet to the Far East, the Home authorities laid down that the defence of Malaya must depend primarily on air power but that, until adequate air forces could be provided, the land forces must be strengthened. The policy of relying primarily on air power was in fact never implemented.

599. In consequence of the above policy the Army dispositions were designed primarily to afford protection to the bases from which the air forces when available would operate. In the event, 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.

SECTION LIX – COMPARISON OF FORCES.

600. *Navy.* – The Japanese were able to operate with a balanced Fleet based on Camranh Bay in French Indo-China. In the battleship “Prince of Wales” we had a more powerful unit than anything the Japanese possessed but we never had a balanced Fleet. The loss of the “Prince of Wales” and “Repulse” left the Japanese in undisputed possession of the eastern approaches to Malaya.

Malaya had a coast line of 1,000 miles with innumerable creeks. To conduct the attack or defence of such a country actively it is essential to be able to undertake water-borne operations on an appreciable scale. In this form of warfare also the Japanese established a superiority, partly by the introduction of a large number of their special military landing craft, partly by the clever use of local craft, and partly by the degree of air protection which they were able to give to their coast-wise shipping. On our side we had three destroyers, three river gun-boats, a few Fairmile motor launches and some converted motor craft, but the latter were slow, unarmoured, lightly armed and very vulnerable to air

attack. Our local craft had little air cover.

601. *Army.* – The initial Japanese landings in South Thailand and Malaya were made by the equivalent of two divisions and one tank regiment. A few days later a division of the Japanese Imperial Guards arrived in South Thailand by train from the north. There are indications that a fourth division may have arrived later in December, while a second tank regiment arrived either in December or January. In the middle of January two fresh divisions landed at Singora in South Thailand. It appears that it was originally intended to employ these divisions for an attack on the east coast of Johore, but as a result of a change of plan they were moved forward by motor transport to the Kluang area in Central Johore. They were in reserve for the attack on Singapore Island.

It appears, therefore, that the Japanese employed five and perhaps six divisions and two tank regiments for the attack on Malaya. As they kept the same divisions in front line for prolonged periods, during which they were known to have suffered heavy casualties, it is probable also that they filled up these divisions with reinforcements. In addition to the above, they had Army, Base and Lines of Communication units. The establishment of these would no doubt be smaller than in the British Army.

On the basis of 20,000 men per division and 150 tanks per regiment, I estimate that the Japanese employed a minimum of 150,000 men and 300 tanks in the Malayan campaign.

602. Against this we had on the outbreak of hostilities the equivalent of 3½ divisions with Fixed and Anti-Aircraft Defences but no tanks. Later we received as reinforcements about the equivalent of another two divisions and one squadron of obsolescent light tanks. The total number of officers and men who took part in the campaign on the British side was a little over 125,000, though the strength in Malaya at any one time was considerably less than this. This number included a high proportion of Command, Base and Lines of Communication troops, many of whom belonged to non-combatant units or were unarmed owing to shortage of personal weapons.

603. The initial attack on Singapore Island was carried out by three Japanese divisions. There were two and possibly three divisions in reserve. Two of the reserve divisions had recently arrived in Malaya and it may be assumed that they were at full strength. Some of the others may have been at less than full strength. On this basis I estimate that there were at the cessation of hostilities a minimum of 100,000 Japanese troops on Singapore Island or in South Malaya. How many of these had actually crossed to the Island and how many were on the mainland is not known nor is it very material, but there is evidence to show that at least 23,000 crossed on the first day of the attack. There were also a minimum of 175 Japanese medium and light tanks on Singapore Island at the cessation of hostilities.

The total of the British forces in the Singapore Fortress area at the same time was

in the neighbourhood of 85,000. This figure included a large number of non-combatant troops, i.e., Medical Services, Pioneer and Labour units, etc., of troops for whom no arms were available owing to a general shortage of personal weapons, and of sick and wounded. Probably about 70,000 of these men were armed and equipped but many of them belonged to Base and other administrative units and were very inadequately trained. There was one squadron of obsolescent light tanks.

The Japanese had an advantage in the fact that a high proportion of their forces in South Malaya and on Singapore Island were fully trained combatant troops, most of their Base and Lines of Communication troops being further north.

604. In official statements made in this country and recently published in the world Press, figures very different from the above have been given. In fairness to the officers and men who fought in Malaya I ask that those statements may now be corrected.

605 *Air.* – There is evidence to show that on the 11th December, 1941, i.e., three days after the outbreak of hostilities, the Japanese had 124 aircraft in Thailand and 280 in Indo-China. It may be assumed that in round numbers about 300 of these were being employed against Malaya. They included twin-engined bombers, dive-bombers, torpedo-bombers and fighters. The range of the fighters had been greatly increased by the use of auxiliary petrol tanks.

Opposed to this our Air Force had on the outbreak of war a total of 141 operationally serviceable I.E. aircraft, with a few light aircraft (Moths, etc.) manned by the Volunteer Air Force. Few of these aircraft were of modern types and a number were obsolescent. There were no long-range bombers or long-range fighters, no dive-bombers, no transport or military communication aircraft and no special army co-operation aircraft. The striking force was weak, the fighters were not of the most modern type, the reconnaissance forces were inadequate and the torpedo-bombers were slow and out-of-date.

During the operations we received reinforcements of 31 aircraft from the Netherlands East Indies, some bomber and reconnaissance aircraft from the U.K. and the Middle East, and the equivalent of three squadrons of Hurricane fighters.

These, however, were never more than sufficient to replace casualties and the strength of our Air Force dwindled progressively throughout the campaign.

What reinforcements the Japanese received is not known but shortly after the cessation of hostilities they were reported to have had 258 aircraft in South Thailand and Malaya and 270 in Indo-China. At the cessation of hostilities there were no British aircraft in Malaya.

SECTION LX. – JAPANESE STRATEGY.

606. The Japanese attack on Malaya was very carefully planned and there is now no doubt that preparations had been going on for a very long time before hostilities actually started. The Japanese themselves admitted that the terrain of Malaya, our battle methods and our equipment were all carefully studied for years before the outbreak of war. The Commander-in-Chief of the 25th Japanese Army detailed for the Malayan campaign had spent six months in Germany before taking over command. He was given the best possible senior staff officers. The Japanese Divisions employed in Malaya are known to have been among the best in the Japanese Army. In particular the Guards Division and the 5 Division, both of which had been very highly trained for the type of warfare to be undertaken in Malaya, had been specially sent from Japan. To give them further experience they took part in April, 1941, in a landing operation on the coast of China followed by a quick thrust inland. They then went to Hainan where they did further training in landing operations and jungle warfare. The Island of Hainan was for a long time used as a springboard for the southward advance.

607. The Japanese strategy consisted in a continuous land and air offensive pressed with the utmost vigour with the object of advancing into South Malaya and capturing Singapore before our reinforcements could arrive. This offensive was supported by their Navy on the east coast of Malaya. Their Navy also co-operated with coast-wise operations on the west coast as soon as landing craft could be made available. These special craft were originally landed at Singora and transported across the peninsula by road to the west coast in the State of Kedah where they were launched on the 22nd December. These sea-borne operations had good and continued air cover. Had there been available at Singapore some flotillas of fast armoured and properly equipped coastal craft it is certain that the enemy would not have been able to exercise the constant threat to our communications with sea-borne forces which they did in fact succeed in doing.

In carrying out this strategy the Japanese undoubtedly took risks as regards the security of their Lines of Communication and the maintenance of their supplies. They relied to a great extent on the resources of the country.

608. The immediate object of the Japanese at the outset of the operations appears to have been (*a*) to cripple our Air Force and (*b*) to cut off and destroy the whole of our forces in Kedah by a rapid thrust from Patani via Kroh to cut the west coast communications west of the River Perak. In this way they hoped to reach the line of the River Perak in two days.

The campaign opened with intensive air operations in which the Japanese Air Force based on Indo-China made full use of the aerodromes which it had occupied in South Thailand. In the course of the first three days the Japanese succeeded in inflicting serious losses on our Air Force and driving it back off the northern aerodromes. The Japanese, however, did not succeed in cutting off and destroying our forces in Kedah, though we suffered very severe losses both in men and material. For a time the situation

was very critical and it was only by a great effort that the Japanese plan was frustrated. It actually took them sixteen days instead of two to reach the line of the River Perak.

The Japanese attack on the State of Kelantan appears to have had the double object of capturing the three aerodromes located there and of providing a base from which land operations against Kuantan could be developed.

609. After crossing the River Perak the Japanese continued their drive down the west coast arteries of communications and supported it by sea-borne operations on the west coast and by a land advance against Kuantan on the east coast. All these operations were closely supported by the Japanese Air Force which attacked our aerodromes in Central Malaya, our troops in the forward areas and columns on the move, as well as providing cover for their sea-borne operations and carrying out strategical and tactical reconnaissances.

During January the Japanese Air Force attacked objectives in the Singapore area, first by night and later, when they were able to support their bombers with fighters based on the Central Malaya aerodromes, by day. The aerodromes continued to be the main target but the Naval Base and, in the later stages, the Singapore Docks were also heavily attacked. There was bombing also, possibly not intentional, of areas in Singapore Town.

Towards the end of January a Japanese force landed at Endau on the east coast of Johore.

610. On reaching the Straits of Johore the Japanese, pursuing their previous strategy, attacked Singapore Island with the least possible delay with the results already recorded in [Part III](#) of this Despatch. That they were able to assemble their forces, bring forward a large number of special landing craft and launch the attack in little more than a week was without doubt a remarkable performance. The landing craft were transported by road from Pontian Kechil on the west coast of Johore to the rivers which flow into the western branch of the Straits of Johore.

611. The Japanese, in commenting on the Malayan campaign, have attributed their success to their pre-war preparations, to the fact that this campaign was the centre of interest throughout their whole Army, to the fact that their commanders, senior staff officers and troops were specially selected, and to the fact that their land operations were closely supported by their Navy and by their Army and Navy Air Forces.

Other important factors in their success were undoubtedly:-

(a) The great superiority, both as regards the quantity and quality of their machines, of the Japanese Air Force;

(b) The freedom of manoeuvre conferred on the Japanese Army, and conversely the crippling effect of the ever present threat to our own communications and bases, resulting from the Japanese strategical naval supremacy off the east coast of Malaya and, to a lesser

degree, from their tactical supremacy off the west coast also;

(c) The inclusion in the Japanese Army of a strong modern Armoured Component, while we on our side had to rely on armoured cars and Bren gun carriers.

SECTION LXI. – BRITISH STRATEGY.

612. The evolution of British pre-war strategy in Malaya has been summarized in [Section LVIII](#) and it has been shown that the Army dispositions were dictated primarily by requirements of protection of the Naval Base and of the bases from which large Air Forces, when available, would operate. Looked at from the Army point of view alone these dispositions were faulty because the comparatively small force available had to be widely dispersed. How widely dispersed it can best be understood by comparing Singapore to the Isle of Wight, an island strongly defended against sea-borne and air attacks, and applying the problem of defending Singapore and the mainland of Malaya with the equivalent of 3½ divisions but without an Armoured Component to that of defending England and Wales, a territory only very slightly larger in area, with a similar force against an attack from the east or from the north launched by an enemy with superior naval and air forces.

613. The project to move into South Thailand, risky though it was with the small forces available, was nevertheless attractive from the point of view of denying to the enemy the use of the two valuable aerodromes in that area. But it suffered from the danger always inherent in such projects, namely the difficulty of deciding when the time has come to enter neutral territory. It was due to this difficulty, combined with our inability to maintain contact with the Japanese convoys carrying their invasion forces during a vital period, that the project to move forward into South Thailand was not implemented. Had it been implemented, it would undoubtedly have eased the air situation but it might, if we had failed to hold the enemy on the Kroh – Patani road, have led to irreparable and early disaster.

614. When, after three days of hostilities, the enemy had succeeded in landing a strong force in South Thailand and North Malaya, intact, except for losses suffered in the attack on Kelantan, had by sinking the “Prince of Wales” and “Repulse” gained full control of the sea communications east of Malaya, and had also established air superiority over North Malaya, our initial dispositions became a source of great danger. It became clear that we had little hope of being able to achieve our object with the small force at that time available and that our best chance of achieving it was by ensuring, as far as lay in our power, the safe arrival of our land and air reinforcements. In order to do this it was necessary to impose the maximum delay on the enemy and to keep his air bases at the greatest possible distance from the vital Singapore area. The strategy adopted, therefore, aimed at a gradual fighting withdrawal with a view to an eventual concentration in South

Malaya where it was hoped the main battle would be fought. Our aircraft were concentrated on the aerodromes in Central and South Malaya where they would be safer from enemy attack. Later the fighters were allotted as their primary tasks the defence of the Singapore area and, in co-operation with the other Services, the protection of the reinforcing convoys.

615. That our strategy was not successful was due primarily to a lack of strength in all three Services but particularly in the Navy and Air Force. With the enemy in control of sea communications east of Malaya, we were prevented from sending more than very limited reinforcements to the northern and central areas of Malaya, and his sea-borne thrusts continually forced us to make detachments to meet them. This, combined, with the lack of reserves, left our forces on the vital central front too weak, with the result that there was little relief for the front line troops who suffered from extreme exhaustion. This had a big influence on the course of the operations.

616. Penang was evacuated in accordance with a decision made by the Far East War Council. Although it had been decided in 1936 to fortify Penang it was in 1941 far from being a fortress. There was one 6 inch Coast Defence battery with searchlights, some beach defences and a very inadequate garrison. There was no antiaircraft gun defence and practically no fighter defence. The situation on the mainland was critical. The Council was faced with the alternative of trying to restore the situation on the mainland and at the same time to hold Penang or of concentrating all available forces on the former. It chose the latter course which was, temporarily at any rate, successful.

617. Up to the 25th January, when we still had possession of the important chain of aerodromes and landing grounds and the lateral road in Central Johore, there was still a hope, though by then only a slender one, that our strategy might be successful. The loss of the Batu Pahat force, however, forced upon us the necessity of withdrawing into the Singapore Fortress area and of concentrating upon its defence. We had then failed in our object of protecting the Naval Base. Our task thereafter was to hold the Singapore Fortress area.

618. The policy for the defence of the Singapore Fortress area was to endeavour to prevent the enemy landing or, if he succeeded in landing, to stop him near the beaches and destroy or drive him out by counter-attack. As a result of the large area to be defended (Singapore Island alone, with Blakang Mati and Pulau Brani, has a perimeter of 72 miles), this necessitated weak forward defences and an inadequate reserve, but we were forced to adopt this policy by the nature of the country, by the lack of depth in the defence, and by the location of the Naval Base and of dumps, depots and other installations. The Japanese on the other hand were able to concentrate their forces for the attack on a selected portion of our defences. By doing so, they effected a landing and made a deep penetration in spite of severe losses. In the later stages exhaustion of the troops, accentuated by the moral effect of the loss of the Naval Base and the enemy's undisputed air supremacy following

the withdrawal of our Air Force to the Netherlands East Indies, again influenced the operations. Ultimately the decisive factor was the imminent danger of a complete breakdown of the water supply as a result of the damage done to the distribution system by bombing and shelling.

SECTION LXII. – TACTICS.

619. The campaign in Malaya probably provided the first instance of operations between forces armed and equipped on modern lines being conducted in a country almost wholly covered with jungle or plantations of various types. There was therefore little previous experience on which to draw as a guide for the conduct of this peculiar type of warfare. It is well-known that such country favours the attacker. It makes the defence of a position a difficult and hazardous operation unless the flanks of that position rest securely on natural obstacles. In Malaya there were in fact no positions, sufficiently narrow to be held by the forces at our disposal, which fulfilled this condition. The positions which approached most nearly to it were those in North Perak and in North Johore, but even these were far too extended. In order to impose the required delay on the enemy, therefore, it was necessary to adopt a more mobile form of defence.

620. The Japanese, in accordance with their strategy of a vigorous offensive, invariably attacked with the least possible delay. They seldom made frontal attacks. Their usual tactics were to probe the front and search for the flanks. Having found the flanks they would then push mobile forces round to attack our communications which usually followed a single road. They also employed widely infiltration tactics by individuals and small parties of men as a means of creating alarm, the use of trees as fire positions, and the use of noise, i.e., fireworks and crackers resembling machine-guns in action, as a weapon of war. For the mobility of their forward troops they relied chiefly on bicycles commandeered in the country. Supporting fire, until they reached Singapore Island for the attack on which a large amount of field artillery was employed, was provided chiefly by the infantry gun and by mortars. Tanks, although able to traverse rubber plantations in which the trees are normally planted in straight rows, were used for the most part for “blitz” tactics on the roads. In order to keep up a relentless pressure the Japanese staged attacks both by day and by night. It is believed that, in order to maintain the momentum of the attack, they relieved their forward troops regularly at short intervals.

The Japanese displayed an ability to cross natural obstacles, i.e., rivers, swamps, thick jungle, etc., much more rapidly than had been thought possible. Their engineers also showed themselves adept at the quick repair of bridges of which some 300 were destroyed to a greater or less degree, though it should be stated that in most cases there was plenty of material available close to the bridge site. The ability of the Japanese to live on the country for long periods was a great asset to them.

The close co-operation between the Japanese infantry and the supporting arms and the co-operation between the ground troops and the air forces, chiefly by W/T, were of a high order.

621. After our initial reverse at Jitra we adopted a policy of defence in depth astride the main channels of communication combined with local offensives as opportunity offered. We also employed ambush tactics and took steps to harass the enemy's communications. In these offensive operations we had on several occasions, as has been recorded in Part II, a considerable measure of success. That they were not more successful was due to the inability of some of our unseasoned troops to employ successfully tactics which demand the highest degree of skill and training. This inability became more pronounced as exhaustion, accentuated by our lack of reserves, overcame the front line troops.

The most successful ambushes were those where it was possible to combine the action of artillery, engineers and infantry.

The employment by the enemy of tanks as the spearhead of his attack made it essential that any position occupied should be covered by a natural or artificial antitank obstacle. The existence of an anti-tank obstacle thus became a primary consideration in the selection of our temporary defensive positions and frequently a great deal of ground which might otherwise have been suitable for delaying action had to be given up to the enemy.

Efforts on the part of forward bodies and detachments whose communications had been cut to fight their way out and efforts to re-open communications to them from behind were seldom successful. This was due chiefly to the lack of strong and fresh reserves with which to make the attacks and also to the lack of tanks to support them.

622. The Japanese troops, especially their reconnaissance parties, were frequently disguised as local inhabitants. In this they had an advantage over our troops, the majority of whom could not well be mistaken for natives of the country.

There is no evidence to show that there was any extensive fifth column organization in Malaya, but there is no doubt whatever that the Japanese obtained considerable assistance at times from the local inhabitants. On many occasions arrows indicating the position of headquarters or other important air targets were found on the ground. Information as to the dispositions and movements of our troops was undoubtedly passed to the Japanese and guides were provided, possibly sometimes under compulsion. The Japanese also impressed what labour they required and did not hesitate to use ruthless methods to attain their ends.

623. The enervating climate of Malaya, which is unfavourable for long and sustained effort, had a considerable effect on the powers of endurance of our troops, many of whom had not been in the country long enough to become acclimatized before going

into action. It is probable that the climate had less, though undoubtedly it had some, effect on the seasoned and more highly trained Japanese troops.

624. Specially selected officers were despatched from Malaya before the close of operations to spread the tactical lessons of the campaign to other theatres of war in the East. Since that time many other lessons have been learned in those theatres. It would be unprofitable, therefore, to discuss the tactical lessons of Malaya at any length in this Despatch, more particularly as the conditions were in many respects abnormal. Nothing, however, occurred to disprove the old axiom that thick country favours the attacker and that therefore the offensive should be seized at the earliest possible moment, but for this fresh and well-trained troops are necessary.

SECTION LXIII. – ORGANIZATION.

625. In view of the more recent experience gained in similar theatres of war it would be superfluous to report in any detail on the short-comings of our organization, which was based on normal British and Indian war establishments, for operations in Malaya. It will be sufficient to comment only on those items which had the greatest influence on the operations.

626. *Armoured Forces.* – The lack of an armoured component was due, not to any weakness in our Army organization, but to inability, owing presumably to lack of resources and commitments elsewhere, to send an armoured component to Malaya when it was asked for.

Whatever the cause, however, the absence of an armoured component had a profound influence on the course of the operations, for while the Japanese had at their disposal medium and light tanks in considerable numbers we had until the last few days only armoured cars and Bren gun carriers. The few light tanks which arrived from India towards the end of January were so obsolescent as to be of little value. Efforts were made to offset our deficiency in tanks by anti-tank weapons and other anti-tank devices. Useful as these proved, yet it remained clear that the tank itself is the only satisfactory counter to the tank.

It is true that armoured forces, which depend for their success primarily on speed, manoeuvrability and invulnerability are not so effective in jungle and wooded country, where their speed and manoeuvrability are limited, as they are in more open country. Nevertheless it is clear from the Malayan campaign that the influence of armoured forces even in that type of country is very great and that no force is complete without an armoured component.

627. *Bren Gun Carriers.* – Full value was not obtained from the Bren gun carrier whose cross-country performance was much restricted and which was too vulnerable to close range fire from troops in ambush. The numbers of these could be reduced.

628. *Artillery.* – Although our field artillery was at times most effective, it was seldom, owing to difficulties of observation and lack of suitable gun position sites, that full value could be obtained from its fire power. On the other hand artillery equipment tends to block roads which are invariably scarce in jungle types of country. Some reduction in the normal allotment of field artillery could therefore be accepted.

629. *Mortars.* – The Japanese used the mortar with great effect as their chief supporting weapon. Their mortar equipment included telephones and cable for observation purposes. I strongly advocate these methods and recommend that the establishment of mortars for operations in Malayan type of country should be increased.

630. *Engineers.* – The engineers were very fully employed as they are always likely to be in similar conditions. No reduction in that arm is recommended.

631. *Signals.* – The fact that communications in the Malayan campaign were at times uncertain can be ascribed to the long distances over which they had to be maintained, to the limitations of the civil telephone system in a country which had been comparatively recently developed, to a shortage of reserve equipment and to the limitations imposed on wireless in the difficult conditions of Malaya. It is important that adequate reserves of equipment should be maintained in countries which are situated at a distance from the main sources of supply.

632. *Transport.* – As soon as operations started it became apparent that there was a superfluity of transport in the forward areas. Besides being very vulnerable to the encircling tactics adopted by the enemy, it tended to block the roads when mobile operations were in progress. In fact, our organization based on trucks was less suited to the Malayan terrain than was the lighter transport of the Japanese. Steps were taken early to reduce this transport but, for operations in that type of country, establishments should be carefully overhauled to ensure that there is no more transport than is absolutely necessary in the forward areas.

SECTION LXIV. – ADMINISTRATION.

633. There is no doubt that the proportion of administrative personnel to the fighting troops was much greater on the British side than it was on the Japanese. This was due principally to the fact that the Japanese, an Asiatic race, were better able to live on the country and required less in the way of maintenance services. Another reason was the fact that two of our divisions, the 9 Indian and the 8 Australian, were each short of a brigade group of fighting troops while, in the case of the A.I.F., at least, the administrative services were complete for a full division. A third reason was the fact that there was a certain overlapping of Base Services between the Malaya Command and the A.I.F., due to the latter being organised as a self-contained force. It is for consideration whether, in similar circumstances in the future, some economies in manpower could not be effected by the

fusion of some of these Services.

634. In general, the administrative organization described in [Part I](#) of this Despatch, which was designed with a view to an advance into Thailand but also to meet the contingency of an enemy attack on any part of the coast of Malaya, worked satisfactorily. Bearing in mind that rapid withdrawals were many times forced upon us the losses on the mainland, though considerable, were not excessive.

635. When the Japanese landed on Singapore Island, many important dumps, depots and other installations quickly fell into their hands. This caused serious embarrassments in the closing stages, but it does not indicate that the siting of these installations was faulty. The sites had been selected in accordance with a carefully considered policy of dispersion to avoid excessive losses from air attack and also to avoid as far as possible the already congested Singapore Town area. Most of these installations had been carefully camouflaged. The comparatively few losses sustained from air attack are a proof of the success of this policy.

636. One of the outstanding administrative lessons of the campaign was that troops in forward areas, if cut off temporarily from the normal supply system, must have sufficient reserves of ammunition, petrol, food, water, medical supplies, etc., to enable them to continue fighting. We were forced to the expedient of ordering units which were in danger of being cut off to hold reserves in excess of the normal field service scale – a wasteful procedure because these reserves could not all be carried in the event of a rapid move.

In this connection we felt very acutely the lack of any proper facilities for air supply. There is no doubt that, as was proved later in Burma and elsewhere, air supply is the only practical solution to this problem.

637. In the years preceding the war care for the welfare of the troops had been increasingly practised throughout the Army. It had perhaps to some extent tended to obscure the greater importance of the ability of the troops to endure hardships in the most trying conditions. In countries like Malaya troops must be able to operate independently of road and rail communications for considerable periods. This involves the ability to live on the country and, if necessary, to exist on short rations and with little water. Japanese columns in the Malayan campaign were frequently despatched into the jungle carrying a week's rations. They made great use of local resources and for long periods were able to dispense with the normal system of supply. It has been proved during this war, both during operations in the field and from the experiences in the prisoner of war camps, that Europeans are capable of enduring hardships under Eastern conditions and of living on Asiatic food to a much greater extent than was previously thought possible. This is a lesson which should not be forgotten. The training of troops to this standard, which was reached during the later stages of the war, should be maintained at all times.

SECTION LXV. – TRAINING.

638. While it is a fact that the Japanese troops being seasoned veterans were better trained for jungle warfare than were the British troops, it is quite wrong to suppose that no attention had been paid to this form of training in the Malaya Command. It is, however, true to say that the standard of training was uneven. The formations and units which had been in the country longest were on the whole well trained, but the great majority had arrived piece-meal within a few months of the outbreak of war. Many of them arrived with a low scale of weapons and it was only towards the end of 1941 that the authorised scale was approached. The 9 and 11 Indian Divisions only received their field artillery late in that year. This greatly interfered with continuity of training.

639. Most of our troops except those of the permanent garrison were inexperienced and semi-trained on arrival in Malaya. This was due to the rapid expansion of our forces which had taken place after the outbreak of the second World War and, in the case of the Indian units, to the fact that expansion had not started till a year later. Even the regular units had been so diluted as to lose some at least, and in some cases a great deal, of their pre-war efficiency.

In making the above statement I have no wish to blame the military authorities either in the United Kingdom, in India, or in Australia. I would rather thank them for the great efforts they made to help us with the very limited resources at their disposal.

640. Those units which had been longest in Malaya had naturally had most opportunities of training and of becoming accustomed to the novel conditions of warfare, but during the period immediately preceding the outbreak of hostilities opportunities for training had been greatly limited, partly by the construction of defence works and partly by the necessity of assuming from time to time a state of readiness in accordance with the political situation as it deteriorated. What was lacking was the ability to drop the construction of defences and take a formation, complete with all its arms, off into new country and there carry out intensive training. It had, however, as explained in [Section VII](#), been planned to do this during the three months commencing December, 1941, and there is no doubt that, had this been possible, many of the lessons which were learned after the war began would have been learned in time to turn them to good account.

641. Staff Rides and tactical training with and without troops had enabled the practicability of landing on the east coast during the period of the north east monsoon and also of moving through forest country to be accurately gauged but the ability of the Japanese to traverse swamps and cross water and other obstacles with little delay had not been fully appreciated.

In 1940, a Manual of Bush Fighting had been produced and circulated by Headquarters Malaya Command. This was subsequently supplemented by training instructions issued as and when required. But doctrine had not only to be disseminated but

practised and it was for this that opportunity was lacking.

642. Successful fighting in jungle country is largely a question of the confidence and self-reliance of the individual. These cannot be acquired without a reasonable period of training in such conditions. Inexperienced troops from the towns and the plains opposed by seasoned troops specially trained in jungle warfare are necessarily at a disadvantage until they have had time to accustom themselves to these conditions.

643. The deduction from the experience of Malaya is that, if any parts of the British Empire, where the terrain is of the jungle type, are subject to attack at short notice by an enemy armed and equipped on modern lines, we should either maintain on the spot or be able to send there immediately when danger threatens a force fully trained and accustomed to these conditions. It is not sufficient to send in at the last minute inexperienced and semi-trained troops.

SECTION LXVI. – MORALE.

644. The lack of training and of experience of the great majority of the troops who formed the Army of Malaya has already been stressed in this Despatch. In this connection Field-Marshal Lord Montgomery has written:-

“New and untried troops must be introduced to battle carefully and gradually with no failures in the initial ventures. A start should be made with small raids, then big scale raids, leading up gradually to unit and brigade operations. Great and lasting harm can be done to morale by launching new units into operations for which they are not ready or trained and which are therefore likely to end in failure. When new units and formations are introduced to battle there must be no failure.”

Those are very true words as all who fought in Malaya will testify. Unfortunately there was no time to put these precepts into practice.

645. The effect of having to fight without tanks and with little air support against an enemy well provided with such essential modern equipment cannot be overestimated. All troops were affected by this in varying degree but more particularly the Indian soldiers who had always been taught to believe in British might and had difficulty in accustoming themselves to these unexpected conditions. During the later stages also the loss of the Naval Base and the withdrawal of the Air Force to the Netherlands East Indies, necessary as it may have been, affected some, but by no means all, of the troops, especially those whose homes were then directly threatened. Finally there was the effect of extreme physical and mental exhaustion which resulted from continual day and night operations over a long period.

The military commanders did their utmost to improve matters by endeavouring to arrange short periods of rest for all front line troops in rotation. Unfortunately, owing to

lack of reserves, this did not always prove practicable. The 11 Indian Division for example, which bore the brunt of the fighting in the north, was engaged almost continuously for the whole period of the campaign.

646. Those who have had the task of re-organising units which have suffered heavy losses in battle will know that time is required before full fighting efficiency can be regained. In Malaya it was never possible to make time available and units had to be sent into action again and again before they had recovered from their previous efforts. Their efficiency suffered accordingly.

647. In these circumstances, it was hardly to be expected that the inexperienced troops would withstand the trials of the campaign as steadfastly as would regular seasoned troops. Nevertheless, although they became more and more exhausted and were bewildered and often disheartened, their morale was never broken. Throughout the campaign there was a great deal of heavy fighting at short range and often, hand-to-hand, in which our troops fought courageously and well. Such was the case, in particular, in Kelantan, on the Kroh and Grik roads, at Kampar, at Kuantan, at Gemas, at Muar, in the Mersing area and in many places on Singapore Island. Nor should the less spectacular operations of administration, of communication and of command, which were going on steadily day and night, be forgotten. It stands to the credit of all ranks that, in the many critical situations which developed in the course of the long withdrawal down the Peninsula, the enemy, in spite of the great advantages which he enjoyed, was never able to effect a complete break-through – an occurrence which, in view of our lack of reserves with which to meet such a situation, would have spelt immediate and irreparable disaster.

648. In the final analysis, it is necessary that the influence of all the conditions under which this campaign was fought, which have been fully set out in this Despatch, should be carefully weighed.

649. I believe that few of the men who came to Malaya had any wide knowledge of the importance of that country, both strategical and economical, as an integral part of the British Empire. To most of them Singapore was known only as the site of the great Naval Base. They knew little of the geography or problems of the Far East generally. In consequence, they had but a very elementary knowledge of what they were fighting for, and in the case of the majority there was no time to bring this home to them after arrival in Malaya.

I believe that the problems and needs of our Empire should be much more widely taught in our schools and colleges and in the Army itself than was, at any rate, the case before the war.

SECTION LXVII. – THE INTELLIGENCE SERVICE.

650. It must be admitted that both during the period prior to the outbreak of hostilities and

also during the operations themselves our information of the Japanese activities and intentions left much to be desired. This can be attributed partly to the extreme secrecy which the Japanese always maintain on military matters and also partly to our shortage of reconnaissance aircraft. But there were other short-comings which cannot be attributed entirely to either of these two causes.

651. Before the Malayan campaign our knowledge of the potentialities of the Japanese Army and more especially of their Air Force was very lacking. The ease with which their aircraft sank our two capital ships on the 10th December, 1941, following on their successful attack on the American fleet at Pearl Harbour, surprised not only us but the whole world. The ability of the Japanese to apply modern "blitz" tactics to jungle warfare was also greater than had been anticipated.

652. The attitude of Thailand remained uncertain until the last minute, although we knew from our reconnaissances that the Japanese had for some time been very active in that country and it was clear that these activities were being carried on with the connivance, if not with the assistance, of the Thai authorities. When war broke out Thailand immediately sided with the Japanese and opposed our advance into Thai territory.

653. The pro-Japanese propaganda, which had for some years previously been spread throughout the East, had undoubtedly had some effect. The Japanese came to Malaya well equipped with the means of continuing these activities and their stream of propaganda, much of it very crude, had its effect on some at least of the people of Malaya, and at times even on a few of the troops. It must be said, however, that those who served in the fighting forces, whatever their nationality, with very few exceptions disregarded this propaganda and conducted themselves with never failing loyalty.

654. Within Malaya itself the Police intelligence organization was handicapped by the complicated political structure of the country. Although certain Japanese subversive activities were brought to light almost simultaneously with the outbreak of hostilities and although the Japanese undoubtedly received some assistance from the population during the campaign, there is no reason to suppose that there was any widespread pro-Japanese organization in the country.

655. The future organization of intelligence in the Far East requires a separate study. It is sufficient to say in this Despatch that a much stronger organization is required than has existed in the past. It should be built up round a nucleus of men trained professionally in Far Eastern affairs with a knowledge of the peoples and their languages. Unless the problem is tackled thoroughly it will be difficult, as it proved in the past, to keep abreast of the great changes which are constantly taking place in that part of the world.

SECTION LXVIII. – LOCAL FORCES.

656. The local Forces played their part in the Malayan campaign in the Navy, in the Army and in the Air Force. The newly formed Malay Regiment in particular acquitted itself with distinction, as did others of the locally raised units.

657. As in other parts of the Empire, which are peopled by coloured races, the resources of European manpower in Malaya were limited. The problem was to make the best use of these resources. In accordance with the principle that every part of the Empire should be responsible for its own local defence, as far as its resources permit, Local Forces, mostly on a voluntary basis, were raised and maintained by the Governments of Malaya. In the light of experience, it cannot be said that the best use was made of the material available.

A proportion of the Europeans were of course required to carry on the Government and other essential activities. Others, for various reasons, were not available for military service. It is with the balance, i.e. those who were available for military service, that this report deals. Many of these men were possessed of special qualifications, such as knowledge of the country, of the people and of the language. The problem was to make full use of these qualifications.

658. In the Malayan campaign the reinforcing units suffered much from lack of local knowledge and from their inability to converse with the inhabitants. As the campaign progressed and more of the local Europeans became available, this difficulty was met by attaching them to the reinforcing units, but in the earlier stages most of those available were employed with units of the Local Forces.

I recommend that each reinforcing unit on arrival in Malaya, from whatever part of the Empire it comes, should have attached to it an intelligence platoon of local Asiatics with European or Asiatic leaders and a team of interpreters, either European or Asiatic. These men should be supplied by the Local Forces, a proportion of which should accordingly be specially organized and trained for this purpose.

659. Another activity which might well devolve upon the Local Forces is the provision of commando groups whose role would be, in case of invasion, to harass the enemy's communications and rear installations. This is a task which could suitably be allotted to residents of the country districts who would in many cases be able to organize their commandos from among their own employees.

660. Those of the Local Forces, apart from the regular units, which are not employed in either of the above ways should be either organized and trained as specialist units, i.e. engineers, signals, armoured car units, railway units, dock units, etc., or for coast defence or garrisons of vulnerable localities.

There should be no attempt made to train the Local Volunteer Forces in ordinary

mobile operations. They do not normally have the time for such training and in any case they would, in the case of major operations, be only a very small proportion of the total forces engaged.

661. Local Forces may be called upon to take their part in ensuring internal security or in the defence of the country in a major conflict. In the latter eventuality, the defence of Malaya must ultimately depend on troops from outside acting in cooperation with the other Services. They will want all the assistance they can get from the Local Forces who should be trained primarily for this purpose.

SECTION LXIX. – AIR.

662. The experience of modern war shows that superiority in the air is necessary before victory can be gained and at least parity in order that defeat may be averted. The Malayan campaign was no exception to this rule. From the opening of hostilities the Japanese Air Force was immeasurably superior to our own. The effect of this on our strategy was, as has been shown, disastrous. The reason for this lay primarily in the inferiority of our aircraft both in quality and in quantity and in the complete absence of many types of aircraft required in modern war. The shortage of aircraft as compared with what had been considered necessary has been shown in Sections VI and XV of this Despatch. The responsibility for these shortages definitely did not lie with the Air Officer Commanding Far East at the time of the campaign, the late Air Vice Marshal Pulford. He was, I know, fully alive to the inadequacy of the material at his disposal and did not fail to represent the situation.

663. Plans to reinforce the Air Force in Malaya by the air route from India and the Middle East were partly frustrated by the capture by the Japanese of the Victoria Point aerodrome in South Burma in the early days of the campaign. This made it impossible for fighters to reach Malaya by air, while the longer range machines had to fly via Sumatra. Fighters had to be brought by sea with the resultant delay.

The Dutch carried out the plans for mutual support in spirit and in letter. No praise is too high for their co-operative spirit during those critical days.

664. The influence of the aerodromes on the initial Army dispositions and on the subsequent strategy of the campaign has already been fully explained. It was only in 1941 that a combined Army and Air Force plan for the siting of aerodromes was agreed upon. It is of the utmost importance that the strategical and tactical problems of their defence should be fully considered before sites for aerodromes are finally settled.

During the campaign the aerodromes became a liability rather than an asset progressively from north to south as the enemy advanced. It was found impracticable to deny them to the enemy by demolitions for more than a very few days. We were therefore faced with the problem, not of holding them for the use of our own Air Force, but of

holding them to deny their use to the enemy Air Force. The psychological effect on the troops who were ordered first to protect the aerodromes for the use of our Air Force and then, after seeing them evacuated and destroyed, to hold them in order to deny them to the enemy, needs no stressing.

665. It is to be hoped that British troops will never again be asked to fight with so little air support as was the case in Malaya. There had never, even before the war, been a sufficiently strong Air Force either in Malaya or within reasonable reach of it. If in future the defence of so important a part of the Empire is to be entrusted in great part to the Air Arm, as indeed it certainly will be, it is most necessary that the nucleus at least of an adequate Air Force should be maintained at all times either in Malaya itself or in a strategic reserve held somewhere in the East. Where such vital interests are at stake it is unwise to take risks as regards the provision of such a necessary means of defence.

SECTION LXX. – AIR DEFENCE.

666. Prior to the outbreak of the second World War there were no modern fighter aircraft in Malaya and there was no warning system. The anti-aircraft gun defence was confined to the immediate defence of the Naval Base and other installations on Singapore Island. It had been built up in accordance with a War Office plan.

667. During the period 1939/41 considerable progress was made in the development of the air defences. Fighter aircraft arrived, a warning system which covered Singapore and the most southern part of Malaya was organised, some anti-aircraft guns and searchlights were made available for the mainland and a co-ordinated air defence system was built up. The air defence system was modelled on that of Great Britain but with very much more slender resources it naturally fell far short of the target. The aerodromes on the mainland were inadequately protected and no defence, other than passive defence, was possible for such important centres as Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Penang and many others. The defence of the Naval Base was reasonably strong judged by pre-war standards, though the equipment was still considerably short of the approved scale. The warning system suffered from the disadvantages inherent in a country which was still not fully developed and in parts of which the population was sparse.

668. During the years immediately preceding the war the anti-aircraft gun defences had carried out much useful training with the co-operation of the Royal Air Force but the value of the firing practices had been limited by the lack of the most modern target-towing facilities.

669. During the campaign the Air Defence System worked satisfactorily within its limits. In the later stages, however, the Singapore defences were seriously handicapped by the contraction, and eventually by the total loss, of the warning system. The height (over 20,000 feet) at which the Japanese almost invariably flew when attacking the Singapore

area in the early stages rendered the 31n. guns ineffective and undoubtedly reduced their own casualties. On the other hand our Light Anti-Aircraft guns had good targets throughout the campaign both on the mainland and in the closing stages on Singapore Island. Figures of aircraft brought down by anti-aircraft gunfire are notoriously difficult to assess accurately but it can be said with confidence that well over a hundred were brought down by this means during the campaign, in addition to many others which were badly damaged.

670. The need for mobility of the gun defences was the outstanding lesson of the campaign. The operations on the mainland were always fluid while even within the area of the Singapore defences the static equipments were at a disadvantage compared with the mobile ones. Had all the units been fully mobile few, if any, guns need have been lost and they could have operated to an even greater advantage than they did.

All the anti-aircraft guns and searchlights allotted for the defence of aerodromes and of the Lines of Communication should be fully mobile, and a high proportion of those in a permanent fortress should also have a good degree of mobility. It is unlikely that a lay-out designed in peace will meet the conditions of war, and mobility provides one means of making rapid adjustments.

671. The system adopted whereby the action of the fighters and the gun defences in the Singapore area were co-ordinated by a senior Air Force Officer worked smoothly and satisfactorily but the appointment in those conditions of an Air Defence Commander, who would have under him all means of air defence, would undoubtedly be advantageous.

672. The Passive Air Defence Services throughout Malaya had been carefully worked out and, though they needed strengthening as the campaign progressed, they functioned on the whole very efficiently. The provision of material defence against air attack was, however, inadequate judged by modern standards both for people and for property. In this connection, however, it is only fair to point out that the congestion in some of the principal cities in Malaya combined with the technical difficulties of constructing underground shelters in places like Singapore make it almost impossible to provide air raid shelters on a satisfactory scale.

SECTION LXXI. – LABOUR.

673. The failure of civil Asiatic Labour and, in the closing stages, of some of the military labour also under air attack was one of the most crippling events of the Malayan campaign.

674. Pre-war plans to organise civil labour had never reached finality and efforts made to raise additional Army labour companies had, as previously explained in this Despatch, been frustrated through delay in obtaining official sanction. In consequence, when war broke out, reliance had to be placed initially on the peacetime system of

obtaining labour through contractors. This system soon proved to be most unsatisfactory, partly because much of the labour produced was unsuitable for the work in hand, partly because it was undisciplined and partly because the system was wasteful from the point of view of time spent on work. When sanction to raise additional Army Labour companies was received it was impossible to get the men owing to the wide difference between the scale of remuneration authorized and the rates current in Malaya. Early in January endeavours were made to improve matters by the appointment of a Director of Labour working directly under the Director-General of Civil Defence. He was, however, responsible only for labour on Singapore Island. An Army Director of Labour also was appointed. On the 20th January a measure to introduce compulsion was passed but there was no time for its value to be disclosed. The labour problem was never satisfactorily solved. To the end labour continued to disappear under air attack.

675. In the sphere of labour there is no doubt that the present long-range hitting power of the air arm, which can attack back areas equally with those near the front line, has created new and difficult problems. Especially is this the case where, as in Malaya, comparatively few of the people are natives of the country and where in consequence “defence of home” is not a strong compelling force. In such a case a much stronger control of labour is required than was actually in existence.

676. The problem is an intricate one. In Malaya it was complicated by the variety of languages spoken by the labourers and the impossibility of finding a sufficient number of supervisors who spoke those languages. There were also difficulties connected with remuneration, transportation, accommodation and food.

There is no doubt that during the pre-war period the problem was not tackled with sufficient vigour. When the danger of the situation became apparent and efforts were made to improve it, there was insufficient time to solve the many and intricate problems which arose.

677. Experience showed that by far the best results were obtained from properly organized labour companies under military control. The labourers were then subject to military discipline and were handled by their own officers and non-commissioned officers, some at least of whom could speak their language. These companies should have their own transport and should be housed as near as possible to the work in hand. They should be issued with regular rations. In this way only will it be possible in a country like Malaya to keep labour at work under modern war conditions and to get the best value from it.

Each of the Fighting Services should have its own labour force and the nucleus at least of these forces should exist in peace-time so that a rapid expansion can take place when war threatens. In Malaya the finding of additional officers and noncommissioned officers to supplement the permanent staff on mobilization should be another call on the Local Forces.

SECTION LXXII. – CIVIL DEFENCE.

678. It is now generally accepted that success in modern war depends upon the wholehearted co-operation of all concerned, both in the Fighting Services and among the civil population, striving with a singleness of purpose to attain the common goal. In the Malayan campaign, fought within our own territory, that was of paramount importance. To organize the civil community and to prepare itself for prompt and vigorous action was clearly one of the Government's responsibilities.

679. A great deal of criticism has been levelled at the Civil Administration. Much of it is unjust. His Majesty's Government had laid down that the primary duty of the people of Malaya was to produce as much rubber and tin as possible for war purposes. The Civil Administration had to keep this object in mind while making at the same time preparations against eventual attack. It had also to watch over the interests of a mixed population of Malays, Chinese, Indians and Europeans. In the circumstances, it was inevitable that clashes of interests should occur.

680. When the war came many men and women of all races, both official and unofficial, played a creditable and often an heroic part in the defence of the country. Many of them lost their lives and many of them suffered a long period of imprisonment or internment at the hands of the Japanese. Most of those who survived suffered heavy losses of property. I wish to express my deep appreciation of the loyal assistance and self-sacrifice of these people.

681. Nevertheless, both during the period before the war and during the campaign itself an artificial and unwarlike atmosphere prevailed throughout Malaya. There seemed to be a lack of a united effort by people determined to repel the common foe at all costs. There were many causes for this – a lack of knowledge of war owing to Malaya's long immunity from it, an inability in some quarters to realise the real danger which threatened, the lack of common citizenship, and the high standard of living resulting from the wealth of the country's resources.

682. Difficulties arose from the complicated machinery of Government comprising as it did a large number of separate administrations. As this is a matter which is now receiving the consideration of His Majesty's Government, it is sufficient to say here that from a defence point of view it is essential that a simpler and more straightforward organization should be evolved.

683. I feel bound to record as a result of my experiences in Malaya that the Fighting Services throughout suffered from this lack of a strong and centralized administration able and ready to take prompt decisions and vigorous action.

SECTION LXXIII. – THE HIGHER COMMAND.

684. The advantage held by the seasoned Japanese troops as a result of the experience of active operations which many of them had had in China applied also in some degree in the case of the senior commanders. Whereas most of the Japanese commanders had had previous experience in handling large forces in the field in Far East conditions of warfare, few of our commanders had had the benefit of a similar experience. Many of them had had no experience whatever of tank warfare.

The importance of commanders in all parts of the Empire being given opportunities in peace-time of training with forces which they will be called upon to handle in war needs no stressing.

685. The Army of Malaya was composed of troops from many parts of the Empire – from the United Kingdom, India, Australia and Malaya – and comprised many different races. The various contingents varied widely in their characteristics. It was my duty and constant effort to weld these contingents into a homogeneous whole.

Between the two wars great progress had been made, by exchange of officers and by other means, in spreading a common doctrine throughout the armed forces of the Empire. There can be no question of the value of this, especially in theatres of war where, as in Malaya, forces are mixed. I recommend, from my experience in Malaya, that this policy should now be developed and greatly expanded because I believe it to be essential that all senior commanders and staff officers should not only have common ideas on the strategy, tactics and staff work applicable to a major war but that they should also look upon all problems of defence from an Imperial rather than from a local point of view. With increased facilities for air travel it seems possible that this ideal may in the future be capable of attainment.

686. Throughout the campaign, Headquarters Malaya Command had the dual function of controlling forces in the field in quickly moving operations ranging over an area nearly as large as that of England and Wales and of dealing with the many matters, such as business with the Home Authorities and the Civil Government, which are necessarily the responsibility of the Headquarters of a Command overseas. Its strength, when war with Japan broke out, was approximately equivalent to that of the headquarters of a Corps and its establishment was not suited to its dual role. Although the staff was strengthened as more officers became available, it remained throughout the campaign too weak to fulfil adequately the dual task imposed upon it.

It would in my opinion have been of great assistance if there had been a single commander over all the Fighting Services and the Civil Administration. I and my staff would then have been much freer to concentrate on operations.

687. Reference has already been made in this Despatch to the disturbing effect of the numerous changes which took place in the Higher Command. During the short campaign there were in all five Commanders-in-Chief. Such rapid changes, though largely

forced upon us by circumstances, are naturally not calculated to create an atmosphere of confidence.

688. It is not within the province of this Despatch to make concrete recommendations for the future organization of Command in the Far East. The defence of British Borneo and possibly also of Hong Kong must enter into the problem. It is obviously necessary to avoid overweighting the structure with too many headquarters, but I feel that a Supreme Commander in the Far East would be a great advantage both in peace and in war. Wide powers of decision, with considerable financial control, should be delegated to him. It is for consideration also whether in time of war the civil administrations as well as the Fighting Services should not come under his control.

689. As war has become an affair of nations and not only of the Fighting Services, I consider it of the utmost importance for the future that all senior commanders, civil officials and staff officers should be fully trained in the art of making war on a national basis. It must be a study in which all brains are pooled. There must be a corps of civilians and officers of each Service fit to staff and command the forces of the future and to understand the complete integration of civil and military efforts. In addition to what they learn in their own Services and Colleges, I am of the opinion that a course at a Combined Imperial Defence College will be essential. For this purpose I would advocate a considerable expansion of the Imperial Defence College as it existed before the war and that graduation at that College should be an essential qualification for the higher military and civil appointments in the strategically important overseas parts of the British Empire.

SECTION LXXIV. – CONCLUSION.

690. The Retreat from Mons and the Retreat to Dunkirk have been hailed as epics. In the former our Army was able with the help of a powerful ally to turn the tables on the enemy; in the latter our Army was evacuated by the Navy with the loss of all heavy equipment. Each of these retreats lasted approximately three weeks. The Retreat in Malaya lasted ten weeks in far more trying conditions. There was no strong ally to help us and no Navy to evacuate the force, even had it been desirable to do so. It has been hailed as a disaster but perhaps the judgment of history will be that all the effort and money expended on the defence of Malaya and the sacrifice and subsequent suffering of many of those who fought in the Malaya campaign were not in vain. The gain of ten weeks and the losses inflicted on the enemy may well have had a bigger influence than was realised at the time on the failure of the Japanese to reach even more important parts of our Empire.

691. An analysis of what has been said in this Despatch shows that a great many of the causes which contributed to our defeat in Malaya had a common origin, namely the lack of readiness of our Empire for war. Our shortage in light naval coastal craft and in modern aircraft, our lack of tanks, the lack of training of most of our troops – especially

the reinforcements – the lack of experience of modern war of some of the senior commanders and the weakness of our intelligence service can all be attributed to a failure to prepare for war at the proper time. This unpreparedness is no new experience. It is traditional in the British Empire. But it is becoming more and more expensive and, as the tempo of war increases, more and more dangerous. I submit that the security of the Empire can only be assured by making proper provision for its defence in time of peace. Even if this involves increased financial expenditure, the money will be well spent if it acts as an insurance against war or at least against a repetition of the disasters which befell us in the early stages of this war. If the Malayan campaign, in conjunction with other campaigns, has done anything to bring this fact home to the peoples of our Empire, it will not have been without merit.

A.E. PERCIVAL,

Lieut.-General,

Formerly General Officer Commanding Malaya.

APPENDIX “A”.

DEDUCTIONS FROM JAPANESE APPRECIATION OF THE ATTACK ON SINGAPORE 1937.

(See [Section VI paragraph 21](#)).

1. The use of territory in Southern Siam by the Japanese is a contingency which demands our careful study. It would enable them both to cut off our food supplies from Siam and also to establish Air Forces within striking distance of Malaya. Naval and Air Forces of sufficient strength to frustrate such an attempt are necessary. In addition everything possible should be done by diplomatic methods to keep the Siamese friendly to us.

2. The defence of the Northern Area of Malaya and of Johore is assuming increased importance. The scale of landing attacks, which was formerly confined to raids by parties of about 200 men, has now greatly increased. On the other hand, the defence of the Northern Area, as far as the Army is concerned, is still entrusted to the Federated Malay States Volunteer Force, assisted by certain units of the Straits Settlements and of the Unfederated Malay States, while the defence of Johore is entrusted to the Johore Military Forces, assisted by part of the Johore Volunteer Engineers.

None of these forces can be considered adequate in all circumstances for the task in hand. At least one Regular Infantry Bn., with R.A. and R.E. attached, is required for the Penang – Province Wellesley Area, and a similar force must be available to strengthen the forces in Southern Malaya.

3. Within Malaya itself the threat from the enemy within our gates is a very real one and is rapidly increasing. The possibility of attempts at sabotage by enemy nationals resident in Malaya has always been accepted. The number of these nationals compared with the strength of the garrison is now so great that it would be within their powers to do extensive damage unless proper precautions are taken to avoid it.

Recently this threat has been increased by the danger of civil disturbance. Labour in Malaya is being organised and the present return to prosperity provides a fruitful field for paid agitators.

It must be expected that an enemy would take advantage of all these conditions and that military operations would be prefaced by sabotage, and perhaps by labour troubles, on a large scale. In these circumstances, it is quite certain that the Police will be

unable to assume the responsibilities under the Defence Scheme which hitherto they have accepted. Further responsibilities would fall on the military for which Infantry would be required. It might not be possible to spare them from the present garrison.

4. The problem of the defence of Singapore, has been greatly affected by the new Combined Operations equipment recently used by the Japanese on the China Coasts – in particular, the special landing craft in large numbers, the landing craft “carriers,” the sea tanks, etc. The effect of this is that large numbers of men could be put into landing craft out of range of our fixed defences and thrown in a short space of time on to our beaches. In particular the beaches between Singapore Town and Changi have become more vulnerable than previously.

A strengthening of our Air Forces, of our local defence Naval Vessels and of our Beach Defences is required. In connection with the latter, it is for consideration whether authority should not now be sought to erect permanent defences in peacetime in the Siglap, Ayer Gomureh and Changi Sectors.

5. The Air Forces available in Malaya must be strong enough to deal with the scale of attack indicated in the appreciation and must be certain of being able to prevent the special landing craft “carriers” from closing our shores. They are not at present strong enough.

6. The Local Naval Craft, i.e. destroyers etc., which it is intended to base on Singapore are badly needed. Their arrival should not be delayed.

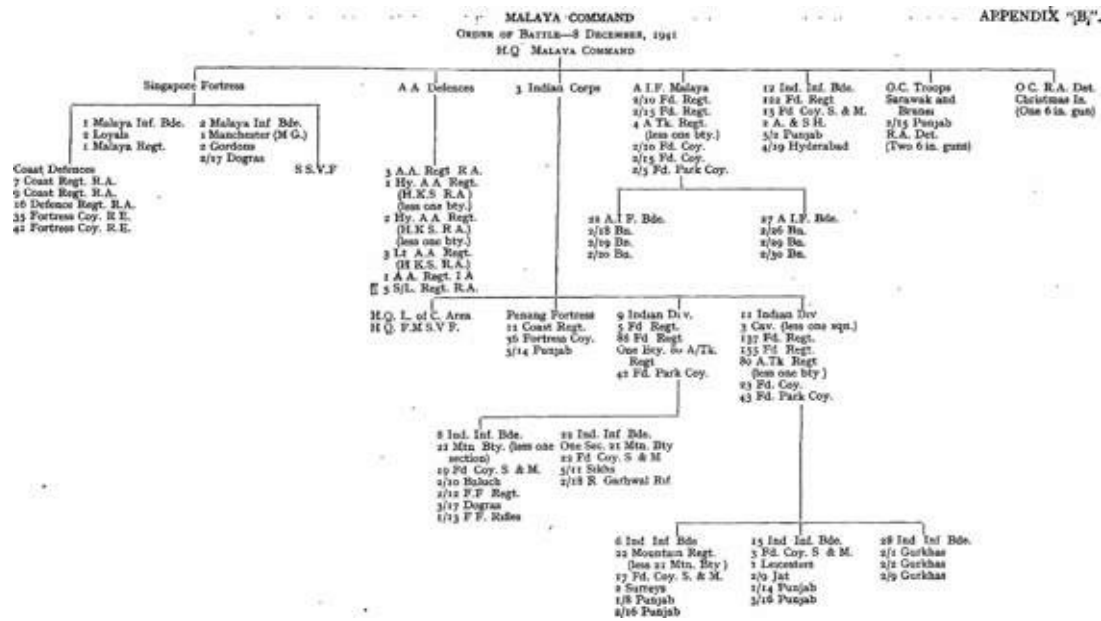
7. The probable effect of the fixed and A/M.T.B. defences, when completed, will be to act as a deterrent against daylight and M.T.B. attacks. The greater damage is likely to be landing attacks under cover of darkness. To counter this danger more Infantry are required. Singapore cannot be considered safe unless reinforcements are brought in before the attack develops. At least two additional battalions are required in the Island itself.

Further, the efficiency of the Volunteer units is still impaired by lack of equipment. It is suggested that a 3-year plan should be worked out, aiming at all requisites being available at the end of that period. If the money cannot be found under the present system, a new system must be adopted.

8. In the light of this appreciation and of recent information, the food supply situation is not satisfactory. The only really satisfactory solution will be to ensure that at any given time the necessary stocks are available within Malaya itself.

A.E.P.

APPENDIX "B" ORDER OF BATTLE



APPENDIX “C.”

23rd December, 1941.

HEADQUARTERS MALAYA COMMAND ORDER No. 28.

The broad policy is to continue opposition to the enemy on the mainland to cover the arrival of our reinforcements.

5. 3 *Indian Corps.*— Will fight the enemy wherever met and will NOT give ground till forced to subject to the condition that the Corps must remain in being as a fighting formation.

It is of importance to cover Kuala Lumpur as long as possible owing to the large amount of material stored in that area.

The lateral road Jerantut – Raub – Kuala Kubu provides the main communication between East and West Malaya. This important factor should be given full consideration in the conduct of the battle.

6. It is the intention to withdraw the Kuantan garrison at a time to be decided later, dependent upon the development of operations elsewhere and upon climatic conditions. Preliminary arrangements will be put in hand forthwith.

7. On completion of the withdrawal of the garrisons from Kelantan and Kuantan, the role of the 9 Indian Division will be:-

(a) to protect the Line of Communication Gemas – Kuala Lipis.

(b) to prevent the enemy repairing and using the Line of Communication Kuala Lipis – Kuala Krai.

(c) to form a reserve in the area Raub –Bentong.

8. The II Indian Division should therefore, if forced to fall back from its present position, fight the enemy in South Perak under instructions to be issued by the Commander, 3 Indian Corps, who will ensure that the operations of the two divisions are co-ordinated.

9. The Commander, 3 Indian Corps, will also be prepared for landings on the west coast of Malaya. For this purpose a small naval flotilla is being formed and will be based on Port Swettenham.

10. *A.I.F.* – While retaining his main forces for the defence of the east coast, the

Commander, A.I.F., will at the same time make preliminary arrangements to deal with (a) an enemy advance down the main Kuala Lumpur – Singapore road (b) landings by small enemy forces on the west coast of Malaya.

11. *C.A.A.D.*– The C.A.A.D. will be prepared to provide the maximum possible A.A. protection for ships arriving with reinforcements while they are unloading.

12. *Singapore Fortress.*– The Commander, Singapore Fortress, will arrange for reconnaissance of the north shore of Singapore Island to select positions for the defence of possible landing places.

14. There must be NO unnecessary withdrawals.

15. Arrangements are being made by Headquarters Malaya Command to harass the enemy's communications.

Similar arrangements should be made by subordinate formations whenever the opportunity offers.

APPENDIX “D.”

Subject:-

TACTICS.

Comd. 3 Ind. Corps.

Comd. A.I.F. Malaya.

Comd. Singapore Fortress.

1. The operations on land in Malaya have developed in a way which probably few of us anticipated to the full before the war started. There have been some normal attacks by formed bodies of the enemy, in which our adversaries have not shown up to any special advantage except that they have shown at times fanatical courage. But the operations have tended to develop more and more on guerrilla lines. The enemy is trying to dislodge us from our positions by flanking and encircling movements and by attacks on our communications. He has the advantage that he is far less dependent on his communications than we are, and also that, being rice eaters, his soldiers are able to live on the country for longer periods than are ours. As I have said before, his Army is an Army of gangsters, relying for success more on weakening the morale of the troops than on any particular skill with his weapons. All reports go to show that, whereas his mortar fire is actually accurate but not very destructive, his small arms fire is generally wild and comparatively ineffective.

2. I believe that our young and inexperienced troops are now getting their second wind. I am confident that, if well led, they will prove their superiority over the enemy. We must play the enemy at his own game. It is developing into a guerrilla war, so let us also adopt guerrilla tactics. Formations should reduce their transport as far as possible by sending all vehicles which are not immediately wanted well to the rear. Every platoon and section should be taught to become both tank hunters and Japanese hunters. The object must be to destroy as many Japanese as possible and also to destroy the morale by constantly attacking him.

To do this we must have a good local intelligence organization. Every unit at least should have attached to it a Malay speaking and if possible Chinese speaking local European who should be able to build up a local intelligence organization. Some of these have already been made available: endeavours will be made to supply others on

application.

3. While our policy for the present is to keep our forces in being as fighting formations this does not mean that casualties must always be avoided. Provided greater losses are inflicted on the enemy, casualties can and should be accepted within reasonable limits. The doctrine to be inculcated into every officer and man is that they must always be looking for a way of getting at the enemy. If they are cut off, they are well placed for attacking the enemy from behind, and should make every effort to do this before seeking to rejoin their own unit.

If on the other hand the enemy succeeds in getting behind us we must turn round and fight him. It is a guerrilla war and must be fought with guerrilla tactics.

A.E. PERCIVAL,
Lieutenant-General,
General Officer Commanding,
Malaya.
6th January, 1942.

APPENDIX “E.”

MALAYA COMMAND OPERATION INSTRUCTION No. 33.

Information.

I. Enemy has continued attacks on II Ind Div which has suffered heavily. 9 Ind Div is fresher but weak.

Intention.

2. Malaya Comd, in conjunction with R.N., R.A.F. and civil defence services will continue to ensure security of Singapore Naval Base.

Method.

3. Singapore Fortress will send one regular Ind bn to relieve A.I.F. bn in area Kota Tinggi on 10th January, 1942.

4. Comd A.I.F. Malaya will take over from 3 Ind Corps operational control of Settlement of Malacca and that part of Johore north of line G. Besar – Labis – Semerah with effect from receipt of this order.

5. A.I.F. will concentrate one A.I.F. bde gp (less two coys on Kluang and Kahang aerodromes) in area Segamat as soon as possible.

6. 45 Ind Inf Bde Gp will come under comd of A.I.F. Malaya with effect from receipt of this order.

7. 3 Ind Corps will withdraw from present posns into Johore, covered by maximum possible demolitions. Withdrawal will be carried out by rail and by M.T. as ordered by the Corps Comd.

“Withdrawal will be covered by rearguards on the demolitions (.) A.I.F. as soon as it can do so is to send forward mobile detachments into Negri Sembilan to relieve rearguards of 3 Ind Corps and harass and delay the enemy by demolitions.”

8. On entering Johore, 9 Ind Div and one twelve gun bty 80 A.Tk Regt will come under comd of Comd A.I.F. Malaya. 3 Ind Corps, will arrange for G and Q staff officers of 9 Ind Div to report to Adv H.Q. A.I.F. Malaya as soon as possible for liaison purposes.

9. 3 Ind Corps less 9 Ind Div and one bty 80 A.Tk Regt will, on withdrawal, take over operational responsibility for Southern Johore up to and incl the line Endau – G.

Beremban –Kluang – Batu Pahat. Date on which 3 Ind Corps will assume this responsibility will be fixed later. Until this date is notified, Comd A.I.F. Malaya will be operationally responsible for whole of State of Johore and Settlement of Malacca.

3 Ind Corps will be prepared to provide one bde gp of II Ind Div to take place of A.I.F. tps on rd Kahang – Kluang and to relieve two coys A.I.F. at Kahang and Kluang aerodromes (see [para 5](#) above).

10. During latter stages of withdrawal, 3 Ind Corps will detail a staff officer to be at Adv H.Q. A.I.F. Malaya to advise as to when rds forward of posns held by tps under Comd A.I.F. Malaya may be demolished.

11. Comd Johore Malacca Area will continue to be responsible for administration of comd depots and units not allotted to formations in State of Johore and Settlement of Malacca.

12. 3 Ind Corps and A.I.F. Malaya will have equal running rights on all rds in Johore.

Communications.

13. Adv H.Q. A.I.F. Malaya will be established at Labis. Rear H.Q. A.I.F. Malaya will remain at Johore Bahru. H.Q. 3 Ind. Corps will be established at Johore Bahru after withdrawal.

K.S. TORRANCE,

Brigadier.

General Staff, Malaya Command.

9th January, 1942.

1220 hrs.

APPENDIX “F.”

MALAYA COMMAND OPERATION INSTRUCTION No. 35.

Information.

1. (a) Enemy. 5 Division (H Q. Labis) operating astride the road Segamat – Ayer Hitam and has Guards Division on the axis Muar – Ayer Hitam.

(b) Own Troops. Our forward troops are holding North and West of Yong Peng road junction. We also hold Batu Pahat.

Intention.

2. Our troops will be withdrawn to-night to positions covering Kluang and Ayer Hitam and including Batu Pahat.

Method.

3. Yong Peng road junction will be held during the withdrawal under arrangements to be made by Westforce. 53 Brigade Group less Loyals will be withdrawn under orders Westforce clearing Yong Peng road junction by midnight 23-24th January and will come under orders Comd. 3 Indian Corps on passing Ayer Hitam cross roads. Loyals will revert to Comd. Westforce.

Troops of 9 Indian Division operating on road Labis – Ayer Hitam will follow 53 Infantry Brigade under orders issued by Westforce.

4. Westforce will come under command of 3 Indian Corps as soon as last troops have been withdrawn south of Yong Peng road junction.

5. Garrison at Kahang may be withdrawn to Jemaluang area at discretion of Comd. 3 Indian Corps. Comd. Westforce will arrange flanking protection on the road Kluang–Jemaluang.

6. Main L. of C. Batu Pahat will be via west coast road.

Administrative.

7. The Comd. of the Kuang Area will be made responsible that the R.A.F. Petrol Dump at the Kluang Aerodrome which the Army is now using is destroyed if necessary to prevent it falling into the hands of the enemy.

Inter-Communication.

8. H.Q. 3 Indian Corps Johore Bahru. H.Q. Westforce, Rengam Area. H.Q. II Indian Division is moving to Pontian Kechil.

9. Ack.

K.S. TORRANCE,
Brigadier,
General Staff, Malaya Command.

Advance H.Q.M.C.

23rd January, 1942.

T.O.O. 1920.

APPENDIX “G.”

MINUTES OF CONFERENCE HELD AT HEADQUARTERS, WESTFORCE.

1515 HOURS. 25TH JANUARY, 1942.

Present-G.O.C. (Lieut.-General PERCIVAL).

G.O.C. 3 Indian Corps (Lieut.-General Sir LEWIS HEATH).

(Comd. Westforce (Major-General GORDON BENNETT)).

Comd. II Indian Division (Major-General KEY).

1. Comd. II Indian Division reported that the force at Batu Pahat had been heavily engaged all the morning and that the coast road had been blocked near Senggarang.

2. Comd. Westforce reported that the situation at Kluang was confused but that we were still holding the Kluang road junction and he believed the counter attack carried out by the Sikhs had been successful.

3. The following decisions were taken:-

(a) Order the Batu Pahat Garrison to withdraw at once and link up with 53 Infantry Brigade in the Senggarang area.

(b) Westforce to withdraw to-night to the general line S. Sayong Halt – S. Benut. This position to be held until the night 27-28th January at least. Subsequent withdrawals to take place to positions, to be laid down in advance, which would in turn be held for a minimum fixed period and longer if possible.

(c) Movement of Eastforce and II Division to conform to that of Westforce, under orders to be issued by 3 Indian Corps.

(d) In view of a possible threat to the Pontian Kechil area Comd. Westforce to hold a good battalion in reserve, whenever possible, which could be made available to move rapidly to that flank.

K.S. TORRANCE,

Brigadier,

General Staff, Malaya Command.

Advance H.Q.M.C.

26th January, 1942.

APPENDIX “H”

PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT BY G.O.C. MALAYA FEBRUARY, 1942

The battle of Malaya has come to an end and the battle of Singapore has started. For nearly two months our troops have fought an enemy on the mainland who has had the advantage of great air superiority and considerable freedom of movement by sea.

Our task has been both to impose losses on the enemy and to gain time to enable the forces of the Allies to be concentrated for this struggle in the Far East. Today we stand beleaguered in our island fortress.

Our task is to hold this fortress until help can come – as assuredly it will come. This we are determined to do.

In carrying out this task we want the help of every man and woman in the fortress. There is work for all to do. Any enemy who sets foot in our fortress must be dealt with immediately. The enemy within our gates must be ruthlessly weeded out. There must be no more loose talk and rumour-mongering. Our duty is clear. With firm resolve and fixed determination we shall win through.

APPENDIX “J”

LETTER RE IMPLEMENTATION OF SCORCHED EARTH POLICY ON SINGAPORE ISLAND

It is of the utmost importance that no material of military value should be allowed in any circumstances to fall into the hands of the enemy. In the past, mistakes have been made owing to the responsibility for carrying out the destruction when the time comes not being clearly defined.

2. The policy approved by the Chiefs of Staff as regards Singapore is that as much surplus material as possible should be disposed of at once, either by removal or destruction, provided this can be done without destroying public “morale.” As regards the rest, every possible preparation must be made at once and detailed schemes drawn up. Destruction by explosion or fire is normally calculated to destroy morale.

3. Responsibility for preparation and execution of schemes will rest on the military authority who is responsible for the dump, depot, or establishment concerned, i.e., Comd. H.Q. (Head of service concerned) will be responsible for Command installations; formation H.Q. for dumps or depots under their control.

4. Food stocks, medical stores, hospital equipment and water supply installations will NOT be destroyed.

5. As regards the orders to put these schemes into effect, if time permits the order will be given by me. It will be readily realised, however, that in the turmoil and confusion of an attack on Singapore it may not be possible to issue any order. Responsible authorities must therefore ensure that there are always on the spot day and night sufficient personnel with a reliable commander who will in the last resort and failing my orders act on his own initiative to ensure that the policy of His Majesty’s Government is carried out.

A.E. PERCIVAL,

Lieutenant-General,

General Officer Commanding, Malaya.

Adv. H.Q.M.C.

1st February, 1942.

APPENDIX “K”

MALAYA COMMAND OPERATION INSTRUCTION No. 40

Ref. Map Johore and Singapore 1/25,000

1. Enemy attacked Western Area in strength 9th February and succeeded in penetrating to the East of Tengah aerodrome. A party of the enemy is reported to have blocked the road Hong Kah Village 6917 – road junction 6313 in rear of 44 Ind. Inf. Bde.

2. A.I.F. Malaya have been ordered to withdraw to and hold the line S. Kranji – Bulim Village 6919 – S. Jurong. 6/15 Bde. has been placed under comd. of A.I.F. Malaya.

3. Should it be impossible to hold the enemy on the line mentioned in [para. 2](#) above, G.O.C. Malaya intends to withdraw to an inner position on which the final battle for Singapore will be fought.

4. General line of this inner position will be:-

West Bank of Kallang River in 8711 – thence west of the inundated area in 8611, 8612, and 8712 to Mt. Vernon 8814 – north of Pierce Reservoir 8118 – Hill 581 in 7616 – west of Bukit Timah Village 7515 – pt. 105 in 7412 – Pasir Panjang Village 7409 – thence along the south coast of Singapore Island to west bank of Rochore River in 8710. Pulau Blakang Mati, Pulau Brani, Pulau Tekong and the defended perimeter of Pengerang will also be held.

5. This position will be divided into three Areas:-

Northern Area – Comd. – Comd. 3 Ind. Corps. Troops – 3 Ind. Corps of II Ind. Div. and 18 Div.

Southern Area – Comd. – Comd. Southern Area (Major-General Keith Simmons). Troops – existing garrison of Southern Area.

Western Area – Comd. – Comd. A.I.F. Malaya.

Note. – Allocation of 12 Ind. Inf. Bde. and 44 Ind. Inf. Bde. will be decided later. At least one of these formations will be in Command Reserve.

6. *Boundaries.*– The defended area defined in [para. 4](#) above will be divided into sectors by boundaries as follows:-

Between 3 Ind. Corps and A.I.F. Incl. A.I.F. Electric Transmission Line 7716 – incl. Swiss

Rifle Club 7715 – incl. road junction 780143 – incl. Bukit Timah Road – road junction 838117.

Between 3 Ind. Corps and Southern Area. Incl. 3 Ind. Corps Macpherson Road – Serangoon Road – excl. Farrer Park – road junction 838117.

Between A.I.F. and Southern Area. Incl. Southern Area track 750107 – Ayer Raja Road – Alexandra Road – road junction 809092 – incl. road junction 812102 – Grange Road – incl. road junction 827102 – excl. road junction 829108 – excl. road junction 838117.

Comd. Southern Area will be responsible for defence of Pulau Blakang Mati, Pulau Brani, Pulau Tekong and Pengerang.

7. Reconnaissances of Areas will be carried out at once and the plans for the movement of formations into the areas allotted to them will be prepared. Formations will arrange to move back and locate in their new areas units located in their present areas which are under command of H.Q. Malaya Command.

8. C.A.A.D. will remain responsible to G.O.C. Malaya for A.A. Defences.

9. H.Q. of G.O.C. Malaya will be located at Fort Canning (Battle H.Q.) together with H.Q. Southern Area.

10. Administrative adjustments which can be made now to fit in with the above organization will be put in hand immediately.

11. ACK.

Lieut.-Colonel

for Brigadier,

General Staff, Malaya Command.

Adv. H.Q.M.C.

10th February, 1942.

T.O.O. 0050.

SIR PAUL MALTBY'S DESPATCH ON AIR
OPERATIONS DURING THE CAMPAIGNS IN
MALAYA AND NETHERLAND EAST INDIES
8 DECEMBER 1941 TO 12 MARCH 1942

REPORT ON THE AIR OPERATIONS DURING THE
CAMPAIGNS IN MALAYA AND NETHERLAND EAST
INDIES FROM 8TH DECEMBER 1941 TO 12TH MARCH,
1942.

The following report was submitted to the Secretary of State for Air on July 26th, 1947, by Air Vice-Marshal Sir PAUL MALTBY, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., A.F.C., Assistant Air Officer Commanding Far East Command, Royal Air Force, from January 12th to February 10th, 1942, and Air Officer Commanding Royal Air Force in Java from February 11th to March 12th, 1942.

FOREWORD.

A report on the operations in Malaya and the N.E.I. would be incomplete without a survey of the situation in the Far East before war broke out there. A convenient date for beginning such a survey is 1st June, 1941, soon after the date, 24th April, 1941, on which the late Air Vice-Marshal C.W. Pulford became Air Officer Commanding R.A.F. Far East Command.

A number of other newly posted Senior Officers also took up their new duties about the same time, the more important amongst them being Lieut.-Gen. A.E. Percival (G.O.C. Malaya – 16th May, 1941), Air Commodore C.O.F. Modin (A.O.A. at A.H.Q. 10.6.41), Group Captain A.G. Bishop (Group Captain Ops. at A.H.Q. 1.6.41) and the late Group Captain E.B. Rice (Fighter Defence Commander of Singapore and Co-ordinator of Air Defences of Malaya, both newly established appointments, 10.7.41).

Although 1st June, 1941, has been chosen as the datum line from which to start the survey, full recognition is given to the large amount of preparatory work which was

done by the predecessors of the officers whose names are mentioned above. Some reference is necessarily made to matters which occurred during the time they were in office, but in general the survey deals with the period between 1st June, 1941, and the outbreak of war. It indicates the energetic measures which were taken immediately beforehand to prepare the Command for war, and points a picture of the situation as it existed at the outbreak of hostilities.

The narrative contains only brief reference to developments in Hong Kong, Burma and the Indian Ocean, operational control of which passed out of the hands of the A.O.C. Far East Command soon after the Japanese had landed in Malaya. Their presence in the Command during the pre-war period did, however, appreciably divert attention and work from pressing matters of local application, and to this degree affected preparation for war in Malaya.

Some reference is necessary to sources of information on which the report is based.

Official records from the Far East are few and incomplete. Most of those which were maintained there had to be destroyed to prevent their capture by the Japanese. The few which survive consist of brief situation reports and a few files of important signals and correspondence, now with the Air Ministry. To make good the loss of the destroyed documents, reports have since been obtained from a number of officers who held important appointments in the Far East Command. But these are far from authoritative. Most of them were written in December, 1945, and January, 1946, nearly four years after the events which they describe had taken place, during which years their authors had been prisoners-of-war in Japanese hands, or alternatively had been actively employed in other theatres of war. A number of important individuals who could have given valuable evidence, I regret to report, died in captivity or during subsequent operations. Discrepancies have been slow and difficult to reconcile between sources of information now scattered throughout the world, despite the ready help I have received from the authors of such reports.

On the other hand valuable information has been freely supplied to me from the Cabinet War Library, the Air Ministry, the War Office, the Colonial Office and by the authors of several other despatches relating to the War in the Far East. To them also I am much indebted.

For the sake of brevity only those matters are mentioned in the report which are necessary for establishing important events, for elucidating the factors which governed action at the time, and for compiling before it is too late a reasonably comprehensive narrative of what happened in the Far East.

Within these limitations every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, and the report, as a whole, is believed to give a reasonably true picture of the campaign from the

air aspect – although doubtless it may display inaccuracies of detail brought about by the circumstances in which it has been compiled. It should, however, contain the necessary data from which correct deductions can be drawn. In order, however, that inaccuracies may be corrected, readers are invited to call attention to them through the Air Ministry.

The whole report has been written under my direction, the first two sections on behalf of the late Air Vice-Marshal Pulford who held his command until 11th February, 1942, two days before he left Singapore. In my opinion there is nothing in these sections, or in Section V, with which he would not agree.

I myself took over my duties at his headquarters on 12th January, 1942, from which date the report is written on my responsibility, and largely with my personal knowledge. This part of the report continues in the third person for the sake of continuity in the narrative.

P.C. MALTBY,

Air Vice-Marshal Royal Air Force.

London.

July 26th, 1947.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE REPORT.

- G.H.Q. - General Headquarters of the Commander-in-Chief, Far East.
- H.Q.M.C. - Headquarters of the General Officer Commanding, Malaya Command.
- A.H.Q. - Air Headquarters of the Air Officer Commanding, R.A.F. Far East Command.
- Norgroup - Code name for Group H.Q. controlling air operations in Northern Malaya.
- Abdacom - Code name for Supreme Allied Headquarters, S.W. Pacific, which formed on 15th January, 1942, and absorbed G.H.Q.
- Abdair - Code name of the Air Section of Supreme Allied H.Q., S.W. Pacific.
- Westgroup - Code name allotted to A.H.Q. on the formation of Supreme Allied H.Q., S.W. Pacific.
- Recgroup - Code name for the Allied Air Reconnaissance Group responsible for seaward reconnaissance of whole sphere of Supreme Allied Command, S.W. Pacific.

Britair - Code name for A.H.Q. in Java after the dissolution of Supreme Allied H.Q., S.W. Pacific.

A.A.C.U. - Anti-Aircraft Co-operation Unit.

A.H.K. - Headquarters of the Dutch Commander-in-Chief at Bandoeng, Java.

A.I.F. - Australian Imperial Forces.

A.L.G. - Advanced Landing Ground.

A.M.E. Station - Air Ministry Experimental Station (Radar).

A.O.A. - Air Officer in charge of Administration.

A.S.P. - Air Stores Park.

(B) - Bomber.

D/F - Radio Direction Finding.

(F) - Fighter.

(F.B.) - Flying Boat.

F.E.C.B. - Far East Combined Bureau – a combined service intelligence organisation for obtaining intelligence, under Admiralty administration, throughout the Far East.

(G.R.) - General Reconnaissance.

I.E. - Initial Equipment.

I.R. - Immediate Reserve.

M.U. - Maintenance Unit.

M.V.A.F. - Malayan Volunteer Air Force.

N.E.I. - Netherlands East Indies.

[N.F.] - Night Fighter.

O.T.U. - Operational Training Unit.

P.R.U. - Photographic Reconnaissance Unit.

R.T. - Radio Telephony.

R. & S.U. - Repair and Salvage Unit.

S.A.O. - Senior Administrative Officer.

S.A.S.O. - Senior Air Staff Officer.

(T.B.) - Torpedo Bomber.

V.H.F. - Very high frequency radio.

SECTION I.

PRE-WAR PREPARATIONS

SCOPE AND FUNCTIONS OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE, FAR EAST.

By mid-summer 1941 the geographical area of the Far East Command, Royal Air Force, included Hong Kong, Borneo, Malaya and Burma; then, embracing Ceylon, it stretched across the Indian Ocean to Durban and Mombasa.

2. The main functions of the Command were firstly to protect the Naval Base in Singapore, and secondly, in co-operation with the Royal Navy to ensure the security of the trade routes in the Indian Ocean and South China Sea. The Headquarters of the Command was in Singapore.

3. In November 1940, Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham was appointed Commander-in-Chief, Far East. He was responsible for operational control and general direction of training of all British land and air forces in Malaya, Burma and Hong Kong, for co-ordinating the defences of those territories; and for similar responsibilities for additional British Air Forces it was proposed to locate later in Ceylon, the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal. He set up his headquarters at the Naval Base in Singapore where he was provided with a small operational staff, but no administrative staff.

4. The formation of G.H.Q. in no way relieved the Air Officer Commanding, Royal Air Force, of his responsibility (which was now within the policy laid down by the Commander-in-Chief) for ensuring the effective co-operation of his Command with the Naval and Military Commands throughout the area, nor did it alter his position vis-à-vis these Commands or the Air Ministry and the several Civil Governments with which he dealt.

THE BASIS OF DEFENCE IN THE FAR EAST.

General Plan.

5. The general defence plan was based on an appreciation written by the Chiefs of Staff in July 1940. Briefly stated, this paper laid down that defence was to rely, in the absence of a Fleet, primarily on air power.

The Chiefs of Staff recognised that, for the defence of the Naval Base, it was no

longer sufficient to concentrate upon the defence of Singapore Island but that it had become necessary to hold the whole of Malaya. Their intention now was to replace, by the end of 1941, the existing establishment of 88 obsolete and obsolescent aircraft by an air strength of 336 modern first-line aircraft backed up by adequate reserves and administrative units. This strength was allocated to the defence of Malaya and Borneo and to trade protection in the N.E. half of the Indian Ocean; it did not include aircraft necessary for the defence of Burma.

6. On the basis of this C.O.S. paper, the three Services in Malaya produced a tactical appreciation, which became the agenda of a conference held at Singapore in October 1940 attended by representatives from all Commands in the Far East. This conference recommended that the C.O.S. figure of 336 aircraft should be increased to 582, which it considered the minimum strength of Air Forces required to meet defence commitments in the Far East. The Chiefs of Staffs' reply on this point stated "we agree that 582 aircraft is an ideal, but consider 336 should give a fair degree of security taking into account our experiences in Middle East, Malta, and Air Defence of Great Britain". The conference also recommended that until the additional air forces were provided, the Army in Malaya should be substantially reinforced.

7. Meanwhile, talks had been initiated between the British, U.S.A. and Dutch Staffs with the object of obtaining concerted action in the event of war breaking out with Japan. After the appointment of the Commander-in-Chief, Far East, in November 1940, further Allied conferences were held in Singapore. By April 1941 agreed general plans had been drawn up.

Allied Air Plans.

8. For the purpose of planning, it was assumed that the Japanese would not be able to attack simultaneously at several widely dispersed places in the Far East, in particular that they would not challenge the combined British, American and Dutch might. It was assumed, therefore, that Allied air forces would be able to reinforce one another. Preparations for mutual help were to be made as follows:-

(a) For Malaya to reinforce the N.E.I. – 4 Bomber Squadrons, R.A.F.

(b) For N.E.I. to reinforce Malaya – 3 Bomber and 1 Fighter Squadrons, Dutch Army Air Service.

(c) For the Philippines to reinforce Malaya – All U.S. Army and Navy Air Service Units available, but only if the Philippines were evacuated.

Each service accepted responsibility within its own territory for providing the necessary bases, where stocks of bombs, petrol and lubricants, peculiar to the respective air forces which might use them, were to be laid down.

9. Further matters of importance which were settled at these conferences were:-

(a) Responsibility for air reconnaissance over the South China Sea; this was co-ordinated and defined.

(b) Allied cypher and signal procedure.

(c) Allied Naval/Air recognition signal procedure.

10. Concurrently with the above, the Far East Command R.A.F. was authorised to provide the means for operating general reconnaissance aircraft in the Bay of Bengal, Ceylon and the Indian Ocean.

Implications of the Plans.

11. Here it is opportune to stress the implications of the expansion programme authorised by the Chiefs of Staff; for the mere statement that the strength was to be raised from 88 obsolete or obsolescent aircraft to 336 modern types conveys no true impression of the extensive preparatory measures required before this force could be accommodated and operated.

12. It should be remembered that until the new policy had been decided by the Chiefs of Staff, defence had been largely confined to the vicinity of Singapore Island: thereafter it included the whole of Malaya.

13. The first step was the construction of bases. Sixteen new ones had to be found and built in Malaya, a country largely covered with secondary jungle remote from human habitations. Of the bases in existence in the colony 5 needed modernisation and 2 reconstruction. Concurrently, construction of new maintenance, repair and storage units was necessary, also throughout the colony.

Fighter defence had to be built up *ab initio*; none whatever had existed hitherto. In addition to bases for fighter squadrons, provision was necessary for an extensive radar system, for a modernised Observer Corps expanded on a primitive one already existing, for communications throughout the colony, and for Fighter Headquarters to control the whole.

At the same time, 8 new bases had to be built in Burma and 3 in Ceylon. Refuelling bases for flying boats were needed at numerous islands in the Indian Ocean from the Andamans to the coast of Africa.

14. The second step was to provide the authorised increase – the new units, the new aircraft; the ancillary services and the staffs for operating them on modern lines; and finally the modern equipment, supplies and local reserves for all.

15. The third step was to train the whole Command in conjunction with the Navy, Army and Civil Defences under the circumstances existing in the Far East, and concurrently to introduce up-to-date methods of operating.

16. The whole presented a truly formidable expansion programme, made still

more formidable by the fact that time was short. The end of 1941 was the date by which the Chiefs of Staff planned for the expanded force to be ready for war. A combination of circumstances was, however, to result in realisation falling far short of the mark, dominating all being the prior and acute claims of the war in Europe, and the Middle East.

ACTION TAKEN IN MALAYA TO IMPLEMENT PLANS

Development of Air Bases Problems of construction

17. The siting of aerodromes in Malaya was mainly influenced by the topography of the country. A rugged, heavily forested mountain chain runs down the centre of the peninsula cutting off the eastern and western coastal belts from each other until Johore is reached at its southern end. Much of both coastal belts is covered by a medley of broken hills; the rest consists of plains planted with rubber and paddy, or of potential mining sites. Rainfall is heavy throughout the year, increasing as the central mountain range is approached. Constant cloud over this range handicaps flight from one side of the peninsula to the other. Consequently, in order to provide reconnaissance over the South China Sea, from which direction the threat to Malaya by sea was greatest, a number of aerodromes had to be sited on the East Coast.

18. Workable sites were difficult to obtain. Every effort was made throughout 1941 to accelerate construction, but progress was not as rapid as had been hoped, despite the fact that, in some cases, sites involving a minimum of work were selected at the sacrifice of operational requirements.

19. There were 11 separate provincial government authorities in Malaya concerned with the acquisition of land; negotiations with each had to be separate. In the earlier stages, delay occurred owing to misunderstanding of the land acquisition legislation; later, emergency powers of acquisition were invoked and this source of delay ceased.

20. Mechanical plant was very short. That which was available was in poor condition, whilst, there were few personnel qualified to operate or maintain it, a combination which constituted a primary handicap to progress.

21. Labour generally throughout Malaya was insufficient to meet the needs of the defence expansion programmes of the three Services, and later of the Civil Government. A permanent Labour Committee existed but its function was, in practice, mainly limited to controlling wages in order to eliminate expensive and wasteful competition between the three fighting Services and Government departments. The powers of this Committee were limited; all labour was voluntary, not conscripted, and no control could be exercised over the rates paid by civilian firms. By mutual agreement, however, it was possible to arrange

a certain priority of employment of the labour available; and this was exercised to the benefit of the Royal Air Force in Kelantan State (in N.E. Malaya).

To improve the labour situation, negotiations were opened with the Civil Government in May, 1941, for forming locally enlisted works units to be clothed in uniform and officered by Europeans. Approval was obtained in August, 1941, and the matter was then put to the Air Ministry, but by the time final sanction was given it was too late to be effective. Fortunately an aerodrome construction unit arrived from New Zealand at the end of October, 1941. It did excellent work.

22. Most R.A.F. sites were in remote and sparsely populated spots to which it was necessary first to build roads. Native labour had to be collected, conveyed to the spot and housed. When this had been done it was still necessary to carry to the area almost all the building material required.

23. Much effort was necessarily diverted to anti-malarial measures, which had to be put in hand concurrently with construction in order to protect labour from epidemic. On completion, drained areas had to be maintained and oiled.

24. Supplies of material fell far short of the total needs of the services and civil departments. A Joint Priorities Committee was established in the Spring of 1941. It sat regularly and allocated supplies in accordance with the priorities decided from time to time. During the latter half of 1941, some shortages became particularly acute. Metalling material for runways was also always particularly short, a serious matter on aerodromes constantly subjected to tropical rainfall, which in itself was a major handicap to rapid construction.

25. It is clear, therefore, that the problems which confronted the Air Ministry Works Department were as numerous and complicated as any encountered in other theatres in wartime. That it did excellent work does not alter the fact that it was severely handicapped in executing quickly a very large and urgent programme of expansion by the absence, particularly during the early stages, of the accelerated administrative procedure which the situation demanded.

State of Construction, 1st December, 1941

26. The locations of R.A.F. Stations and Establishments in Malaya and Singapore Island, together with remarks about their state of completion a few days before war broke out in the Far East, are shown in [Appendix "A."](#)

27. Of the occupied bases in Malaya, both Alor Star and Kota Bharu were old civil grounds with little room for dispersal. The buildings at Alor Star had been constructed on the old R.A.F. peace-time layout and were congested and too near the runway. This station was high in the priority list for reconstruction when opportunity offered. Both stations were in the forefront of operations in the first days of the war; their deficiencies proved a great handicap.

28. The old bases, and the first of those built on the new programme, had no form of camouflage. The ground had first been deforested and no attempt had been made to use natural surroundings or irregular outlines to obtain concealment. They stood out stark and bare, against the surrounding country. This was largely due to failure, before 1940 to realise, not only in the Far East but in Europe also, the need for dispersal and camouflage on the scale which war experience proved to be necessary. In later bases, excellent concealment was obtained by retaining natural surroundings, avoiding straight lines and using a type of construction which, amongst the trees, was indistinguishable from the native huts. Financial considerations, however, continued to prevent the acquisition of sufficient land for effective dispersal.

29. Dispersal areas and splinter-proof pens at aerodromes in Malaya were arranged on what was then thought to be an adequate scale based on:-

- (a) The scale of attack in accordance with the information then available about the Japanese Air Services.
- (b) The ultimate scale of A.A. defences to be provided at each aerodrome.
- (c) The development of a fighter defensive system.

By the 1st December, 1941, however, neither time nor resources had permitted satisfactory development of the fighter system, and few anti-aircraft weapons were available. The Commander-in-Chief, Far East, had laid down that each aerodrome was to be protected by eight heavy and eight light A.A. guns. At no aerodrome in Malaya was this scale approached; on the outbreak of war, some aerodromes had no A.A. guns at all (for details see [Appendix A](#), Column 5 (b)).

30. Each base was provided with a supply of road metalling and labour for the repair of aerodrome surfaces in the event of damage by enemy attack. The reason for mentioning this apparently trivial point will become clear later.

Ancillary Construction

31. In addition to aerodromes the following important works were either completed or in hand on the 1st December, 1941:-

- (a) Combined Army/Air Operations Room: This was completed and occupied by H.Q. R.A.F. Far East Command (A.H.Q.) and H.Q. Malaya Command (H.Q.M.C.) at Sime Road, Singapore.
- (b) Alternative Combined Army/Air Operations Room: Provided because of the above-ground vulnerable position of the main Combined Operations Room.
- (c) Fighter Control H.Q. in Singapore: This was ready for occupation. It had an operations room, a filter room, a W.T. station, etc.
- (d) A.M.E. Stations: The ultimate intention was to have 20 Radar Stations throughout

Malaya. Six stations only, all in the vicinity of Singapore Island, were completed by the 1st December, 1941.

(e) Radio Installation and Maintenance Unit: This was partially completed at Ponggol, Singapore.

(f) Ammunition Park: Construction at Batak Quarry, Singapore; it was occupied although extensions were in progress.

(g) Storage of Petrol:

(i) Reserve storage accommodation for 6,500 tons of aviation petrol was under construction at Woodlands North, Singapore.

(ii) Reserve storage accommodation for 7,500 tons of aviation petrol at Port Dickson was more than 50 per cent. complete.

(iii) Reserve storage accommodation for 930 tons at Kuantan was completed.

(h) Universal Holding Unit: This was completed and was occupied by 152 M.U. at Bukit Panjang, Singapore; extensions were in progress. This reduced the congestion and concentration of stores held at Seletar.

(i) Engine Repair Depot and Universal Holding Unit: This depot was completed at Kuala Lumpur, provided with its own railway siding and occupied by No. 153 M.U. It was designed to service squadrons based in North Malaya and so to reduce further the congestion and concentration which had hitherto persisted at Seletar.

Allied Reinforcement Arrangements U.S.A. Reinforcements from the Philippines

32. The actual number of aircraft that might be expected in Malaya, should the evacuation of the Philippines occur, was of necessity indefinite; so was the amount of equipment peculiar to the U.S. Naval and Army Air Services which might accompany them.

33. Reconnaissances were carried out and dispersed moorings planned for a total of 20 reinforcing Catalinas of the United States Naval Air Service. A provisional plan for maintaining them was also prepared.

34. The Commander-in-Chief ruled, in September, 1941, that four bases were to be prepared for accommodating B.17's of the United States Army Air Corps; two in the North and two in the South of Malaya. Gong Kedah and Butterworth in the North, Tebrau and Yong Peng in the South, were selected. Extensions of the runways to 2,000 yards at each were put in hand but only those at Gong Kedah were completed by the time war came.

Dutch Reinforcements from N.E.I.

35. In the mutual reinforcement programme arranged with the Dutch Army Air Service, it was assumed that:-

(a) Three Bomber Squadrons (27 Glenn Martins would be based at Sembawang)

(b) One Dutch Fighter Squadron (9 Buffaloes) would be based at Kallong: and plans were made accordingly.

36. The Dutch Squadron and Flight Commanders concerned visited these stations, toured Malaya and were given a short course in R.A.F. operational methods. Appropriate stocks of Dutch bombs were procured.

37. The Dutch Naval Air Service had been allotted, in the initial seaward reconnaissance plan, responsibility for the area Kuantan – Great Natunas – Kuching (B. Borneo). To execute this task, it had to base a Group (3 Catalinas) of Flying Boats at Seletar. Provision was made for this; and stocks of petrol and moorings were also laid down at Kuantan. The Group remained under Dutch operational command.

38. Liaison Officers of the Dutch Army Air Service and the Royal Air Force were interchanged and were attached to A.H.Q. in Singapore and at Dutch Army Air H.Q. in Java respectively.

Preparations within R.A.F., Far East Command.

Role of Squadrons in War.

39. In July, 1941, a memorandum was circulated outlining the role of squadrons in war, and training syllabi were issued. Strict supervision was imposed to ensure that the fullest training value was obtained in all exercises and that the maximum number of practices of different kinds was arranged whenever a training flight was undertaken.

Preparation of Initial Reconnaissance Plan.

40. Seaborne invasion from the N.E. constituted the main threat to Malaya. A reconnaissance plan was therefore drawn up to detect its approach at the maximum distance, responsibility for its execution being divided amongst the Allies. R.A.F. Far East Command was allotted responsibility for the area Kota Bahru – Southern tip of Indo-China – Great Natunas – Kuantan. A reconnaissance plan was prepared accordingly. Its execution necessitated the employment of one G.R. (Hudson) Squadron based on Kuantan and one based on Kota Bahru. The use of two Catalinas was superimposed to ensure an overlap with the Dutch area immediately to the South. Squadrons were exercised in this plan from their war stations.

41. When the Japanese occupied Indo-China in July, 1941, A.H.Q. queried the fact that this reconnaissance plan made no provision for searching the Gulf of Siam, but

G.H.Q. confirmed that the limited reconnaissance force available must be concentrated initially upon the more likely area of approach.

Concentration of Squadrons in War.

42. In accordance with the principle that squadrons were to be concentrated in the defence of whatever area was threatened, alternative locations for squadrons, dependent on the axis of attack, were prepared.

Transition to a War Footing.

43. In the past, a considerable number of code words had been issued, each governing the action of units in various kinds of emergency. As a whole, they were most confusing and liable to result in unco-ordinated action. To rectify this situation, G.H.Q. instructed all Commands, in May, 1941, to prepare for three “degrees of readiness” and laid down the general principles governing each. A.H.Q. took the opportunity to issue Units with an exact description in detail of the action to be taken on promulgation of these degrees of readiness. The transition to a full war footing was thereby made smooth and rapid.

Co-ordination of Night Flying Arrangements.

44. Before the autumn of 1941, arrangements for night flying had not been coordinated, each Unit employing its own method of laying out a flare path and other lighting. A standardised procedure was drawn up in November, 1941, as it was essential to ensure that all squadrons could operate by night with confidence and could use any aerodrome in the Command.

Establishment of Air Corridors.

45. Air corridors “in” and “out of” Singapore were established and promulgated, whilst a standardised procedure for “approach” to all aerodromes in the Command was issued in July.

Establishment of Operations Rooms.

46. Operations rooms were opened at each base as it became available for use, the ideal aimed at being that squadrons on arrival should find the same layout, information and procedure as that which existed at their parent aerodromes. This was designed to avoid the delay and disorganisation caused by the necessity of transferring material and documents: it speeded up the efficiency of operations.

Mobility of Squadrons.

47. A high degree of mobility, was necessary for squadrons to fulfil their laid-down role as the primary defence of the Far East in general, and of Malaya in particular, But the

composition of the forces allotted to the Far East included no transport aircraft; and although A.H.Q. drew attention to the deficiency on several occasions no aircraft could be provided. The Dutch Army Air Service had a fleet of some 20 Lodestars and promised assistance, provided their own circumstances permitted. In the autumn of 1941, some Lodestars were borrowed, and selected squadrons were practised in the organisation required for moving.

48. A shortage of M.T. in Malaya made the position more serious. Orders for the M.T. required were placed in the U.S.A. but they could not be met in time. There was no M.T. unit in the Command nor were there sufficient spare vehicles to form a Command pool. Individual units were themselves below establishment in M.T.

DEVELOPMENTS IN HONG KONG.

49. No Air Forces were allotted for the defence of Hong Kong. There was a station flight at Kai Tak on the mainland for target towing purposes, but apart from local reconnaissance no war role was envisaged or arranged for this flight.

50. In the summer of 1941, an urgent request was received from Hong Kong pressing for some fighter aircraft because of the great support they would give to civilian morale. This request could not be met. In case it should prove possible later to meet the request for fighter aircraft, a Fighter Sector Control room and Radar Stations were sited and plans were prepared for the provision of a fighter defensive system.

DEVELOPMENTS IN BRITISH BORNEO.

51. Facilities for land planes in British Borneo were confined to one aerodrome and one landing ground, at Kuching and Miri respectively. The former was not large enough for bomber aircraft but its extension was in hand when war broke out. Flying boat moorings were also laid in the river nearby. There were no A.A. defences, but a battalion of the Indian Army, with H.Q. in Kuching, was located in Borneo for the protection of the aerodrome and landing ground areas and the Miri oilfields.

DEVELOPMENTS IN BURMA.

52. As a result of the Singapore Conference in the autumn of 1940 ([para. 6](#)), the findings of which were generally endorsed by the C.-in-C. Far East on his arrival, the Government of Burma co-operated actively in constructing and developing the eight air bases, and additional satellite strips, considered necessary for air operations from Burma. These bases stretched from Mergui on the Tenasserim Coast in a half circle round the Siamese frontier to Lashio in the Northern Shan states. In anticipation of approval, Flight Lieutenant C.W. Bailey, Inspector of Landing Grounds at A.H.Q., had been sent by A.H.Q. to Burma in

November, 1940. He had drawn up plans for extending old, and constructing new, aerodromes. Further, in co-operation with the Government of Burma, arrangements had been made for reorganising the Public Works Department so that it could undertake supervision of construction, which was immediately begun.

53. In March, 1941, H.Q. No. 221 Group (Commander, Group Captain E.R. Manning) was established at Rangoon to develop these bases and to command the Air Forces located in Burma. Although the Group staff was very small, progress was so good that all bases were completed by the end of 1941 with accommodation at each for some 450 all ranks. Facilities for dispersal were reasonable, pens being provided, as were some satellite strips. There was a measure of A.A. protection in the Rangoon area but none elsewhere.

54. Co-operation with the Army in Burma was excellent. Army H.Q. in Burma and No. 221 Group R.A.F. were in close proximity and the G.O.C. and his staff could not have done more to assist the R.A.F. in its preparations. From the outset of planning in November, 1940, the G.O.C. was in the picture of R.A.F. development. The raising and training of aerodrome defence troops was consequently conducted in parallel with construction.

55. During 1940, an air observer system was developed by the G.O.C. under the active direction of the Postmaster-General. From the outset, its functions were made clear and, despite difficulties of training, it developed and operated usefully on the outbreak of hostilities; control of it passed to the R.A.F. on the formation of 221 Group Headquarters. One Radar Station was completed at Moulmein and two others in the Rangoon area were nearing completion when war broke out. A Fighter Control Operations room was designed and constructed in Rangoon.

56. No. 60 (B) Squadron (Blenheim I's) ex India, was located at Rangoon from February, 1941. G.H.Q. considered it important to ensure some measure of fighter defence at Rangoon; consequently, pending the availability of an established fighter squadron, half of No. 60 was re-equipped with Buffalo fighters for the period August-October, 1941, somewhat handicapping the squadron's operational efficiency. As soon as No. 67 (F) Squadron (Buffaloes) in Malaya was fully trained it was transferred to Rangoon; the transfer took place in October, 1941.

Heavy demands on No. 60 (B) Squadron for communication flights occupied much of its flying effort; and although it had a very high standard of flying in monsoon conditions over Burma, it became desirable to transfer the squadron to Malaya to bring it operationally up-to-date in practice. All its aircraft and crews were therefore sent to Kuantan, the new Air/Armament Station of the Command, where they arrived shortly before the Japanese attacked Malaya.

57. In addition there was a flight of six Moths used for training Burma's Volunteer

Air Force. The aircraft of this flight were allotted the role of maintaining communications and carrying out certain limited reconnaissance.

58. A plan was drawn up in co-operation with the Army in Burma, the object of which was to destroy communication facilities in the Siamese Isthmus. Land forces were to advance across the isthmus and conduct a “burn and scuttle” raid on port, rail and air facilities at Prachuab Kirrikand. Their arrival was to synchronise with air attack from Malaya under A.H.Q. arrangements.

59. The question of the Command of the forces in Burma had been raised on more than one occasion. Those who considered it from the angle of India’s defence recommended that control should be by India. A.H.Q. supported the opposite view, namely the retention of Burma in the Far East Command, because it considered that effective co-ordination of the air forces operating from Burma and Malaya in defence of the Far East could only be achieved by unified command. This view was accepted. In the actual event, however, the control of Burma had to pass to India seven days after war broke out – at 0630 hours on 15th December, 1941.

60. Finally, reference must be made to the American Volunteer Group under Colonel Chennault, who was given all possible assistance, particularly in relation to maintenance, training and accommodation. R.A.F. Base, Toungoo, the training aerodrome for the Force, was visited by the A.O.C. and Staff Officers from A.H.Q.; officers who had had fighter experience in Europe were sent to lecture and to assist in training. Excellent work was later done by this Force, in co-operation with the R.A.F., in the defence of Burma.

DEVELOPMENTS IN N.E.I.

Dutch Borneo.

61. In accordance with the mutual reinforcement plan, the Dutch allocated Sinkawang and Samarinda in Dutch Borneo for use as bases for four R.A.F. bomber squadrons. Each of these bases was to be provided with accommodation for two bomber squadrons and to be stocked in peace with supplies peculiar to the Royal Air Force. Their only method of supply was by means of transport aircraft provided by the Dutch, who deliberately avoided making roads to them through the dense jungle in which they were situated, and which thus remained an undisturbed defence. By December, Sinkawang was ready and had been inspected by the C.O. and Flight Commanders of one of the squadrons allocated to it. Samarinda was not ready.

Sumatra.

62. Permission was also obtained from the Dutch in the summer of 1941, to reconnoitre all

aerodromes in Sumatra. This was required because A.H.Q. anticipated that, in the event of war, Sumatra would be required for:

(a) An alternative air reinforcement route from India owing to the vulnerability of the old route to Singapore via Burma and N. Malaya once the Japanese had penetrated into Siam.

(b) Potential advanced landing grounds for operations against the flank of a Japanese advance down Malaya.

The main preoccupation was therefore with those aerodromes which were situated in the Northern half of Sumatra.

63. As the result of this reconnaissance, extensions to the grounds at Lho'nga and Sabang were put in hand to make them suitable for modern aircraft.

64. Assistance was also given to B.O.A.C. to organise facilities at Sabang for the operation of an alternative seaplane route Rangoon – Port Blair – Sabang instead of the normal one via Bangkok.

Java.

65. Visits were paid to Java by a number of staff officers from A.H.Q. who thus gained useful information about Dutch maintenance establishments and resources generally.

DEVELOPMENTS IN INDIAN OCEAN AND BAY OF BENGAL.

66. A memorandum was prepared about June, 1941, and issued by A.H.Q. detailing the bases to be developed in this area; their status was defined and priority of provisioning was laid down. By December, 1941, the position was as follows:-

Andamans and Nicobars – at Port Blair and Nancowrie, moorings and petrol had been laid, and limited accommodation constructed for operating flying boats. Port Blair was also prepared by B.O.A.C., with R.A.F. assistance, as an alternative to the route Rangoon – Penang.

Ceylon – H.Q. No. 222 Group was established, with a joint Naval/Air Ops. Room, at Colombo.

China Bay – one flight of Vildebeeste was located here for target towing and local reconnaissance. This station was being developed as a permanent base for one G.R. Squadron and one F.B. Squadron, the accommodation for which was practically completed.

Ratmalana – Aerodrome was being constructed for one G.R. Squadron.

Koggala – was being developed as the main base for flying boats operating in the

Indian Ocean. Accommodation for one Squadron was nearly ready.

<i>Christmas Island</i>	}	
<i>Cocos Islands (Direction Island)</i>	}	
<i>Maldives (Male)</i>	}	Fuel and moorings had been
<i>Seychelles (Mahe)</i>	}	laid and limited accommodation
<i>Chagos (Diego-Garcia)</i>	}	provided for operating flying
<i>Mauritius</i>	}	boats at each of these places.
<i>Tanganyika (Lindi).</i>	}	
<i>Durban</i>	}	Were being developed as permanent
<i>Mombasa</i>	}	bases for one F.B. Squadron each.

Much credit is due to the Air Ministry Works Department for the great volume of construction which had been carried out in these outlying parts of the Command, as well as for that executed in Malaya, in a relatively short space of time despite many and considerable handicaps.

OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY OF UNITS IN MALAYA.

Intelligence Organisation.

67. In June, 1941, A.H.Q., had no Intelligence Organisation of its own. All air intelligence personnel and records in the Far East had been centralised in the Combined Intelligence Bureau (F.E.C.B.) which functioned under the control of C.-in-C. China Station. Theoretically it served, inter alia, the needs of A.H.Q. In practice, however, its means for obtaining air information throughout the Far East was totally inadequate; its staff was insufficient to cope fully even with G.H.Q. Air Intelligence requirements; and although the information it possessed was always available to A.H.Q., F.E.C.B. had not the means of supplanting the missing intelligence machinery at A.H.Q.

Representations were therefore made by A.H.Q. of the need for a thorough intelligence system throughout the Command. About July, a conference was held with G.H.Q., who wished to create a second Combined Intelligence Centre to serve the joint needs of A.H.Q. and H.Q.M.C. A second joint organisation of this nature would not, however, have been suitable for building up the Intelligence organisation required throughout the Command at all levels from A.H.Q. downwards. This view was accepted.

An establishment for an Intelligence organisation for the whole Command was drawn up and submitted to the Air Ministry, and in late autumn, in anticipation of approval, personnel were made available locally and were appointed to H.Q. and Units. The nucleus organisation thus formed was fortunately in being when hostilities broke out, but its development was backward, and in particular the information it had collated for briefing crews was scanty.

68. According to intelligence current in the Command, the efficiency of the Japanese Naval Air Units was known to be good, but that of their Army Air Units was not high despite the fanatical valour of their personnel.

This wrong assessment of their Army Air Units was partly due to the fact that the system for collecting intelligence throughout the Far East was only sufficient to enable F.E.C.B. to obtain incomplete air information, and the reliability of most of this was far from high. And it was partly due to the fact that A.H.Q., stations and squadrons possessed only the embryonic intelligence organisation already referred to: the result was that such intelligence as the Command received was not effectively digested, promulgated or acted upon.

A particular outcome of this state of affairs, which was destined to have far-reaching consequences in Malaya, was that the personnel of the Command remained unaware up to the outbreak of war of the qualities of the Japanese fighter squadrons, whose Zero fighters were to prove superior in performance to our own fighter's. This naturally affected training in our Squadrons, particularly in the tactics to be adopted by our fighters.

The need for an Operational Training Unit.

69. The Air Ministry had been unable to approve requests made during the year to establish an O.T.U. in Malaya. But in September, 1941, owing to the fact that large numbers of personnel required operational training, A.H.Q. established a makeshift O.T.U. at Kluang from the resources available in the Command. Its role was:-

(a) To train pilots for Fighter Squadrons who had been, for some time, arriving from New Zealand direct from Service Flying Training Schools, and who therefore lacked operational training.

(b) To convert personnel of No. 36 and No. 100 (T.B.) Squadrons from Vildebeestes to twin-engine aircraft in anticipation of their re-equipment with Beauforts.

(c) To train pilots from New Zealand on twin-engine aircraft to fill vacancies in Bomber Squadrons.

Training aircraft were provided, from Wirraways thrown up by No. 21 (F) Squadron when it re-armed with Buffaloes, and by Blenheims borrowed from No. 34 (B) Squadron. The Wing Commander Training at A.H.Q. (Wing Commander Wills-Sandford) was appointed

Commanding Officer. The Unit had to be disbanded on 8th December, on the outbreak of hostilities, but it had completed most valuable work.

Lack of Armament Training Facilities.

70. Up till October 1941, the only armament training facilities in the Command were on Singapore Island, and at an improvised air range near Penang. Maximum use was made of the Singapore ranges, but they were very insufficient to meet requirements. In October 1941, the new Command Armament Training Station at Kuantan was opened, but there was time for one squadron only to complete a course before the outbreak of war.

71. The air firing situation was particularly unsatisfactory. There was an acute shortage of target towing aircraft, and the few available were slow.

Lack of Transport and Communication Aircraft.

72. The lack of transport and communication aircraft was acutely felt during the prewar period when training was all important. G.H.Q. and H.Q.M.C. had frequently to ask for communication flights, aircraft for which had necessarily to be found, mainly by G.R. Squadrons. Although such requests were pruned and co-ordinated, flights were nevertheless sufficiently frequent to interfere seriously with the training of squadrons, many of whose vital flying hours were thus expended. Furthermore, visits to subordinate units by A.H.Q. staff had to be correspondingly curtailed.

Fighter Squadrons.

73. In June-July 1941 a Fighter Group Operational Cadre was formed to take over the training and operation of all fighter aircraft in Singapore: the Senior Officer (Group Captain E.B. Rice) at the same time being appointed Air Defence Co-ordinator, Malaya.

74. The following Fighter Squadrons, with an establishment of 16 I.E. and 8 I.R. Buffaloes, were formed on the dates shown:-

No. 67 (F) Squadron, formed at the end of March 1941. The Squadron and two Flight Commanders to be appointed from U.K., the remaining pilots from bomber squadrons within the Command. Establishments were completed with pilots from New Zealand F.T.S's. The Squadron was transferred to Burma in October 1941, shortly after it had been passed as operationally efficient ([para. 56](#)).

No. 243 (F) Squadron, formed in April, 1941. Personnel were found as in the case of No. 67 Squadron, but a slightly higher proportion were F.T.S. personnel.

No. 453 (F) Squadron, formed October 1941. The Squadron and two Flight Commanders were appointed from U.K. This was an R.A.F. "infiltration" squadron¹ filled from F.T.S's in Australia. Some of the personnel were not entirely suitable for a Fighter Squadron, and the Squadron Commander was in Australia selecting replacements when war broke out.

No. 488 (F) Squadron, formed in October-November 1941. The Squadron and two Flight Commanders came from U.K. This was an R.N.Z.A.F. infiltration squadron and was filled from F.T.S's in New Zealand with excellent material; but their standard of flying on arrival was backward. This squadron had taken over the aircraft on which No. 67 (F) Squadron had trained, and many of these were in poor condition.

No. 21 (F) Squadron, R.A.A.F., which had formed as a General Purpose Squadron in Australia and moved into the Command in 1940, was in October 1941 re-equipped with Buffaloes and converted into a Fighter Squadron, with 12 I.E. and 6 I.R. aircraft. The Squadron had been previously equipped with 2-seater Wirraways, some of which were returned to Australia, the remainder being retained to assist in training Nos. 453 (F) and 488 (F) Squadrons. It will be observed, therefore, that the pilots of this squadron had not been selected originally for fighter aircraft, and some were not in fact entirely suitable for this role.

75. The main role of the Buffalo Squadrons was "day defence" only, primarily of the Singapore area, but night flying training was instituted to ensure that pilots could take off before dawn and land after nightfall.

76. Except for No. 488 (F) Squadron all the above squadrons were considered operationally trained by the outbreak of war. No.488 (F) Squadron was deficient in squadron and flight training and was not passed as operationally ready until the latter half of December 1941. Training and assessment of operational readiness had, however, been based on an under-estimation of the enemy. The tactics thus taught and practised proved unsuitable and costly against the Japanese Navy "O" fighter, which was greatly superior to the Buffalo in performance. Moreover, advanced training had suffered because, prior to the formation of an O.T.U. in September 1941 (see. [para. 69](#)), all pilots had joined their squadrons without having received individual operational training.

77. The standard of gunnery in all squadrons was low because:-

- (a) Towing aircraft were very slow and there were very few of them,
- (b) Cine gun equipment was lacking,
- (c) Continual trouble was experienced with the .5 gun and synchronising gear. This was largely overcome by local modification by October 1941. Nevertheless, pilots were still not confident about their armament when war overtook them.

78. The Buffalo had a disappointing performance. It was heavy and underpowered and had a slow rate of climb. Maintenance was heavy, which meant a low standard of Serviceability. Wastage during training was high, and many of the aircraft in Squadrons suffered from rough handling. The Buffalo had no V.H.F. radio and the maximum range of R.T./W.T. was 9 miles, being frequently less when atmospherics were bad. Intercommunication between aircraft was unreliable.

79. There was one multi-seat fighter squadron in the Command, No. 27, a night fighter squadron equipped with Blenheim I's. Aircraft were old and in poor condition and were thus of limited value in a night-fighting role. Its conversion into a bomber squadron, for which personnel were available, came up for consideration but could not be adopted owing to the need for retaining a night fighter unit.

Observer Corps.

80. In July, 1941, control of an existing Observer Corps system was transferred from the Army to A.H.Q. It had been organised chiefly as part of the civil air raid warning system, and needed a great deal of development for use in an active air defence system. The personnel were enthusiastic, but unfortunately little time was available to train them in their new duties. It was found impossible to establish the necessary Observer Posts in the jungle-clad mountainous country of Central Malaya where there was, therefore, a serious gap in the warning system. Observer Corps Operations Rooms were established at Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, and were linked up to the Dutch system in the Rhio Archipelago to the South, but difficulty was experienced in organising the whole through lack of existing telephone communications in Malaya and to an acute shortage of telephone material and equipment.

Radar Stations.

81. The approved policy of priority for the development of radar facilities was:-

- (a) Singapore Island.
- (b) The East Coast of Malaya.
- (c) Penang and the West Coast.

All Stations were to look seaward with only restricted overland cover behind, the hinterland being covered by the Observer Corps.

82. By December, 1941, four stations were operating – Mersing, Tanah Merah Besar (in East of Singapore Island), Bukit Chunang (S.E. tip of Johore) and Tanjong Kupang (S.W. tip of Johore). A further station, Kota Tingi, in Johore was nearly ready and was being accelerated partly to close the gap down the central portion of Malaya. A sixth, at Kota Bahru, the most northerly point on the East Coast of Malaya, had been built but no radar had yet been installed.

The general position was, therefore, that there was fair cover for Singapore but little elsewhere.

Fighter Operations Room.

83. A Fighter Group Operations Room in Singapore was designed, constructed and occupied by December – almost too late to do more than break the ice of training its staff

and fighter squadrons in the intricate art of fighter defence. It had an operational staff only, no administrative branches: it was in fact an offshoot of the Air Staff of A.H.Q.

Fighter considerations in general.

84. Thus an Air Defence system had been organised by the time war came. Whilst it was by no means as efficient as it would have been if the resources, time and equipment had not been so short, yet it provided Singapore with a scale of defensive effort which was by no means insignificant. Great credit is due to those who achieved this result with so short a time for preparation, outstanding amongst whom was the late Group Captain E.B. Rice.

Bomber and G.R. Land-based Squadrons.

85. There were two light bomber and two landplane G.R. squadrons in Malaya:-

No. 62 Squadron (Blenheim I) – Alor Star.

No. 34 Squadron (Blenheim IV) – Tengah.

No. I (R.A.A.F.) Squadron (Hudson II) – Kota Bahru.

No. 8 (R.A.A.F.) Squadron (Hudson II) – Sembawang.

These two types of squadron, Bomber and G.R., are bracketed together because, owing to the small size of the total force, specialisation was impracticable. Although the Hudson squadrons were the main overseas reconnaissance force, the Blenheims had also to be trained in these duties. Similarly, both types of squadron had to be trained in all types of bombing over the sea and over the land, both by day and by night.

86. From May, 1940, until the Spring of 1941 there had been severe flying restrictions imposed on Blenheim Squadrons owing to the lack of spares in the Command. During this period, hours were restricted to 5 hours flying monthly per I.E. aircraft. In Spring, 1941, selected pilots had to be withdrawn from these squadrons to assist in the formation of the first two fighter squadrons in Malaya.

87. Nos. I and 8 (G.R.) Squadrons R.A.A.F. had reached a higher standard of training, but it was necessary for the Australian Air Board to withdraw crews as they became fully trained and to replace them by untrained crews, the former being required for the further expansion of the R.A.A.F. in Australia.

There was, therefore, in both types of squadron a wide variation between crews in the degree of their training, and especially in their efficiency in night flying, in which a high degree of skill was desirable for operating through the violent tropical thunderstorms which prevail over Malaya at night during the monsoons.

Torpedo/Bomber Squadrons.

88. There were two Torpedo/Bomber Squadrons, Nos. 36 and 100, both based on Seletar,

the personnel of which were highly trained and of long experience. But their aircraft, Vildebeestes, which had a speed of 90 knots and an action radius of 180 miles, were obsolete. With modern aircraft these highly trained squadrons would have been invaluable, especially in the first days of the war. But their approved re-armament programme, with Beauforts, had been delayed by technical complications in production in Australia. In their training more emphasis was placed on the torpedo than the bomb, because their main role was to attack enemy convoys well out to sea. Facilities for them to operate with torpedoes from Kota Bahru had been established.

Flying Boat Squadron.

89. There was one Flying Boat Squadron in the Command, No. 205 Squadron, based at Seletar with a detachment in Ceylon.

90. The squadron did not have sufficient trained crews. When its establishment was raised from 4 I.E. Singapore III's to 6 I.E. Catalinas, no additional crews were available. These were therefore trained by the squadron. One or two trained crews were based in Ceylon for work in the Indian Ocean, where, unfortunately, two crews were lost in accidents in September/October, 1941.

Photographic Reconnaissance.

91. Long-range Hurricanes had been requested for photographic purposes but were not available. In November, 1941, a P.R.U. with 2 I.E. (later raised to 4) aircraft was formed in Singapore with Buffaloes drawn from local resources, and personnel were trained in photographic reconnaissance. By stripping all armament and non-essential equipment and providing additional tankage, the Buffaloes range was increased to 1,400 miles. The formation of this flight proved a most valuable asset to the resources of the Command. Concurrently a Photographic Interpretation Unit was formed.

Malayan Volunteer Air Force

92. The Malayan Volunteer Air Force had flights located in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh and Penang. Its miscellaneous collection of about 30 aircraft comprised two Rapides, one Dragonfly, and a number of Moths and Cadets. Flights were organised for transport duties under A.H.Q., and for communication and reconnaissance in affiliation with Army formations. Moths were fitted with 20-lb. bomb racks and pilots were trained in their use, but none of the aircraft could be fitted with defensive armament. The enthusiasm of the unit was most marked and it made excellent progress.

Elementary Flying Training School

93. An E.F.T.S. had been established at Kallang in 1940 from local resources: instructors and technical personnel were obtained from units stationed in Malaya, and from the

M.V.A.F., whose club aircraft were made available for its use. It did excellent work. A number of pilots were trained by it, some subsequently serving in other theatres of war and some in Malaya.

Signals Organisation

94. Signals organisation was generally backward. There was a shortage of W/T equipment, particularly of mobile sets.

Teleprinter lines existed between A.H.Q. and aerodromes on Singapore Island, but not between A.H.Q. and aerodromes up the peninsula.

There were two telephone lines from Singapore to N.W. Malaya and one to the N.E. and east. These were quite insufficient for joint needs, Army, Air Force and Civil, and all passed through civil exchanges. Secraphones were very few and were apportioned between the services in a strict order of priority.

There was no V.H.F., which limited the effective control of fighters to about 10 miles; this was still further limited by atmospherics during thunder periods.

Centralisation of Work at A.H.Q.

95. Appendices A and C will show how many, and scattered, were the units in the Far East Command and how varied were their duties by land, sea and air: their administrative problems were correspondingly numerous and varied.

A degree of decentralisation of work from A.H.Q. was achieved by:-

(a) forming, in March, 1941, No. 221 Group H.Q., with a small staff in Rangoon, to which all work of formations in Burma was decentralised.

(b) forming, in March, 1941, No. 222 Group H.Q. in Ceylon for controlling flying boat operations based on Ceylon: this Group had no administrative staff, so that A.H.Q. continued to administer direct all its bases throughout the Indian Ocean.

(c) forming, in August, 1941, No. 224 (Fighter) Group H.Q. in Singapore, for supervising fighter training and air defence arrangements within Singapore Island: this Group also had no administrative staff (see [para. 83](#)) so that A.H.Q. dealt direct with its stations and units on administrative matters.

But this was the limit of decentralisation. It resulted in a heavy load of centralised work at A.H.Q. This was particularly felt once the expansion programme began to take effect. It fell heavily enough on Air Staff, but still more so on the Administrative Staff and on that of the Air Ministry Works Department.

The need for an A.O.C. Malaya, with an appropriate staff to whom to decentralise local problems in Malaya, became increasingly apparent during 1941, but it was not found possible to meet this need.

This state of affairs was complicated by a shortage of qualified officers – (see next paras.) – caused by the demands of the war in Europe.

Supply of Officers for Staff and Administrative Duties

96. Officers for filling vacancies on the staff of the greatly expanded A.H.Q. and at the new stations were largely found by enrolling personnel from Australia and New Zealand. More than 140 were obtained from this source. It was possible to give them only a short disciplinary course combined with a brief survey of their duties. Their average age was 45. They naturally varied much in their qualifications. The remainder, more than 50 in number, were obtained by commissioning local business men in Singapore; most of them just before, but some after the outbreak of war in the Far East. For them no training was practicable. The majority of these officers were willing and able, but their value was limited owing to their unavoidable lack of service knowledge, experience and training.

97. Of the regular officers, there were few with Staff experience; and the brunt of the work consequently fell on the few. The work of A.H.Q. was increased by the inexperience of officers at stations, which needed more “nursing” than is normally the case.

98. The strain fell particularly heavily upon the A.O.C., who despite the great increase of work which was caused by the expansion of his Command, undertook much supervisory staff work which he would have delegated to others in normal circumstances. He did so in order to ensure that it was properly carried out. This reacted unfavourably on his health, which was poor even when he arrived. He overtaxed his strength, and was a tired man when war descended on Malaya.

Equipment Problems

99. The equipment position was bad in many important items. Except for Buffaloes there were no reserve aircraft whatsoever in the Command. There was an acute shortage of spares, especially for Blenheims and even more for Hudsons, and also of all tools. M.T. was very short, with an effect on mobility that has already been noted. Small arms were insufficient to arm more than a proportion of R.A.F. personnel. All these were items which were badly needed during 1941 in Europe and Africa, and the requirements of the Far East had necessarily to take second place.

On the other hand, stocks of petrol and bombs laid in with G.H.Q.’s particular assistance were good.

Personnel Problems.

100. The following major personnel problems affected the efficiency of the Command:-

(i) There were no reserve aircrews.

(ii) The strength of the Command in airmen was doubled during the last six months of 1941, but most of these reinforcements came direct from training establishments in the United Kingdom and needed further training. At the same time, a number of time-expired airmen were relieved, with the result that at the outbreak of war three quarters of the strength was new to Malaya.

(iii) A number of the reinforcements were posted to the Command in anticipation of the completion of the expansion programme. They arrived faster than the expansion programme could absorb them. A surplus was therefore built-up, which was employed partly as infantry guards on Singapore Island to relieve the Army of such duties.

(iv) Special courses were organised in musketry and, in the expectation of the defection of native employees, in cooking and M.T. driving.

Other Measures.

101. The following preparatory measures were also put in hand:-

(i) An Air/Sea Rescue Service was organised. It was given six launches, and some light aircraft of the Malayan Volunteer Air Force. It commenced operations in mid-December, 1941, and altogether saved the lives of 24 aircrew. Five of the launches were provided locally.

(ii) A Bomb Disposal Unit was formed in June, 1941, to serve all Services, including Civil Defence.

(iii) Welfare Services were organised. Holiday facilities were provided at Butterworth and Malacca. A fund of 20,000 dollars was raised and used by a central welfare committee. Mobile canteens were made and equipped locally.

(iv) Arrangements were made for hospitalisation and evacuation of R.A.F. sick and wounded; these facilities were provided by the Army everywhere except within the bounds of R.A.F. stations, where they were provided by the R.A.F.M.S.

RELATIONS WITH G.H.Q.

102. The Commander-in-Chief, Far East (Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham) being an Air Force officer naturally took a keen personal interest in the R.A.F.; and relations between G.H.Q. and A.H.Q. were correspondingly close.

103. But G.H.Q., had no administrative staff, only an operational one. It was felt at A.H.Q. that the lack of the former prevented the latter from fully appreciating the day-to-day impacts of the multitude of administrative problems which arise in the subordinate command during the period of preparation for war. Without this full experience the operational staff must have found it hard to grasp in their full significance the difficulties which faced the subordinate command. This statement is made in no critical spirit of

G.H.Q.'s staff, who were sympathetic and helpful about matters which came their way, but merely to disclose the weakness of an organisation which is vested with operational responsibility but which has no administrative branches of its own through which to keep its finger on the pulse of the administrative problems arising at the level of the subordinate command.

104. The difficulty which G.H.Q. experienced in obtaining full and accurate intelligence about air matters in the Far East has already been referred to ([paras. 67 and 68](#)). Its estimation of the Japanese Naval Air Arm was high. Its estimation of the Japanese Army Air Forces was that, although numbers were great and they were known to possess long-range fighters, efficiency was low and that, despite their fanatical bravery, reasonable opposition would turn them from their targets.

105. To turn to the enemy's probable actions. For most of 1941, G.H.Q. was in doubt about the date and place Japan would challenge the Allied position in the Far East. The chance that she would do so early was reduced when in the late summer of 1941 the U.S.A. decided to reinforce the Philippines. Further support for this view came from the Chinese, who, in the early summer of 1941, considered that the next major Japanese effort would be made on the line Hanoi – Kunming to cut the Burma road. Nevertheless, throughout the summer, G.H.Q. stressed the need for pressing on with all preparations necessary for meeting an attack, realising that Japan could strike at her selected moment so long as no British fleet was based on Singapore.

Early in November, 1941, the C.-in-C. re-affirmed the opinion that Japan was unlikely to attack Malaya now that the N.E. monsoon had set in, because the heavy surf, which beats upon the beaches of the East coast of Malaya throughout the season, would make it difficult for assaulting troops to land. It was reckoned that the attack, although possible, was unlikely before February, 1942, by which time the monsoon would be over.

By 22nd November, however, the Japanese intention of further aggression had become clear to the C.-in-C. ([para. 140](#)).

106. Meanwhile, during the autumn, preparations were initiated for giving air support to the Chinese, on the assumption that the next Japanese move would probably be towards Kunming. It was the intention to form an International Air Force, consisting of R.A.F. bombers and fighters and of an American Volunteer Group under Col. Chennault, to operate in South China. Administrative preparations were begun, petrol stocks were sent to the Chinese airfields, and bombs and components were prepared for despatch. Early in November, 1941, an R.A.F. Commission was sent from the Far East to investigate operational conditions: it included several senior staff officers of A.H.Q. and the station commander of Tengah, who were still away when the Japanese landed in Malaya. The project was no small commitment for A.H.Q., as G.H.Q. had insufficient staff to undertake all the detailed planning and administration which would normally have been done at the level of the higher command: much of this had necessarily to be done by the staff of

A.H.Q., which was already insufficient for dealing with its own work ([paras. 96-98](#)).

CO-OPERATION WITH NAVY.

107. A.H.Q. had advocated a combined Naval/Air Operations Room in Singapore to co-ordinate and control the seaward air operations of the Command with the naval forces of the Commander-in-Chief, China Station, but it was decided that such cooperation would be better conducted on a G.H.Q./C-in-C. China Station level. To ensure liaison, however, a Naval liaison officer was attached to A.H.Q., for some months before war broke out: later a Naval air-maintenance officer was added.

108. It was recognised that should a full scale Eastern Fleet be based on Singapore, many detailed arrangements for liaison would become necessary. But a full Eastern Fleet staff could not be assembled owing to a shortage of naval officers; indeed, it was considered unwise to assemble one in Singapore before the situation cleared, namely until a fleet arrived in Singapore and its future role could be estimated.

Five days after the outbreak of war, however, a staff of junior Naval officers was provided for watchkeeping in the Army/Air Combined Operations Room, a step made possible when additional officers were thrown up by the loss of H.M.S. Prince of Wales and Repulse. They proved adequate for subsequent needs, but had the Far Eastern Fleet remained in being in Singapore it would have been necessary to strengthen them in order to provide the close co-operation which would have been then essential.

109. Co-operation with the C.-in-C., East Indies was close, and a Combined Operations Room had been established at Colombo. There was real understanding of the problem facing the R.A.F., particularly the difficulty, owing to shortage of flying boats, of assisting in the control of sea communications in the Indian Ocean. There were never more than two Catalinas, often only one, available in Ceylon for this work.

110. Invaluable memoranda about Naval/Air matters, obtained by G.H.Q. from Coastal Command and other sources, were available at A.H.Q. These were collated and revised to suit local conditions and a Far East Command handbook was printed. It was issued in August, 1941, to R.A.F. Units and Naval Commands for guidance in carrying out all types of operations over the sea.

CO-OPERATION WITH ARMY IN MALAYA.

Close Support.

111. Co-operation with the Army in Malaya had not been highly developed or exercised in the past. No. 21 Squadron, R.A.A.F., when it was equipped with Wirraways, had been regarded in part as an A.C. Squadron, and had carried out some limited exercises with

troops in the field. The methods of co-operation which had been practised were, however, not in line with recent developments in Europe and the Middle East.

112. There was much material available at A.H.Q. of the experience gained in other Commands but, owing to lack of staff, the lessons had not been digested. Active steps were taken to remedy this, and instructions for the joint information of Army and Air Force Units to cover the operations of bombers in support of troops were produced and issued in September, 1941, with the concurrence of the G.O.C., Malaya Command. Similarly, instructions were compiled and issued for joint information to cover the operations of fighter aircraft employed on tactical reconnaissance.

113. Classes were started for training aircrews in Army organisation and tactics. Each bomber and fighter squadron in the Command was affiliated to an Army formation and was allotted so many flying hours per month for combined training. But owing to lack of signals equipment, communications were improvised and primitive, which severely restricted the type of support which could be given.

Aerodrome Defence.

114. For some years before war broke out, considerable difference of opinion had existed between the Army and the R.A.F. about the siting of aerodromes on the peninsula of Malaya. Until 1937 the army's policy had always been to have the East Coast undeveloped as far as possible because insufficient forces were available to defend the long coast-line.

The need then arose for aerodromes on the peninsula well forward of the Naval base at Singapore. Sites for them on the eastern side of the mountainous backbone of the peninsula, hitherto undeveloped, were essential for two reasons. Firstly to obtain maximum air range over the sea to the east, from which direction the threat to Malaya was greatest. Secondly in order to avoid the cloud-covered mountainous backbone which in those days, effectively prevented aircraft based on aerodromes on the west side from operating over the sea on the east, the threatened, side.

Unfortunately there had been insufficient co-operation on the spot in Malaya between the two interests involved, with the result that some of the sites selected were tactically weak to defend. But in the Spring, of 1941 the necessary full cooperation was established between the services on the spot, in this important matter of selecting aerodrome sites.

115. However, those aerodromes that were located in the Singapore fortress area were well sited for defence. They were, furthermore, covered by the fortress A.A. umbrella. Sabotage was regarded as the main threat, particularly during the initial stages of war.

116. The defence of aerodromes on the mainland was a more difficult problem. There were three areas of major importance:-

(i) *N.E. Malaya* – Kelantan aerodromes.

(ii) *E. Coast Malaya* – Kuantan.

(iii) *N. W. Malaya* – Kedah aerodromes.

It was some of these aerodromes which had been sited in tactically weak positions for the reasons given in [para 114](#). Some were even in exposed positions close to favourable landing beaches. The desirability, from an administrative view-point, of selecting sites close to existing communications and sources of labour had contributed to this dangerous situation.

It meant that the Field army on the west coast, down which the main enemy thrust on land was expected to develop, had to make large detachments to protect aerodromes on the east coast.

117. On the east coast, the direct defence of aerodromes was the prime function of the Army. Accordingly, the Brigadiers at Kota Bahru and Kuantan were, by agreement between the A.O.C. and G.O.C., appointed Aerodrome Defence Commanders in their respective areas. The arrangement, with certain safeguards, worked well and resulted in good co-ordination of the resources available for defence.

118. The training, experience, quality and numbers of the forces manning the defences of the aerodromes other than those at Kota Bahru and Kuantan were much under requirements. They were mostly Indian State troops, who had had little opportunity for training in this specialised work. A further handicap was a general paucity of weapons of all kinds, particularly A.A. guns and their equipment.

119. Every effort was made to improve the defences of aerodromes against ground attack. Old tanks, armoured cars and any form of weapons were sought from other Commands and from the U.S.A. H.Q.M.C. did its best, but the men and weapons required could not be made available. Assistance was also given by the Naval Base and later by the Dutch. Financial authority was given by the A.O.C. in the autumn to put in hand urgent work on defence schemes of mainland aerodromes without the necessity for prior reference to A.H.Q.

120. Joint Army and R.A.F. Aerodrome Defence Boards were set up about July, 1941, throughout Malaya to co-ordinate defence schemes; and thereafter care was taken to ensure that the defence aspect was considered at the outset when new aerodrome construction was put in hand.

121. Full instructions were prepared and issued to guide local Commanders in preparing denial and destruction schemes, and arrangements were made for obstructing airfields not in use.

122. The first two major aerodrome defence exercises were held in the late summer in the presence of large numbers of Army spectators for instructional purposes:

one was held at Tengah with the co-operation of Fortress troops, and one at Kluang in Johore with the Australian Division.

123. Finally, in conjunction with A.H.Q. and H.Q.M.C., G.H.Q. produced about this time a handbook on aerodrome defence which detailed the probable scale of attack to which each would be subject, the minimum defences required, and the priority of their provision.

Co-operation with A.A. Defences.

124. During the latter half of 1941, A.A. equipments rapidly increased in number, in Singapore especially, and demands for air co-operation for the training of A.A. crews multiplied accordingly. Special aircraft for the purpose were few, so A.A. defence exercises were combined with other forms of training in order to make full use of flying hours. Nevertheless, this resulted in many flying hours of operational units, which were all too precious for their own training, being expended on this work; yet the A.A. Defence Commander's requirements were never approached.

Photographic Survey.

125. Photographic survey of large areas in Malaya for both the Army and the Civil Government was another commitment which had to be met. It necessitated the allotment and training of a special flight.

Joint Army/Air Planning: Operation "Matador".

126. During July, 1941, a staff conference was held at H.Q. Malaya Command which was attended, it is believed, by representatives of G.H.Q., H.Q.M.C., III (Indian) Corps and A.H.Q. It was called to consider a War Office project for the occupation of the Kra Isthmus by a joint Army/R.A.F. force from Malaya, the object of which was to deny to the Japanese the port and aerodrome facilities in it (which, if exploited, constituted the main threat to Malaya) by meeting and defeating him on the beaches.

127. It was evident that the development of the aerodromes there by the Siamese could only be linked up with the spread of the Japanese over Indo-China and their increasing influence in Bangkok. It appeared obvious that they would soon contain all the facilities required by Japanese aircraft, particularly fighters, which would then be able to support effectively landings in Southern Siam and Northern Malaya. The A.H.Q. representative was consequently in favour, at the least, of a raid to destroy these facilities.

128. The conference finally adopted a plan for seizing and holding the Singora area and "The Ledge" position on the Patani Road, but only if:-

(a) a minimum of 24 hours' start of the enemy was available;

(b) the opportunity occurred during the North-East Monsoon, (October/March), i.e., when

the Japanese would not be able to employ tanks off the roads.

This plan was known as “Operation Matador”. The A.H.Q. representative was strongly pressed to state definitely what squadrons would be available to take part in it, with particular reference to breaking the railway running south from Bangkok, along which it was presumed a Japanese advance would come concurrently with any attack from seaward. An offer was made of a Singapore III flying boat to carry a demolition party to some suitable stretch of railroad near the Siamese coast, but it was not taken up. Otherwise, no definite allotment could be made because of the meagre air strength in Malaya and its many commitments. The force available would have to depend on the situation at the time and on the priority of tasks allotted by G.H.Q. to the R.A.F. as a whole. From the Army point of view this was a most unsatisfactory reply.

129. At this conference the chances of executing this operation successfully appeared remote, dependent as it was upon most accurate timing for forestalling the Japanese in the Singora – Patani area and for doing so without precipitating war with Japan or appearing to be the aggressors. Moreover, there seemed some doubt whether sufficient Army resources would be available to carry it out. However, the benefits deriving from it, if it were successful, were held by G.H.Q. to outweigh the risks involved. Careful and comprehensive plans were therefore drawn up with the Army to move elements of the IIIrd (Indian) Corps by road and rail to Siam, with the R.A.F. supporting from aerodromes in Northern Malaya with such units as the situation at the time permitted.

Control of Army/Air Operations.

130. For the control of operations in support of the Army in the north of Malaya A.H.Q. formed a nucleus Operations Group H.Q. It was designated Norgroup. Its functions were:-

- (i) to command such air forces as A.H.Q. might allot to it from time to time;
- (ii) to advise G.O.C. IIIrd Corps on air matters and to control such air forces as might be allotted to IIIrd Corps. A Combined IIIrd Corps/Norgroup Headquarters was established at Kuala Lumpur with an advanced H.Q. close to Butterworth.

Norgroup Headquarters was formed in July, 1941, was exercised in its functions, and was then disbanded. But it was held in readiness for mobilization when required.

131. On Singapore Island, under G.H.Q. orders, a combined Army/Air Operations Room was constructed alongside A.H.Q. in Sime Road, Singapore. It was ready for use just before war broke out. (As it was very vulnerable the construction of an alternative Operations Room was put in hand.) It functioned at the level of A.H.Q. and H.Q.M.C. Thus G.H.Q. and C.-in-C. China Fleet were not represented in it. Five days after the outbreak of war, however, the latter provided a staff to represent him in it.

SUMMARY OF SITUATION, 22ND NOVEMBER, 1941.

General pre-war situation.

132. Enough has been said to paint a pre-war picture of the Command and, it is hoped, of the vigorous efforts which were made to carry out the expansion programme authorised by the Chiefs of Staff. But the fact remains that by December, 1941, the R.A.F. Far East Command was not yet in a position to fulfil its responsibility of being the primary means of resisting Japanese aggression. The calls of the war in Europe had allowed it to develop only a fraction of the necessary strength.

133. Re-equipment of squadrons had not taken place and was not likely to do so in the near future; Vickers Vildebeestes were still our main striking strength. Buffalo fighters had arrived, it is true, but their performance and armament were disappointing, and inexperienced pilots were still being trained to man them.

134. The aerodromes in Northern Malaya on which so much was to depend, especially during the early stages of the war, had none of the pre-requisites of secure air bases for occupation in the face of the enemy. The number of fighters available was very inadequate for providing effective fighter cover. Both heavy and light A.A. guns were quite insufficient. Dispersal arrangements for aircraft and their protection from blast were not as complete as was planned. And, in the absence of an adequate air raid warning system the aerodromes were open to surprise attack.

135. But the role of the Command remained constant. It was not practicable to alter it.

It was:-

- (a) To find the enemy at sea as far away from Malaya as possible: then
- (b) to strike hard and often,
- (c) to continue attacks during the landing operations: and
- (d) in co-operation with the Army to delay his advance.

While real progress had been made in fitting the Command for its allotted tasks, deficiencies were still apparent in almost every aspect of its functions.

136. The Army in Malaya was also still weak: its additional interim strength considered necessary to ensure security until such time as the air strength had been built up was not present in the Colony. It was over-extended in its dispositions, a state of affairs forced upon it by its many and widely scattered commitments.

137. In a country like Malaya it was not difficult for the enemy to obtain information about our forces. He was well served by a long-established system of agents.

138. For their part the Japanese had already occupied Indo-China. While no certain information could be obtained by F.E.C.B. it was patent that they were building up

their forces there and were preparing operational facilities in Siam. Japanese reconnaissance flights over Borneo and Malaya had become so frequent by October 1941 that a section of Buffaloes had been stationed at Kota Bahru to curb those over Malaya.

Deterioration of the Political Situation.

139. During 1941, relations with Japan became increasingly strained. The attitude of the Siamese Government was doubtful. It professed great friendship for Britain and sent two goodwill missions to Singapore to cement this friendship. Nevertheless, the Japanese continued to reconnoitre Siam and to make preparations for utilising that country as a Base: they accelerated the provisioning of the aerodromes at Singora and Patani, which they also extended to make them suitable for modern aircraft. As November 1941 progressed, evidence of Japanese activities increased until, on 22nd November, 1941, the information at G.H.Q's disposal was sufficient to indicate that Japan was about to embark upon a further major venture in South-East Asia. The resultant action initiated by G.H.Q. is dealt with in Section II.

SECTION II.

NARRATIVE OF OPERATIONS BASED ON MALAYA.

EVENTS FROM 22ND NOVEMBER TO MIDNIGHT 7-8TH DECEMBER, 1941.

G.H. Q. Appreciation of the Situation – 22nd November, 1941.

140. On 22nd November, 1941, G.H.Q. issued their appreciation of the situation. Briefly, this appreciation considered that any further major action by Japan in the near future would take place from South Indo-China against Siam, rather than from North Indo-China against the Burma road. G.H.Q. did not, however, disregard the possibility of Japan making a “gambler’s throw” against Malaya or even against Singapore itself. G.H.Q. concluded that the most likely operation which would be called for on our part in the immediate future would be to the set plan “Matador,” namely an advance by our land forces into South-East Siam. A.H.Q. was accordingly instructed to make all preliminary moves and to be ready to support “Matador” at 72 hours’ notice, and was informed that this support for “Matador” was to take precedence over the preparations then being made for an International Air Force to operate in South China. A.H.Q. was also warned that the full reconnaissance plan for detecting the approach of a sea expedition against Malaya might be ordered later.

141. The Order of Battle of the Far East Command in Malaya at this stage is shown in [Appendix “C”](#).

Action taken by A.H.Q. to implement Operation “Matador”.

142. A.H.Q. immediately adopted the following measures for reinforcing N. Malaya.

(a) Formed Headquarters Norgroup which assembled on 24th November at Kuala Lumpur alongside Headquarters IIIrd Indian Corps. The Commander appointed was Wing Commander R.G. Forbes, Station Commander, Alor Star, in the absence of the Commander designate, Group Captain A.G. Bishop, who was away in South China.(See [para. 106.](#))

(b) Ordered No. 21 (F) Squadron, R.A.A.F., to move to Sungei Patani: move to be completed by 25th November.

(c) Put No. 34 (B4) Squadron (Blenheim IV) at short notice to move to Alor Star.

(d) Made provisional arrangements for the move of No. 60 (B) Squadron aircraft (7 Blenheims) out of Kuantan to Butterworth. This move would be necessary if the reconnaissance plan were to be brought into force because No. 8 (GR) Squadron, R.A.A.F. would require the accommodation at Kuantan for carrying out that plan.

(e) Instituted certain other precautionary measures, including the warning of our fighters at Kota Bahru, Sungei Patani and Singapore of the action they were to take if unidentified aircraft were sighted. Training was allowed to proceed with certain restrictions.

143. Commander, Norgroup, was informed that the following squadrons would support Operation “Matador”:-

(a) No. 62 (B) Squadron (Blenheim I) from Alor Star.

(b) No. 34 (B) Squadron (Blenheim IV) from Alor Star.

(c) No. 21 (F) Squadron, R.A.A.F. (Buffaloes) from Sungei Patani.

(d) No. 27 (NF) Squadron (Blenheim I) from Sungei Patani.

Further G.H.Q. Appreciation – 28th November, 1941.

144. On 28th November, 1941, G.H.Q. informed A.H.Q. of a report received from Saigon that the Japanese intended landing troops in South Siam on 1st December, 1941. G.H.Q. stated that the Japanese had adequate forces to carry out such a move but placed no great credence in the report. They assumed that if such a convoy did leave Saigon it would travel at 15 knots or less and anchor off Nakwan or between Singora and Patani on the S.E. coast of Siam on the morning of either the 30th November or 1st December. G.H.Q. ordered A.H.Q. to despatch air reconnaissances daily with a view to locating this Force, but in view of the danger that the Japanese might, by holding out a bait, induce us to strike the first blow and thus appear to be the aggressors, with consequent loss of American sympathy, stated that “a striking force will not be ordered to attack the convoy if found”. From this day until 3rd December, reconnaissances proceeded without event except that on the 3rd December two large cargo boats were sighted.

145. On 29th November, 1941, the notice for Operation “Matador” was shortened by G.H.Q. from 72 hours to 12 hours.

Assumption of No. 2 Degree of Readiness.

146. On 1st December, 1941, G.H.Q. ordered the Command to be brought to “No 2 degree of readiness”. The promulgation of this degree informed the Command that “the international situation was deteriorating” and brought it into a position to operate at short notice. Inter alia it meant that the full air raid warning system was to be brought into being.

Arrival of Naval Reinforcements.

147. On the 2nd December, H.M.S. “Prince of Wales” and H.M.S. “Repulse” arrived in Singapore as a counter-measure to continued Japanese encroachment in the South-West Pacific. The former wore the flag of Admiral Sir Tom Phillips, the new C.-in-C., Eastern Fleet.

Initiation of full Air Reconnaissance Plan.

148. On 3rd December, 1941, orders were issued by G.H.Q. for the full reconnaissance plan to be put into force on the following day. As a result, in the afternoon of the 3rd, a Dutch group of three flying boats arrived at Seletar in accordance with prearranged plans (see [para. 37](#)). The reconnaissance areas allotted to the Dutch and British respectively were:-

Dutch: Kuantan – Gr. Natunas – Kuching (British Borneo).

British: Kota Bahru – Southern tip of Indo-China – Gr. Natunas – Kuantan.

An extension of the reconnaissance area into the Gulf of Siam as part of routine reconnaissance was not possible owing to a shortage of aircraft.

The task of executing the British section of the reconnaissance plan was allotted to Nos. 1 and 8 (GR) Squadrons, R.A.A.F., based on Kota Bahru and Kuantan respectively. Their effort was reinforced by Catalinas of No. 205 (FB) Squadron to fill in gaps and to ensure overlapping the Dutch.

The initiation of the full reconnaissance plan cancelled the special reconnaissance which had been carried out hitherto, and involved the movement of No. 8 (GR) Squadron, R.A.A.F. from Sembawang to Kuantan. Owing to lack of transport aircraft and inadequate land communications, the ground personnel and equipment of this squadron proceeded there by sea.

Reconnaissance period 4th-6th December, 1941.

149. On the 4th December, owing to bad weather, aircraft at Kota Bahru (No. 1 (GR) Squadron, R.A.A.F.) were unable to operate, but those at Kuantan (No. 8 (GR) Squadron, R.A.A.F.) carried out their part in the reconnaissance plan, as did the Dutch, with nothing to report. Reports of the sightings of strange submarines in the reconnaissance area had been received, so a special reconnaissance was carried out by No. 60 (B) Squadron from Kuantan; but it was negative. On this day a Catalina took Admiral Sir Tom Phillips, Commander-in-Chief Eastern Fleet, to Manila.

On 5th December, 1941, bad weather still prevented No. 1 (GR) Squadron, R.A.A.F., at Kota Bahru operating, but again the Dutch Reconnaissance Group and No. 8 (GR) Squadron, R.A.A.F., at Kuantan gave negative reports. On this day a special anti-submarine patrol was maintained by three Vildebeestes ahead of H.M.S. “Repulse” which proceeded at slow speed en route from Singapore to Australia.

On the 6th December, 1941, three crews were despatched to Sourabaya to collect three Catalinas loaned by the Dutch. The anti-submarine patrol in co-operation with H.M.S. "Repulse" was also maintained.

First sighting of Japanese Expedition – 6th December, 1941.

150. On December 6th Kota Bahru aerodrome was serviceable and the full reconnaissance plan was operated. The N.E. monsoon was blowing; its tropical downpours periodically made unaided navigation and accurate ship recognition matters of considerable difficulty.

A Hudson of No. I (R.A.A.F.) Squadron, Captain F/Lieut. J.C. Ramshaw, was the first to sight the enemy. He located two approaching convoys:-

(a) at 12.12 I Motor vessel, I minelayer and I mine sweeper in a position 185 miles, and on a bearing of 52°, from Kota Bahru, steering a course of 310°.

(b) at 12.46 I battleship, 5 cruisers, 7 destroyers and 25 merchant vessels in a position 265 miles, and on a bearing of 86°, from Kota Bahru steering a course of 270°.

Another Hudson of the same squadron shortly afterwards reported another convoy:-

(c) at 13.00 2 cruisers, 10 destroyers and 10 merchant vessels in a position 260 miles, and on a bearing of 76°, from Kota Bahru steering 270°.

151. Information about the latter convoy was subsequently amplified to the effect that it contained 21 merchant vessels which were cruising in two lines astern. This amplification was received by telephone at A.H.Q. at 1517 hours.

152. The position of the first of these convoys was such that it had the appearance of having recently rounded Cape Cambodia and was now headed N.W. into the Gulf of Siam. The position of the other two convoys was about 80 miles S.S.E. of Cape Cambodia, the Southern tip of French Indo-China; both were steering west, one slightly ahead of the other. They might, or might not, be following the first small convoy and in turn head N.W. into the Gulf of Siam.

One of the Hudsons had been chased by an enemy aeroplane and there could be no doubt that the Japanese knew that they had been spotted.

153. In the meantime, reports were received of aircraft, apparently Japanese, taking photographs at various points. G.H.Q. confirmed that no offensive action was to be taken by fighters against them, although A.A. defences were given authority to open fire on unidentified aircraft.

154. As a result of the enemy sighting reports, Kota Bahru was instructed to send Hudsons from No. I (GR) Squadron, R.A.A.F., to shadow the convoys. Catalinas of No. 205 (FB) Squadron from Seletar were ordered to take over this shadowing from the Hudsons, and to maintain it during the night 6/7th December until relieved by Hudsons again in the morning of 7th December.

155. On receipt of sighting reports, the Command was put by G.H.Q. at “No. I degree of readiness” which meant that it was to be “ready for immediate operations and prepared for enemy attack without prior warning.”

Action taken by A.H.Q. on Enemy Sighting.

156. The following action was taken by A.H.Q. as a result of the reconnaissance reports received:-

- (a) 7 Vildebeestes of No. 36 (TB) Squadron were despatched from Seletar to Kota Bahru. (9 were ordered but only 7 could proceed). Aircraft were armed with torpedoes on arrival at Kota Bahru.
- (b) Norgroup was informed that No. 62 (B) Squadron at Alor Star was removed to A.H.Q. control.
- (c) No. 34 (B) Squadron was retained at Tengah at short notice to move to Alor Star.
- (d) The one Beaufort² still in the Command was moved to Kota Bahru to stand by there for a special photographic reconnaissance required by G.H.Q. (see [para. 162](#)).

Attempts to maintain contact with Enemy.

157. On the afternoon of the 6th December, Hudsons despatched at 1620 hours from Kota Bahru to shadow were unable to contact the convoys, and bad weather prohibited relief aircraft being sent. The first Catalina of No. 205 (FB) Squadron left Seletar at 18.30 hours according to programmes to shadow the convoy during the night.

158. During the late evening of the 6th, scrutiny of reports and records revealed that the Japanese convoys were probably one hour ahead of the positions reported. It was assumed, therefore, that the convoys on rounding Indo-China had turned to the N.W. into the Gulf of Siam, thus passing out of the reconnaissance area (vide [para. 152](#)). This, perhaps, appeared at the time to explain why Hudsons despatched to shadow had not contacted the enemy; visibility conditions, however, had been poor.

159. No reports having been received from the first Catalina despatched to shadow the convoys, orders were issued to a second Catalina, before it took off to relieve the first, that if no contact was established, a search was to be made off the West Coast of Cambodia.

This was done because G.H.Q. considered the convoy had probably anchored at Ko Kong, for which it might be making as the next step towards Siam. The second Catalina left Seletar at 0200 hours on 7th December. After it was airborne it was ordered to keep 10 miles away from the coast of Siam. No report was ever received from this second Catalina, which was afterwards confirmed as having been shot down by the Japanese.

Reconnaissance Plan for 7th December, 1941.

160. For the 7th December, 1941 the Dutch flying boat "Group" and No. 205 (FB) Squadron at Seletar, and No. 8 (GR) Squadron, R.A.A.F., at Kuantan were instructed to continue the set reconnaissance plan covering the more direct line of approach to Singapore in case a further invasion convoy should attack from that direction. Such an attack would have been most dangerous, particularly if it were directed against the beaches in the Mersing/Endau area, where a successful landing would have gravely jeopardised the field army in Northern Malaya and might even have threatened Singapore itself, before the same field army could come to its defence.

But the G.R. Squadron at Kota Bahru was detailed to carry out a special reconnaissance sweep into the Gulf of Siam with the object of re-establishing contact with the Japanese convoys known to be in it.

Vildebeestes were despatched to maintain an anti-submarine patrol ahead of H.M.S. Repulse which had been recalled from Australia.

Events on the 7th December, 1941.

161. Owing to bad weather, it was not until 0645 hours on the 7th that the reconnaissance aircraft from Kota Bahru, of which there were three, were able to take off for a sweep into the Gulf of Siam. Shortly afterwards, owing to rain, low clouds and bad visibility, two of them returned; the third proceeded alone.

162. At 1025 hours the C.-in-C., Far East, visited the Combined Army/Air Operations Room and stated that he:-

- (a) Wished B.O.A.C. to continue using Bangkok until the last possible moment, and confirmed that flights on the 8th December were to go through Bangkok.
- (b) Was considering allowing our aircraft to fire at aircraft not established as friendly.
- (c) Would issue orders shortly for the reconnaissance of Ko Kong anchorage, which he wished the P.R. Beaufort, now at Kota Bahru, to carry out.

163. Shortly afterwards, G.H.Q. issued their orders for the reconnaissance of Ko Kong. The aircraft left Kota Bahru at 1220 hours, but returned at 1445 hours owing to bad weather. During the morning, the Catalina with Admiral Sir Tom Phillips on board returned from Manila.

164. Meanwhile at 1345 hours on the 7th December, A.H.Q. was informed that air reconnaissance from Kota Bahru had sighted a 6,000-8,000 ton cargo vessel in the Gulf of Siam steaming west, and this was followed by a further sighting at 1545 hours, by a Hudson of No. 8 (R.A.A.F.) Squadron, of one other Japanese merchant vessel steering south. This latter vessel was stated to have a large number of men on deck in khaki.

165. Two Hudsons from Kota Bahru were immediately directed on a diverging

search north of that place and 10 miles off the Siamese coast. At 1750 hours one merchant vessel and one cruiser steaming 270° were sighted about 112 miles north of Kota Bahru. The cruiser opened fire on the aircraft. At 1848 hours, under conditions of very bad visibility, four Japanese naval vessels, perhaps destroyers, were seen 60 miles north of Patani steaming south.

166. Owing to subsequent destruction of records, the exact positions of some of the ship sightings mentioned above cannot now be given with any certainty.

Resulting Action.

167. In consequence of these reports, G.H.Q. decided, late on 7th December, not to put "Operation Matador" into effect that night, and issued orders for B.O.A.C. aircraft to avoid Bangkok and to use the West coast route.

168. Conditions at midnight 7th-8th December, 1941 were therefore:-

(a) Contact with the main Japanese convoys located on the 6th had not been re-established.

(b) Conditions for air reconnaissance in the Gulf of Siam had been bad, but in the late evening four ships had been sighted off Singora steaming south.

(c) "Norgroup," with Nos 21 (F) R.A.A.F., and 27 (NF) Squadrons at Sungei Patani, was standing by in support of IIIrd Corps, but Operation Matador had not been ordered.

(d) The following aircraft under the command of the Officer Commanding Kota Bahru were fully armed and ready to take the offensive:-

(i) No. 1 (GR) Squadron R.A.A.F., and one Section (2) Buffaloes of No. 243 (F) Squadron at Kota Bahru.

(ii) Seven Vildebeestes (No. 36 (TB) Squadron), with torpedoes, at Gong Kedah, to which they had been transferred owing to congestion at Kota Bahru.

(e) The remainder of the squadrons were under A.H.Q. control as follows:-

(i) Reconnaissance:-

No. 8 (R.A.A.F.) Squadron at Kuantan.

No. 205 (F.B.) Squadron at Seletar.

Dutch (F.B.) Group at Seletar.

(ii) Bombers:-

No. 60 (B) Squadron at Kuantan (N. Malaya).

No. 62 (B) Squadron at Alor Star (N. Malaya).

No. 34 (B) Squadron at Tengah (Singapore).

No. 100 (T.B.) Squadron at Seletar (Singapore).

(iii) Fighters:- (decentralised to 224 (F) Group for the direct defence of Singapore).

No. 453 (F) Squadron at Sembawang.

No. 243 (F) Squadron at Kallang.

No. 488 (F) Squadron at Kallang.

The Command was at the fullest degree of readiness, but there was no undue alarm owing to G.H.Q.'s view that the Japanese expedition was directed against Siam.

169. A.H.Q. decided to send at first light on the 8th December a coastal reconnaissance to the Lakon Roads, north of Singora, to identify whether or not the Japanese had landed in S.E. Siam as forecast in the G.H.Q. appreciation ([para. 140](#)).

OPERATIONS FROM 8TH TO 23RD DECEMBER, 1941.

Japanese landing at Kota Bahru.

170. At midnight 7th-8th December, the weather at Kota Bahru cleared, but the aerodrome surface was extremely boggy owing to heavy rains. About 0030 hours on the 8th, O.C. Kota Bahru rang up A.H.Q. and stated that three ships had been seen by the beach defences. This message was followed by another at 0100 hours confirming the presence of these ships, stating that shelling was taking place and that Brigade H.Q. were being asked to clarify the situation. On this, A.H.Q. ordered the despatch of a single Hudson with flares to see what was happening. Before this could be done, at 0115 hours definite information came through from Kota Bahru that landing on the beaches by the Japanese had started from 3-5 ships lying three miles offshore.

Orders issued by A.H.Q.

171. O.C. Kota Bahru was immediately ordered to take offensive action with all available Hudsons, and to order the Vildebeestes at Gong Kedah to deliver a torpedo attack at first light. It must be remembered that the orders issued to O.C. Kota Bahru as a result of G.H.Q. instructions ([para. 144](#)) specifically stated that no offensive action would be taken against the convoy when sighted. He could not, therefore, initiate the first offensive action of the campaign without further orders.

172. A.H.Q. also issued orders to Nos. 8 (GR), 27 (NF), 34 (B), 60 (B) and 62 (B) Squadrons to take off at first light and attack shipping in the Kota Bahru area whilst No. 100 (TB) Squadron was ordered to proceed to Kuantan on the following morning and standby for orders.

173. Norgroup was informed that No. 27 (NF) was also to revert to A.H.Q. control, leaving only No. 21 (F) Squadron (R.A.A.F.), for co-operation with IIIrd Corps.

174. The Beaufort at Kota Bahru was instructed to carry out the photographic reconnaissance at first light to Lakon Roads ([para. 169](#))

First Operations against enemy landings at Kota Bahru.

175. At Kota Bahru the first seven Hudson sorties of No. I (GR) Squadron R.A.A.F. had taken off to oppose the landing, and by 0300 hours the two available Buffaloes had been despatched against landing barges entering the river which flows into the sea within the frontage of the beach defences guarding the aerodrome.

176. At 0730 hours on 8th December, the O.C. Kota Bahru gave a resume of the night's operations. 17 Hudson sorties had been carried out, one transport had been destroyed and two others damaged and perhaps sunk. Landing barges en route to the beaches had been attacked and casualties had been inflicted amongst the troops in them. Intensive A.A. fire had been experienced, particularly accurate from a cruiser covering the landing. Two Hudsons had been shot down and a third badly damaged, leaving him still six. One Buffalo had also been hit. The Vildebeestes from Gong Kedah were in the air.

177. Apparently some 8 transports covered by one cruiser and several destroyers had been involved, and O.C. Kota Bahru thought all vessels had now retired to the north. He intended to carry on using the Hudsons for mopping up small craft and beach parties still visible. At 0800 hours, he confirmed that all vessels had retired to the north and that he was mopping up the few small craft left with bomb and machine-gun fire. He added that there had been some infiltration into the Brigade area.

178. Meanwhile the Vildebeestes of No. 36 (TB) Squadron from Gong Kedah, in heavy rain, found the cruiser, delivered an attack with torpedoes which it evaded, and landed at Kota Bahru on their return.

179. Nos. 8 (GR) R.A.A.F., 27 (NF), 34 (B) and 60 (B) Squadrons also arrived on the scene and found little to attack in the area; a signal sent them whilst they were airborne to search further north was not received by all units. One flight of No. 8 (GR) Squadron at least received it but was unable to find the enemy owing to a very heavy rainstorm. Nos. 8 and 60 Squadrons returned to Kuantan, No. 27 to Sungei Patani, whilst No. 34 Squadron landed at Butterworth. All squadrons were ordered to refuel and re-arm.

180. No. 62 (B) Squadron which had also been ordered to attack, not finding any target, proceeded north to Patani to bomb transports there. This squadron (II Blenheim I's) encountered fighter opposition and fairly intensive A.A. fire. It carried out its attack from 8,000 ft. but the results obtained were not seen.

First Air Attack on Singapore.

181. Whilst the first landings had been taking place at Kota Bahru, Singapore had its first air-raid shortly after 0400 hours on the 8th December. Radar detected the approaching raid

at a distance of 130-140 miles from Singapore (giving more than 30 minutes warning). Its approach was promulgated from the Fighter Control Operations Room. Unfortunately the staff of this room was unable to obtain any response from the H.Qs. of the Civil A.R.P. organisation, with the result that the civil population received no effective warning, nor was the Civil Air Defence Scheme put into effective action until it was too late. Some 17 aircraft took part in this raid, the majority of the bombs falling at Seletar and Tengah. At the latter place 3 Blenheims of No. 34 (B) Squadron were damaged and the aerodrome was cratered.

Japanese attacks on Northern Airfields.

182. Between 0730 and 0800 hours, Kota Bahru, Gong Kedah and Machang aerodromes were attacked by bombers and low-flying fighters; except for dummy aircraft, the latter two were unoccupied at the time. These attacks were repeated throughout the day mainly by low-flying fighters, with little effect save in delaying the refuelling and re-armament of aircraft at Kota Bahru.

183. Sungei Patani, Penang and Butterworth in N.W. Malaya were also attacked throughout 8th December by formations of from 27 to 60 bomber aircraft, with serious results. The Japanese used light bombs only, directed against aircraft and personnel; they studiously avoided damaging aerodrome surfaces. Personnel on the spot noted that for the next few days Japanese attacks in this area frequently synchronised with aircraft landing or getting ready to take off. This indicated a leakage of information to the Japanese, but it was never definitely proved that such a leakage actually occurred.

184. There was a particularly serious attack against Alor Star, delivered immediately after No. 62 (B) Squadron had landed after its attack at Patani ([para. 180](#)). The aerodrome was first bombed by 27 Japanese aircraft, which then came down low and machine-gunned aircraft on the ground. As a result No. 62 (B) Squadron had only two serviceable aircraft left.

185. Nos. 21 (F) R.A.A.F. and 27 (NF) Squadrons at Sungei Patani also suffered badly and were each reduced to 4 serviceable aircraft; and in consequence of the repeated low attacks on this airfield both squadrons, with their personnel, were withdrawn to Butterworth. It was later learnt that the guns in the Buffaloes had given trouble and were all unserviceable from lack of solenoids. The serviceable Blenheim fighters of No. 27 Squadron had carried out periodic patrols over N.W. Malaya without result. No 34 (B) Squadron at Butterworth was also seriously reduced.

Ground Situation in N.W. Malaya.

186. Aircraft losses from enemy attack thus gravely weakened the air forces available in N.W. Malaya for supporting the army, where the main enemy advance on land was expected to develop. On the 8th there was little enemy air activity against our own ground

forces, owing to the enemy's concentration on the bombing of our aerodromes.

187. "Matador" had been cancelled during the morning, and the Army was taking up positions forward of a partially prepared line at Jitra. Covering forces were advancing north and north-east from Kedah province: one to make contact along the line of advance from the Singora area, the other (Krohkol) to occupy what was known as the Ledge, an important tactical feature, across the Siamese frontier on the Kroh – Patani road, which protected the communications of the force in North Kedah.

The first of these covering forces made contact with the enemy at 2130 hours on the 8th, at Ban Sadao, ten miles inside Siam. The other (Krohcol) reported some opposition from Siamese forces, but continued its advance.

Enemy landings in Singora and Patani area.

188. At 0915 hours on the 8th December the P.R. Beaufort returned from its reconnaissance of the Lakon Roads ([para. 174](#)). En route, it had been heavily attacked by fighters and landed in a badly shot up condition, subsequently having to be destroyed. The pilot reported verbally that a large concentration of vessels was landing troops in the Singora – Patani area. His photographs were flown back to Singapore by the remaining Buffalo fighter. Shortly afterwards, Norgroup, under orders from IIIrd Corps, despatched 3 Buffaloes of No. 21 (F) Squadron R.A.A.F. on a tactical reconnaissance to Singora. This reconnaissance confirmed the presence of the main convoy in the Singora area and also revealed a force of about 60 Japanese aircraft, mainly fighters, on Singora aerodrome.

Squadrons driven out of aerodromes in N.E. Malaya on 8th December.

189. It is now necessary to return to the Kota Bahru area. Heavy fighting had been going on on the beaches all day, and reserves had been put in to try and regain the beaches by counter attack. At 1245 news was received at A.H.Q. of the landing of further troops from one transport covered by a cruiser and several destroyers. The Station Commander at Kota Bahru had at 1200 hours despatched 4 Hudsons and 3 Vildebeestes to deal with this threat. It transpired later that the report of this further landing was false, but aircraft continued mopping up barges and machine gunning beaches. At 1530 a Hudson from Kota Bahru bombed the railway bridge across the South Golok River west of Kota Bahru, but with doubtful success; the crew, however, observed that the line itself had been partially destroyed already at a point further eastward.

190. Towards 1600 hours reports received at A.H.Q. indicated that the situation on the ground had become serious. The Station Commander reported that penetration had been made up to the aerodrome boundary, and that aircraft and personnel had come under sporadic fire. On his representation A.H.Q. approved the evacuation of the aerodrome. All aircraft were ordered to Kuantan, personnel and stores to proceed by train, whilst the denial scheme was to be put in operation. This was successfully achieved, and 5 Hudsons and 7 Vildebeestes arrived at Kuantan. This withdrawal as far south as Kuantan was

unavoidable because Gong Kedah, the only aerodrome in the Kota Bahru area that might have been used, was virtually undefended and was in a very exposed situation near the coast.

191. During the day, various reports of suspicious vessels off the East coast had been received, necessitating reconnaissances which, however, were all negative.

Summary of situation on the evening of the 8th December, 1941.

192. That night (8th-9th December) the situation was, therefore:-

(a) The Japanese expedition to capture the Kota Bahru aerodrome area was succeeding; and the use of aerodromes in this area was now denied to the R.A.F. Our troops in the area were thus without close air support.

(b) The Japanese main forces were landing unimpeded in the Singora – Patani area, covered by air operations against our aerodromes in N. Malaya. Their advance towards the north-west frontier of Malaya had already begun, and our forward troops had made contact. The shipping at Singora had not been attacked, partly because the aircraft at Kota Bahru were fully engaged locally by the time it was reported, and partly because heavy Japanese air attacks against our virtually undefended aerodromes in N.W. Malaya had seriously reduced the squadrons available on them.

(c) The Japanese Air Force was already operating in strength from Singora aerodrome. From the narrow view point of the Royal Air Force, it was apparent that the cancellation of Operation “Matador” was to have a far-reaching influence on air operations in Northern Malaya.

Air Operations in North West Malaya – 9th December, 1941.

193. In the N.W. aerodrome area, enemy air attacks continued, and early on the 9th No. 62 (B) Squadron was forced to withdraw from Alor Star to Butterworth.

194. To counter these attacks, it was decided to destroy the Japanese fighters based on Singora. Two attacks against this aerodrome were planned. The first was to be made by the aircraft of No. 34 (B) Squadron still located at Tengah, reinforced by No. 60 (B) Squadron, which had by now moved there from Kuantan. No. 34 Squadron was ordered to land at Butterworth, re-arm and take part in the second attack. The second attack was to be made by all available aircraft of Nos. 34 and 62 Squadrons, from Butterworth. A.H.Q. issued orders that both attacks were to be escorted by the maximum strength of Buffaloes from No. 21 (F) Squadron, R.A.A.F.

195. The first attack, consisting of 6 Blenheims of No. 34 (B) Squadron, three of which were manned by crews of 60 (B) Squadron, was made in the early afternoon of the 9th. Heavy fighter opposition was encountered, and 3 of our aircraft were shot down. Results of the attack were not observed, but returning crews claimed that, at least, a congested aerodrome had been hit

196. No fighter escort had been available. No. 21 (F) Squadron, R.A.A.F., had two aircraft serviceable only, which were on tactical reconnaissances for IIIrd Corps. It may be noted here that these aircraft, on the morning of the 9th reported the presence of Japanese light tanks, which were observed at Ban Sadao moving south.

197. The second attack – a mixed force of Blenheim I's and IV's from Nos. 34 (B) and 62 (B) Squadrons – due off from Butterworth at 1700 hours, was never launched. Just before the time of “take-off,” Japanese bombers carried out a high bombing attack followed up by machine-gunning aircraft on the ground. One aircraft only of No. 62 (B) Squadron – Captain, Flight Lieutenant A.S.K. Scarf – took off as the attack was developing; the remaining aircraft on the ground were all rendered unserviceable. Flight Lieutenant Scarf circled the aerodrome until it became apparent that no other aircraft were joining him. He then proceeded to Singora and pressed home his attack. During his approach to the target and subsequent get-away, A.A. fire and heavy fighter opposition were encountered, and Flight Lieutenant Scarf was mortally wounded. This very gallant officer felt unable to make the longer journey back, to Butterworth, but managed to retain consciousness until he reached Alor Star, where he crash-landed without injury to his crew. He died in hospital that evening. He was subsequently awarded the Victoria Cross.

198. As a result of this day's operations against Singora, A.H.Q. decided that no more bombing by day should take place over land until such time as fighter escort could be provided.

Preparations for withdrawal from the N.W.

199. At 0900 hours on the 9th, Adv. H.Q. Norgroup opened at Bukit Martajim (near Butterworth), but it became evident that the evacuation of the N.W. bases could not long be delayed. Up till this time there had been no A.A. defences at Butterworth. Eight Bofors guns arrived on the afternoon of the 9th but their presence was not, of course, any deterrent to high flying bombers.

200. A.H.Q., therefore, issued instructions that all airfields on the mainland to the southward were to be got ready for immediate operational use. At the same time, orders were issued to do everything possible to improve dispersal arrangements at aerodromes on Singapore Island.

Evacuation of Kuantan Aerodrome on 9th December.

201. During the night of the 8-9th there were many reports of further landings on the East coast, fears of which were to persist throughout the brief campaign and cause many hours to be spent on coastal reconnaissance.

202. On the 9th, two pairs of Vildebeestes were sent at 0300 hours to sweep the coast north and south of Kuantan. During the day, 6 Hudsons were employed on similar duties: whilst Catalinas extended the search area into the South China Sea. The remainder

of the aircraft at Kuantan stood by to attack whatever might be found. Confirmation was obtained of the large concentration of ships of all natures unloading in the Singora – Patani area, but no threat of further seaborne attack was discovered although 3 Vildebeestes were despatched on a false report to attack a ship 60 miles east of Kuantan.

203. However, with the destruction of aircraft on the ground in N.W. Malaya in mind it became evident to A.H.Q. that a dangerous congestion of aircraft existed at Kuantan, particularly vulnerable because there was no A. A. protection there at all. Orders were issued to O.C. Kuantan, early on the 9th, to retain 12 Vildebeestes and the 13 Hudsons of Nos. 3 and 8 (GR) Squadrons, R.A.A.F., and to despatch the remainder to Singapore.

204. At noon the expected attack took place, and Kuantan was subjected to its first experience of high bombing, followed up by the bombers flying low and shooting up at will. A.H.Q. thereupon decided to evacuate Kuantan, the surviving 10 Hudsons and 8 Vildebeestes returning to Singapore. The withdrawal of the ground party from Kuantan might have been better controlled. From then on Kuantan was available as an A.L.G. for refuelling only.

Reports of a landing at Kuantan – 9-10th December, 1941.

205. During the night 9-10th, reports were received of a landing north of Kuantan. Six Vildebeestes and 3 Hudsons were ordered to attack. The Vildebeestes found 3 small ships and bombed them with doubtful results, but the Hudsons which arrived later found no target although they prolonged their search of the area past daylight. There is reason to believe that the beaches at Kuantan had been fired on during the night, but that the enemy force was only a light reconnaissance to test the defences, and its size had been magnified in the telling.

206. Further bombing of Kuantan aerodrome on the morning of the 10th added to the uncertainty of the situation and all available bombers in Singapore were put at short notice to await developments. Sharks from the target towing flight carried out reconnaissance of the approaches to Singapore, whilst Blenheim IV's from No. 34 (B) Squadron, using Kuantan for refuelling purposes, continued reconnaissance of the east coast up to 50 miles north of Singora, confirming once more the large concentration of shipping off the Siamese coast.

207. The false report of a landing at Kuantan proved to have a vital bearing on the movements of H.M.S. "Prince of Wales" and H.M.S. "Repulse", and it is now necessary to turn to the events leading up to the sinking of these two vessels.

Sinking of H.M.S. "Prince of Wales" and "Repulse" – 10th December, 1941.

208. The C.-in-C. Eastern Fleet, Admiral Sir Tom Phillips, decided to sail on the 8th December, 1941, with H.M.S. "Prince of Wales" and H.M.S. "Repulse" accompanied by four destroyers, with the object of attacking the concentration of Japanese transports

reported between Singora and Patani. He intended to arrive in the target area at dawn on the 10th December.

209. Before leaving on the 8th December (p.m.) the C.-in-C. asked for the following:-

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

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

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

The A.O.C. gave tentative replies that he could provide (a), hoped to be able to provide (b), but could not provide (c). It was decided that he should go thoroughly into the problems involved and give definite replies to the Chief of Staff, Eastern Fleet (Rear Admiral Palliser), who remained at the Naval Base in close liaison with G.H.Q.

210. The doubt about the reconnaissance required in (b) above was due to the fact that the reconnaissance would have had to be provided by Blenheim IV's based on Kuantan, and it was uncertain whether this aerodrome would be out of action or not.

211. The reason why the fighter protection asked for in (c) could not be provided was mainly that the northern aerodromes were either untenable or else had been badly damaged by bombers; this meant that the fighters would have to operate from aerodromes at considerable distance from Singora, and, owing to the short endurance of the Buffalo, would have been able to remain only a very short time over the Singora area before having to return to refuel. These factors meant that a short patrol might possibly have been provided at intervals at Singora, but that it was impossible to guarantee appreciable fighter protection.

212. On the evening of the 8th December the A.O.C. confirmed his tentative replies to the Chief of Staff, Eastern Fleet, and this information was passed by the latter to the C.-in-C. The signal as received on board "Prince of Wales" expressly stated that no fighter protection could be provided on 10th December, 1941. The words "off Singora" did not appear in the text of the signal, but were implied in the light of Admiral Phillips' request ([para. 209](#) (c)).

213. The agreed air reconnaissances were carried out on both the 9th and 10th December.

214. In the early hours of 10th December a signal was received at Singapore indicating that the Fleet might return sooner than was originally planned. Apart from this no communication was received from the C.-in-C. and his position was unknown.

215. Suddenly, shortly after 1200 hours on the 10th December, a signal,

originating from H.M.S. “Repulse”, was received in the Operations Room at A.H.Q. of enemy air attacks on H.M.S. “Prince of Wales” and “Repulse” in a position some 60 miles Eastwards of Kuantan. No. 453 (F) Squadron (II aircraft), which was standing by specifically to provide protection for these ships in case of their return to Singapore, left six minutes later, only to arrive in the area, 165 miles away, to find destroyers picking up survivors from these two great vessels. For the rest of the day a number of sorties by flying boats and fighters was carried out in connection with the return of these destroyers to Singapore.

216. It subsequently transpired that the Fleet had been located by Japanese reconnaissance p.m. 9th December, and that later the same day the C.-in-C. received news of a landing at Kuantan (in [para. 205](#)). These two events must have decided the C.-in-C. to abandon the Singora operation and to close Kuantan on the 10th December.

217. Had the C.-in-C. notified his change of plan, it is conceivable that A.H.Q. might have moved No. 453 (F) Squadron to Kuantan where it could have stood by at call: R/T inter-communication between the two ships and the squadron aircraft had already been arranged. Some effective support might then have been given. Actually no call for assistance was sent until the Japanese attack had been pressed home, by which time intervention from Singapore was impossible.

218. It also transpired later that the ships had been attacked by a force of high level bombers backed by a large number of torpedo bombers, that both ships had suffered a number of hits by torpedoes and had thus been sunk. The sinking of these two ships was a serious shock to the morale of everybody in the Far East. Their loss, combined with the American losses at Pearl Harbour, gave the Japanese an undisputed command of the sea in Malayan waters. The reactions of this state of affairs upon the subsequent dispositions of air units, with particular reference to the share they were able to take in the land battle, will become clear later in the narrative.

Arrival of Dutch Reinforcements.

219. During the morning of 9th December the three Dutch Bomber (22 Glenn Martins) and one Fighter (9 Buffaloes) Squadrons arrived at Sembawang and Kallang respectively in accordance with the mutual reinforcement plan. It was found that the Dutch bomber crews were not trained in night flying, and so one squadron (9 aircraft) was sent back to the N.E.I. to train; the intention being, on its return, to send back the other squadrons in succession for the same purpose. As A.H.Q. had already decided not to use British bomber squadrons in their bombing role by day until fighter escort or cover could be provided (see [para. 198](#)), it was obviously essential to apply the decision to the Dutch bomber squadrons, particularly as their Glenn Martins were slower and no better protected than the British Blenheims.

Air Forces driven out of Aerodromes in N.W. Malaya.

220. Meanwhile in Northern Malaya it was evident that the main line of advance by the Japanese Army was from Singora across Malaya to the Alor Star area. The advanced troops of the 11th (Indian) Division were still holding a position near the frontier but the vital Ledge position on the Kroh – Patani road had not yet been secured.

221. Bombing of our aerodromes in N.W. Malaya continued during the 10th December and A.H.Q. decided that the area must be evacuated. From Butterworth No. 62 (B) Squadron (reduced to 2 aircraft) was evacuated to Taiping; No. 21 (F) Squadron R.A.A.F. (6 repairable aircraft) to Ipoh, where 8 Bofors guns had by now been installed, leaving No. 27 (NF) Squadron (nil serviceability) still at Butterworth. All the unserviceable aircraft of Nos. 27, 34 (B) and 62 (B) Squadrons which were capable of flying were flown to Singapore for repair.

222. The withdrawal of the ground parties was carried out under difficult circumstances.

Units had been subjected to severe and constant bombing and machine gun attacks on scantily defended aerodromes where they saw no effective means of hitting back, and aircraft were remorselessly destroyed on the ground without replacement. The apparent opportuneness of the enemy's attacks (see [para. 183](#)) and pernicious rumours of disaster in the land fighting added their influence. There was no senior officer at Butterworth with sufficient weight to take control, and some of the personnel of No. 21 (F) Squadron R.A.A.F. and No. 27 (NF) Squadron R.A.F., both of which had already been driven out of Sungei Patani, did not behave at all steadily. Other units, however, maintained their order.

223. The difficulties of all units was intensified by the wholesale, but understandable, disappearance of unenlisted native followers – cooks, M.T. drivers, sanitary personnel etc. – and only improvised arrangements were possible for replacing them by European personnel at the dislocation of the latter's normal work.

The defection of labour spread to the railway area.

224. Withdrawals were nevertheless effected successfully and, in the case of units other than those mentioned above, in good order. It was due to the untiring energy of a small party headed by Flight Lieutenant R.D.I. Scott, who himself drove a locomotive, that much R.A.F. equipment was removed south.

225. In an endeavour to improve repair and maintenance facilities in N.W. Malaya, an R. & S.U. was formed at this time from No. 151 M.U. at Seletar and was ordered to Taiping; on arrival it detached a Mobile Salvage Section to Butterworth to assist in the work of salving material.

226. Meanwhile, during the commencement of the denial schemes at Alor Star on 10th December, the sight of large fires and the sounds of explosions in their rear had

caused some concern amongst our forward troops. Orders were therefore issued to the Commander, Norgroup, that no fires were to be started and no demolitions by explosives carried out. Buildings were to be damaged only, petrol and oil run to waste, and the demolition of aerodromes with the help of explosives was to be left to Corps Royal Engineers to co-ordinate with the operations of our troops.

Scale of Enemy Air Effort.

227. It was computed that on the 8th, 9th and 10th December the Japanese had used a daily average of over 120 aircraft in N. Malaya, mostly against R.A.F. aerodromes. Fighters and some bombers were based on S.E. Siam, the majority of bombers on Indo-China. It was estimated that over 100 aircraft were based in the Singora – Patani area and at least 280 in Indo-China. Types identified were:-

Fighters – Navy “O”.

Twin-Engined Bomber – Navy 96 and Army 97.

Dive Bombers – Junkers 87N (Japanese version).

Formation of War Council, Malaya.

228. On the 10th December Mr. Duff Cooper, whose ministerial duties had taken him to Singapore, formed a War Council, the composition of which was as follows:-

Mr. Duff Cooper, Chairman;

H.E. the Governor of the Straits Settlements;

C.-in-C., Far East;

C.-in-C., Eastern Fleet;

G.O.C., Malaya;

A.O.C., Far East;

and later, Sir George Sansom as being responsible for propaganda and Press control, and the late Mr. Bowden as representative of the Australian Government.

This War Council met daily for deliberation, mainly in connection with the conduct of the war in Malaya.

Events on the 11th December, 1941.

229. On 11th December the squadrons in N. Malaya were not in a position to take offensive action. Coastal reconnaissance, however, to the north of Kuantan by sections of Hudsons, continued. Catalinas extended the search into the S. China Sea, whilst P.R. Buffaloes continued to register Japanese activities of the South Siamese coast. Enemy submarine reports necessitated the despatch of sections of Vildebeestes without result.

230. No. 21 (F) Squadron, R.A.A.F. at Ipoh had no aircraft available for tactical reconnaissance for IIIrd Corps, and so A.H.Q. issued orders that the squadron was to be brought up to strength (16 I.E.) immediately with a proportion of new pilots.

231. Eighty Japanese aircraft attacked Penang Town; no aircraft were available for its protection.

232. On the ground, in addition to advances in the N.E. and N.W., the Japanese had infiltrated down the east coast as far as Trengannu. In the north-west, where the main Japanese forces were advancing, there was considerable pressure on the 11th (Indian) Division, but no major action had been fought. Attacks from the air on our forward troops increased in weight on the 11th, though the enemy air effort was still being expended chiefly on our aerodromes.

233. To assist in the defence of Borneo the Dutch placed at Sinkawang under A.H.Q. operational control one squadron of (9) Glenn Martins and one flight of (4) Buffaloes.

Consideration of Bomber Policy.

234. On the evening of the 11th December it was decided to attack Singora aerodrome once more, the arrival over the objective to be just before first light on the 12th. Eight aircraft of No. 34 (B) Squadron at Tengah were detailed. The attack was unsuccessful: few aircraft got through the bad weather and others were lost as a result of it.

235. This raid was carried out as part of the current policy for bombing Japanese aerodromes in order to reduce the scale of their air activity against our ground forces. The Air Staff at A.H.Q., however, favoured the view that the correct employment of air forces, was in the attack of the shipping and troop concentrations in the Singora area, where the main landing had taken place, and through which reinforcements were still entering. They felt that the time had not yet come to concentrate on cooperation with the Army to delay the Japanese advance on the ground. Furthermore, the resources available for the bombing of aerodromes were not sufficient to produce any real effect on the Japanese effort. This was the view of the A.O.C., but he considered that he could not alter the policy which was selected to meet the wishes of the G.O.C., Malaya, who was anxious that action should be designed to reduce the scale of air attack on our troops. The G.O.C. was approached again at about this time, but reiterated that "bomber policy must give immediate relief to his troops" which, in his view, could only be achieved by bombing aerodromes.(See next paragraph.)

236. *Note by Lieut.-General A.E. Percival.*

"I have no recollection of this approach. In any case I am quite certain that there was no strong difference of opinion on the subject between the late Air Vice Marshal Pulford and myself. I would point out that there had been practically no air attacks on the

ground troops up to that time, so it was very unlikely that I should press for immediate relief of the troops. At the same time I have always held, and still do, that the first essential in any campaign is to obtain some measure of control in the air. By 11th December the Japanese fighters, most of which were based on Singora aerodrome, had established control of the air over Northern Malaya. As long as they held that control the chances of our aircraft doing damage to Japanese shipping and troop concentrations in the Singora area was remote. Before that could be done it was necessary to regain some measure of air control. The only chance of doing this was to destroy a number of enemy fighters on their congested and weakly defended aerodrome. Therefore, if I did press for an attack on the aerodrome, it would have been for that reason and not to provide immediate relief for the ground troops.”

237. The G.O.C.’s point of view was confirmed by G.H.Q. who, on 12th December, issued a War Instruction, the relevant paragraph of which read:-

“For the present, assistance to the 11th Ind. Division is to take precedence over other R.A.F. offensive tasks.”

On the 12th December the C.-in-C. visited A.H.Q and re-emphasised the importance of providing support to the Army in the north-west.

Provision of Support for the Army.

238. On the 11th/12th December the land position in the north-west worsened. The 11th (Indian) Division was attacked in and forced to evacuate the Jitra position, and Krohcol came under heavier attacks. The withdrawal of the latter force would have had grave consequences as it would have exposed the communications of the 11th Indian Division and thus necessitated a general withdrawal out of Kedah province.

239. The only aircraft still available in the area for direct support of the Army were two or three Buffaloes of No. 21 (F) Squadron, R.A.A.F., at Ipoh; the rest of the squadron was being re-equipped at Singapore. The A.O.C. decided, therefore, to send the aircraft and pilots of No. 453 (F) Squadron from Singapore to Ipoh where they would be serviced by the ground crews of No. 21 Squadron. It was intended to return them to Singapore when the rest of No. 21 Squadron had been re-equipped.

240. No. 453 (F) Squadron arrived at Ipoh on the morning of the 13th and began operating from there, using Butterworth as an advanced landing ground. Connection was established with the Observer Corps Operations Room at Kuala Lumpur in the hope of obtaining at least a short warning of attacks upon the station.

241. Operations were vigorously undertaken from Ipoh between the 13th and the 15th December. Japanese convoys were attacked on the road Simpang – Alor Star – Kepala Bantas. Tactical reconnaissances were carried out, and enemy bombers and reconnaissance aircraft in the area were engaged with some success, notably on the 13th

when five enemy aircraft attacking Penang were claimed by the squadron. As a result, it was reported that the morale of our troops sharply appreciated.

242. On the 15th December No. 21 (F) Squadron, R.A.A.F., left Singapore to reinforce Ipoh, but owing to bad weather five aircraft force-landed and crashed and only six aircraft got through.

243. Operations in support of the Army seriously reduced the serviceability of No.453 (F) Squadron, and further losses were caused by the intensive bombing of Ipoh aerodrome, which now started. In consequence, on the 15th December, G.H.Q. issued an instruction that the role of the Ipoh fighter force was primarily reconnaissance for IIIrd Corps: it was not to be used against ground targets, and wastage was not to be made good at the expense of the squadrons allotted to the defence of Singapore. In practice, the squadrons in the north functioned mainly in the defence of the Ipoh area, carrying out such tactical reconnaissance as was required by IIIrd Corps. They continued in this role at Kuala Lumpur, to which enemy air attacks drove them on the 19th December.

Demolition of Aerodromes.

244. The salvage of equipment from aerodromes in north-west Malaya continued. Sungei Patani, Butterworth and Taiping were successively cleared, and all stores and personnel sent back to Kuala Lumpur by road and rail for sorting.

245. Experience was to show that the demolition of aerodrome surfaces had little more than nuisance value, and only slightly retarded the Japanese efforts to bring them into service for their own forces. Speedy repairs were possible because:-

- (a) large stocks of road-metal had been accumulated on each aerodrome for repairs, and it proved too bulky for removal and denial to the enemy ([para. 30](#));
- (b) occupation by the Japanese followed demolition so quickly that the heavy rains had no time to take effect;
- (c) the abundant native labour was forcibly impressed by the enemy for repair work.

Air Forces driven out of North-West Malaya.

246. As early as the 20th December Japanese bombers and fighters were using aerodromes in the north-west, particularly Sungei Patani, and the scale of attack in the Kuala Lumpur area correspondingly increased. By the afternoon of 22nd December these attacks had reduced the combined strength of Nos. 21 (F) R.A.A.F. and 453 (F) Squadrons to four operationally serviceable aircraft.

247. In view of the enemy's great numerical superiority, further attempts to reinforce these squadrons only meant dissipating aircraft from their main role – the defence of Singapore. It was decided, therefore, to withdraw the force to Singapore, and this was done on 23rd December. It meant that operations in support of the Army in the

north-west could be undertaken only by using Kuala Lumpur and other airfields to the south of that place as advanced landing grounds.

248. These two fighter squadrons had been forced to operate under very difficult conditions. Maintenance and servicing facilities had been necessarily primitive, whilst the warning system gave little, if any, notice of attack.

249. However, the unexpectedly high calibre of Japanese aircraft and pilots, and the superior numbers of the enemy, had proved too much for them.

250. Nevertheless, the work of these squadrons had had a good effect on the attitude of our troops to the air, although the number of enemy aircraft shot down was only small.

251. With the withdrawal of the R. A. F. from the north-west, Norgroup was disbanded, and a Liaison Officer was left at H.Q. IIIrd Corps.

Army Situation.

252. While these operations and moves of air forces had been taking place the Army had been compelled to give more ground. On 15th December the Japanese forced the 11th (Indian) Division to evacuate the Gurun position, and threatened to push through the gap between the division and Krohcol. A big withdrawal had therefore to be made out of Kedah province to the Krian river. Penang was thus left isolated and was evacuated on the night of 16th/17th December.

253. Between the 17th and 26th December our forces fought for the Taiping-Ipoh area, preparatory to taking up positions in the Kampar district, which offered the best possibilities for prolonged defence in this part of Malaya.

254. The prospects of stabilising the situation, however, were not good; and as early as 16th December the sole Command reserve, consisting of a Brigade Group, had been committed to the fighting in the north-west.

255. In the rest of Malaya were:-

- (i) A Brigade Group which was in process of being withdrawn from the State of Kelantan.
- (ii) A Brigade Group at Kuantan which was already threatened by Japanese infiltration down the Trengganu coast.
- (iii) A Division (2 Brigades) of the Australian Imperial Forces in Johore, whose particular role was to guard against landings in the Mersing area on the east coast of Malaya.
- (iv) The garrison of Singapore Fortress.

All these formations were either already committed actively or potentially. Adequate reinforcement for the main battle area therefore depended upon the safe arrival of reinforcements from outside Malaya. But before dealing with this aspect it is first

necessary to dispose of some other matters.

Preparations for basing squadrons in the N.E.I.

256. The evacuation of the northern aerodromes had been foreseen, and as this would eventually result in congestion of aerodromes on Singapore Island, A.H.Q. issued orders as early as the 14th December for stocks of bombs together with refuelling and re-arming parties to be sent to aerodromes in Sumatra. Shortly afterwards, two staff officers from A.H.Q. and an officer of the A.M.W.D. were ordered to Sumatra to accelerate work in connection with:-

(a) providing facilities for the transit of reinforcing aircraft;

(b) the operation of bombers from Sumatra, including the selection of a Bomber Group H.Q.

257. For these movements it was possible to call upon an Air Transport service from Singapore – Sumatra – Java which had been instituted by the Dutch Army Air Service. The number and capacity of the transport aircraft were limited, but they enabled the movements to Sumatra to be carried out rapidly. They illustrated the value of transport aircraft. It was considered inadvisable to operate these aircraft in Northern Malaya where little fighter protection could have been provided for them.

258. A warning order was also issued on the 22nd December for moving No. 153 M.U. from Kuala Lumpur to Java. By that date the Japanese had advanced as far south as Taiping, and Kuala Lumpur was threatened. Thus it was felt that the work of the unit could be more satisfactorily carried out in Java.

Japanese Attack on Borneo.

259. It is now necessary to revert to operations off the East coast of Malaya leading up to the Japanese attack on Borneo.

On the 13th December G.H.Q. received information from a reliable source that a large convoy of well over a hundred ships was heading S.S.W. from the direction of Saigon. Its destination was not known for some days. It constituted a serious threat to Malaya, on the east coast of which existed several good landing beaches with little or no defence, where a successful landing would have seriously jeopardised our army formations still closely engaged with the enemy on the western side of the peninsula.

260. Accordingly, reconnaissance activity from Malaya was materially increased, and during the period 13th to 24th December most of the available bombers stood by to attack the enemy convoy in the event of its approach.

261. An average of 2 Catalina, 6 Hudson and 6 Glenn Martin sorties was sent out daily from Malaya to locate the expedition, whilst Dutch Glenn Martins from Sinkawang in Dutch Borneo were similarly employed. On the 14th, 6 cruisers were reported south of

Saigon, and on the afternoon of the 16th a landing was reported at Miri, in British Borneo. The ships in the area were attacked by the Dutch in bad weather on the 17th, 18th and 19th. Hits were claimed on a cruiser and transports, and several near misses against transports.

262. The reconnaissance activity continued, spreading south-east to the Rhio Archipelago, and on the 23rd December an expedition heading towards Kuching was detected. Both Kuching and Sinkawang aerodromes had been attacked by Japanese aircraft on the preceding days, and the former had been “blown”. The Dutch aircraft at Sinkawang were withdrawn to Palembang in Sumatra on the 24th, though before they were transferred they were able to carry out a few attacks against the enemy convoy.

263. This same convoy was attacked on the 24th by 3 Hudsons and also by 5 Blenheim IVs of No. 34 (B) Squadron. Several near misses were claimed but no positive sinkings. A Dutch submarine claimed to have sunk 3 transports and 1 tanker in the area.

Increased Air Reconnaissance activity.

264. Seaward reconnaissance at this time absorbed almost all the G.R. and bomber aircraft in Malaya. In addition to major Japanese expeditions east of Malaya, Japanese forces were still infiltrating southwards down the East coast towards Kuantan; and on the 15th December a flight of M.V.A.F. was established at Kahang to carry out local coastal reconnaissance for the Australian forces in Johore who were responsible for guarding against landings in the Mersing – Endau area. Reconnaissance up the West-coast also became an increasing commitment during the second half of December. Regular reconnaissances were instituted from 22nd December, as the Japanese were already showing signs of infiltrating in small boats by day and night down the West coast behind our Army’s left flank. The discovery and attack of these infiltrations was difficult because the boats moved in waters flanked by luxuriant tropical undergrowth. By day the Japanese protected their movements with fighter patrols.

265. The possibility that the Japanese might spread across from Malaya to Sumatra had also to be faced, thus a squadron of Dutch Glenn Martins at Pakenbaroe in Sumatra were employed on reconnaissance to detect any such movement with effect from 15th December.

Minor Reorganisations.

266. Meanwhile, certain reorganisation of squadrons had taken place. One flight of Wirraways (6) was formed at Kluang on the 18th and training in dive-bombing commenced. The aircrews of No. 60 (B) Squadron were sent back to Burma by sea by B.O.A.C. to join their ground personnel at Rangoon: the squadron’s aircraft were taken over by No. 62 (B) Squadron.

Order of Battle – 24th December, 1941.

267. At this stage of the campaign the disposition of squadrons and their approximate strengths in serviceable aircraft were as follows:-

Bomber Squadrons:

Blenheims	No. 34 Squadron	10	Tengah
	No. 62 Squadron	9	Tengah
Dutch Glenn Martins	Two Squadrons	15	Sembawang
Wirraways	One Flight	6	Kluang

T.B. Squadrons:

Vildebeestes	No. 36 Squadron	16	Seletar
	No. 100 Squadron	13	Seletar
Albacores	One Flight	5	Seletar

Fighter Squadrons:

Buffaloes	No. 21 Squadron R.A.A.F.	}	reorganising
	No. 453 Squadron	}	Sembawang
	No. 243 Squadron	15	Kallang
	No. 488 Squadron	14	Kallang
	Dutch Squadron	9	Kallang
Night Fighter (Blenheims)	No. 27 Squadron	}	reorganising Kallang

G.R. Squadrons:

Hudsons	No. 1 Squadron R.A.A.F.	5	Sembawang
	No. 8 Squadron R.A.A.F.	8	Sembawang
	No. 205 Squadron	4	Seletar

Miscellaneous:

No. 4 A.A.C.U. Swordfish	One Flight	4	Tengah
Sharks	One Flight	4	Tengah
M.V.A.F. (Various)	Recce. Flight	-	Kahang
M.V.A.F. (Various)	Comm. Flight	-	Kahang
Dutch Squadron (Glenn Martins)	One Squadron	9	Pakanbaroe (Sumatra)

Reinforcement Situation

268. From the 8th December onwards many messages had been interchanged between the Air Ministry and the Far East on the subject of reinforcements, which, commencing with a long-range policy of supply, developed, with the steady advance of the Japanese Army, into an emergency arrangement of diverting to the Far East squadrons from other Commands which it was hoped could arrive in time. By the 25th December, the position as understood by A.H.Q. was:-

Hudson II's – 6 arrived from Australia on 25/12 to reinforce Nos. 1 and 8 (GR) Squadrons, R.A.A.F.

Hudson III's – 52 to be flown out from England commencing about 20/12.

Blenheim IV's – 12 from Middle East – 7 arrived by 25/12: remainder en route.

Hurricanes – 51 in crates with 24 pilots en route by sea due on or about 8th January, 1942. These had left England as reinforcements for the Middle East but were diverted to Singapore whilst at sea.

Catalinas – 4 en route with 2 spare crews.

The Plan for their disposition was:-

Hudson III's – to (a) re-equip No. 62 (B) Squadron: and

(b) reinforce Nos. I and

8 (GR) Squadrons R.A.A.F.

Blenheim IV's – to be absorbed into No. 34 (B) Squadron.

Hurricanes – to be used from Kallang and Johore hi defence of Singapore; it was anticipated Buffalo Squadrons would be whittled away by the time these Hurricanes arrived.

Catalinas – One to remain at Ceylon, remainder to reinforce No. 205 (FB) Squadron at Seletar.

Thus some air reinforcements, urgently wanted, were now on their way despite the still critical state of the war in Europe from which they had had to be diverted to Singapore.

NARRATIVE FROM 25TH DECEMBER, 1941, TO 30TH JANUARY, 1942

Changes in Higher Command

269. Before proceeding further with the narrative, it is appropriate to mention some changes in the Higher Command in the Far East which were about to take place during the next few weeks.

On 27th December, General Sir Henry Pownall relieved Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke Popham as Commander-in-Chief, Far East. The former's instructions differed from those of the latter, as described in [para. 3](#). General Pownall was instructed to deal with "matters of major military policy and strategy", but that it was not the intention that he should "assume operational control". These instructions were given before the outbreak of the Japanese war, which occurred however whilst he was en route. As their consequence, the system described in [para. 3](#), under which G.H.Q. was responsible for the control of operations, now came to an end.

270. On 1st January, 1942, the small Fighter Control H.Q. in Singapore was expanded, albeit on a restricted scale. It became known as No. 224 (F) Group. Group

Captain E.B. Rice remained in command. Circumstances, however, did not permit full administration of its units and stations being transferred to it from A.H.Q.

271. On 4th January, Air Vice Marshal P.C. Maltby arrived in Singapore as Chief-of-Staff designate to the newly appointed C.-in-C. Far East. He remained in Singapore to assist the A.O.C., being attached to A.H.Q. on 12th January for the purpose.

To resume the narrative of events

Arrival at Singapore of Reinforcement Convoys

272. With effect from the 26th December, arrangements for the reception of reinforcement convoys at Singapore became of overriding importance, not the least factor being the urgent necessity to maintain the secrecy of their arrival. This was successfully accomplished, it is believed.

273. In view of the importance of these convoys to the defence of Malaya, G.H.Q. issued an instruction on the 27th December that "air protection for convoys bringing reinforcements will now take precedence before the other tasks".

274. Reinforcements were, if anything, more important to the Army even than to the R.A.F. All the fighting since the beginning of the campaign had fallen on the IIIrd Corps, particularly the 11th (Indian) Division, and the troops badly needed a rest; and as the reinforcements contained a complete fresh Division (18th) as well as anti-aircraft regiments, it was vital from the Army point of view that the Air Force in Malaya should do everything in their power to ensure that the convoys got through.

275. Air protection for these convoys was provided by means of widespread reconnaissance sweeps into the S. China Sea, close anti-submarine patrols from the Banka Straits onwards and fighter escort for the final approach to Singapore. An extremely vulnerable part of the route was that which lay through the Banka Straits off E. Sumatra. For the protection of the convoys in this area, the Dutch Fighter Squadron based at Kallang was moved to Palembang on the 29th December, and again on the 9th January. Apart from the fighters, operations for shepherding these convoys, for periods of three days for each convoy, employed at least 2 Catalinas, 6 Hudsons and 4 Glenn Martins daily. In addition, during these 3-day periods, all other available aircraft in the Command were kept at short notice in case the convoys were attacked by enemy naval or air forces. In this situation the absence of effective Naval strength in Malayan waters was aggravated by the insufficiency of air forces to reinforce the Navy, and at the same time to meet the needs of the battle on the land. In these circumstances there was no alternative but to withdraw appreciable numbers of our aircraft, and to make them stand by for the protection of convoys when they might otherwise have been participating in the battle on land.

276. The task was successfully accomplished. The first convoy arrived in Singapore on 3rd January and a second on 13th January. The latter included the first brigade of the 18th Division to arrive. It also contained 51 crated Hurricanes accompanied by more than 20 Hurricane pilots.

It is difficult here adequately to convey the sense of tension which prevailed as these convoys approached Singapore, and the sense of exultation at their safe arrival. The feeling spread that at least the Japanese were going to be held on the ground if not driven back, whilst many confidently expected that the Hurricanes would sweep the Japanese from the sky.

Withdrawal of the Army to Johore

277. But by the time that the first reinforcements arrived the position of the Army had seriously worsened. On the West coast a withdrawal from the strong Kampar position had been forced upon IIIrd Corps by an out-flanking landing at Telok Anson on the West coast.

278. The forcing of a line on the Slim river and further landings in the Kuala Selangor region led to the evacuation of Kuala Lumpur and Port Swettenham on the 10th January; and by the middle of January the bulk of our forces, were back to the northern frontier of Johore, little more than 100 miles from Singapore.

279. On the East coast, the Brigade that had originally held the Kota Bahru area had fallen back, without serious losses, to Central Malaya. The Brigade Group defending Kuantan, which had been attacked from the north on 30th December, had also to be withdrawn to prevent its communications being cut as the result of the West Coast withdrawal.

280. Thereafter, the Japanese on the East coast began to move steadily down towards Mersing. There had been no attacks in this area up to the middle of January, but a major Japanese landing was expected daily.

281. Thus the progress of the Japanese Army was quicker than had been anticipated, chiefly as the result of its possession of an armoured component, its superiority in jungle warfare, its superiority in the air, and its ability to pass parties in boats down the West coast round the left flank of our Army. Infiltrating Japanese frequently got behind our forward troops and formed road blocks on their lines of communication which proved difficult, and sometimes impossible, to clear. Our own demolitions were swiftly repaired or circumvented by the enemy; and in general the speed and aggression of his follow-up came as a surprise.

Co-operation with the Army on the West coast

282. The heavy commitments of the air forces for reconnaissance, convoy protection and

the air defence of Singapore, reduced the number of aircraft available for the direct support of the Army during this period. But, within the limitations thus imposed, air action was carried out on both West and East coasts, increasing in quantity as the battle area came within range of aircraft based on aerodromes in Singapore.

283. In response to requests from H.Q.M.C. and IIIrd Corps, action was taken against Japanese landing parties on the West coast. Daily offensive reconnaissances were carried out by 4 to 6 Glenn Martins or Blenheims, unescorted at first, but later, after 4 aircraft had been shot down in one day, with fighter protection. Five Shark aircraft were moved up to Batu Pahat on 2nd January: they also took part in this type of operation.

284. Barges off Port Swettenham were attacked by Blenheims on the 2nd, 3rd and 4th January: several near misses were observed but no definite sinkings.

285. As Japanese activity against the West coast increased, so, from 15th January, air attacks were made on an increased scale:-

15th Jan. – by 6 Hudsons, 6 Glenn Martins and 3 Blenheims escorted by 12 Buffaloes attacked barges in the Linggi River: two barges were sunk and three damaged by the Hudsons.

16th Jan. – 15 Buffaloes attacked transport and movements on the road Tampin/Gemas whilst 9 Blenheims and 6 Glenn Martins followed by 4 Buffaloes attacked barges in the Muar River where further landings were taking place.

17th Jan. – 9 Vildebeestes escorted by 6 Buffaloes continued attacks on barges in the Muar River, whilst fighter cover was provided for a move by road of the A.I.F. in the area.

18th Jan. – Attacks on barges in the Muar River and on troop concentrations in the Gemas area continued – a total force of 6 Blenheims, 5 Hudsons and 14 Buffaloes being employed.

286. In addition, tactical reconnaissance by one or two sections of Buffaloes was carried out for IIIrd Corps, chiefly in the Seremban – Tampin – Gemas area. Special bombing attacks were carried out by Blenheims on 10th January to destroy trains full of Army stores, which, owing to the congestion and dislocation of the railway system, had been stranded at Malacca. The attacks were at least partly successful, as were others made on 12th January against some oil tanks which had been left intact at Port Swettenham.

287. Part of our offensive effort continued to be made against Japanese-held aerodromes in order to meet the wishes of G.O.C. Malaya for reducing enemy air action against our forward troops, which had been carried out concurrently with attacks against our aerodromes both in Malaya and on Singapore Island and against our road and rail communications behind the battle front.

288. Daily flights over Northern Malaya by our P.R. Buffaloes revealed that aerodromes “blown” in the withdrawal were quickly repaired and occupied. Gong Kedah

was occupied by the enemy on the 31st December, Ipoh on the 4th January and Kuantan on the 9th January.

289. Consequently our aircraft made attacks on aerodromes in Northern Malaya at frequent intervals during the latter part of December and the first half of January. They entailed long flights by night, often in the face of violent tropical thunderstorms. Altogether, between 20th December and 15th January, some eighty sorties were carried out against this type of target. Sungei Patani was attacked six times, Gong Kedah twice, Ipoh and Alor Star once. Good results were achieved by Blenheims of No. 34 (B) Squadron at Sungei Patani on 27th/28th December, photographic reconnaissance on the following day confirming that at least 7 fighters had been destroyed and 5 fighters and 3 bombers damaged.

290. Good results were also obtained at Gong Kedah on 1st/2nd January by Catalinas. These aircraft had by this time largely been withdrawn from reconnaissance work, which was instead carried out by Hudsons, owing to the vulnerability of the Catalina to fighter attack. The range and bomb load of the Catalinas proved very useful for night bombing operations. Twice in January they attacked the main enemy base at Singora, a target which by this time was beyond the range of any other aircraft in the Command.

291. In addition, two attempts were made to carry out strong fighter attacks against Kuantan aerodrome; but tropical thunderstorms on each occasion forced our fighters to return.

292. That these operations inflicted losses upon the enemy is certain. It is equally certain that he had more than sufficient reserves to replace his losses without delay.

Air Activity off the East coast.

293. Off the east coast there was considerable reconnaissance and activity. On 27th December, photographic reconnaissance confirmed the arrival of 34 ships at Singora, which were proved subsequently to have brought a reinforcing Division. Further reports of enemy shipping necessitated sweeps by Hudsons to the Natunas on the 3rd and 4th January.

294. Daily East coast reconnaissances to the north from Endau beyond Trengannu occupied at least 6 Glenn Martins or Hudsons, whilst the M.V.A.F. continued close reconnaissance for the A.I.F. in the Endau – Mersing area.

295. On the 8th January, 9 Glenn Martins and 4 Hudsons bombed and scored direct hits on a ship anchored in the South China Sea, believed to be used by the Japanese as a navigational aid for their aircraft. On 9th January, 9 Glenn Martins bombed with success ships unloading at Kuantan.

296. Meanwhile, Kuantan had been occupied by the Japanese on the 9th January.

Infiltration down the coast towards Endau and Mersing immediately commenced. By the 13th January A.H.Q. became convinced of the possibility of a landing in this vital area, and a general direction was therefore issued to all squadrons governing their action in such a contingency. A daily reconnaissance by 6 Hudsons was instituted to detect the approach of any convoy from Indo-China; reconnaissance northwards up the east coast, although restricted, was still maintained.

Capture of Borneo.

297. Borneo had been lost by this time. Kuching had been captured on 26th December, and its garrison of one Indian Battalion forced to retreat. It was located by our reconnaissance as it made its way to Sinkawang, where supplies were dropped for it by three aircraft on 31st December. Apart from a further reconnaissance on 9th January to ascertain the state of Kuching aerodrome, no further air action in the Borneo area was possible.

Japanese air operations against Singapore.

298. During the first half of January the Japanese extended their air attacks to Singapore Island, directing them mainly against its aerodromes, with the evident intention of neutralising our squadrons. Tengah, on which the Blenheim force was based, received particular attention. Night raids were a constant occurrence, but these were mainly of a nuisance value and little damage was done by them. No. 27 (NF) Squadron, which had been reorganised at Kallang, and which now had 5 Blenheim I's serviceable, was used in an endeavour to intercept these attacks, but without success owing to the poor performance of their aircraft.

299. Day raids by the enemy took place with increasing intensity, at first by bombers alone, and later by bombers escorted by fighters. On the 1st January the first serious attack against Tengah took place, as a result of which native labour disappeared. This was to happen at all aerodromes as they became attacked, necessitating the replacement of domestic personnel by Europeans and making it increasingly difficult to repair damage to aerodrome surfaces. At all Stations on the Island dispersed accommodation was provided for personnel normally quartered at them, mobile kitchens were improvised, and, in the case of Seletar, married families were moved to alternative quarters.

300. Tengah was attacked again on the 6th January, 9th January, 12th January, 13th January and 14th January. On the 15th, the naval base was attacked, and on the 16th, aerodromes and the docks. The 17th was a particularly bad day. Attacks on aerodromes were carried out by escorted bombers, and, under their cover, low flying fighters slipped in and attacked Sembawang and Seletar. At Seletar, 2 Catalinas at their moorings were burned out and another 2 damaged. Six Blenheims at Tengah were damaged to a varying

degree, whilst at Sembawang 3 Buffaloes on the ground were destroyed and 4 damaged. Attacks were carried out by some 80 bombers, of which 2 were brought down and another 4 damaged. The attack was repeated on the 18th against the naval base and the docks, and again 2 were brought down and possibly 6 damaged for the loss of 8 Buffaloes.

301. The absence of a first-class fighter aircraft prior to the second half of January was a handicap. An attempt was made to improve the performance of the Buffalo by reducing its petrol load and replacing the unsatisfactory .5 guns, which were heavy and possessed faulty interrupter gear, by .303 machine guns, but it remained inferior to the Navy O particularly in “dog-fighting”.

302. Moreover, owing to the short warning of enemy raids, our fighters were frequently still climbing to meet the enemy when they were themselves attacked. A warning of at least thirty minutes was required to enable the Buffalo to reach 24,000 feet, which was the height at which the enemy formations often flew. But the successive evacuation of Observer Corps Posts on the mainland as the Japanese advanced, and the inadequate radar cover available, meant that the period of warning was almost always insufficient.

303. The Dutch Fighter Squadron in Singapore was transferred in the middle of January to Palembang ([para 357](#)), leaving only 2 squadrons of Buffaloes – Nos. 243 (F) and 488 (F) – for the defence of Singapore, because Nos. 21 (F) R.A.A.F. and 453 (F) Squadrons based at Sembawang were used primarily for Army co-operation and for escorting bombers operating by day on the West coast. Apart from other handicaps, therefore, defending fighters were outnumbered in the air by the Japanese fighters in varying degrees between 6-1 and 15-1.

304. The A.A. defences of the Island were of limited effect in countering air attacks, Bofors guns gave protection against all but a few surprise low level attacks. But the great majority of the enemy’s bombing was carried out from altitudes of over 20,000 feet, where they were well above the effective range of the 3-in. guns which formed one-third of the heavy A.A. defences. At such heights only the 3.7-in. guns, of which there were only 40 for the defence of the many targets on the Island, could reach them.

Further changes in the Higher Command.

305. At the beginning of January it had been decided by the Allied authorities to unify the command of all their forces in the South West Pacific under a Supreme Allied Commander. General Sir Archibald Wavell was appointed to this post. He arrived in Singapore on 7th January and commenced to form his staff, absorbing into it the Commander-in-Chief, Far East, and his staff. On 11th January he moved to the site selected for his Supreme Allied Headquarters, South West Pacific Command, namely to Bandoeng in Java. There on 15th January he assumed command of operations throughout the S.W. Pacific, and G.H.Q. as such ceased to exist. The code name for General Wavell’s

H.Q. was Abdacom.

306. It is unnecessary for the purpose of this report to describe the organisation of Abdacom. Suffice it to say that it included a department, the code name of which was Abdair, whose head functioned in the dual capacity of Chief-of-the-Air-Staff at General Wavell's H.Q., and of Commander of all the Allied air forces in the S.W. Pacific. This appointment was temporarily filled by Major General Brereton, U.S. Army Air Corps, pending the arrival of Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Peirse, R.A.F., who was appointed to it and who took up the duty during the last days of January.

307. To facilitate control of air operations within the S.W. Pacific Command, the area was divided by Abdair into six Groups, of which only two need be mentioned in this Narrative:-

(i) *West group* – consisting of R.A.F. Far East Command, including Units in Malaya and those in process of being transferred to the Netherlands East Indies.

(ii) *Recgroup* – consisting of all seaward reconnaissance units in S.W. Pacific Command, British, Dutch and American. Its Headquarters was in Java.

Directive to Air Forces in Malaya.

308. On the 18th January Abdacom stressed the importance of Singora as a target and issued a general directive to govern the operations of the Air Forces in Malaya. This directive stated that “protection of convoys at present takes precedence over action against other Japanese forces. If, however, new expeditions are located threatening the east coast of Malaya or endeavouring to pass south of Singapore, all available air effort should be directed to destroying such targets”. The directive also stressed the importance of slowing up the Japanese advance on land by attacking Singora, intervening in the land battle, and of reducing the scale of Japanese air attack.

Relative Strength of Air Forces in Malaya.

309. To carry out efficiently all these tasks was beyond the strength of the Air Forces available. On the afternoon of 18th January, the serviceability state of the Air Forces in Malaya showed 74 bomber and G.R. aircraft and 28 fighters, all based on Singapore with the exception of a small detachment at Kahang. Moreover, many of these aircraft were obsolete or obsolescent. Against these it was estimated that the Japanese were maintaining in Malaya at this time a force of 150 fighters and 250 bombers. Concentration was therefore made, in general, on one task at a time in the order of priority indicated in the directive, but influenced by the situation.

Arrival of Further Convoys and of Air Reinforcements.

310. Special attention, as the directive instructed, continued to be paid to the provision of protection for reinforcing convoys arriving at Singapore. Further convoys came in on

22nd, 24th and 28th January, bringing the remainder of the 18th Division, except for a few units, a Brigade Group from India, two to three thousand troops from Australia, and more anti-aircraft units.

311. Five Hudson sorties were made daily over wide areas around the convoys to detect the approach of Japanese naval forces. One Catalina was maintained on antisubmarine patrol, and during the final approach to Singapore a fighter escort of six aircraft was maintained. All other aircraft were kept at short call as the convoys approached, in case the enemy should attack them.

312. Three reinforcing Catalinas arrived on 7th January and were allotted to No. 205 (FB) Squadron.

313. During the third week in January, the 51 Hurricanes which had arrived on the 13th January ([para. 276](#)), were being assembled preparatory to joining Buffaloes in the defence of the Island. Spares were ample but tool kits were scarce.

314. On their arrival they were immediately unloaded, and the majority dispersed to previously selected concealed positions, where they were erected and wheeled to nearby airfields for test; the remainder proceeded direct to No. 151 M.U. for erection at other dispersed points. The speed with which these aircraft were erected was a very remarkable achievement (see Postscript).

315. Twenty-four pilots from Nos. 17, 135 and 136 (F) Squadrons had arrived with them: some had had experience in the Battle of Britain. When A.H.Q. first heard of their diversion to the Far East, it had been planned to give aircrews a spell before employing them in operations. This spell was obviously desirable, not only because of the length of their sea voyage, but also because of the need for acclimatising pilots to local conditions. However, events had moved too fast and the stake was too high for delay to be acceptable. The Hurricanes had to be used immediately they had been erected and tested. They were in action as a squadron by the 20th January, exactly a week after they had been landed in crates.

316. The aircraft were accompanied by some ground personnel of No. 232 (F) Squadron, deficiencies being made good by personnel from the transit camp. They were based at Seletar and Kallang, and the whole operated as No. 232 (F) Squadron.

317. Sixteen Hudson III's arrived in Singapore from the United Kingdom, the first of them during the third week of January: They were allotted to 62 (B) and No. 8 (GR) R.A.A.F. Squadrons. They came at somewhat scattered intervals, and as long as the air route to the Far East remained open, i.e., until mid-February. The balance of the 52 which had been expected were unable to get through before the enemy cut the air route from India.

318. Two reinforcing bomber squadrons, Nos. 84 (B) and 211 (B) Squadrons, began to arrive on 23rd January from the Middle East. They were diverted to Sumatra, for

reasons which will be related in due course. They, too, arrived at scattered intervals and were far from complete when the enemy cut the air route. Their ground crews and equipment were to follow by sea ([para. 417](#)).

A.H.Q. was notified that a further 48 Hurricanes, over and above those mentioned in [para. 313](#), would be flown into Singapore from H.M.S. Indomitable about the end of January, and that 39 more in crates were en route by sea.

Further withdrawal of the Army – to Singapore Island.

319. Despite the arrival of reinforcements the position on land continued to develop adversely during the second half of January.

320. On the west coast, the Japanese took full advantage of their command of the sea to land behind the Army positions. Between the 16th and 18th January there was a succession of landings on the Johore coast between Muar and Batu Pahat, which, combined with heavy frontal attacks, forced our troops to withdraw to the line Batu Pahat – Mersing.

321. On the East coast, the long expected landing in the Mersing – Endau area took place at Endau on 26th January. The lateral communications available in north Johore permitted a junction between the Japanese forces in the east and west of the peninsula, while a Japanese advance from the Endau area threatened the communications of the main British forces in the west.

322. Our losses in the west coast battle and the new threat from the East dictated a general withdrawal of our forces to Singapore Island itself, a decision which was taken on the 27th January. The withdrawal was achieved in good order. Nevertheless it had been hoped that the arrival of reinforcements would permit the holding of a bridgehead in Johore, but this now proved to be impossible.

Air Action against the Japanese Advance.

West Coast.

323. The Japanese exploitation of their superiority at sea led, on the west coast as well as the east, to a number of air reconnaissances and sweeps being undertaken over the left flank of the Army. Attacks against Japanese-held aerodromes in Central Malaya, were also carried out.

324. On the 19th January the situation at Muar was reported to be serious. Twelve Buffaloes carried out an offensive sweep of the area, using surplus ammunition on barges during their return. The latter were also attacked twice during the day by 3 Hudsons escorted by Buffaloes. That night, 19th/20th January, 9 Vildebeestes bombed the aerodrome at Kuala Lumpur, where some twenty fighters had been observed by Buffaloes

of No. 488 (F) Squadron.

325. On the 20th January two Blenheims made an offensive reconnaissance against shipping off the coast. Later, 6 Buffaloes carried out an offensive sweep of the Muar – Gemas area where the Army reported heavy dive bombing against troops of IIIrd Corps. They met a formation of 6 Army 97's, destroyed one and forced the others to jettison their loads. That evening, at last light, 7 Blenheims bombed and machine-gunned Kuala Lumpur with great success, claiming the destruction of over 20 fighters. 6 Hudsons attacked Kuantan at the same time. These attacks were followed up that night by 24 Vildebeestes, 12 bombing each aerodrome.

326. From the 21st to 24th January, many requests for support of the Army in the Muar area were received, but these were days during which the protection of convoys took precedence, and little was available with which to meet them. On the 21st January, 6 Buffaloes carried out sweeps in the morning and afternoon in the Parit Salong – Batu Pahat area; 2 Albacores and 2 Buffaloes attacked small boats near Batu Pahat; and 2 Albacores dropped supplies successfully for troops who had been cut off, and thus assisted them to extricate themselves.

327. On 22nd January the Japanese were infiltrating from Muar to Batu Pahat. This road was attacked by 2 Albacores, 1 Shark and 6 Buffaloes. More supplies were dropped by Albacores of No. 36 Squadron to troops cut off in the Parit Salong area. That night, 22nd/23rd January, 21 Vildebeestes again bombed Kuala Lumpur.

328. On the 23rd January, 5 Buffaloes patrolled over the withdrawal of troops from the Yong Peng area (N.NE. of Batu Pahat) and engaged 12 Navy 'O' fighters which were harassing them. All available Sharks, Albacores and Wirraways attacked enemy troops on the road leading south from Muar. That night, 23rd/24th, 12 Vildebeestes bombed Kuantan aerodrome.

329. On the 24th January, 6 Vildebeestes attacked troops on the bridge at Labis on the Segamat – Singapore road, whilst 3 others bombed oil tanks left standing at Muar.

330. On the 25th January, 12 Buffaloes carried out sweeps, morning and evening, in the Kluang – Gemas – Batu Pahat area, whilst that night 24 Vildebeestes and 3 Albacores carried out 2 sorties each to cover the sea evacuation of a battalion which had been cut off in the Batu Pahat area. During that day 5 U.S.A. Fortresses from Java bombed Sungei Patani under Abdair direction. At night, 3 Hudsons attacked Kuala Lumpur.

331. By the evening of the 25th January, the airfields at Kahang, Kluang and Batu Pahat became untenable and were demolished, as were also the strips which had been prepared in S. Johore. Their loss was a severe blow, as it had been hoped they would be available for the reinforcing Hurricanes; they had been specially prepared and equipped for that purpose. Seletar, which had now to be used instead, was not so well equipped with dispersal points.

Air Action against the Landing at Endau.

332. To turn to the East coast. On the 26th January, at 0930 hours, Hudson reconnaissance sighted 2 cruisers, 11 destroyers and two 10,000 ton vessels accompanied by barges, 10 miles off the coast approaching Endau. ([para 321](#)). They were being protected by Japanese fighters based on Kuantan.

333. The forces available for opposing them were:-

9 Hudsons of Nos. 1 and 8 (GR) Squadrons, R.A.A.F.

21 Vildebeestes, 3 Albacores of Nos. 36 and 100 (TB) Squadrons.

334. The attack was organised in two waves. The first wave comprised 9 Hudsons and 12 Vildebeestes and was escorted by 15 Buffaloes and 8 Hurricanes; the second, 3 Albacores and 9 Vildebeestes, escorted by 4 Buffaloes and 8 Hurricanes.

335. Unfortunately, as the Vildebeestes and Albacores of Nos. 36 and 100 (TB) Squadrons had been operating throughout the whole of the previous night ([para. 330](#)), the first wave of attack could not be launched until the early afternoon. By this time most of the Japanese troops were probably clear of their transports.

336. However, the first wave, consisting of 9 Hudsons and the Vildebeestes of No. 100 (TB) Squadron, was able to press its attack home, being helped by rather cloudy conditions. 5 Vildebeestes were lost. It was claimed that one cruiser and two destroyers were sunk, both transports were hit (one set on fire), and casualties were caused to troops in barges and on the beaches.

337. With the arrival of the second wave, the Vildebeestes of No. 36 (TB) Squadron, the weather in the area suddenly cleared and enemy fighters intercepted the squadron before it could attack. 6 Vildebeestes and 2 Albacores were shot down and other aircraft damaged and aircrews wounded. Later, 5 Hudsons of No. 62 (B) Squadron from Sumatra arrived in the area and attacked barges.

338. The fighter escort problem had not been easy owing to the slow speed of the T.B. aircraft and the distance of the target from their aerodrome. During these two attacks, 12 Japanese Navy "0" fighters were shot down and 4 damaged for the loss of 2 Hurricanes and 1 Buffalo, one Hurricane pilot personally accounting for 4 Japanese fighters.

339. No. 36 & 100 (TB) Squadrons suffered very heavily. More than half their aircraft were shot down, including those of both Commanding Officers. The remainder were badly shot about, and a number of aircrews in them were wounded. Both were withdrawn to Java on 29th/30th January for reorganisation after their very gallant effort.

Sustained Japanese Air Attacks on Singapore

340. During the second half of January the Japanese carried out air attacks on targets on

Singapore Island with increasing intensity. Two, and sometimes three, attacks were delivered by formations of 27 to 54 enemy bombers escorted by fighters. The main targets were our aerodromes, but a number of attacks were delivered against Singapore harbour, the naval base and other military objectives. Raids were made in perfect formation despite A.A. fire, and the accuracy of bombing from heights over 20,000 feet was marked.

341. This continual pounding made it difficult to keep aerodrome surfaces serviceable. Kallang was built on reclaimed salt marsh, which oozed up through the bomb craters. The drainage at Tengah had never been satisfactory. Effective repairs were thus difficult. Rainfall at the time was exceptionally heavy, which in itself was a further handicap to repair work.

342. To complicate matters further, all native labour, which had many disabilities to face under air bombardment, disappeared. On the 7th January the Director General of Civil Defence had appointed a Director of Labour who was to organise and control all labour, allotting it to the services in accordance with an arranged priority programme.

There was also an acute shortage of M.T., without which labour, and the material for labour to use, could not be transported to the places where it was needed. The collection and allocation of M.T. was also placed under the Director General of Civil Defence.

Both these measures had become acutely necessary – to provide and organise labour in the face of repeated air raids, and in order to make the best use of limited supplies of motor transport.

343. First priority for what labour there was, was given to the repair of aerodromes. The G.O.C. Malaya diverted some of his reserves, at the expense of the construction of defence work, to reinforce R.A.F. labour parties. Later, parties of 100 sailors, survivors from H.M.S. “Prince of Wales” and “Repulse”, were stationed at each of the 4 airfields in the Island.

344. Heavy attacks on our aerodromes on the Island had been anticipated some weeks beforehand by A.H.Q. In order to augment the number of airfields on the Island, six sites for landing strips had been selected, and work on them was put in hand on various dates during the latter half of December. Labour difficulties slowed up their construction, and, as will be narrated later, they had all to be demolished before they could be brought into use.

345. A considerable number of aircraft was destroyed, or rendered unserviceable on the ground largely because dispersal points had not been widely enough scattered in the first instance, whereas, time and labour had not been sufficient afterwards to rectify this shortcoming.

Operations by Fighters in the defence of Singapore

346. During the second half of January our depleted fighter squadrons did their utmost to ward off the enemy's attacks. No. 21 (F) Squadron R.A.A.F. and 453 (F) Squadron were mainly employed in operations in support of the army ([paras. 323-330](#)), leaving Nos. 243 and 488 (F) Squadron in a defensive role. To their assistance now came the newly arrived squadron of Hurricanes ([paras. 314-316](#)).

347. The Hurricanes' first day, 20th January, was most successful. Twenty-seven bombers came over unescorted and 8 were shot down without loss. It appeared as if confidence in their decisive influence was to be justified. This was the last occasion, however, on which Japanese bombers came over unescorted. The following day 5 Hurricanes were shot down, including the C.O., S.L. Landells and a Flight Commander, against no loss to the Japanese.

348. From then on the Hurricanes were constantly airborne, carrying out 3 to 5 "scrambles" daily. Owing to their being constantly outnumbered by the escorting fighters, which were well handled, bombers could seldom be attacked. But with the realisation that "dog-fighting" did not pay, the revised "in and out" tactics adopted gradually gave increasing success.

349. The Hurricane pilots had been informed of the characteristics of the Navy "Os" and particularly warned of the inadvisability of getting involved in "dog-fighting" owing to the Navy "O's" small turning circle. Despite this, some of them had become involved in "dog-fights", which led to casualties.

350. The limitations of the warning system for Singapore have already been described ([para. 302](#)). Some help was obtained at this stage from Army G.L. sets; but the short time of warning, 10-15 minutes, remained a great handicap to efficient fighter defence. Operational control remained restricted owing to the lack of V.H.F. and to the unreliability of R/T.

351. These new aircraft were Hurricane IIs. They were fitted with desert oil filters because their original destination had been the Middle East. These deprived them of some 30 m.p.h. They were not quite so fast as the Navy "O" near the ground, but as height increased the Hurricane gradually overhauled the Navy "O" until at 20,000 feet it had an appreciable advantage in speed and climb. The Hurricane could always dive at higher speeds, but at all heights the Navy "O" was the more manoeuvrable.

352. It must be admitted here that too much had been expected of this handful of Hurricanes. Civilians and the armed forces alike had anticipated that these modern aircraft would carry all before them. That this was not achieved was no fault of the pilots, who under S/L. R.E.P. Brooker, D.F.C., achieved, in the face of overwhelming numbers, results which stand greatly to their credit. Nevertheless the false hopes which had been placed in them reacted keenly when they were not realised.

353. The average daily serviceability of Hurricanes from the 21st January to 28th

January was 16, and by the latter date the position as regards the 51 crated aircraft was:-

17 destroyed (some of them at their bases).

2 repairable at Unit.

7 repairable at Depot.

21 available + 4 more in 24 hours.

On the 29th and 30th January, 20 were available.

354. During this period the Buffaloes of Nos. 21 R.A.A.F. and 453 (F) Squadrons were employed mainly on operations in support of the Army. Nos. 243 and 488 (F) Squadrons had continued in their role, in co-operation with the Hurricanes, in the defence of Singapore. By the 30th January, the number of Buffaloes had so dwindled that all (6) were concentrated in No. 453 (F) Squadron. Nos. 21 R.A.A.F. and 243 (F) Squadron personnel were evacuated, whilst No. 488 (F) Squadron was retained to service the Hurricanes, together with a few of the pilots of all these squadrons to replace casualties.

Effect of Japanese Advance on R.A.F. dispositions.

Decision to Transfer Units to N.E.I.

355. The advance of the Japanese into Johore meant that our aircraft had to operate from the four aerodromes on Singapore Island. Thus a dangerous congestion of aircraft on the ground had come about. The dangers of congestion increased as enemy air attacks steadily grew in violence during January. When expected aircraft reinforcements should begin to arrive from the United Kingdom and the Middle East during January there were prospects of still greater congestion. Dispersal beyond the confines of Singapore Island would then become imperative.

356. During December, the first preparations had been made for operating R.A.F. Units in the N.E.I. ([paras. 256-258](#)). On 4th January No. 153 M.U. was moved to Java, and on 16th January No. 225 (B) Group Headquarters was formed in Singapore and moved to Sumatra two days later in order to make preliminary arrangements for operating bombers from aerodromes in that island.

357. By mid-January it was clear to A.H.Q. that the transfer of Units must be accelerated even though facilities for their operation and maintenance in Sumatra were not yet ready. In accordance with a prior agreement made with the Dutch Army Air Force, that Dutch Units should be moved first, a progressive withdrawal now took place from Singapore:-

19th January – Dutch Buffalo Squadron at Kallang was withdrawn. On arrival in the N.E.I. it reverted to Dutch control. Its main function was to maintain, as requisite, fighter

cover required for future convoys through Banka Straits.

22nd January – 2 Dutch Glenn Martin Squadrons withdrew to Java and reverted to Dutch control.

23rd-27th January – Nos. 27 (NF), 34 (B) and 62 (B) Squadrons, except for small aircraft handling parties, were transferred to Sumatra, as were also the main parties of Nos. I and. 8 (GR) Squadrons, R.A.A.F.

358. Concurrently with the above moves:-

(b) Base Accounts and Record Offices were ordered to Java.

(c) Station H.Q. Sembawang was ordered to Sumatra.

359. Each Unit was instructed to proceed with 30 days' rations, certain barrack stores and 28 days' pack-up of aircraft equipment. All ground personnel proceeded by sea. It will be seen later that, owing to confusion at the Singapore docks caused primarily by bombing, and owing to enemy attacks on shipping en route, the arrangements made for the transfer of our units to the N.E.I. were badly disorganised. Dutch Lodestars helped in these moves. Their assistance was invaluable.

360. When the decision was taken on 27th January that it would be necessary for the army to withdraw to Singapore Island, it became evident at once that one aerodrome only, Kallang, would shortly be available for use. The other three on the Island, Tengah, Sembawang and Seletar, were sited on its northern coastline and would soon be exposed to observed artillery fire from Johore at ranges as close as 1,500-2,000 yards: it would not be practicable to operate aircraft from them for long. Unfortunately Kallang itself was rapidly becoming of limited use. Its surface, a crust of marl laid on a salt marsh, was pock-marked with bomb craters which were most difficult to fill. Extension was impracticable, huddled as it was between the sea and the built-up area of Singapore Town. Consequently, further transfer of squadrons to the N.E.I. now became inevitable.

361. On the 27th January No. 8 (GR) Squadron, R.A.A.F., was sent to Sumatra, and No. 205 (FB) Squadron on the 28th to Java. The latter on arrival in Java, was placed by Abdair under Dutch control as part of Recgroup. No. 205 Squadron left I Catalina at Seletar until the 30th January in connection with the arrival of a further convoy. On the 29th and 30th January the remaining G.R. Squadron (No. 1, R.A.A.F.) was transferred also to Sumatra.

362. Thus by the end of the month the whole of the bomber force had been compelled to withdraw to air bases in Southern Sumatra, where they were now organising with the intention of providing air support from that quarter to the army invested in Singapore.

363. On the 31st January, apart from fighters, there were left in Singapore only 3 Swordfish. They were still under Army control for coast defence spotting purposes, as

H.Q.M.C. at this stage still did not rule out the possibility of a landing from the sea on Singapore Island itself.

Changes in appointments in the Command.

To digress for a moment from the narrative:-

364. With the arrival of reinforcements a reorganisation of senior appointments became practicable in the second half of January.

365. About 17th January Group Captain G.E. Nicholletts replaced Group Captain A.G. Bishop as Group Captain, Operations, at A.H.Q., the latter having been appointed to command the Bomber Group (No. 225) in Sumatra.

366. About 19th January Air Commodore W.E. Staton arrived and began taking the duties of S.A.S.O. from Air Commodore B.J. Silly. His recent and personal experience of air operations over Europe was to prove of great value to the Command.

367. On the 29th January Air Commodores S.F. Vincent and H.J.F. Hunter arrived from the U.K. They had been sent by the Air Ministry as Commanders designate of Fighter and Bomber Groups respectively Air Commodore Hunter was sent to Sumatra on 1st February, to command No. 225 Group which had already formed at Palembang.

368. By the 30th January, owing to the transfer of units to the N.E.I., the A.O.C. decided to make preparations for establishing of a rear A.H.Q., in the N.E.I. Air Commodore Silly was sent to Sumatra as Deputy A.O.C. in order to select its site and begin its organisation.

NARRATIVE – 30TH JANUARY UNTIL THE FALL OF SINGAPORE.

Situation of the Army.

369. It will be remembered that the Army withdrew into Singapore Island on a programme to be completed on 31st January. This was successfully carried out.

Early in February a reinforcing convoy arrived in Singapore. It brought the few remaining units of the 18th Division.

370. But the position of the Army, now invested on the Island, was jeopardised by the presence of four aircraft landing strips which were being constructed to augment the airfields of the Island ([para. 344](#)). There was real danger that the Japanese might use them for establishing airborne troops behind the frontal defences of the Island in order to accelerate the reduction of the garrison, a danger which could only be averted so long as they remained serviceable, by means of large detachments of troops who could not be spared for the purpose. On 30th January it was therefore decided to blow them, and also to

accelerate the obstruction of other open spaces.

Reduction of the Fighter Force in Singapore.

371. This action restricted our fighters to the four main aerodromes of the Island, and negated any possibility of their further dispersal. These aerodromes were under constant bombing, and considerable difficulty was being experienced in maintaining serviceable strips upon them. Further, three of them – Tengah, Sembawang and Seletar – were sited on the northern side of the Island and were therefore likely to be usable for a short time only ([para. 360](#)).

372. On the 30th January, therefore, Sir Archibald Wavell approved A.H.Q. plans to maintain in Singapore only a fighter strength of 8 Hurricanes reinforced by the remaining Buffaloes. It was agreed that the further reinforcing Hurricanes now arriving in H.M.S. “Indomitable” should be based on Sumatra, and from there not only maintain the strength at Singapore but also reinforce it as opportunity permitted.

373. To implement this policy A.H.Q.:-

(a) decided to retain in Singapore for the maintenance of the Fighter Force – an Air Stores Park, a Repair and Salvage Unit and an Ammunition Park.

(b) formed No. 226 (F) Group with H.Q. in Palembang and appointed Air Commodore Vincent the Group Commander. The staff for this Group H.Q. was to be provided partly from the reductions now possible in the Staff of the existing Fighter Group in Singapore and the remainder from H.Q. No. 266 (F) Wing, known to be arriving by sea in the N.E.I.

(c) issued orders for the move to Java of No. 151 M.U. less the repair and salvage party referred to in [para. 358](#) (a).

374. Concurrently with this reduction in strength, General Wavell approved the A.O.C.’s proposal that, consequent on the transfer of the bulk of the strength of the Command to the N.E.I., he should proceed himself with the main body of A.H.Q. to the N.E.I. whence it would be possible to control more effectively the conduct of further air operations. It was intended to leave in Singapore a small advanced A.H.Q. to maintain liaison with H.Q.M.C. H.Q. No. 224 (F) Group was also to remain to control fighter operations.

375. A.H.Q. was reduced in accordance with this plan, personnel being despatched to Palembang in Sumatra for attachment to H.Q. No. 225 (B) Group pending the decision about the site for the rear A.H.Q. which Air Commodore Silly had been instructed to find.

376. On 5th February Abdair expressed disapproval of the transfer of A.H.Q. to the N.E.I., being of opinion that A.H.Q. should remain in close contact with the G.O.C. Malaya, to ensure that future air operations were planned in relation to the best means for the defence of Singapore. The A.O.C., after an exchange of signals with Abdair on the subject, cancelled the transfer on 6th February. He decided to remain himself with A.H.Q.

in Singapore, despite another signal he had received on 5th February which instructed him to proceed temporarily to Java when it was convenient for him to do so: he was badly in need of a rest. But circumstances moved fast, and he declined to go until the last of his subordinates had been evacuated ([para. 394](#)).

377. By the 5th February it had become clear that no suitable site for a Rear H.Q. existed in Sumatra, and so Air Commodore Silly was instructed to proceed to Batavia and take administrative charge there.

378. Not only were personnel and equipment from Singapore now arriving at that port, but also the ground personnel of the reinforcing squadrons. It was also anticipated that the site for a Rear A.H.Q. would best be located in the Batavia area.

Dislocation at Singapore Docks.

379. There was a scarcity of suitable shipping for conveying equipment, particularly M.T., to the N.E.I.: a difficulty aggravated because some vessels had to be loaded at their moorings by means of lighters. Those which did come alongside, of which there were many, deserve great credit. Owing to enemy air bombardment, ships had to be dispersed, which further delayed loading. Air bombardment also caused dock labour to disappear; its replacement by Service personnel could not be on a scale adequate to meet requirements. Conditions at the docks became confused as the scale and intensity of air attack increased. Plans made for the embarkation of personnel and stores were disorganised. Units became split up and personnel became separated from their equipment. Much equipment, urgently required by the Bomber Force in Sumatra, could not be loaded at all. In some instances, owing to air attack, ships sailed before being fully loaded.

Severe losses were inflicted by the Japanese air attacks on ships en route from Singapore during the final 14 days of evacuation. Considerable quantities of equipment including some 200 M.T. vehicles, were lost, all of it urgently needed in the N.E I.

Final Air Operations from Singapore.

380. Except for a small number of Hudson sorties for convoy protection, and a sweep by Buffaloes over the Batu Pahat area on 28th January to cover the evacuation of troops cut off by the Japanese advance, air operations from Singapore itself from the last days of January to the fall of the Fortress were nearly all carried out by fighters for the defence of the Island. Bomber operations from Sumatra for the support of the defence of Singapore are narrated in Section III.

381. An attack was carried out on the night of 2nd February by the Swordfish flight, released by the Army for the purpose, against the aerodrome at Kluang, where the Japanese had by now established a strong fighter force. Subsequently this Flight had to be destroyed, as its aircraft were in no condition to be flown to Sumatra.

382. The P.R. Buffalo Flight, which had functioned almost daily with outstanding success under the command of Squadron Leader Lewis since the beginning of the campaign, finally lost its aircraft by enemy air attacks on the 7th February. This Flight had carried out over 100 sorties, the majority of which had proceeded as far north as Singora. Aircraft were intercepted by Japanese fighters and hit on numerous occasions, although none was shot down. Throughout, no armour or guns had been carried; pilots had relied entirely upon evasion in order to fulfil their missions. The greatest credit is due to them for the valuable work they did.

Final Fighter Operations from Singapore.

383. On the 31st January the fighter strength of Singapore was 8 Hurricanes of No. 232 (F) Squadron and 6 Buffaloes taken over by No. 453 (F) Squadron. The small Buffalo force gradually wasted away and 453 (F) Squadron was evacuated to Java about 4th February. The Hurricanes were maintained from Sumatra at an average daily strength of 10 aircraft. This average was maintained firstly by the arrival on 29th January of No 258 (F) Squadron with 15 Hurricanes. This squadron was one of several which had been convoyed from the Middle East (where they had just arrived as reinforcements from England) to the Far East in H.M.S. Indomitable. They had been “flown off” south of Java and had proceeded by air via Batavia and Sumatra, No 258 thence flying on to Seletar. They had had a long and varied passage from England, involving a sea voyage to Sierra Leone, followed by a long flight across the whole breadth of Central Africa to Port Sudan, where they had embarked in H.M.S. Indomitable. They came into action on 1st February after a delay caused by the necessity for removing all guns to clear them of anti-corrosion grease with which they had had to be protected for the journey. This squadron was relieved by 232 (F) Squadron on 3rd February, also ex H.M.S. Indomitable. The latter remained in Singapore until the withdrawal of the last of our aircraft.

384. These fighters were far too few in number to affect materially the scale of enemy attack. But they put up a stout fight, and throughout the first ten days of February they were almost constantly airborne throughout the hours of daylight, attempting to ward off the constant Japanese attacks.

385. Most of their sorties were for the defence of the Island. Fighter cover was provided on 30th January for the final withdrawal of the Army across the Johore causeway; and a few sorties were also flown against aircraft attacking our troop positions on the Island. On 9th February, the day following the Japanese landing on the Island, Hurricanes took off at the request of the Army and engaged enemy dive bombers, shooting down at least one.

386. A number of patrols were made for convoy protection. One convoy reached Singapore on 5th February. It had been shepherded through the Banka Straits, and during its onward passage towards Singapore, by reconnaissance and protective patrols from

Sumatra. Fighters from Singapore covered its final approach. The “Empress of Asia” was attacked and set on fire, but that was the only loss incurred by reinforcing convoys. They escaped unscathed partly because of the protection they were given, but partly also because, it must be admitted, the Japanese made no very determined attacks against them. In contrast, many ships leaving Singapore during February were heavily attacked and there were many losses amongst them.

387. The devotion to duty of the fighter pilots and of the ground crews who serviced their aircraft and maintained landing strips during these last few days was exemplary. Warning of attack was short, and on occasion the Japanese bombers had dropped their bombs and were withdrawing before our fighters could reach them. But with experience of the enemy’s tactics results steadily improved; and on the final day of operations, (9th February), 6 enemy aircraft were shot down and a further 14 seriously damaged for the loss of 2 Hurricanes and 1 pilot. It was significant that by 5th February the surviving pilots were mostly experienced men who had had previous battle experience before coming to the Far East.

388. On the 4th and 5th February, Seletar, Sembawang and Tengah came under steady observed shell fire, and all operations had then to be carried out from Kallang. The Japanese bombers concentrated their attack on this station, and the landing area was soon so riddled with craters that only by constant and arduous labour was a landing strip 750 yards long maintained in operation. Even so, by 6th February our pilots experienced very great difficulty in avoiding craters when taking-off and landing.

389. On the 10th February, by which time the Japanese were established in strength on the Island, all aircraft were withdrawn to Sumatra. G.O.C. Malaya concurred in this decision, which was also endorsed by C.-in-C. South-West Pacific who visited Singapore the same day. A few Buffaloes were left, owing to their condition, and had to be destroyed.

Results of Fighter Operations in Malaya.

390. Total results of the fighting in the air over Singapore are difficult to assess with any accuracy, as definite confirmation of successes was in most cases impossible. Group Captain Rice, who commanded the Fighter Force during the whole of its operations over Malaya, estimated that 183 Japanese aircraft were destroyed, exclusive of others lost by them during our attacks on their aerodromes.

391. It is felt that this claim may be excessive, though, not by much. Reports which have been received from all sources appear to establish that the Buffalo Squadrons shot down a total of 30 Japanese aircraft: others were damaged and a proportion of them probably crashed during their return to base.

It is probable that the Hurricane force destroyed, or so seriously damaged that they failed to return to base, a total of 100 Japanese aircraft. For this total, 45 Hurricanes were

lost from all causes, including flying accidents and enemy air bombardment. In view of the odds which were faced these figures speak for themselves.

Final transfer of R.A.F. to Sumatra.

392. On 8th February the Japanese launched their attack on Singapore Island and rapidly obtained a firm foothold. It now became essential to transfer A.H.Q. to Sumatra in order to take control of the Command, whose combatant units were already there, for the purpose of carrying on the fight in the N E.I.

A nucleus staff, including the S.A.S.O. (Air Commodore Staton) proceeded by air to Palembang on 10th February by order of the A.O.C.

Sir Archibald Wavell again visited Singapore the same day, 10th February. He ordered the immediate evacuation to the N.E.I. of all remaining R.A.F. personnel, which was commenced the following day. At the same time he instructed Air Vice Marshal Maltby, hitherto Assistant A.O.C. at A.H.Q., to take charge in the N.E.I. as soon as possible, that officer proceeding there by air the same afternoon accompanied by an addition to the nucleus staff which had preceded him. He was appointed by Abdair A.O.C. Westgroup in the N.E.I. with effect from 11th February.

393. Aerodrome surfaces were ploughed up. Bomb components, large stocks of petrol and much equipment which could not be got away was destroyed or rendered ineffective. But the volume of the whole was so great that neither time nor circumstances permitted its transfer or destruction, particularly a large quantity salvaged from Malaya which was housed in the town of Singapore where its destruction by fire was impossible. Special action was taken to destroy secret equipment e.g. radar apparatus, signals installations etc. It is believed that little of immediate value to the enemy was left to him.

394. On 13th February Air Vice Marshal Pulford, who had declined to leave until all R.A.F. personnel, who could be, had been evacuated, left Singapore. He did so at General Percival's instigation. He accompanied a party under the orders of Admiral Spooner, R.A. Malaya. When they sailed they were unaware that the Japanese fleet had interposed itself between Singapore and their destination, which was probably Batavia in Java. They were detected, attacked from the air and their boat was stranded on an island of the Tuju or Seven Islands Group some 30 miles north of Banka Island. There the whole party, some 40 in number, lived as best they could, the fishermen inhabitants having deserted it. It was malarial, unhealthy and contained little food. The party had few stores, practically no medicines and no doctor. After remaining at large for more than two months the survivors were compelled to surrender. By then 18 had died, including Air Vice Marshal Pulford and Rear Admiral Spooner. The remainder were in a bad way. Thus it was that these gallant officers lost their lives and that the former was unable to rejoin his Command in the N.E.I.

Fall of Singapore.

395. On the 15th February Singapore Fortress was compelled to surrender.

SECTION III.

SUMMARY OF OPERATIONS BASED ON SUMATRA.

INTRODUCTION.

396. As has already been narrated in [Section II](#) of this Report, by the 16th January, 1942, all Air Force units in Malaya had been driven back to Singapore Island. Even with the existing strength, aerodromes on the island were already congested, they would become more congested when reinforcements, now well on their way, arrived. The scale of Japanese air attack against these aerodromes was increasing. It had become imperative to disperse more widely. Extra elbow room was particularly desirable because H.M.S. “Indomitable”, with 48 Hurricanes on board, was due to arrive at the end of January. If bomber units could be transferred to Sumatra, not only would they be dispersed more safely, but fighter squadrons could then be distributed to all the aerodromes in Singapore. It was not realised at the time how soon three of those aerodromes – Tengah, Sembawang and Seletar – would become untenable ([para. 360](#)).

General Conditions in Sumatra.

397. Sumatra, an island nearly 1,000 miles long, lies west of and runs parallel to the west coast of Malaya, but extends far to the southward. Its main features are a mountain range running down the west coast throughout the whole length of the island, and a relatively low-lying belt of country eastward of it, consisting mainly of jungle and swamp, which is intersected by many rivers with a west to east trend. It is developed in scattered areas only. Roads are few, and although there are railway systems in the north and south, they are not connected, and communications are consequently poor. From the Allied point of view the chief economic importance of Sumatra was the oil field and refinery near Palembang, of which the normal outlet is to the east via Palembang river to the sea, though there is a single track railway running to the Port of Oesthaven in the extreme south. There was a radio telephone system inter-connecting the principal towns in Sumatra with an external connection to Java. This telephone system was open and insecure.

398. At the time this Section of the Report opens, the monsoon was still in progress over Sumatra. A feature of this monsoon was the prevalence of torrential thunderstorms, both by day and night. These thunderstorms are very violent indeed, and they completely black out all visibility from aircrews flying through them, whose skill and

endurance they test to the utmost: navigation through them is fraught with great risk. Unfortunately at this season several such thunderstorms were certain to be encountered during the course of every long flight.

State of Aerodromes.

399. Up to this date, 18th January, the policy of A.H.Q. had been to develop aerodromes in Northern Sumatra as refuelling grounds for reinforcements arriving by air from India, and as advanced landing grounds for operational use on the flank of Malaya. In consequence of this policy constructional work on them had been given priority over that at aerodromes in the south, and it was the aerodromes in the south of Sumatra which would now be wanted for our squadrons to use as their main bases. By the middle of January small refuelling and re-arming parties of varying strengths, up to 50, had been established at the following places:-

(a) Sabang (also for Flying Boats).

(b) Lho'nga.

(c) Medan Civil Aerodrome (a large military aerodrome was also being constructed in this area).

(d) Pakanbaroe.

(e) Padang.

(f) Palembang – at the civil aerodrome known as P.I.

(g) a secret military aerodrome 20 miles south of Palembang known as P.II.

In addition there was a strip at Lahat, and a field under construction by the Dutch at Oesthaven. Wing Commander Duncan, Squadron Leader Briggs and Squadron Leader Wightwick (A.M.W.D.) were already located at Palembang for liaison with the Dutch in connection with the development of these aerodromes.

DEVELOPMENT OF R.A.F. ORGANISATION IN SUMATRA.

400. A.H.Q. therefore decided, on the 16th January, that the time was becoming imminent when bomber units would have to be transferred to Sumatra. For this reason H.Q. 225 (B) Group was formed at Singapore on this date, and was sent to Palembang in Sumatra on the 18th January 1942. Initial appointments made by A.H.Q. were:-

Group Commander

Group Captain A.G. Bishop.

S.A.S.O.

Wing Commander K. Powell.

S.A.O.

Squadron Leader Briggs.

A.M.W.D.

Squadron Leader Wightwick

Instructions to No. 225 (B) Group.

401. On formation of the Group Headquarters, the A.O.C. instructed the Group Commander-

(a) to establish a Bomber Group H.Q.

(b) to accelerate, to the maximum, arrangements for operating bomber units from Sumatra; such arrangements not only to provide for all bombers then in Singapore but also for the following reinforcements:-

(i) Nos. 84 and 211 (B) Squadrons (Blenheim IV) then en route from Middle East.

(ii) Hudson III's en route from U.K. which were to re-equip in succession No.62 (B) Squadron, and Nos. 1 and 8 (GR) Squadrons, R.A.A.F.

402. The A.O.C. also decided that, dependent on the situation, when bomber units were located in Sumatra, either Group H.Q. would be responsible for the selection of targets (within the policy laid down by A.H.Q.) and for the briefing of squadrons, or alternatively squadrons would proceed to bases in Singapore and be briefed there under A.H.Q. arrangements. To provide for this latter arrangement, refuelling and rearming parties for bomber units would be maintained at aerodromes on Singapore Island. At this time it, was fairly confidently anticipated that the situation on the ground in Malaya would be stabilised and that a bridgehead would be held of sufficient area for the deployment of reinforcements preparatory to a counter-offensive being undertaken ([para. 322](#)). That it would be necessary later to transfer fighter squadrons from Singapore was not at this time "on the cards". *Development by No. 225 (B) Group H.Q.*

403. Group Captain Bishop, on arrival at Palembang on the 18th January, decided to:-

(a) Establish Group Headquarters at Palembang.

(b) Expand and accelerate the provision of accommodation at P.I and P.II aerodromes, and improve aircraft dispersal at each.

(c) Develop Lahat for use by bombers.

(d) Reconnoitre the area to the south of Palembang for the selection and development of further landing strips.

At the same time he put in hand reconnaissance for siting an Ammunition Park, an Air Stores Park and an R.S.U., which were to be provided for the maintenance of the Force.

A.H.Q. were informed and approved of these decisions.

404. P.I. was, at that time, a large 'L' shaped aerodrome with two hard runways. It possessed dispersal arrangements which were at once considerably developed by Dutch Engineers. There was no accommodation for personnel nearer than the town, 8 miles away.

P.II was a huge natural field about 10 miles in perimeter with good natural cover for aircraft. It was not visible from the road, and its construction had been successfully kept secret from the Japanese. Similar clearings in the neighbourhood made it difficult for air crews to locate it from the air, even by those who had been briefed as to its location. Great care was taken to preserve its secrecy and, although at one time more than 100 aircraft were based on it, Japanese reconnaissance, which frequently flew over it by day and night, never located it. Communications between Palembang and P.II were handicapped because there was no bridge over the Palembang river, on the north of which lay Palembang town and P.I, the river had to be crossed by a small ferry which had a limit of 4 to 6 vehicles. The Dutch put in hand the construction of huts for accommodation of personnel at P.II aerodrome.

405. There was a single line telephone linking each aerodrome with Group H.Q's., but instruments and wire were not available for developing an internal telephone system on either aerodrome.

For point to point communication a W/T set was improvised which was able to link up with A.H.Q., and with Sabang and Lho'nga on the air reinforcement route.

406. A civil Dutch Observer system existed at Palembang, consisting of two concentric circles of posts round Palembang, at 50 and 100 kilometers radius. There were a few posts still further out – one on the north end of Banka Island, one at the mouth of the Palembang river and one on Tanjong Pinang Island, just south of Singapore. Posts on the outer circle were unavoidably somewhat widely spaced: most warnings came from the 50 kilometre circle only. Communication between posts and the centre was by W/T or telephone. No radar was available to supplement the observer system, whose volunteer operators were most enthusiastic but unfortunately had had little experience in aircraft recognition. Warnings were consequently erratic.

407. With the most willing and energetic co-operation of the head of the Observer Corps, steps were immediately taken to improve the system. Additional posts were selected, manufacture of W/T sets began and additional personnel were trained. But events moved too fast for these measures to take effect. The original system only was available during the actual events which followed.

408. The Dutch army in the N.E.I. had no A.A. artillery, having been unable to obtain guns from the belligerents in Europe or from the USA. Thus the aerodromes in Sumatra had no A.A. defences. The Dutch had already had aircraft destroyed on the ground at Medan and Pakenbaroe by Japanese low flying fighters.

409. By the end of January, however, Abdacom was able to allot A.A. defences to P.I. and P.II., 6 heavy and 6 Bofors guns to each aerodrome, and 4 of each type to the oil refinery at Palembang. Ships carrying ammunition for these guns were unfortunately sunk and there was little ultimately available. There were two Dutch armoured cars and 150 native Dutch troops allotted to the defence of each aerodrome. With the arrival of R.A.F. ground personnel, aerodrome defence parties were organised to reinforce them.

410. There was one Dutch native regiment for the defence of the whole Palembang area, but there were no defences on the river leading to the town. On the 23rd January representations were made both to the Dutch naval and military authorities, and to Abdacom, on the inadequacy of the defences in the Palembang area, but no reinforcements were available. It is thought that plans were in hand to strengthen the defences, as General Sir John Laverack, Commanding 1st Australian Corps, visited Palembang about 25th January and indicated that an Australian division might be expected in the near future. Presumably, owing to the general situation in the Far East, the move was cancelled.

411. In short, the aerodrome defences were very weak and few troops were available for the defence of the area against invasion.

Arrival of R.A.F. Units from Singapore.

412. However, Japanese progress in Malaya was quicker than had been anticipated. The transfer from Singapore had to be accelerated and expanded beyond what had first been contemplated. In the event, all aircraft had to be based on P.I and P.II, although the personnel of one bomber squadron moved to Lahat on 10th February, Group Captain Noble being appointed Station Commander. But events moved too quickly for that aerodrome to come into use.

413. This Report has already narrated the plans made by A.H.Q. in Singapore for transferring and re-organising in Sumatra and Java, and how these plans were largely frustrated by the speed of the Japanese advance in Malaya and by the dislocation caused at the docks in Singapore by air attack. These plans were further frustrated by Japanese action against shipping at sea en route to the N.E.I. Many ships were sunk and others re-routed at sea to other ports. The cumulative effect was disastrous. Practically all equipment destined for Sumatra went astray. In particular no M.T. arrived except some light motor cars about the 8th February and a few bomb trailers. There were only three refuellers available. Most important of all on the domestic side, few rations arrived and no tentage and field equipment. On aerodromes which were practically without accommodation, the last was a serious loss during the prevailing monsoon weather.

Aircraft spares were also scarce, particularly those for Blenheims, with which type the two reinforcing squadrons, Nos. 84 and 211 (B) Squadrons, were also equipped.

Three month's anticipated requirements in petrol, oil and lubricants had arrived at each aerodrome. A limited number of bombs also came across and these were distributed

to P.I. and P.II.

414. Local buses were requisitioned and gradually came into service. An organisation for the local purchase of supplies was set up and contracts already placed for the manufacture of domestic equipment were expedited and expanded.

415. By the end of the first week of February personnel were reasonably fed and accommodated. But later when large numbers arrived, many unexpectedly, from Singapore, accommodation had to be found at short notice. Thus 1,500 were provided for in P.II, where provision was ready for only 250, whilst 2,500 were housed in schools and cinemas in Palembang town.

Throughout, however, operational and maintenance facilities remained primitive in the extreme. The aerodromes in Sumatra were virtually landing grounds “in the blue”.

All the problems which faced the staff and units were tackled with energy and spirit, and the praiseworthy results which were achieved in the face of every handicap are a great credit to both.

The Dutch gave magnificent assistance in all these local preparations, headed by the Resident Palembang, who personally inspired and directed the civil authorities in their efforts.

416. From the 22nd January onwards, personnel and aircraft started streaming in. The former were in some disorder owing to loss of kit and a splitting up of units through the confused conditions of embarkation at Singapore. The situation was further aggravated because the arrivals included units destined for Java, which had been re-routed at sea to Palembang. All had to be sorted and re-organised, and units for Java entrained for Oesthaven and shipped thence to Batavia.

417. On the 23rd January Blenheim IV's of Nos. 84 and 211 (B) Squadrons began to arrive from the Middle East. Their ground personnel, who came by sea, landed at Oesthaven about 14th February. The arrival of the latter coincided with the Japanese attack on the Palembang area (which will be related in due course), and they had to be re-embarked for Batavia before they could join their squadrons, which thus never had their own ground staffs with them in Sumatra. Each squadron had 24 aircraft when it left the Middle East. Sixteen of No. 84 Squadron arrived at P.I. 18 of No. 211 Squadron arrived on different days between 23rd January and 14th February ([para. 318](#)). Unfortunately the change of route from Singapore to Palembang resulted in the loss of 3 aircraft of No. 84 Squadron as a result of wrong briefing given to them on leaving Burma about the location of landing grounds in Sumatra.

Dispositions arranged for Units.

418. On the 23rd January P.I aerodrome received its first air attack. Twenty-seven unescorted bombers dropped their loads from 22,000 feet with great accuracy, but caused

only slight damage to the surface of the aerodrome. The Dutch Buffalo Squadron on the aerodrome established contact with the formation and damaged at least two Japanese bombers without loss to themselves. It was now evident that our aerodromes in southern Sumatra were about to be bombed in their turn, in all probability with increasing severity. It was therefore decided to dispose our squadrons accordingly. Fortunately it was possible to take advantage of Japanese habits which by this time were well known, complete confidence could be placed in the fact that no daylight attack would take place before 0830 hours or after 1700 hours. Other factors which were taken into consideration were:-

(a) that P.I. was best adapted to the use of fighters, and it was soon realised that part of the Hurricane force, which was known to be arriving in H.M S Indomitable, would want to use it: thus it would be advisable to minimise the number of bombers on it.

(b) that P.II was suitable for all types of medium bombers, that its existence was believed to be unknown to the Japanese. Moreover it had good facilities for dispersal, and cover from view in the scrub jungle which surrounded it.

419. Squadrons were, therefore, to be disposed on them as follows:-

P.I. M.V.A.F., Nos. 84 and 211 (B) Squadrons, serviceable aircraft moving to P.I during Japanese raid hours.

P.II. Nos. I (GR), 27 (NF), 34 (B) and 62 (B) Squadrons, whose aircraft strength when they arrived from Singapore would be low.

It will be remembered that the ground parties of Nos. 84 and 211 (B) Squadrons had yet to arrive by sea from the Middle East. Provision for servicing them was therefore made from amongst technical personnel who had been evacuated from Singapore. Those surplus to requirements were sorted out and despatched to Java.

420. Aircraft and personnel began to arrive from Singapore earlier than had been anticipated, so Wing Commander Powell, S.A.S.O. of the Group, was appointed Station Commander of P.II until the arrival of Group Captain McCauley on 29th January. The former then took over command of P.I from Wing Commander Duncan, the latter being placed in charge of the refuelling party at Pakenbaroe.

OPERATIONS CARRIED OUT BY No. 225 (B) GROUP.

22nd January-14th February.

421. No. 225 (B) Group was responsible for reconnaissance northwards from the Sunda Straits to cover several convoys that went through to Singapore during the last week in January and the first in February. During the passage of a convoy through the Banka Straits on the 27th January, Blenheim IV's maintained a fighter escort over it because no fighters were available in Sumatra; the Dutch Buffalo Squadron had by this time been withdrawn to Java. All other available bomber aircraft stood by during these periods in

case convoys were attacked by Japanese naval forces. The whole resources of the Group were directed towards the protection of these convoys during the two-day periods each took to traverse the area for which it was responsible.

422. On the 26th January the Endau landing took place ([paras. 332-339](#)) and No. 225 (B) Group was ordered to despatch all available aircraft to the scene. A force of 6 Hudsons from No. 62 (B) Squadron and 5 Blenheim I's of the same squadron but manned by No. 84 (B) Squadron aircrews was scraped up. The Hudsons arrived on the scene during the late afternoon, and landed at Sembawang for the night, returning to Palembang on the 27th January. The Blenheims arrived too late to participate, and so were ordered to land at Tengah and await orders from A.H.Q. This force was used on the night 27th-28th January to bomb Kuantan, returning to Palembang on 28th January.

423. On 26th January 6 Blenheim IV's of 34 (B) Squadron and 6 Hudsons of No. 8 (GR) Squadron R.A.A.F. were withdrawn from operations and were sent to Java under orders of A.H.Q. in connection with the arrival of H.M.S. Indomitable with 48 Hurricanes on board. This carrier was met at a point some distance to the Southward of Java by the bombers or G.R. aircraft, on which the Hurricanes were flown off in Squadron formations and were navigated to Java by the former aircraft. Meanwhile a Catalina provided anti-submarine patrols for the carrier's protection. The Hurricanes were again navigated during their onward journey to P.I, one squadron No. 258 (F) Squadron onward again to Singapore. The bombers and G.R. aircraft returned to P.II on 2nd February and became available again for operations.

424. On the 30th January Air Commodore H.J.F. Hunter, who had been appointed by the Air Ministry as Commander designate of a Bomber Group in the Far East, arrived in Sumatra and took over Command, Group Captain Bishop becoming S.A.S.O. of the Group.

425. Incidentally, Air Commodore Silly, Deputy A.O.C., also arrived in Palembang on the 30th January with orders from the A.O.C. to site a Command H.Q. in Sumatra. In this he was unsuccessful and left on 6th February to organise the R.A.F. Base, Batavia.

426. By the 30th January Singapore was clear of all but fighter aircraft. The strengths of

bomber squadrons in Sumatra then were:-

No. I Squadron, R.A.A.F.	16 Hudson II	Many overdue for inspection and showing signs of wear and tear.
No. 8 Squadron, R.A.F.	6 Hudson III}	

No. 34 Squadron _	6 Blenheim IV}	Not available until 2nd February.
No. 62 Squadron _	10 Hudson III	
No. 62 Squadron _	5 Blenheim I}	
No. 27 Squadron _	3 Blenheim I}	Particularly poor condition.
No. 84 Squadron _	10 Blenheim IV}	Most aircraft required
No. 211 Squadron _	4 Blenheim IV}	inspection and minor repairs, after their long flight from the Middle East.
M.V.A.F.	Mixed Flight	

427. From the 30th January-5th February, as convoy duties permitted, the following attacks, were carried out during the nights shown:-

30th January-31st January.

6 Blenheims – Ipoh aerodrome – using Pakenbaroe for refuelling.

31st January-1st February.

6 Hudsons – Alor Star aerodrome – using Medan for refuelling. Hits were scored on the runway and aerodrome buildings.

1st February-2nd February.

5 Blenheims – Penang aerodrome – using Medan for refuelling.

2nd February-3rd February.

7 Blenheims, 3 Hudsons – Singora docks – using Medan for refuelling.

4th February-5th February.

5 Blenheims, 4 Hudsons – Kluang aerodrome – using Singapore for refuelling.

5th February-6th February.

8 Blenheims – proceeded Medan en route Singora: cancelled owing to bad weather.

12th February-13th February.

12 Hudsons – Kluang aerodrome.

The policy was for aircraft to arrive at the advanced landing ground just before dusk, refuel and rest. Then after delivering their attacks aircraft either returned direct to base, or alternatively refuelled again at the appropriate advanced landing ground and returned to base at first light. On account of Japanese fighter patrols, aircraft could not remain on undefended grounds in Northern Sumatra during daylight hours.

428. These long nights in themselves imposed great strain on crews, it was still the wet monsoon season in Sumatra and torrential thunderstorms were prevalent, particularly at night. Not all the crews of reinforcing squadrons were up to the standard of night flying required for such conditions, particularly in the absence of radio aids to navigation: those that were showed outstanding determination and skill, and of them Wing Commander Jeudwine, C.O. of No. 84 (B) Squadron, was preeminent. It was only rarely, that results of bombing could be observed in any detail owing to the bad conditions of visibility.

429. Up to the 6th February No. 225 (B) Group had maintained daily reconnaissances across the South China Sea to Borneo to detect any Japanese movement southwards.

On the 6th February there were reports of a Japanese force assembling in the Anambas. This was located by Hudson sorties; it was attacked on the night 7th-8th February by 9 Blenheims in most adverse weather conditions, and again on the 11th-12th February by 10 Blenheims.

430. Throughout this period many transit flights to and from Singapore were carried out by Hudson aircraft either escorting Hurricanes or assisting in the evacuation of personnel.

Serviceability in all units was low.

The M.V.A.F. at Palembang were invaluable throughout in maintaining communications between P.I. and P.II. and Lahat, providing a twice daily reconnaissance of the river approaches, and locating crashed aircraft.

ORGANISATION – No. 226 (F) GROUP.

431. It will be remembered that it had not been the intention until quite a recent date to operate any of our fighters on aerodromes in South Sumatra, but that the unexpectedly rapid Japanese advance right up to the confines of Singapore island had made it impracticable for them to use the aerodromes on the island except Kallang. It now became necessary, therefore, to make arrangements for them in Sumatra. On the 1st February, 1942, Air Commodore Vincent arrived in Palembang and formed H.Q. No. 226 (F) Group. For this purpose he brought with him personnel drawn from No. 224 (F) Group, Singapore, and absorbed those of H.Q. 266 (F) Wing which was now arriving in Sumatra from U.K. ([para. 373 \(b\)](#)).

432. In anticipation of the formation of a Fighter organisation, and with the energetic co-operation of the Dutch, a Fighter H.Q. Operations Room had already been established at Palembang on the 25th January by H.Q. 225 (B) Group. This Operations Room was connected to a naval transmitter in the docks some distance away, for communicating with aircraft. At first, orders from the Operations Controller had to be relayed to aircraft: later this arrangement was improved and the Controller was connected direct to the transmitter.

Arrangements were made for the Gun Operations Room to be in the same building. It was also connected with the Dutch Civil Observer System, which was in course of being improved ([paras. 406](#) and [407](#)).

433. The role of the Group was:-

(a) Defence of the Palembang area.

(b) Protection of shipping in the Banka Straits, by means of escort patrols and offensive sweeps.

(c) Up till the 9th February 1942 maintenance of a token force of fighters in Singapore.

434. V.H.F. was not available, nor was D/F for assisting homing aircraft. The absence of the latter was a serious handicap because intense thunderstorms were frequent and fighter pilots were apt to lose their bearings when negotiating them.

All aircraft of the Fighter Group were based on P.I. aerodrome, the administrative shortcomings of which have already been related. It had a telephone from the Operations Room in Palembang but no instruments were available for dispersal points round the aerodrome, which slowed down the speed with which fighters could get away to intercept an enemy raid.

Strength of Fighter Squadrons.

435. About 50 Hurricanes were available when the Group formed, the majority direct from H.M.S. "Indomitable." The remainder were part of the original consignment which had arrived in crates in Singapore on the 13th January.

436. Forty-eight flew off H.M.S. "Indomitable" on 20th January. All flew off with their guns protected with anti-corrosion grease with which they had been provided for the journey. Fifteen flew via Batavia and P.I. to Singapore, arriving on the 29th January. Their guns were cleaned at Seletar. The remainder remained at P.II to have their guns cleaned before transfer to P.I. Cleaning of these guns was a slow operation owing to lack of all the usual facilities, and considerable delay occurred before squadrons were able to go into action.

437. Pilots were drawn from Nos. 232, 242, 258 and 605 (F) Squadrons and operated as two composite squadrons – Nos. 232 and 258. Most pilots, with the exception

of the Commanding Officers and Flight Commanders, were straight from O.T.U's., and deserve credit for the spirit with which they went straight into action. They had experienced a long sea voyage, but once again no time could be spared for acclimatization or training.

438. When they first arrived their aircraft were serviced by personnel from Buffalo squadrons. From the 6th February onwards however, ground personnel of No. 266 (F) Wing began to arrive via Oesthaven, including advanced parties and stores with an Air Stores Park and an R.S.U. There was a deficiency of Hurricane tool kits, few battery starters for aircraft, and no battery-charging facilities were available at the aerodrome: factors which contributed to a low standard of serviceability.

439 To improve the climb and manoeuvrability of the Hurricane the four outside guns were removed, as it was considered that eight guns were ample against the unarmoured Japanese aircraft.

OPERATIONS CARRIED OUT BY No. 226 (F) GROUP.

440. From the 2nd-5th February many sorties were carried out escorting shipping proceeding north and south through the Banka Straits. On the 3rd February, nine aircraft of No. 258 Squadron left for Singapore to co-operate with a bomber force in a combined attack on Kluang aerodrome, returning the following day. They landed at Tengah, but owing to an error on the part of that Station, the squadron was not ready to take off at the appointed time, and the attack was a failure.

441. Meanwhile, Japanese reconnaissance was maintained daily over Palembang, and was quick to note our activity. Air attacks on P.I. aerodrome took place on 6th, 7th and 8th February by formations of bombers escorted by fighters.

442. On the 6th February warning was short, and the Hurricanes, caught at a tactical disadvantage, lost four and claimed one Navy "O". No. 232 Squadron were away at Singapore on this day conducting operations from the Island.

443. On the 7th February warning was even shorter, and results were serious. The Japanese combined a high bombing attack with a low attack by fighters. Three Hurricanes were destroyed and 11 others damaged on the ground, whilst three were shot down in the air. In addition four unserviceable Blenheims on the ground, and one Hudson, which arrived as the attack was in progress, were destroyed. Only one Navy "O" fighter could be claimed.

444. On the 8th and 13th February fresh attacks on the aerodromes took place, but more warning was received: on the 8th an inconclusive interception took place, but on the 13th, three Navy "O" fighters and two Army 97 bombers were shot down for the loss of one Hurricane.

445. On the 12th February the Group was reinforced by Wing Commander Maguire and eight aircraft. These were part of a reinforcing Wing, No. 226 (F) Wing which included 39 Hurricanes, a pool of 15 pilots, and the ground crews of Nos. 232, 258 and 605 Squadrons: it had arrived at Batavia by sea on the 4th February.

446. On the 13th February a further nine aircraft from Batavia arrived at P.I. Unfortunately they did so while the attack on the aerodrome was in progress. They were short of petrol, and in ensuing engagements six were either shot down or crashed.

447. It was quite evident that the Japanese already realised that we were endeavouring to establish our squadrons on P.I. and that they were devoting a very considerable effort, particularly with strong forces of fighters, to prevent it.

It is opportune at this juncture to digress for a moment.

Control of operations in Sumatra assumed by Abdair.

448. It will be realised that A.H.Q. in Singapore had, by the end of January, much depleted its staff in forming the staffs of the two new Groups, Nos. 225 and 226, in Sumatra, which were themselves much under requirements. This depletion particularly affected the signals organisation. Firstly because its numbers were reduced at a time when signals traffic was on the increase consequent upon the splitting up of the Command between Singapore and Sumatra. Secondly because it was just at this time that the trained and experienced cypher staff had to be evacuated. The result was acute congestion of, and increasing delays in, signals traffic. This had reached such a pitch on 6th February as to constitute a breakdown between Palembang and A.H.Q. in Singapore. Abdair therefore assumed operational control of all R.A.F. units in Sumatra with effect from 7th February.

Formation of Westgroup H.Q.s in the N.E.I.

449. Air Vice-Marshal P.C. Maltby and Air Commodore W.E Staton arrived in Palembang on the 10th February, and on the following day the former became A.O.C. and the latter S.A.S.O. of Westgroup, which comprised all R.A.F. and R.A.A.F. Units of the Far East Command now located in Sumatra and Java. Whilst in Palembang they picked up a nucleus staff and moved with it on 12th February to Java, having first reconnoitred South Sumatra and ascertained that no suitable site for a H.Q. existed in that area. It was arranged that, pending the establishment of H.Q. Westgroup in Java, Abdair would continue in direct control of all operations carried out by Westgroup Units.

FURTHER OPERATIONS BY 225 (B) GROUP – 12TH TO 14TH FEBRUARY.

450. From the 7th February onwards, all reconnaissance by No. 225 (B) Group had been discontinued under orders from Abdair, who wished to economise air effort by centralising

all reconnaissance under the Reconnaissance Group in Java and thereby increasing the size of the striking force available in Sumatra.

451. On the 13th February, however, the shipping situation as known at H.Q. 225 (B) Group appeared most confused. Reconnaissance reports made by Reconnaissance Group and received through Abdair showed that Japanese naval forces were in strength south of Singapore. These reports were 5-7 hours old by the time they reached 225 (B) Group owing to bad communications, locations of convoys had by then completely changed. To confuse matters still further, a stream of shipping of all kinds was at the same time passing south from Singapore to Java despite the presence of Japanese forces; friend was difficult to distinguish from foe.

452. By the 13th February (p.m.) it was felt at H.Q. 225 (B) Group that, despite orders to the contrary, a reconnaissance must be carried out to clear the situation and ascertain whether or not there was an immediate threat to Sumatra. One Hudson of No I (GR) Squadron, R.A.A.F., was sent in the afternoon and reported a concentration of Japanese shipping north of Banka Island, which confirmed impressions that a landing at Palembang was imminent. All available Blenheims were immediately despatched to attack the enemy force, but results were difficult to assess owing to darkness and rainstorms.

453. On the 14th February an offensive reconnaissance of 5 Hudsons was despatched so as to be over the area at first light. This located and attacked a convoy consisting of 25-30 transports, heavily escorted by naval vessels, at the northern entrance of the Banka Straits, heading towards the Palembang river. The convoy was protected by fighters believed to be from one or two aircraft carriers which were not, however, located. This was followed up by attacks by all available Hudsons and Blenheims, during which at least 6 transports were sunk or badly damaged. All of these attacks, except the first, were unescorted and carried out in the face of heavy A. A. fire and strong fighter defence. Six to eight of our aircraft were shot down or destroyed on landing in a damaged condition, whilst the majority were hit to a varying degree. Nevertheless, the successes already achieved more than balanced those losses and during the night of the 14th everything possible was done to prepare for further attacks the following morning.

454. The reason why no fighter escort had been available except for the first attack was because the Japanese had, in co-ordination with the approach of their convoy, staged a parachute attack on P.I. aerodrome, on which our fighters were based. It was the only occupied aerodrome which they had located in Sumatra. Presumably by attacking it they hoped to neutralize all air resistance to the convoy. As events will show, their failure to locate P.II and neutralize it as well was to prove costly. However, before proceeding further it is now necessary to turn to describe events at P.I.

Parachute attack on Palembang I Aerodrome – 14 th February.

455. On 14th February all serviceable Hurricanes were airborne, escorting 225 Group's

bombers which were attacking enemy shipping in Banka Straits. At about 0800 hours the approach of a large hostile formation was reported by the Observer Corps. Attempts to divert our Hurricanes to intercept it failed because they were beyond R/T range.

456. Shortly afterwards P.I. was attacked, first by bombers with light bombs, then it was well shot up by the large escort of fighters, and finally troop carriers dropped 2 groups of parachutists, each 150-200 strong, at two points 400-800 yards to the S. and W. in the scrub jungle which surrounds the aerodrome. Simultaneously 300 more were dropped on the oil refinery a few miles away near Pladjoe.

457. The aerodrome defences (8 heavy and 8 Bofors British A.A. guns, 150 Dutch infantry with 2 old armoured cars and about 60 R.A.F. ground defence gunners of 258 and 605 (F) Squadrons) warded off an attempt to rush the aerodrome, a number of casualties occurring on both sides.

458. Our absent fighters, now with empty tanks and guns, were diverted to P.II. And were subsequently employed against the main enemy attack in the Palembang river. Some landed at P.I. not having received the diversion order, were refuelled and sent on to P.II.

459. Shortly afterwards the A.A. guns, having by then almost exhausted their small stock of ammunition, were withdrawn to Palembang Town. Wing Commander Maguire organised the withdrawal of unarmed R.A.F. personnel at the same time. He remained himself with about 60 R.A.F. personnel and some Dutch native infantry to deny the aerodrome to the enemy. One paratroop party had, however, reached the road leading to Palembang and ambushed part of the withdrawing parties, subsequently making a road block with overturned vehicles.

460. Two subsequent attempts from Palembang Town to reinforce the aerodrome were driven back at the road block after close quarters fighting. The first, at about 1100 hours, was by an R.A.F. party under F.L. Jackson and P.O. Umphelby who pressed their attack with determination: some of the party succeeded in reaching the aerodrome through the scrub and assisted in evacuating some wounded and unarmed personnel. The second, at 16.30 hours, was by a Dutch contingent which also was able to get some small assistance and information to the aerodrome.

461. Wing Commander Maguire's party, by now much reduced, was running out of ammunition, and had no water or food. Thus, this handful of men was in no position to continue their gallant denial of the aerodrome to the enemy in face of an attack in force which was certain to come at night. He therefore destroyed all material, including some unserviceable aircraft, and withdrew. Being cut off from Palembang Town the party made its way to the West Coast of Sumatra after an arduous trek of seven days, during which they destroyed a number of stocks of petrol and some rubber factories. They there rejoined their units in Java.

462. Our aircraft at P.II meanwhile were too busy dealing with far greater a threat to be in a position to help recover P.I aerodrome, as will now be related.

EVENTS FROM 14TH FEBRUARY (P.M.) – 18TH FEBRUARY.

Attacks on Japanese Convoy off Palembang, 15th February.

463. By 14th February (p.m.) therefore, the total Air Forces located in Sumatra were at P.II aerodrome. The strength assisted of:-

22 Hurricanes.

35 Blenheim I's and IV's – many of which were unserviceable.

3 Hudsons (the remainder of the Hudson force was flown to Java for repairs on the 14th February).

The whole was placed under the command of the Station Commander P.II, Group Captain McCauley, who was instructed by the A.O.C. No. 225 (B) Group to continue attacks on the Japanese convoy entering the Palembang River from first light on the 15th ([paras. 452-4](#)).

464. Reconnaissance on the 15th pin-pointed the position of transports and barges, and revealed approximately 20 naval vessels and transports steaming through the Banka Straits, whilst other transports and landing craft were in the river mouth.

465. The first attack, off at 0630 hours, was made by 6 Blenheims escorted by Hurricanes. It met strong fighter opposition but pressed home the attack. From then onwards until 1530 hours a constant stream of our aircraft proceeded to attack the convoy, and, as all enemy fighter opposition had ceased, Hurricanes were employed in shooting up barges whilst bombers similarly expended their ammunition after dropping their bombs. The limiting factor in the number of attacks was the speed with which re-armament and refuelling could be carried out. The Japanese in barges and transports fought back for a time with A.A. and small arms fire but by 1100 hours this opposition ceased. By 1530 hours all movement on the river was stopped and surviving barges and landing craft had pulled in to the thick undergrowth. Troops had dispersed onto the river bank, and against them attacks continued.

466. It is difficult to assess the damage done. All pilots reported upon its extent. Thousands of troops in barges were caught in the open by machine gun fire, particularly by the Hurricanes, and very heavy casualties were inflicted upon them. Bombing accounted for many more, whilst in addition, 3 transports were sunk, a number of others were hit and an unknown number of landing craft were also sunk.

467. As a fitting finale to the day, a number of Navy 'O' fighters were located on a strip on the beach on Banka Island and were destroyed by Hurricanes. It is probable that these fighters were those which had been encountered during the initial sorties of this day.

468. Air action thus brought the landing to a standstill. The Japanese were punished heavily for their failure to locate P.II aerodrome. Unfortunately, there were no troops or naval light craft available in the area to take advantage of the situation.

Withdrawal from Sumatra.

469. On the evening of the 14th February, A.O.C. 226 Group returned to Palembang from P.II. Both he and A.O.C. 225 Group were informed by the local Dutch Territorial Commander that the situation was well under control and that he had every hope of eliminating the paratroops. He gave the impression that a drive was to take place that night to clear the area. Contrary orders evidently were received later by him, because a start was made during the night in burning oil and rubber stocks in the town, and in the destruction of the oil refinery area.

470. When A.O.C's. Nos. 225 and 226 Groups saw the Dutch Territorial Commander early on the morning of the 15th, they found that the Dutch H.Q. had closed and that the Territorial Commander himself considered it too late to restore the situation. He was himself about to leave for Lahat in the South.

471. The Dutch Territorial Commander also stated that the ferries across the river and the railhead facilities would be blown in one hour's time, with the object of embarrassing the Japanese advance towards the South. In consequence, A.O.C. No. 225 Group ordered the immediate evacuation of the town by all remaining R.A.F. personnel. This was effected by road and rail to Oesthaven.

472. A further paratroop landing took place at P.I. later during the morning of the 15th, and the Japanese established themselves in the vicinity of Palembang town. There was thus a distinct possibility that P.II. aerodrome might be over-run during the night 15th/16th February. Also by 15th February (p.m) stocks of bombs and ammunition at P.II were almost expended, whilst food supplies were cut off.

473. In view of these factors and the lack of any supporting troops, Abdair approved the evacuation back to Java of all R.A.F. units, and this was effected by road and rail on the evening of the 15th via Oesthaven. All flyable aircraft were flown to Java, the remainder destroyed. Aircraft of Nos. 84 and 211 (B) Squadrons, which had borne the brunt of the attacks during the day, finished their last sorties too late to proceed that evening. They remained on the aerodrome, flying to Java on the morning of the 16th February.

474. Personnel at landing grounds in N. and Central Sumatra were instructed to proceed by road to west coast ports for evacuation in accordance with pre-arranged plans.

475. Special mention must be made here of the valuable services rendered by the General Manager, Sumatra Railways. Despite orders received from his superior authorities he delayed destruction of rail facilities and personally arranged for the trains required during the night 15th/16th February. He himself did not leave until after the departure of the last train conveying R.A.F. personnel.

Credit is also due to Group Captain A.G. Bishop for the part he played in Sumatra. He put our squadrons on their feet and organised the staff despite primitive circumstances. He contributed in no small degree to the success of the operations which were conducted in Sumatra, and finally he personally supervised the successful withdrawal of the force from the Palembang area when its position there was no longer tenable.

476. At Oesthaven on the 16th February, it was found that the Dutch had already fired the bazaar and destroyed all military property. At the docks the British Military Embarkation Commandant stated that he had been given orders that all personnel were to be clear by midnight; personnel only were to be evacuated, not M.T. or equipment. As a result, essential and vital aircraft equipment, including that brought from Palembang, was left behind. This was particularly unfortunate because spare engines and other urgent stores for the Hurricanes which had been landed at Oesthaven with No. 41 Air Stores Park, of No. 266 (F) Wing, were left behind. No. 266 (F) Wing's R.S.U. similarly lost valuable equipment. A.A. guns and ammunition which had been brought to the port from P.I. and P.II aerodromes had also to be abandoned. [Section IV](#) of this Report will show that the loss of this R.A.F. and A.A. equipment had serious results during operations conducted later in Java. Fortunately the light tanks were re-embarked, and all personnel, Army and R.A.F., were evacuated.

477. The evacuation of the port was covered by a screen of R.A.F. personnel from No. 84(B) Squadron acting under the command of Group Captain G.E. Nicholetts, who had been appointed R.A.F. Base Control Officer about ten days previously.

478. It was unfortunate that Oesthaven was evacuated so hastily. Two days later Group Captain Nicholetts, with a party of 50 volunteers of No. 605 (F) Squadron, returned from Batavia to Oesthaven by sea in H.M.S. "Ballarat" which was commanded by a Royal Australian Naval Reserve officer specially appointed for the voyage owing to his knowledge of Oesthaven Harbour. On arrival, early on the 18th, twelve hours were spent by the party loading the ship to the gunwales with R.A.F. equipment and some Bofors ammunition. At the same time the railway track was damaged, loaded rolling stock and petrol dumps were fired, and the water by the dockside was obstructed by pushing into the sea abandoned heavy M.T. and other vehicles.

479. That this work of salvage and destruction proceeded unhampered by the enemy must not detract from the spirit shown by both the R.A.F. party and the crew of H.M.S. "Ballarat," who volunteered for the adventure with a full knowledge of the hazards involved.

As it happened, air reconnaissances from Java had made it clear that the casualties and disorganisation caused as a result of our air attacks on the convoy off Palembang during the 14th and 15th February had been so severe that the Japanese were in no state to run through from Palembang to Oesthaven at the speed which had been anticipated when the port was evacuated, but Group Captain Nicholetts and his party were unaware of this fact.

SECTION IV.

SUMMARY OF OPERATIONS BASED ON JAVA.

INTRODUCTION.

Early Days of War in the N.E.I.

480. Before hostilities had broken out in the Far East the Dutch considered that their best interests lay in co-operating with the British from the outset with the object of repelling a Japanese attack in its early stages. They felt confident that, by joint means, an attack could be halted in the north and that war would never reach Java itself.

481. Dutch air units, therefore, operated from the first day of war in Malaya, Borneo and the northern islands of the N.E.I. There they suffered considerable casualties. Dutch naval units also played an early part and suffered considerably.

482. Early reverses caused apprehension but acted as a spur to Dutch co-operation. Their will to help was most marked although their resources were very limited.

Formation of H.Q. S.W. Pacific Command (Abdacom) in Java.

483. On 15th January, 1942, Sir Archibald Wavell arrived in Java to take control of all Allied Forces in the S.W. Pacific and formed his H.Q. (Abdacom) near Bandoeng. Confidence was raised by this and by the news of expected reinforcements – British, Australian and American – and still further by the actual arrival, towards the end of January and early February, of the first of them. More were on the way.

484. Even when the British forces in Malaya were, by 31st January, invested on Singapore Island, it was believed that that fortress, the key of the Far East, would hold out for some while. This would provide the necessary time for adequate forces to be built up in the N.E.I. for the successful defence of the rest of the Far East.

Then came a series of unpleasant events.

Effect in the N.E.I. of Japanese Capture of Singapore and Sumatra.

485. On 8th February the Japanese secured a foothold on Singapore Island and within a

couple of days its imminent capitulation became evident.

486. On 14th February they attacked and overran South Sumatra, admittedly at heavy cost. The British forces, mainly air units, had to withdraw to Java.

487. Between 12th and 18th February large numbers of personnel, evacuated from Singapore and Sumatra, arrived in considerable confusion in Western Java: amongst them were approximately 10,000 R.A.F. of all ranks. They augmented considerable numbers of refugees who had preceded them in a steadily growing stream from the same places and from other N.E.I. Islands.

488. At this time, mid-February, Abdacom was still established in Bandoeng, reinforcements were arriving and more were expected. Nevertheless it was evident now that Java would be attacked in the near future. A civilian exodus from Java on a grand scale replaced the small stream which had been leaving for some time through Sourabaya and Batavia.

Congestion in Batavia.

489. At Batavia the exodus became confused with incoming reinforcements and evacuees from Singapore and Sumatra. For several days the harbour of Batavia, and the roadstead outside, were congested with shipping. This unloaded as best it could. The result was that quays, warehouses and the roads leading from them rapidly became blocked with an inextricable confusion of merchandise, equipment, M.T., abandoned cars and goods of every description. The town of Batavia became congested with personnel – outgoing refugees, incoming reinforcements, incoming evacuees and Dutch troops mobilised for defence of the locality.

490. Into this confused area the R.A.F. evacuated from Singapore and Sumatra, arrived, for the most part between 12th and 18th February.

491. Those from Singapore had embarked there under heavy air attack on shipping of all kinds as it came to hand, and amongst a number of civilian refugees. Units had become much mixed, many personnel were separated from units and many had become separated from their equipment. It had proved impracticable to embark much equipment owing to conditions at Singapore docks, and some of what had been embarked had been lost at sea through enemy action.

492. Units from Sumatra had also suffered loss of their equipment by reason of the hasty withdrawal from aerodromes near Palembang, and still more so by circumstances at the port in South Sumatra, Oesthaven, at which they had embarked: such small amount of equipment as they had possessed in Sumatra, and which they had succeeded in removing to Oesthaven, could not be embarked and brought with them ([para. 476](#)).

493. An appreciable number of bombers and fighters had, however, reached aerodromes in the Batavia district, though a high proportion of them were unfit for

operations.

494. Such was the situation in Batavia on 16th February. It was from personnel and equipment so placed that a maximum air fighting strength with ancillary services had to be evolved, and surpluses evacuated from Java. Twelve days were destined to be available for this work before the Japanese landed in Java.

R.A.F. RE-ORGANISATION IN JAVA.

Situation on 16th February.

495. On the 16th February, the date of the evacuation of Sumatra, the position in Java was as follows:-

(a) *H.Q. Westgroup* (A.O.C. – A.V.M. P.C. Maltby) – A.O.C. and a nucleus staff had arrived at Soekaboemi on 14th February and were organising a H.Q. there; this was still known as Westgroup. Soekaboemi was chosen because it is centrally located in Western Java, where all Westgroup units were being located. Westgroup assumed administrative responsibility for its units on 16th February. As it was not yet ready to take operational control, this was retained by Abdair, which had assumed it on 7th February whilst units were still operating in Sumatra ([para. 448](#)).

(b) *No. 205 (F.B.) Squadron* – (Wing Commander Councell in Command) had arrived in Batavia on 1st February and was operating as part of the Allied Reconnaissance Group (Recgroup), using anchorages at Batavia and Oesthaven.

(c) *Nos. 36 and 100 (T.B.) Squadrons* – (Squadron Leader Wilkins in Command). Aircraft had arrived on 29/30th January from Singapore for re-organisation. After being based on various aerodromes they were rejoined by their ground personnel on 15th February at Tjikampek.

(d) *No. 153 M.U.* – (G/Capt. Ridgway in command) had arrived in Java on the 9th January and moved to Djocjacarta, where it was ready to start work on 15th January.

(e) *No. 152 M.U.* – (Squadron Leader S.G. Aylwin in command) had arrived in Batavia on 14th February and moved on the 17th to Poerbolingo to form a transit store.

(f) *R.A.F. Base, Batavia* (Group Captain Ridgway in command until 18th February 1942 when Air Commodore Silly relieved him). This base had been established in Batavia on the 24th January to organise the reception, sorting and despatch of personnel arriving by sea from Singapore and Sumatra and of air reinforcements from the Middle East and the United Kingdom. It also organised the reception and erecting of a number of boxed Hurricanes. By 18th February this base was administering 5 transit camps in Batavia and one at Buitenzorg. Personnel of all other units not mentioned in (a) to (e) above passed through this base for reorganisation and disposal, a total of over 12,000 being handled.

(g) *Certain A.M.E. Units* were installing radar facilities in the Batavia and Sourabaya areas.

(h) Thirty-nine crated Hurricanes had been erected in Batavia during the first ten days of February. Seventeen had proceeded to No. 266 (F) Wing in Sumatra, where a number of them were lost. Twelve were handed over by Abdair to the Dutch Army Air Force. For diplomatic reasons they could not be withdrawn in spite of the losses which our fighter squadrons had just sustained in Sumatra. Thus only 10 were left as replacements for our squadrons.

Allocation of Aerodromes.

496. On the evacuation of Sumatra, on 16th February, Abdair allocated aerodromes as follows:-

(a) All Hudsons to Samplak:

(b) All Blenheims to Kalidjati:

(c) All fighters to Tjililitan.

These aerodromes had not been highly developed, dispersal being limited, aerodrome ground defence weak, internal signals and night flying arrangements lacking. No A.A. defences were available.

497. On the 18th February, in view of the reduced strength of squadrons and the fact that no further bomber reinforcements could be expected, A.O.C. Westgroup decided to concentrate all aircraft by types into selected squadrons as follows:-

(a) *Semplak:*

Station Commander – Group Captain Brown, No I (GR) Squadron, R.A.A.F. – Commander, W/Cdr. R.H. Davies. Strength 14 Hudson II's and 12 Hudson III's (about 12 operationally serviceable).

(b) *Kalidjati:*

Station Commander – Group Captain Whistondale (pending availability of Group Captain Nicholetts) No. 84 (B) Squadron – Commander, W/Cdr. Jeudwine. Strength 26 Blenheims (about 6 operationally serviceable).

(c) *Tjikampek:*

No. 36 (TB) Squadron – Commander, S/Ldr. Wilkins. Strength 9 Vildebeestes and I Albacore. (No torpedo facilities were available in Java.)

(d) *Tjililitan:*

No. 232 (F) Squadron – Commander, S/Ldr. Brooker.

No. 605 (F) Squadron – Commander, S/Ldr. Wright.

Total strength of 25 Hurricanes (about 18 operationally serviceable).

The former had been in action since its arrival in the Far East, in Singapore and Sumatra, and had been kept up to strength by absorbing No. 232 (F) Squadron proper which had arrived in H.M.S. Indomitable. It was now very depleted again, and in turn absorbed practically the whole of No. 242 (F) Squadron also from H.M.S. Indomitable – but the original designation of the squadron, No. 232 (F) Squadron, was retained.

No. 605 (F) Squadron had hitherto been mainly employed in erecting Hurricanes for No. 266 (F) Wing. But it was now armed with a small quota of aircraft and came into action on 23rd February.

The decision to retain two fighter squadrons in Java was taken in expectation of the arrival of U.S.S. “Langley,” a U.S.A. aircraft carrier, with a consignment of P.40 fighters on board, with which it was hoped to arm one of them, the other retaining Hurricanes. Unfortunately the “Langley” was later sunk when approaching Java and the expectation was never realised.

Re-formation of Bomber and Fighter Groups.

498. On 18th February H.Q. Nos. 225 (B) and 226 (F) Groups were re-formed in skeleton to assist Westgroup in re-establishing their squadrons in Java.

No. 225 (B) Group, under Air Commodore Hunter, re-formed in Bandoeng. Bomber aerodromes were visited and assistance given, in co-operation with the Dutch, to units to solve their acute problems of housing, rationing and transportation. Air Commodore Hunter was absorbed into Abdair on 19th February to act as A.O.A.; the remaining members of Group H.Q. were absorbed into H.Q. Westgroup on its arrival in Bandoeng on the 23rd February.

No. 266 (F) Group, under Air Commodore Vincent, took charge of Nos. 232 (F) and 605 (F) Squadrons, and of a fighter operations room in Batavia and its local warning system. This had made good progress during the preceding few days, thanks largely to the initiative of Wing Commander Bell, previously Station Commander at Kallang, Singapore. Owing to the highly developed nature of communications in Java, efficient operations and filter rooms were quickly connected to the Dutch Observer Corps, the fighter aerodrome, the A.A. defences of Batavia, and Abdair’s (later Britair’s) operations room in Bandoeng. Two R.D.F. and two G.L. sets were quickly erected in the Batavia district and were also connected with them. The Dutch provided the utmost assistance, including the provision of many volunteer Dutch youths and women to man the filter and operations rooms; their alertness and enthusiasm could hardly have been bettered.

499. To maintain this Force it was decided to retain:-

(a) No. 153 M.U. (already organised for work at Djocjacarta).

(b) No. 81 R.S.U.

(c) No. 41 Air Stores Park for Unit supply.

(d) An improvised Air Stores Park for collection and sorting of equipment.

500. Establishments were drawn up and issued; and instructions were given that all personnel surplus to establishment were to be evacuated via the R.A.F. Base, Batavia, as shipping became available and as far as possible with their original units. Preference was to be given in the following order, after women and children evacuees – formed units, aircrews, technical personnel and selected details.

501. Aircraft serviceability for various reasons was low: the Hudson and Blenheim Squadrons had about six serviceable each, the two fighter squadrons not more than 18 in all. For the next few days minor operations only were carried out (under Abdair orders), and all efforts were directed towards improving the condition of aircraft and to getting ready generally for the serious operations to come.

AIR OPERATIONS 18TH TO 24TH FEBRUARY.

502. While re-organisation described above was progressing under Westgroup direction, the following operations were carried out under the directions of Abdair.

503. On the 18th February, one Hudson reconnoitred the port of Oesthaven and the road to Palembang. No signs of Japanese activity were observed.

504. On the 19th February all available (5) Blenheims attacked shipping at Palembang. On this day a bombing attack was launched by the Japanese against Semplak and 6 Hudsons were destroyed. Semplak had no A.A. defences and dispersal facilities were poor.

505. On the 20th February 4 Hudsons and 3 Blenheims again bombed shipping at Palembang in the face of severe fighter opposition from aircraft based on P.I. The following day 2 Hudsons and 5 Blenheims continued these attacks. On this occasion it was possible to observe results, hits were obtained and one 10,000-ton ship was set on fire.

506. On the 22nd February, Semplak, which had no A.A. defences, sustained low flying attacks by some 20 fighters. Six Hudsons were burnt out and three others damaged beyond repair. As a result of this raid Abdair approved the move of the remains of No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron R.A.A.F. to Kalidjati where a light battery (8 Bofors) had by 20th February been located as part of the aerodrome defence. Six aircraft were transferred the next day, a rear party being left at Semplak to repair the unserviceable aircraft on the aerodrome and to strip the rest of serviceable parts. Whilst they were there, another attack was sustained on 24th February, and more aircraft, unserviceable, were destroyed.

507. On the 23rd February, 3 Blenheims bombed 4 submarines off the coast and

claimed that one had been sunk.

508. On the 24th February, Kalidjati was bombed by the enemy, and again twice on the 26th. The Bofors guns successfully prevented a low flying attack from developing on the latter date.

509. Four Blenheims attacked P.I on the 25th February. By this time there were only 2 Hudsons operationally serviceable, with 9 others repairable: the Blenheim position, however, was slowly improving.

SUPREME ALLIED H.Q. S.W. PACIFIC LEAVES JAVA.

510. The enemy's unexpectedly rapid advance had frustrated the hopes, originally entertained, of building up a large Allied strength in the S.W. Pacific under the direction of Abdacom in Java, which was by now under imminent threat of invasion. Being without appropriate forces to handle, Abdacom could serve no useful purpose by remaining in the island: on the contrary such action could only result in the loss of a valuable Allied staff, the capture of which would have given great prestige to the enemy. On 22nd February its withdrawal was ordered.

511. It was decided that the British forces remaining in the island should in future operate under the Dutch Naval and Army Commanders-in-Chief in the N.E.I. In conformity with this decision H.Q. Westgroup moved on 23rd February from Soekaboemi and took over the H.Q. in Bandoeng vacated by Abdair. It took over operational control of its squadrons from Abdair on 24th February and was renamed Britair. It was placed under the orders of Maj.-Gen. van Oyen, the Dutch A.O.C., whose staff was already installed in Abdair's operations room. Command passed to the Dutch Authorities on 25th February, and personnel of Abdacom left Java on 25th and 26th February.

512. Before he left Java Sir Archibald Wavell issued his instructions to the A.O.C. Britair (Air Vice Marshal Maltby). They were to the effect that:-

- (a) He was to command all R.A.F. units left in Java.
- (b) He would exercise Command under the orders of General van Oyen, the Dutch A.O.C. in Java, who, in turn, was under Command of the Dutch C.-in-C., General ter Poorten.
- (c) The British Army troops left in Java were under command of Major-General H.D.W. Sitwell who would receive his orders from General ter Poorten.
- (d) To co-operate with the Dutch and to go on fighting as long as they continued effective resistance.
- (e) Thereafter to do the utmost to evacuate remaining personnel.
- (f) To ensure that no undamaged equipment fell into enemy hands.

(g) As senior British Officer in Java to act as signals link between all British forces in the island and their service departments in London, Delhi, Washington and Melbourne.

(h) That no help from outside could be expected for a long time.

513. Gen. van Oyen issued instructions that the operations room, vacated by Abdair, was to be maintained for the combined use of his H.Q. and of Britair, and that it was to be organised for covering all operations in the S.W. Pacific. This necessitated a last minute augmentation of Britair's staff.

514. As the Japanese invasion fleet began its approach to Java, from bases in and around Borneo, on 25th February, energetic action was essential for collecting and organising the necessary personnel and material, and for establishing the contacts with the various Dutch, American and British authorities with whom Britair was now to deal.

515. During the following days encouraging messages were received from the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Air, and from the Chief of the Air Staff, emphasising the importance of every day which could be gained by resistance in Java. These were promulgated.

FORCES AVAILABLE AND DUTCH PLAN FOR DEFENCE OF JAVA.

516. Before proceeding further with the narrative of events it is advisable to give a brief description of the outstanding topographical and climatic features of Java, of the Dutch naval, army and air resources, and of the Dutch plan of defence.

Topography and Weather.

517. Java is approximately 650 miles long with an average width of 80 miles. Its northern coast, the one most exposed to Japanese attack, affords innumerable landing beaches throughout its length. The western end is dominated by aerodromes in South Sumatra. Highly developed road and rail communications cover the Island, the main arterial lines of which run east to west: these are exposed at many points throughout their length to attack by landings on the northern coast. An outstanding feature of the island is its mountainous southern coast, parallel to which run a series of mountainous massifs along the centre of the island. During the season under consideration, S.W. winds pile up tropical thunderstorms on them from midday until far into the night. Whilst these are raging, aircraft based on aerodromes in the southern (mountainous) half of the island are, for the most part, seriously handicapped by them.

Squadrons based on aerodromes along the northern coastal strip are, on the other hand, not so severely handicapped: although heavy cloud and rain occur throughout the afternoon and night, aircraft can effectively operate at all hours. Mornings are usually

bright and cloudless. Aerodromes in the northern coastal strip are, however, sited not far from exposed landing beaches. Their occupation was, therefore, not unattended by risk.

Naval, Army and Air Resources.

High Command.

518. Bandoeng, in central western Java, was the wartime seat of the Dutch Government, and of Naval and Military Headquarters. The latter was known as A.H.K. (The Dutch have no separate air force – their navy and army having their own air contingents.)

The High Dutch Commanders were-

Governor-General of N.E.I. – Jonkheer Dr. A.W.L. Tjardo van Starckenborgh Stachouwer.

C.-in-C. Royal N.E.I. Navy – Admiral Helfrich.

C.-in-C. Royal N.E.I. Army – Lt.-Gen. ter Poorten.

Navy

519. A Combined Allied Fleet was based on Sourabaya, with a subsidiary base at Batavia. It consisted of 8 cruisers (3 British, 2 Australian, 1 American, 2 Dutch), 11 destroyers (5 British, 4 American and 2 Dutch) some Dutch submarines and other auxiliary craft, and was commanded by Vice Admiral C.E.L. Helfrich, Royal Netherlands Navy, as Commander of Naval Forces. He had assumed command on the 11th February.

Army.

520. (a) The Dutch had approximately 25,000 regular troops, made up of four regiments of infantry (native) with artillery, garrison and ancillary units. They had a few obsolete A.F.V.'s, having been unable to obtain modern tanks from the Allies. Units had been heavily depleted of white personnel for various reasons, from a proportion of one white to five native to a proportion of one to about forty. An attempt to re-arm and to re-organise on modern lines had failed because modern armaments were unobtainable for the new units which had been formed for handling them.

(b) In addition there was a Home Guard of about 40,000. They were static in role, and necessarily poorly armed and trained. Those in west Java were reported to be the best, particularly those in the vicinity of Soebang near Kalidjati aerodrome (eventually to be occupied by British bombers) where there were about 1,000 men with twelve armoured cars.

(c) To the Dutch Army was added a small British force under the direction of Major-General H.D.W. Sitwell. It consisted of a squadron of light tanks, two Australian infantry battalions (one a machine-gun unit without its machine guns) and a number of

small administrative units. The whole was organised hastily into a mobile striking force for operation in western Java, and was under the command of Brigadier A.S. Blackburn, V.C. (Australian Imperial Forces). To it were added later an American Field Battalion much under strength, and a contingent of 450 R.A.F. airmen hastily armed and trained as infantry under Wing Commander Alexander. It was called "Blackforce". It co-operated closely with the Dutch troops (under the command of General Schilling) located in western Java for the defence of the Batavia area.

(d) Certain British A.A. batteries were concentrated on aerodrome defence in Western Java as follows:-

Tjililitan – 12 Bofors guns soon after 15th February. Also one battalion Australian Infantry relieved on 25th February by 15th Heavy A.A. Battery armed as infantry. The former were relieved from aerodrome defence duties because they were required as part of "Blackforce".

Kalidjati – 10 Bofors guns soon after 15th February. Also some Dutch Infantry relieved on night 28th February/1st March by 12th Heavy A.A. Battery hastily armed as infantry. The former were wanted for service with the Dutch field army.

Thus there were no Heavy A.A. guns for the defence of these aerodromes. The few available on the island were wanted at more vulnerable places, including the Naval base at Sourabaya.

Air Forces.

521. (a) The Dutch had about 5 Bomber, 3 Fighter and 2 Observation Squadrons in Java, most of which were much depleted as the result of protracted operations in the north. Serviceability of aircraft was low. They and their administrative units operated under Dutch control decentralised from Bandoeng.

(b) There were 12 to 15 American heavy bombers (believed to be B.17's) and a few fighters (P.40's). Whole serviceability was low. These were located under American control in east and central Java.

(c) There was also a mixed Dutch, American and British Reconnaissance Group based in Java for seaward reconnaissance, which operated under a Dutch Commander. No. 205 (F.B.) Squadron formed part of it.

(d) To this force was to be added the British Air Contingent under Westgroup, alias Britair, whose re-organisation has already been described.

During the time that Abdair remained in Java, all the above air formations acted under its direction, control of the first two being exercised through the Dutch A.O.C., General van Oyen. When Abdair left Java, the latter took command of them all.

Strategy

522. An invasion of Java was considered most likely to approach down the east or west sides of Borneo, or both. The Dutch High Command feared simultaneous landings at both ends of the islands, near Sourabaya in the east and in the Sunda Straits on the west: this was the most difficult form of attack to parry, and it was to be expected that the enemy would adopt it. A landing in central Java was not thought to be likely. The Dutch defence plan was laid accordingly.

Dutch Plan.

523. This was:-

(a) To watch, by means of air reconnaissance, as far northwards as possible on both sides of Borneo, and the whole of the Java Sea – this being undertaken by the Reconnaissance Group. Submarines supplemented this watch.

(b) An invasion was to be opposed as far out to sea as possible by air action: all bomber and reconnaissance aircraft were to be used for the purpose when occasion arose.

(c) A Combined Allied Naval Striking Force of 5 cruisers and 9 destroyers was based at Sourabaya and would engage the main threat when it appeared.

(d) Finally, should the enemy land, he was to be resisted on the beaches at certain points only. Suitable landing beaches were so numerous that only a few of the most obvious could be defended. Elsewhere the plan was to keep troops in local reserve and to counter-attack landings with them, the Army falling back if necessary on to previously prepared positions covered by demolitions.

(e) As a successful invasion was all too probable it was decided that there should be two centres for a final stand, a decision which was enforced by a shortage of troops and by the great length of the island. The two chosen centres were Malang Plateau in the east and Bandoeng volcanic plateau in the west.

APPROACH OF ENEMY CONVOYS.

524. On the 25th February air reconnaissance on the east side of Borneo reported that shipping, which had been collecting for some time past in ports in the Macassar Straits, was forming up at Balikpapan, evidently in preparation for putting to sea. The invasion of Java was imminent.

525. On 26th February a convoy of more than 50 ships and transports, accompanied by a strong naval escort, was located in the southern end of the Macassar Straits steaming south.

526. On the 27th February it was again located, now in the Java Sea, on a course and speed which would bring it to the north coast, westward of Sourabaya, at midnight 27th/28th February.

527. The Allied Fleet put to sea and fought an engagement with the escort of heavy cruisers and destroyers during the night 27th/28th February. The latter was very superior in numbers, weight and metal. The Allied ships were either sunk or disabled. This gallant action afforded the land defences another 24 hours' grace, because the transports turned away northwards at the beginning of the sea action and steamed towards Borneo during the night.

528. On 28th February the transports were again located steaming south at a speed which would bring them to landing-beaches westward of Sourabaya about midnight 28th February/1st March.

529. Meanwhile the situation on the west side of Borneo had not developed so clearly. Invasion forces had been suspected in the Natuna or Anambas Islands and possibly at Muntok on Banka Island. Reconnaissances had failed up to 26th February to clarify the situation.

530. On the 27th February, a small convoy with escort was located about 50 miles south of the southern tip of Banka Island steaming slowly on a north-easterly course. This might or might not be part of an invading convoy "marking time" before turning south towards Western Java.

531. On the 28th February about noon, the situation became clearer. A convoy was sighted at that hour approximately 100 miles north-east of Batavia steaming on an easterly course at high speed. It consisted of 11 transports; one cruiser and three destroyers were disposed some 30 miles to the south and on a parallel course. Another and larger convoy was located to the north-west: strength, course and speed were not clear. Both were at a distance which would make landings possible at two points in western Java about midnight.

532. The moon was one day past full, wind off shore, ideal conditions for landing. All was evidently set for simultaneous landings – one at the eastern end of Java probably just west of Sourabaya, and two at the western end of Java in the vicinity of Batavia.

BOMBER OPERATIONS 27TH FEBRUARY TO 1ST MARCH.

533. To revert to the night of 27th/28th February. It then appeared that the major threat would develop against Eastern Java. It was therefore decided to move No. 36 (T.B.) Squadron (9 Vildebeestes and 1 Albacore) at once to Madioen (near Sourabaya) to co-operate with American B.17's in resisting it. No. 36 (T.B.) Squadron arrived at Madioen on the afternoon of 28th February, and during the night 28th February/1st March carried out two sorties per aircraft, the first against transports, the second against landing barges. The first attack entailed a long search because reconnaissance information with which

they had been briefed proved inaccurate. A convoy of 28 ships was eventually found 5 miles off the Coast, north of Rembang, some 100 miles west of Sourabaya. Most pilots claimed hits on transports, and execution amongst the barges. Subsequent reports received from American H.Q. in the area stated that attacks had been most successful and that No. 36 (T.B.) Squadron had sunk 8 ships – the Americans themselves claimed 7 others: but it has not been possible to verify this seemingly very high rate of success. On completion of the second attack, No. 36 (T.B.) Squadron returned direct to Tjikampek, less three aircraft which had been shot down including that of the C.O., Squadron Leader J.T. Wilkins, an outstanding leader who was unfortunately killed. Each aircrew of this squadron, operating from a strange aerodrome, thus carried out two night attacks in 24 hours, involving over 15 hours flying in open cockpits – an excellent achievement.

534. In the meantime, during 28th February, the threat to western Java had crystallised ([para. 531](#)) in the form of two Japanese convoys approaching from the north with the evident intention of landing on both sides of Batavia.

535. All available Blenheims and Hudsons were directed against that convoy, which was approaching the beaches eastward of Batavia. During the night 28th February/1st March, 26 Blenheim and 6 Hudson sorties were carried out against it from Kalidjati. The first attack found it 50 miles north of Eritanwetan, a point on the north coast about 80 miles east of Batavia: it was steaming south at high speed. Weather conditions were bad and by this time only one narrow strip was serviceable on the aerodrome. Not all pilots were sufficiently well trained to cope with the conditions: of those that were, some carried out three sorties each. There is no doubt that attacks were successful and were pressed home from a low level with great determination. When attacks began, 15 ships formed the convoy: early on 1st March, only 7 were seen anchored off the disembarkation beach which was at Eritanwetan. At least three, perhaps more of its ships, are believed to have been sunk. The larger figure may be an exaggeration, as other Japanese ships were seen on 1st March lying off some miles N.W. of the main convoy.

536. Disembarkation at Eritanwetan began at about 0100 hours on 1st March and continued during the rest of the night, despite a number of attacks by our aircraft while landing was in progress.

537. During the night, the Dutch A.O.C., General van Oyen, advised Air Vice Marshal Maltby that the bomber force at Kalidjati would be more favourably placed for opposing the enemy landings if it remained there than if it were withdrawn to aerodromes further inland amongst the hills. He did not appear to have much confidence in the weak detachments of Dutch Home Guard which were watching the river crossings on the roads leading from the enemy landing at Eritanwetan to Kalidjati, a distance of more than 50 kilometres. But he placed more reliance upon the Home Guard of about 1,000 strong, supported by about 10 armoured cars, which were located at Soebang, a town on the road leading to the aerodrome. He also stated that a Dutch battalion at Cheribon had been

ordered to counter-attack the landing. The British A.O.C., therefore, decided to keep the bomber force at Kalidjati where it was best placed to resist the enemy.

538. It was decided to “stand down” bombers at Kalidjati at the end of the night’s operation because:-

(a) Crews had been on a stretch for 36 hours, standing by during much of the night of 27th-28th February, and then operating at high pressure throughout late afternoon and the night of 28th February-1st March. They had worked splendidly, had achieved good results, and needed a rest.

(b) There would be plenty for the crews to do at high pressure for several days to come.

(c) Previous experience had shown that Blenheims and Hudsons were particularly vulnerable if employed in the cloudless conditions which prevail during the mornings at this season, because the Japanese normally provided their landings with strong Navy ‘O’ fighter cover. It was therefore decided to employ bombers daily during the late afternoons (when cloud cover could be relied upon) and under cover of darkness, and to use all available fighters, which could look after themselves, to continue the opposition, during the cloudless mornings.

539. On completion of the night’s work, the Station Commander at Kalidjati, Group Captain Whistondale, was instructed at 0700 hours, 1st March, to disperse his aircraft and to prepare them for further operations later in the day.

Shortly after daybreak the Dutch squadrons withdrew from Kalidjati aerodrome, under General van Oyen’s orders as it later transpired, although no information that they were going to do so was given to the A.O.C. or his staff. Nor were the latter kept informed that the Dutch counter attack had failed or that the Dutch defences between the beaches and Kalidjati had not been able to put up the resistance it had been understood they would offer. It is probable that this failure was due to the fact that time had been insufficient for the wheels of co-operation of the recently established staffs (see [para. 514](#)) to get run in, and that there was a similar unestablished close touch between the aerodrome and the local Dutch Commander in Soebang. It had a disastrous sequel.

540. About 1030 hours the aerodrome was overrun by Japanese light tanks supported by infantry in lorries – part of the force which had landed at Eritanwetan some hours earlier – and the aerodrome was captured. The whole force of Blenheims, by now reduced to 8 serviceable aircraft, being fully dispersed, was captured. 4 Hudsons which were dispersed on the aerodrome managed to take off under fire of light tanks, which were by now on the aerodrome, and to reach Andir near Bandoeng.

541. Subsequent inquiry made it clear that the aerodrome defence party, a combination of Army and R.A.F. personnel, put up a stout fight and covered the withdrawal of the ground personnel of the squadrons, the majority of the Bofors guns adopting an anti-tank role. It is believed that there are no British survivors of the

aerodrome defence party. The Japanese appear to have given no quarter. Later the Japanese testified to the gallant and protracted defence the aerodrome defences put up, and this was supported by the number of bodies, both British and Japanese, which were found near the aerodrome and in the woods around it by the British salvage parties employed by the Japanese after the capitulation of Java. The Dutch aerodrome defence contingent, although it had been relieved during the night by the newly arrived British defence party, remained to assist in the defence. It located posts on the roads leading to the aerodrome on the N., E., and W., the two former of which were overrun by the enemy's armoured vehicles, to deal with which it had no antitank weapons. The number of Dutch bodies which were later found on both sides of the roads along which the Japanese attack came, testify to the opposition it put up.

542. It has been impracticable as yet to obtain a clear picture of what exactly happened at Kalidjati. Surviving British witnesses of consequence are few. Much still remains unsatisfactorily explained. It is hoped that time may reveal the full facts.

543. The captured aerodrome was only a few miles from Tjikampek, the aerodrome on which No. 36 (T.B.) Squadron was also resting after having operated throughout the night ([para. 533](#)). The latter aerodrome had no defences whatever and was in considerable danger of being overrun by the same troops which had already captured Kalidjati. The Squadron was, therefore, immediately withdrawn to Andir, and was later moved to Tjikamber in S.W. Java, Group Captain Nicholetts being placed in command of the Station.

FIGHTER OPERATIONS IN BATAVIA AREA – 1ST FEBRUARY TO 3RD MARCH 1942.

Consolidation of Fighter Strength.

544. Before proceeding further it is necessary to turn to earlier operations of the Fighter Force.

545. It will be remembered that Nos. 232 (F) and 605 (F) Squadrons were operating at Tjililitan under a Sector Control (a skeleton of No. 226 (F) Group) whose operations rooms and warning systems were installed in and around Batavia.

546. From 17th to 27th February this force was continually in action in its role of the air defence of Batavia. Normal odds met in air fighting were in the vicinity of 10-1. Its operations were handicapped, particularly during the earlier part of the period, by insufficient warning of approaching enemy aircraft.

547. A Fighter Group H.Q. became redundant by 27th February, its squadrons and overhead controlling organisation being established by that date. The Group Commander, Air Commodore Vincent, and several members of his staff, were ordered on that date by

the A.O.C. to leave Java, which they subsequently did by sea.

548. By noon on 28th February the combined strength of the two fighter squadrons was less than that of one. The U.S. aircraft carrier “Langley” had been sunk by the Japanese when bringing in a full load of P-40 fighters, with some of which it had been hoped to re-arm one of the squadrons. Thus the last prospect of keeping two fighter squadrons at reasonable strength had gone. It was decided to retain No. 232 (F) Squadron which, under Squadron Leader Brooker’s leadership, volunteered to remain in Java. Vacancies in it were filled from volunteers in No. 605 (F) Squadron. No. 605 Squadron, except the volunteers who could be employed, was withdrawn for evacuation after it had handed over its remaining aircraft to No. 232 (F) Squadron on the afternoon of 28th February.

Fighter Operations 1st – 3rd March.

549. In accordance with the decision ([para. 538](#) (c)) not to employ bombers during the cloudless mornings, but to oppose the landings during these hours by means of fighters, instructions were issued to No. 232 (F) Squadron to employ all its Hurricanes throughout the forenoon of 1st March, in co-operation with 10 Dutch Kittyhawks and 6 Buffaloes, in attacking two Japanese landings which had occurred simultaneously during the night in Western Java.

550. One of these landings was that which had been made at Eritanwetan ([para. 536](#)). Twelve Hurricanes took part in opposing it, and in doing so encountered intense A.A. fire. They pressed home their attacks at low height, inflicting severe casualties amongst troops in landing craft, and set on fire at least six landing craft and three motor vehicles. Several later attacks against the same targets also produced good results.

551. The other landing in Western Java had occurred simultaneously with the foregoing one, but on the extreme western beaches on either side of Merak in the Sunda Straits. It was in greater strength. The remaining Hurricanes of No. 232 (F) Squadron made several sorties against it during the morning at the request of the Dutch Army: they successfully engaged enemy columns, including cavalry and M.T., advancing along the roads from the landing beaches towards Batavia.

552. After the British bombers had been overrun at Kalidjati the fighters continued their attacks against the landing at Eritanwetan. Shortly after midday they brought to a standstill a cyclist column proceeding westwards towards Batavia. In addition three Japanese flying boats were destroyed on the water.

553. All No. 232 (F) Squadron aircraft suffered damage in varying degree from A.A. fire during these operations, which were all carried out at low level.

554. On 2nd March Tjililitan aerodrome was under constant attack by the enemy, and the squadron was in action all day defending it and carrying out road reconnaissances in western Java for the Dutch Army. The aerodrome was also becoming somewhat

exposed to overland attack by Japanese forces which had disembarked at Eritanwetan; these were, by the afternoon, reported to be approaching Poerwokerto and the river crossings thirty miles or so to the north-east of the aerodrome. Withdrawal along the road which passes through those places was already out of the question. Moreover, these places were held by Dutch troops on similar lines to Soebang and the river crossings protecting Kalidjati aerodrome; a repetition of the Kalidjati debacle, involving the only remaining British fighter squadron, was distinctly possible during the night or following morning. The A.O.C. therefore, when visiting the aerodrome on this day, ordered No. 232 (F) Squadron, now 10 Hurricanes, to move back to Andir near Bandoeng, the move of the ground parties and aerodrome defence troops to be completed along the Buitenzorg road by the following day. Group Captain Noble was appointed Station Commander at Andir.

555. In the early morning of 3rd March the squadron returned to Tjililitan from Andir under orders issued by General van Oyen. It was airborne throughout the morning repelling Japanese air attacks. At noon it was finally withdrawn to Andir, en route to which it made a successful attack on Kalidjati aerodrome destroying several enemy aircraft. A running fight took place with Japanese fighters from Kalidjati to Bandoeng.

Withdrawal from Batavia.

556. As the Dutch announced on 3rd March their intention of declaring Batavia an “open” town, the operations and filter rooms; together with the radar stations in the vicinity, were destroyed, and their staffs were ordered to Bandoeng on the 3rd March.

OPERATIONS BY No. 205 (F.B.) SQUADRON – 1ST FEBRUARY TO 3RD MARCH.

557. No. 205 (F.B.) Squadron during the whole of its stay in Java operated as a unit of the Allied Reconnaissance Group which was responsible for all seaward reconnaissance throughout the S.W. Pacific Command. This Group, under Dutch Command, took its orders first from Abdair and then, after Abdair left Java, from General van Oyen, the Dutch A.O.C. Britair was responsible for administration only of 205 (F.B.) Squadron.

558. Based on Batavia and Oesthaven, 205 (B) Squadron carried out reconnaissances between Borneo and Sumatra, and also undertook anti-submarine patrols in the Sunda Straits.

559. When the Japanese descended upon the Batavia area on 1st March it was ordered to transfer its base to Tjilitjap, an unserviceable flying boat having to be destroyed when it left. The Squadron operated from Tjilitjap on anti-submarine patrols until 3rd March, by which time it could no longer be usefully employed. The squadron was then ordered out of the island, two boats going to Ceylon and one, with a damaged air-screw, to Australia.

FINAL AIR OPERATIONS – 4TH MARCH TO 8TH MARCH 1942.

560. The position on the morning of 4th March was:-

(a) H.Q. Britair – Bandoeng.

(b) No. I (GR) Squadron, R.A.A.F., 7 Hudsons (3 serviceable) – Andir.

(c) No. 232 (F) Squadron, 10 Hurricanes (all in dubious condition) – Andir.

(d) No. 36 (T.B.) Squadron, 5 Vildebeestes (4 just serviceable) – Tjikamber

(e) About 450 armed R.A.F. personnel under Wing Commander Alexander operating as infantry with “Blackforce” in the Buitenzorg area.

(f) About 1,900 unarmed personnel awaiting evacuation near the port of Tjilitjap, and a further 600 at Djojacarta; many other personnel now surplus to squadron requirements were under orders to move to the area as accommodation became available near the port.

561. The Army situation on 4th March was:-

Eastern Java: The enemy had made a successful landing on 1st March west of Sourabaya and was pressing the Dutch forces in two directions – those originally in the Sourabaya district towards the S.E. extremity of the island, and those in central Java westwards towards Poerwokerto.

Western Java: The enemy after landing at Eritanwetan had captured Kalidjati aerodrome, on which strong Japanese fighter forces were by now well established. The enemy had repulsed Dutch attempts on 2nd March to recapture Soebang (from the direction of which the enemy was by now pressing towards Bandoeng) and on 3rd March to recapture Kalidjati aerodrome.

The enemy force, which had landed in the Sunda Straits, had forced the evacuation of Batavia, and the Dutch garrison of extreme western Java was in the Buitenzorg – Soekaboemi vicinity, falling back on the final Bandoeng “stronghold.”

562. No. 36 (T.B.) Squadron based at Tjikamber attacked Kalidjati aerodrome, now full of enemy aircraft, on the nights of 2nd-3rd and 3rd-4th March. On 4th March it was moved to Tasik Malaja because of reports (subsequently proved to be false) of landings in S.W. Java which threatened the aerodrome, and because the rapid advance, authentic, of the enemy towards Soekaboemi threatened to cut the only road available for withdrawal from it.

563. From Tasik Malaja the squadron continued attacks on Kalidjati during the nights of 4th-5th and 5th-6th March, doing two sorties per aircraft on the former night. Large fires were caused and considerable damage was done.

564. On 6th March, by which date an early capitulation had been forecast by

General ter Poorten (See [para. 577](#)), two aircraft only remained serviceable, and orders were given for these to be flown north in an endeavour to reach Burma. They left on the 7th March but unfortunately both crashed in Sumatra and the crews were either killed or captured.

565. *No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron, R.A.A.F.*, was ordered to fly its three remaining flyable Hudsons to Australia carrying operational records and as many spare aircrews as possible. The first left on the night 4th-5th, the others on the nights of 5th-6th and 6th-7th – all reaching Australia.

566. *No. 232 (F) Squadron*, now at Andir, was given the role of carrying out periodic offensive sweeps against Kalidjati aerodrome. It was instructed also to take advantage of any particularly favourable targets presented by the Japanese Army attacking Bandoeng from the north. For the latter purpose the squadron established a liaison officer at the Dutch H.Q. responsible for defences on that front.

567. By this time no warning of impending attack could be obtained, and the aerodrome was subjected to almost continuous attack throughout each day. The squadron was repeatedly in action and considerable success was achieved.

568. By the 7th March the squadron was reduced to 5 aircraft. On this day it was transferred to Tasik Malaja, and by the evening only two aircraft remained. These two carried out a tactical road reconnaissance on the morning of the 8th March, and on completion of this they were destroyed under orders from Britain.

Operations of No. 266 (F) Wing.

569. Whilst *No. 266 (F) Wing* was in action in Sumatra and Java it is believed to have inflicted the following losses on the enemy:-

In Sumatra, 2nd-16th February.

About 8 enemy aircraft were shot down. In co-operation with the bombers of *No. 225 (B) Group*, very heavy casualties were inflicted on troops in boats and barges moving up the Palembang river on 15th February.

In Java, 17th February-8th March.

About 32 enemy aircraft were shot down (8 by *No. 605 Squadron* and 24 by *232 Squadron*) of which about 15 were destroyed during the closing days in Java, 2nd to 8th March. Heavy casualties were also inflicted on enemy troops which landed on Java at Eritanwetan and Merak, particularly the former.

During the combined periods about 60 Hurricanes were lost, chiefly on the ground, by enemy attacks on our inadequately defended aerodromes.

PROGRESS OF EVACUATION.

570. Throughout the period under review, evacuation of surplus R.A.F. personnel proceeded as fast as shipping permitted. Units were concentrated for evacuation as they became surplus to requirements. They were kept together as units as far as possible, and as shipping accommodation allowed. Towards the end, when accommodation became extremely limited, priority was given to aircrews and technical personnel whose value in other theatres of war was greatest.

571. On the 23rd February, owing to enemy action, Batavia was closed as a port and the R.A.F. Base, Batavia, with its ancillary transit camps, was progressively transferred to Poerwokerto, adjacent to Tjilitjap in South Java, the sole port still open. Tjilitjap was also subjected to air bombardment, and ships leaving it to attack by Japanese light naval forces. On the 27th February, S.S. "City of Manchester" was torpedoed off Tjilitjap whilst approaching the port to assist in the evacuation.

572. From the 1st March onwards, little movement from the port took place. It was finally closed on the 5th March leaving on the island about 2,500 R.A.F. personnel whom it had been intended to evacuate, but for whom no shipping was made available.

573. On 5th and 6th March about 8 seats were allotted to the R.A.F. in Dutch Lodestars; the Dutch had been using these aircraft to evacuate personnel to Australia. The Lodestar service ceased on the 6th March, thus closing the last evacuation channel from Java.

574. A handicap experienced throughout the evacuation of surplus R.A.F. personnel was the difficulty which many of the Dutch had in understanding the necessity for sending out of the island, at a time when it was about to be invaded, personnel who appeared to them to be soldiers: they could not realise that our airmen were untrained as such and were of great value in their real role as airmen for prosecution of the war elsewhere. Informed Dutch authorities appreciated the matter, but many failed to grasp its truth. This is said in no critical spirit; the Dutch outlook is easily understood. But it must be stated in part explanation of the loss in Java of a number of surplus airmen.

575. During the period 18th February onwards, nearly 7,000 R.A.F. personnel were evacuated, leaving a total of about 5,000 in Java.

EVENTS LEADING UP TO SURRENDER OF JAVA.

576. *Conference at Dutch Headquarters.* At 1800 hours on the 5th March, the Dutch Commander-in-Chief, Lieut.-Gen. ter Poorten, convened a conference at his H.Q., A.H.K. in Bandoeng. The Air Officer Commanding, Britair, and the General Officer Commanding British Military Forces in Java, Major-General H.D.W. Sitwell, and representatives of their staffs, were summoned to this conference. It was also attended by senior officers of

the Dutch C.-in-C's. staff.

577. At this conference the Dutch Commander-in-Chief stated:-

(a) That the situation was grave: the enemy had practically overcome the northern defences of Bandoeng and was also rapidly closing in from the west.

(b) That morale was at a low ebb and that it was possible Bandoeng might fall very soon. When the enemy penetrated the outer defences, the C.-in-C. did not propose to defend that town, which would be declared an open city. It was full of refugees and could not in any case hold out for long.

(c) That no guerilla warfare was possible or would be attempted by the Dutch. There was great hostility amongst the native population towards the whites, and without the help of the natives guerilla warfare could not possibly be successful. All his staff were emphatically agreed that such warfare was out of the question.

(d) That owing to difficulties of communication, Dutch G.H.Q. could operate only from Bandoeng. They could not exercise control from elsewhere and so would not move from Bandoeng.

(e) That resistance was to be carried on elsewhere under the direction of local commanders if possible and in accordance with an order issued by Queen Wilhelmina of Holland that there should be no surrender to the Japanese. He then added an unexpected rider – that he had instructed his troops to disregard any order that he might subsequently issue to them to cease fighting: they were to disobey it and to go on fighting.

578. In subsequent discussion the Commander-in-Chief was informed by General Sitwell that the British would certainly continue to fight on as long as any of the Dutch did so. When Dutch resistance ceased, then he must reserve to himself the right to decide his actions in accordance with the circumstances at the time. The Commander-in-Chief also informed the A.O.C. that A.H.Q. and Andir aerodrome in Bandoeng must not be defended in the event of the Japanese entering the town. The Commander-in-Chief was then asked to allot an area in the hills in which the British Forces could concentrate and continue resistance. After some discussion he allotted an area near Santoso to the southward of Bandoeng. Its choice appeared to be influenced more as a means of escape to the south coast than as a stronghold; emphasis had to be laid on the fact that it was wanted for the latter purpose.

British move into the Hills.

579. In consequence the G.O.C. and the A.O.C. British Forces went to Santosa at first light on the 6th March to reconnoitre. The remainder of A.H.Q. and other Army and R.A.F. personnel in the area of Bandoeng, except the ground party at Andir, were moved to Tasik Malaja the same day.

580. The distribution of Air Force personnel on the 6th March (p.m.) was:-

(a) Tasik Malaja, preparing for defence, with Army Units also ordered there	900
(b) Contingent with "Blackforce"	450
(c) Andir area, aerodrome staff and units	850
(d) Poerwokerto area awaiting evacuation, under Air Commodore Silly's orders	2,500
(e) Detached from units, stragglers, escape parties, etc., in south central Java	400
Total	5,100

581. The orders issued to the various contingents on the 6th March were:-

(a) The Andir contingent was to surrender because Bandoeng was being declared an "open" town, and on that day there was no transport to move them.

(b) The Poerwokerto contingent was to place itself under the orders of the local Dutch Commander, stand fast and surrender. There was no alternative as the men were unarmed and had very slender rations and other resources. They would have been an embarrassment to a final stand in the hills, yet would have had to share its hardships and any retribution which might be meted out. They were therefore less likely to come to harm if they were not associated with further resistance.

(c) The Tasik Malaja contingent was to defend to the last the aerodrome area, where the G.O.C. and A.O.C. would rejoin them if a better place for continuing the fight was not found.

582. Reconnaissance of the Santosa area on 6th March drew a blank. Not only was the terrain unsuited for defence by a small force, but the local Dutch had no defence plan, obviously did not want fighting to occur there, and were only too ready to assist the British to the coast.

583. As the result of a suggestion from General Schilling, who was most helpful to the British in their wish to continue resistance, the area south of Tjikadjang was reconnoitred on 7th March. It was found more suitable for protracted defence. It was therefore decided to concentrate all army units and all armed R.A.F. personnel in the defence of that area.

584. In conformity with this decision orders were issued to the following to move to the area on 8th March:-

(a) The Andir contingent, for whom transport was now available; and

(b) the Tasik Malaja contingent.

Both of these contingents were armed. In addition, “Blackforce” and all other British Army Units in Java were also ordered to the area. The total combined force was about 8,000 strong.

585. At the same time it was confirmed that the remainder of the personnel, who were unarmed, were to stand fast and surrender. The Dutch G.O.C. of the Poerwokerto area, under whose direction Air Commodore Silly had placed the Poerwokerto contingent in accordance with his instructions, ordered them to move further west because unarmed forces would be an embarrassment in a locality where he intended to resist the Japanese advance. This was done under his arrangements and the contingent arrived at Tasik Malaja on 8th March (p.m.). It had suffered severe casualties owing to its rail convoy having been ambushed en route.

586. On 7th March (p.m.) A.H.K. declared Bandoeng, Tasik Malaja and Garoet “open” towns. This action had been anticipated for Bandoeng but in respect of the other two it came as a complete surprise, and it did not assist the concentration of the British Forces in the hills, which was by now in progress.

587. Early on 8th March moves to the concentration area in the hills began. A combined Army/Air H.Q. was established at Tjikadjang with W/T station alongside to communicate with the Air Ministry, etc.

Order to Surrender received from Dutch H.Q.

588. At about 0900 hours 8th March, a rough translation of a broadcast by the Dutch C.-in-C. was received at British H.Q. at Tjikadjang. It had been promulgated in the name of all the Allied Forces in Java as well as in that of the Dutch. At about 1030 hours it was telephoned through in English by, it is believed, Colonel Gulik the Dutch Air Staff Officer at A.H.K., who had come for the purpose to Garoet at the foot of the hills. It was to the effect that “all organised resistance” in Java had ceased and that troops were to offer no further resistance to the Japanese. Colonel Gulik said that the Dutch C.-in-C. had cancelled his instructions about disregarding surrender orders and that he intended this order to be obeyed. The last was quite unexpected.

589. The A.O.C. received this message and, in the absence of the G.O.C., who was reconnoitring the area and allocating defence positions, he first sent a despatch rider to inform the G.O.C., and then, feeling that further clarification was desirable, went himself to Garoet to make further enquiries.

590. At Garoet the Dutch Resident, Heer Koffman (the District Civil Administrator) who had on the previous day, 7th March, strongly emphasised the difficulties of local supplies and accommodation, and had been apprehensive about the prospects of a “massacre of whites” if guerilla warfare was attempted particularly amongst

the difficult natives of the Garoet district, now on 8th March re-emphasised his belief in the dangers of a native rising if fighting in the hills was attempted. He called in other authorities to support his opinion – amongst them the District Regent (Native District Administrator).

591. The A.O.C. rang up A.H.K. and spoke (it is believed) to Colonel Gulik who confirmed that the Dutch C.-in-C. had cancelled his order, and that he intended his latest instruction, namely for fighting to stop, to be obeyed. He said that all Dutch troops were complying. The A.O.C. then telephoned to several other Dutch centres and found this to be so in each instance.

592. Whilst he was so engaged, A.H.K. again rang him up at the Resident's House. The Staff Officer doing so specifically enquired whether the British were going to fight, whether General Sitwell had full control of "Blackforce", and whether the last could be persuaded to stop fighting. To these questions he was given non-committal answers except an assurance that "Blackforce" would definitely obey any orders General Sitwell might issue. The A.O.C. was given a further urgent message from the Dutch C.-in-C., which it is understood was telephoned through from Kalidjati, where at that time the Dutch C.-in-C. was negotiating terms with the Japanese C.-in-C. The message pressed for action to be taken to stop "Blackforce" blowing up any more bridges to cover their withdrawal to the hills, as this action was handicapping the negotiations. It is not known how the information about blowing the bridges south-east of Bandoeng reached the Japanese at Kalidjati many miles to the north. This information made it clear that the Japanese already knew our intention and whither we were withdrawing into the hills.

593. The A.O.C. then returned to Tjikadjang where he met the G.O.C. and Brigadier Blackburn at 1330 hours, when the situation was as follows:-

(a) Troops were arriving in the concentration area, the last being due during the night. They possessed small arms and ammunition and a few Bofors guns, but as had been expected, no mortars, aircraft or artillery. Although personnel were tired and many were poorly clad and kitted, particularly R.A.F. personnel evacuated from Singapore, morale appeared on the whole good.

(b) Administrative arrangements were, however, grave. Only 3 days' rations had so far accompanied the force. Army convoys had experienced considerable obstruction when collecting stores, and the dump in Bandoeng was reputed to be destroyed (news later to prove false). There might be time to collect some more, but this was not certain. Petrol was limited to what vehicles had in their tanks. The combined British/Australian Field Hospital in Bandoeng could not be moved to the hills because it was already overloaded with patients. Hospitalisation was therefore totally impracticable, and medical supplies limited to those carried by units, which were few and of a first aid nature only. Water was everywhere polluted by reason of native habits, water carts were few and effective sterilization was impracticable. Stomach troubles were already in evidence.

594. Given local co-operation and time these handicaps could have been overcome, but there appeared to be prospect of neither. The Dutch had ceased fighting everywhere and, to say the least, were not being helpful. The natives might, or might not, turn against the whites: warning about them had been received, and in any case they were unlikely to assist. And time had suddenly become unexpectedly short now that the Japanese knew about the movement. Much had still to be done in reorganising, in preparing positions for defence and in solving administrative difficulties. Time was now particularly short for training the R.A.F. contingent, which comprised about one-third of the force, in its new and future role, namely in infantry fighting about which it knew nothing, particularly of jungle fighting. Indeed, many A.A. gunners recently rearmed as infantry were in little better case.

595. Yet something might have been done but for the quandary in which the British had now been placed by reason of the Dutch C.-in-C's. broadcast ([para. 588](#)). This had been promulgated on behalf of the British forces, as well as on that of the Dutch, but without consultation with the A.O.C. or G.O.C. and although the British intention to continue resistance was well known to the Dutch C.-in-C. The broadcast contained the phrase "All organised resistance having now ceased." This phrase had an important bearing. It was believed to have the effect in international law of placing those who continued to resist outside the protection of belligerent rights and subject to summary execution if captured. The Japanese were likely to exercise their rights in the matter. The problem which now faced the A.O.C. and G.O.C. was how to sort out the force, now in a state of movement over a wide area, into those who were willing to face such consequences and those who were not. The latter could not be given legal orders to continue fighting under such conditions as bandits against their will. The next problem was to reorganise the former into a fighting force well clear of the latter and of the 2,900 unarmed R.A.F. contingent which had by now moved unpleasantly close, although still in the plains ([para. 585](#)). One alternative was to send the "bouches inutiles" down to the plains to surrender and for the former to fight where they were. But Japanese revenge on those who submitted themselves under such circumstances was already too well known to permit adoption of such a course. The other alternative was for the volunteer contingent to move to, and reorganise in, a new defence area. But this was impracticable. The Japanese already occupied Bandoeng, through which led all roads to the hill country in the S.W. extremity of Java, where lay the only other remote spots which might be suitable for guerilla resistance: the country elsewhere was too highly developed and too well served by numerous roads. The Japanese quite clearly knew where the British had withdrawn and their intention, and were free to follow up quickly, as was their habit. It was thus impracticable by now to reorganise anything effective.

596. In these circumstances the A.O.C. and G.O.C., regretfully decided that they must comply with the order to surrender. The order as received from A.H.K. was accordingly issued to units about 1430 hours.

Orders were also issued:-

(a) To destroy arms and warlike stores likely to be of value to the enemy, except a limited amount of transport.

(b) For all ranks to observe absolute reticence if questioned for military information by the enemy.

A signal was sent to the R.A.F. H.Q. Signal Section for transmission to the Air Ministry to the effect that the orders to surrender were being complied with. The reasons why this signal did not get through are contained in [paras. 610-613](#).

Escape Organisation.

597. Col. van der Post, a British officer believed to be of South African Dutch descent, had remained in Java in order to organise a means of escape after the foreseen occupation of the island by the Japanese. He initiated plans for assembly points in the mountains to the southward of Batavia and tried to organise shipping and boats for surreptitious evacuation from the mountainous S.W. coast. Lack of time prevented his plans maturing. Great credit is due to this officer for his activities, attended as they were by considerable personal risk at the hands of the enemy, a fact of which he was well aware. In anticipation of Col. van der Post's plans succeeding, authority was given by the A.O.C. for the issue from public funds of 2,000 guilders to each of twenty individuals to finance the attempt; action was to be taken by Air Commodore Staton to select them.

598. Despite the necessity for abandoning the organised escape scheme, many still wished to make an attempt to leave Java. The hazards involved by the doubtful attitude of the natives and the malarial nature of the country were pointed out; if nevertheless they wished to persevere in their attempts they were assisted by advice and the advance of money from the funds already drawn for the organised escape scheme.

POST-CAPITULATION PERIOD, 8TH – 30TH MARCH, 1942.

8 th – 10 th March.

599. By 2200 hours 8th March the concentration in the hills, as ordered, was complete. Distribution of Royal Air Force personnel was:-

In Tjikadjang area, in the hills, armed	2,200 (approx.)
Tasik Malaja and other areas, in the plains, unarmed	2,500 (,,)
Stragglers, detached and in hospital in Bandoeng	400 (,,)

600. On 9th March a second order was received from A.H.K., containing instructions to collect arms, to display white flags and to make surrender arrangements with the nearest Japanese General. The A.O.C. accordingly went to Bandoeng on 9th March and on 10th March contacted Lieut. General Maruyama, the Japanese Commander in the Bandoeng district. From him were received instructions about collecting arms and troops and handing them over to Japanese representatives. Accommodation and promises to help with supplies were also obtained. He forbade communication with outside countries, but implied when pressed, without committing himself fully, that prisoners would be treated in accordance with the Geneva Convention of 1929.

11th – 12th March.

601. On 11th March the four Senior Officers (British A.O.C. and G.O.C.: Australian – Brigadier Blackburn: American – Col. Searle) were summoned to Garoet. They were conducted during the night from there to Bandoeng. The true reason was not told them. After being kept waiting all night they were assembled at 0730 hours 12th March for the formal signing of the surrender terms before General Maruyama.

602. In front of a number of Japanese witnesses General Maruyama undertook that prisoners would be treated in accordance with the terms of the Geneva Convention of 1929, an undertaking which was recorded in writing.

603. An undertaking that the British and American troops would obey all orders of the Japanese was also included. An attempt to introduce the word “lawful” before the word “orders” was refused by General Maruyama who stated that it was unnecessary since he was giving P.O.W’s. the protection of the Geneva Convention, under which no unlawful orders by the Japanese Army would be possible. It was evident that further insistence on the inclusion of the word “lawful” might lose the grant of the terms of the Geneva Convention. It was, therefore, erased from the original Instrument of Surrender, which was retained by General Maruyama.

13th – 20th March.

604. Arms and equipment were subsequently surrendered at Garoet, all equipment and weapons in possession of the R.A.F. except some M.T., a number of rifles and bayonets, some field glasses and minor equipment, having been destroyed. Some difficulty arose about this, but an explanation that it was a point of honour with the British not to let arms fall undamaged into the enemy’s hands was accepted.

605. On 17th March all senior officers were summoned to Garoet for the first cross-examination by the Japanese Intelligence Staff: a few other officers who happened to be nearby also became involved. So far as the G.O.C. and A.O.C. were concerned, it was conducted entirely correctly. Refusals to answer questions, based on the Geneva

Convention of 1929, were generally accepted.

606. Brigadier S.R. Pearson was, however, faced by a firing party but, on still refusing to speak, was pardoned. Pilot Officer R.L. Cicurel was threatened with mutilation but, still refusing, was also pardoned.

607. On 20th March occurred a further deliberate and flagrant violation of the Geneva Convention. General H.D.W. Sitwell, Air Commodore W.E. Staton, Brigadier S.R. Pearson, Group Captain A.G. Bishop and Colonel A.E. Searle, U.S. Army, went to Bandoeng ostensibly to attend a conference. They were, instead, subjected to interrogation for military information by Major Saitu, an Intelligence Staff Officer. The first four were subjected to a month's rigorous imprisonment, which in Japanese hands is truly rigorous, for refusing to answer questions, after which they were released. Whether or not representations made by the Dutch Representative of the International Red Cross in Bandoeng and by Col. E.E. Dunlop, C.O. of the Australian Hospital in Bandoeng, to General Maruyama's H.Q. had any effect in bringing about their release will never be known; but there is reason to believe that this may have been the case, because these events coincided in time.

608. The Japanese subsequently endeavoured to extract information from aircrews of Nos. 232 (F) Squadron and No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron, R.A.A.F., and from other individual officers and airmen, with almost complete lack of success, in spite of protracted brutal treatment in many cases. They then gave up all attempts to obtain it. More than once, their Intelligence Officers afterwards stated that the British had proved obstinate and stupid about the matter and had suffered accordingly. Credit is due to the above named individuals, who were the first to set an example of compliance with orders to observe complete reticence in spite of brutal treatment, as it is due to those who subsequently followed their lead.

609. The later treatment of P.O.W.'s, with little regard to the terms of the Geneva Convention of 1929 which had been accorded to them on surrendering, is too well known to need further elaboration in this report.

Breakdown of Signals Communication with Air Ministry.

610. The original site chosen on 7th March (p.m.) for the Signals Station near Tjikadjang proved unsuitable for communication with outside countries, screened as it was by the surrounding mountains. It was, therefore, moved about noon 8th March towards the coast, in an attempt to find a suitable position.

611. A technical breakdown, caused by contamination of the Diesel fuel of the T. 1087 high power transmitter, followed by a road accident which damaged the transmitter itself, presented this set being used again.

612. Attempts were made that evening to come into action with another, a low

power, set were at first forbidden by the Commander of the Dutch troops into whose area the station had by now moved, and who by this time, was strictly obeying the terms of surrender. These orders forbade further communication with the outside world. Despite them a T. 1082/R. 1083 Vanette set was brought into action but it failed to establish communication with Melbourne, Ambala or Air Ministry. Several signals were broadcast by this means for three hours on the morning of 9th March in the hope that they would be picked up. Amongst them was the signal which informed the Air Ministry that the orders to surrender were being complied with ([para. 596](#)).

It subsequently transpired that these signals were not picked up although at the time the operator believed that they had been.

613. Subsequent attempts by the Signal Station to contact H.Q. and reciprocal attempts by H.Q. to find the new position of the station, failed to establish touch before the staff of this station had to destroy their equipment because:-

(a) It was believed that the last signals for despatch had been sent:

(b) Current reports of the imminent arrival of Japanese troops (subsequently proved to be false) made it necessary to destroy compromising documents and the set itself, to avoid capture in accordance with strict instructions which the A.O.C. had issued a few days previously on the subject of preventing the capture of cyphers and secret equipment.

These were the circumstances in which the report of the final surrender of the British troops in Java was not received by their respective Governments.

REFLECTIONS ON THE FAR EAST CAMPAIGN, DECEMBER, 1941, TO MARCH, 1942.

SCOPE OF REPORT.

614. This paper reports on only one aspect of the campaign of 1941/42 in the Far East – the air aspect. Weaknesses are admitted where they are believed to have existed. The air aspect was, however, only one of several. An account which discloses its weaknesses, but not those of the other aspects, is liable to leave an impression that the air was primarily responsible for the downfall of Malaya. This was not the case.

615. In order to counteract this tendency it is necessary, therefore, to refer to weaknesses elsewhere which played their part. This is done hereunder in no carping spirit, but in recognition of their causes and of the efforts made by those who endeavoured to overcome them. It is done for one reason only – to counterbalance a one-sided examination and to throw the whole into perspective. Weaknesses lay in many places. Failure in Malaya was a combined failure brought about firstly by the unpreparedness of

the Empire as a whole for war, and then, when war came, by the needs of far more vital theatres of war on the other side of the world and in the seas which served them.

WEAKNESSES IN THE FIGHTING SERVICES.

616. In Malaya, the old policy of restricting the defence of Singapore to the immediate vicinity of the Island had been replaced by one of defending the whole of Malaya. In conformity with this policy the Chiefs of Staff had authorised large army and air force increases. In the absence of the Fleet, defence of the Far East was to depend primarily on a mobile air defence. Pending provision of the increased air strength, the army needed additional interim strength, over and above its ultimate total, to ensure security in the meantime.

617. The Japanese attacked whilst this policy was being implemented. The air force and the army had by then received only a part of the modern equipment and reinforcements which had been estimated to be necessary. The vital and pressing needs of the war in Europe and the Middle East, which had passed through a long and very critical period, had proved of overriding importance. The result was that the forces in the Far East were attacked in positions which could only have been defended if the full strength planned by the Chiefs of Staff had been available.

Mutual Naval and R.A.F. Support.

618. The Air Force in Malaya was not yet in a position to deny the waters off Malaya to a seaborne invasion. It possessed, neither the necessary aircraft nor secure aerodromes, and the enemy proved altogether too strong in the air once he had obtained a footing in South Siam and North Malaya.

619. The “Prince of Wales” and “Repulse” were lost in a gallant attempt to help the army and air force in their predicament in North Malaya. The attempt was made in the face of a strong shore-based Japanese Air Force but without the corresponding air support, either carrier-borne or shore-based. Thereafter it was progressively impracticable for the Navy, other than the lightest units, to remain in Malayan waters, particularly in the absence of such support.

620. The freedom of the seas which the enemy gained by his use of air power both at Pearl Harbour and off the coast of Malaya, was such that he was virtually free thereafter to hit when and where he liked. The consequences to the army and air force dispositions and operations in Malaya were profound. No criticism is levelled, the war against Germany and Italy had stretched our resources as never before. The small forces which were available in the Far East were faced with overwhelming circumstances and were too weak to overcome the advantages which the enemy gained in the first and most vital days of the campaign. In short, neither the Air Force nor the Navy was in a position to support

the other.

Mutual Army/Air Support.

621. The enemy army proved to be more effective than had been expected: our army had a number of shortcomings. It is not for this paper to say what they were or to expand upon them: it is appropriate only to say that they existed and that the army, in consequence, was unable to play its part adequately in the provision of secure air bases for our air forces. The root cause was the same, namely the overriding calls of the war in Europe and the Middle East.

622. When war came, the construction of aerodromes in Malaya had outstripped the provision of air forces to occupy them. But the aerodromes had had to be defended – a factor, amongst others considerably more important, which led to the army adopting a forward policy. The army had insufficient troops for the purpose, particularly in the absence of the additional interim strength it required pending full Air Force expansion. It became widely scattered in trying to meet all its commitments, and was defeated in detail.

623. The R.A.F., although inadequate for the task, had to occupy these forward and ineffectively defended aerodromes. There it suffered severe losses which could not be replaced, and it was driven out.

624. Thereafter the army had to fight in northern and central Malaya without any air support, and to face an enemy whose air support was constant and strong. It was not until the Japanese advance brought the land battle within effective range of aerodromes on Singapore island, that our army could be supported from the air. Even then this support fell far short of the scale demanded by the situation, although it was the maximum available. The enemy's air support remained undiminished. Neither service was in a position to support the other or to fulfil its commitments: both suffered severely in attempting to do both.

Mutual Support between Japanese Forces.

625. The Japanese, on the other hand, had sufficient forces to support one another. Their naval and air forces were adequate to cover the initial landings of their army, and to give its subsequent expeditions virtual freedom of action to strike where and when they liked. Their army was strong enough to hold the countryside as it was overrun, and in particular to defend the aerodromes it captured. Their air forces were able to fill those aerodromes with aircraft, maintain them there at full strength, and from them gain and fully exploit the advantages of air superiority in the land, sea and air battles.

They possessed what we had not – balanced harmony by land, sea and air, their forces in which elements were strong enough to play their respective parts and to support one another fully.

Joint Navy/Army/Air Co-operation.

626. Two lessons emerge from the foregoing factors:-

Firstly, that only by full co-ordination of the fighting services – in strength, organisation and methods of operating – can success be achieved.

Secondly, that the issue of a modern war largely depends on the struggle for secure air bases, which all three fighting services have a joint responsibility for obtaining, defending and maintaining.

That side which is successful, and which denies its opponent the advantage of secure air bases, dominates the whole theatre of war within air striking range. It has then every prospect of success, while its opponent has but little.

THE CIVIL COMMUNITY.

Shortages of Labour and Material.

627. Civil interests and the fighting services competed keenly for labour, M.T., constructional material and equipment, all of which were in short supply (see [paras 21 and 24](#)). Before war came it was difficult to obtain access to land for the construction of aerodromes and other installations (see [para. 19](#)), particularly if its acquisition affected the production of rubber or tin, which were Malaya's most important contribution to the war in Europe and which her administrators had been enjoined to raise to a maximum.

628. The complicated administrative machinery in Malaya, which comprised numerous states with varying constitutions, was slow to produce results. Speed was further handicapped by the multiplicity of nationalities – Chinese, Malay, Indian and European – who populated Malaya and whose interests and outlook varied widely.

Native Labour.

629. Experience confirmed the unreliability of unenlisted natives employed as domestics, as M.T. drivers and for construction and repairing damage to aerodromes. They disappeared en bloc, as did many native employees of the railways, whenever bombing started or the siren sounded. At critical moments dislocation occurred to the domestic life of R.A.F. stations, and to road and rail movements.

630. It is imperative in these days of air warfare to enlist all native personnel on whom dependence is to be placed in war. If enlisted, and officered by trained leaders, the natives in the Far East proved to be most reliable. This was demonstrated by the R.A.F. Special Technical Corps of enlisted Chinese, Malays and Indians, whose service in Malaya and Java during the war was exemplary.

Outlook in Malaya Towards War.

631. A word on this subject is necessary because it had its effect upon preparation for war in the Far East. Considerable criticism, much of it unjust, has been levelled against the civil population of Malaya, although, unfortunately, there was justification for much of it. But it must be remembered that Malaya had been enjoined to spare no effort to raise business output to a maximum in support of the war in Europe, particularly of rubber, tin and of dollars for financing foreign exchange. It was thus natural that many in Malaya should have felt that Malaya's best contribution to the war in general lay in this direction – and no one will deny that the response they gave was a great contribution to the war in Europe.

Nevertheless their efforts in this direction had its effect on Malaya's preparations for her own defence, because the calls of the latter could only be met by diverting effort from the former. It must have been most difficult at times for those in responsible positions, in administrative and business circles alike, to hold the correct balance between these diametrically opposed interests.

In short, the calls of the war in Europe had its effect upon the civilian side of preparation for war in Malaya as it had on the fighting services.

632. Despite these difficulties much was done on the civil side towards preparing for war. Yet much remained to be done when war came. Shortages of equipment and still more important, lack of thorough training resulted in voluntary organisations not being ready, some more some less, when war broke out. Credit is due to those who volunteered to play their part and who, when war overtook them, played it despite many a handicap. But it is unfortunate to have to state that there were appreciable sections of the community, particularly amongst its Asiatic element, which might have been more interested and might have done more towards putting Malaya's defences on a sound footing.

In this respect a belief was widely held that Singapore defences were in reasonably good order, and that war was not imminent in any case. More than one official pronouncement on the subject had the unintentional effect of fostering a false sense of security and of supporting the view that business output came first, despite other official pronouncements which were made with the express object of combating complacency. Again that statement is made in no critical spirit. The former pronouncements were made for very good reasons. But they must be mentioned because of their effect on civilian and service personnel alike. The general atmosphere inevitably affected the latter, who had to live in it from day to day. Only the more informed and imaginative of both communities could be expected to foresee the future with accuracy and to remain unaffected. Nevertheless there were many, amongst the civil community as well as in the services, who foresaw the danger and who strove to accelerate readiness for war. To them the greatest credit is due. But despite their efforts the general atmosphere militated against the

progress of which they aimed and had a grave effect upon preparations for war.

633. Two lessons were learned:-

Firstly, the most drastic and comprehensive measures are necessary to shake up a community which has long lived in peace into a realisation of the dangers of war and of the need to take timely action to prepare for it. This is particularly true if a community is of such a complex political and economic structure as that which existed in Malaya.

Secondly, the success of the fighting services is largely dependent upon the wholehearted, thoroughly organised and, where necessary, trained support of the civil community.

UNITY OF COMMAND.

634. In the Far East the Higher Direction of War, and of preparation for it, was not unified until the formation, in January, 1942, more than a month after war had broken out, of H.Q. Supreme Command, S.W. Pacific, under General Sir Archibald Wavell.

635. Before this date many and complicated channels of control had existed between Ministries and the Chiefs of Staff in the United Kingdom on the one hand, and, on the other, the Civil Government and Service Commanders in Malaya. They varied in degree. G.H.Q. had operational but not administrative responsibility for the army and the air forces; while in the case of the navy its responsibility was limited to co-operation with the naval C.-in-C. in the Far East. G.H.Q. had no administrative staff, which handicapped its operational staff in appreciating in full detail the true state of affairs in the subordinate commands ([para. 103](#)). The situation was further involved by additional channels of communication with the Australian and Dutch Governments, and by varying control of the forces which they contributed to the defence of Malaya.

636. Such complicated machinery is unlikely to work efficiently during times of emergency when speed in preparing for war is paramount. It has even less chance of success in war itself.

637. From this emerges the lesson that responsibility for the defence of any region which is exposed to attack is better centralised in a Higher Command, both during the preparatory period before war and during war itself. This Higher Command should have full operational and administrative authority over the three fighting services, and also strong representation in all matters affecting the civil population.

638. In short, control should be comprehensive, and, in particular, administrative responsibility should not be divorced from operational responsibility. The outcome of war is likely to be in proportion to the observance of this lesson. Unity of Command enhances the prospect of success: lack of it invites failure.

POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS BEFORE OUTBREAK OF WAR.

Handicap imposed on Air Striking Force.

639. At the outbreak of war, political circumstances, which made it imperative for us to avoid any action that might precipitate war, or that might make us appear to be the aggressors, were partly responsible (but only partly – see [paras. 641](#) and [671](#)) for preventing the small air striking force that was available in Malaya being used in the role for which it had been primarily trained – to hit the enemy convoys at sea, as far away and as often as possible. The consequence was that the enemy was able to establish himself firmly ashore in a neutral country before action could be taken against his convoys.

Operation Matador.

640. The political factor was also partly responsible for preventing the initiation of the planned British advance into Siam. The consequences were far-reaching: those affecting the Air Force were immediate. The enemy was able to establish his squadrons in strength in Siam within easy striking distance of our virtually defenceless aerodromes in northern Malaya. Many of our aircraft were thus destroyed with little accomplished, and our squadrons were driven out. Thereafter they were unable to give air support to the army in its battles in northern and central Malaya.

641. In passing, it is legitimate to reflect that had the reconnaissance into the Gulf of Siam been greater on 6th December after the Japanese convoys had been sighted, and on 7th December ([paras. 150-169](#) and [671](#)), and had the object of the Japanese expedition been disclosed thereby, it might well have had an influence on the decision to initiate operation “Matador”, or brought about its cancellation earlier than was the case.

Japanese Action.

642. The Japanese, on the other hand, chose the moment for attack that was most opportune for themselves. In doing so they brushed aside political hindrances – as indeed they had done whenever it suited them during their successive encroachments into the South-Western Pacific.

Lesson.

643. The lesson which emerges is that when the initiative lies in the hands of a prospective enemy, as it did in the Far East, it is highly dangerous to depend upon a plan of defence which may be frustrated by political considerations.

WEAKNESS OF ALLIED INTELLIGENCE.

Under-estimation of Japanese Strength.

644. Put bluntly, the enemy's true value was much under-estimated. Although he was known to possess some good military (the word is used in its widest sense) qualities, conspicuous amongst which was a fanatical valour, it was believed that he would display weaknesses, hitherto undisclosed, when he came face to face with the modern forces of the British Empire and the U.S.A.

645. There is reason to believe, from the experience of those who underwent military interrogation as prisoners-of-war in Japanese hands, that the enemy took deliberate steps in peace-time to mislead her potential enemies into under-estimating her fighting forces. They themselves on the other hand were not deluded about our true value: they were too well informed by a long-established organisation of agents.

Japanese Air Forces.

646. The qualities of the Japanese Air Force came as a complete surprise – in numbers, performance and quality of equipment, training and experience of its personnel, and in its mobility. Its fighters displayed unexpected all-round qualities. They and the Japanese medium bombers had ranges of 1,500 to 1,600 miles which enabled them to operate from bases out of our reach. Their normal operational height was 20,000-24,000 feet where they were immune from any of our A.A. gun defences. Japanese torpedo-bombers proved to be unexpectedly effective.

647. It is difficult to assess the precise air strength the enemy deployed against Malaya. At the time, it was thought that he had 700 first line aircraft based in South-Indo-China, with adequate immediate reserves, as against our 158 obsolete and obsolescent types with practically no reserves.

Japanese Army and Naval Forces.

648. It is not for this paper to explain the extent to which these were under-estimated, except to say that his army proved to be more effective than it was believed to be, and that the Japanese ability to strike so strongly and simultaneously in several directions in the Pacific had not been anticipated.

Need for an Intelligence Corps.

649. It is therefore appropriate to suggest here that our mistakes can only be attributed to lack of an adequate Intelligence organisation. True, a combined services intelligence organisation was in existence for obtaining naval, military and air information throughout the Far East (F.E.C.B. – see [para 67](#)) but it was inadequate for the purpose. In the East an Intelligence system of any real value takes years to build up and requires considerable funds at its disposal. That it should be a combined organisation to serve the needs of all the defence Services goes without saying. It is suggested that a specialised Intelligence

Corps will be essential in the future: that only by this means can continuity of knowledge, experience and contact be maintained: and that the appointment of individuals, as an incident of their service careers, can no longer be relied upon to fulfil requirements.

WEAKNESS OF JOINT ARMY/AIR FORCE INTEREST.

Army/Air Force relations.

650. There has been much exaggerated talk about the poor relations which existed between the Army and R.A.F. in Malaya. That there was foundation for it in limited quarters is unfortunately true during the time immediately before the arrival of the late Air Vice-Marshal Pulford and Lieut.-General A.E. Percival, who quickly took steps to put matters right. Unfortunately, honestly held differences of opinion about defence matters between their predecessors had led to weaknesses which had not been fully rectified by the time war came. The two chief matters are hereunder ([paras. 651](#) and [652](#)).

Army/Air Support.

651. Organisation of, and training in air support for the army was in a primitive state of development in both services. There was a marked lack of specialised equipment for the purpose, and there were but few persons in both services who had had appreciable experience in co-operation between air and ground forces, particularly modern experience. The result was that neither party in Malaya knew much about the technique of co-operating with the other when war came.

Siting of Aerodromes in N. Malaya.

652. Unfortunately the selection of several aerodrome sites in Malaya had been made with insufficient regard to the needs of their tactical defence. Until the middle of 1941, sites had been chosen without sufficient consultation between the army and air force authorities concerned. Sited as they were, in positions tactically difficult to defend, these aerodromes imposed an unnecessary strain on the army in the ultimate event. It is only fair to point out, however, that they were strategically necessary if the R.A.F. was to fulfil its allotted role in the defence of Malaya.

Insecurity of Aerodromes.

653. Our aerodromes, particularly in N. Malaya, were far from being the secure air bases which could properly be occupied in the face of a strong enemy. There were neither the fighter aircraft, nor sufficient A.A. defences, nor an effective warning system to ensure reasonable defence against air attack. The enemy could, and did, destroy our aircraft on the ground in N. Malaya almost at will, and our squadrons were driven out of the aerodromes there within a matter of days.

654. These same aerodromes were invaluable to the enemy. He had the necessary air forces to occupy them as they were captured, and he had the means of defending them from all forms of attack.

655. From this emerges the lesson that aerodromes may be a liability rather than an asset unless there are sufficient forces, both air and ground, available to prevent the enemy capturing and using them. In other words – provision of defences must go hand in hand with aerodrome construction.

WEAKNESSES IN AIR FORCE MATTERS.

Over-centralisation in A.H.Q.

656. A.H.Q. had to deal directly with eight superior and collateral authorities. The area it controlled stretched from Durban to Hong Kong. The majority of its units were located in Malaya. (See [Appendices A](#) and [C](#)).

657. When war came in 1941 the formations in Burma and the Indian Ocean were transferred to another Command. Nevertheless, A.H.Q. still had to handle a large number of units with many different functions, and to do so simultaneously in a land battle, in seaward operations and in air defence. It had to administer direct the operational units engaged in them as well as a large number of administrative units, many of which were unexpectedly involved in mobile operations for which they were not fully prepared. It had no intervening bomber, coastal or administrative groups to which to decentralise in Malaya.

658. Even if the staff had contained an adequate number of experienced staff officers, such a high degree of centralisation would have been difficult to exercise efficiently. But most of the staff were inexperienced, although they were willing and many were able men. The load had consequently to be carried by a few able and experienced officers whose numbers were quite inadequate to cope with the situation – either before war broke out or after. Here again the war in Europe had its effect: its urgent needs absorbed all but a few experienced officers.

659. These faults demonstrated the weakness of an over-centralised organisation and of a Command which lacks a sufficient percentage of trained staff officers. A Headquarters which suffers from either fault cannot withstand the strain of war.

Allied Air Forces.

660. The British air striking force which was available in the Far East was in numbers far below that which the Chiefs of Staff considered necessary to ensure a reasonable degree of security, even against the calculated Japanese strength which, as already shown, was under-estimated.

661. In quality our aircraft were obsolescent or obsolete. Squadrons had not been modernised. Their signals and navigational aids were primitive or out of date. Radar warning was limited to the immediate vicinity of Singapore. Their armament was in some respects poor.

662. Several fighter squadrons had formed shortly before the war broke out and were not adequately trained. Others had recently re-armed and were still unfamiliar with their aircraft. A high proportion of fighter pilots had joined their squadrons straight from F.T.S.'s without O.T.U. training.

All were troubles which would have been put right but for the war in Europe.

Change of Personnel.

663. A sweeping change of personnel by posting and drafting occurred during the summer and autumn of 1941. Those who were relieved had been over-long in the Far East and it was time they went. A high proportion of those who replaced them came straight from training establishments without having had unit experience. No criticism of those responsible is intended: it was assumed that there would be time for them to settle down before war broke out. When war unexpectedly came the Command contained a high percentage of personnel who had much to learn about the application of what they had been taught or about their new duties in service units. Many were new to the tropics. Much credit is due to them for the manner in which they strove to play their part. It is unfortunate that circumstances in Europe had prevented the change being spread over a longer period by being started sooner.

Inadequate Training.

664. Personnel were willing, but the means for training them were inadequate because the demands elsewhere had drained resources. Many courses of instruction were improvised locally, during the summer and autumn preceding the war, to make good short-comings in training of aircrews, administrative and other personnel of all ranks, but they were too late to produce the results required.

665. In particular there were weaknesses in the training of fighter squadrons which had been based on the assumption that the enemy was of poor quality.

666. The imperative necessity for personnel to be fully trained in their duties before they have to face a trained enemy needs no further emphasis.

Reserves.

667. Reserves of aircrews and aircraft were inadequate; even the first casualties could not be fully replaced. Spare parts, for engines, airframes, armament, and M.T. in particular were short. Squadron strengths consequently became abnormally low at the outset and remained so.

The need for adequate reserves in a theatre of war cannot be over-emphasised. Unfortunately it had been impossible to build up reserves in Malaya because supplies had been absorbed in supplying critical theatres in Europe, particularly in the Middle East and Russia.

Morale.

668. As perhaps is liable to happen when a force is confronted by an unexpectedly superior enemy, there was a loss of morale by a small section of the Command in the early days of the war. Trials had been severe, and had come before those concerned had had time to adjust themselves to their unpleasant and unforeseen circumstances. Lack of sufficient experienced officers undoubtedly contributed to the trouble, many of whom were newly commissioned and were not versed in their responsibilities.

Such incidents were few, and should not be exaggerated. But they serve to emphasise the need for giving all ranks that vital training which alone enables inexperienced troops to withstand their first novel shock of war. Such incidents also serve to enhance the credit of those who did maintain their morale, and who did their duty as was expected of them, and they comprised the great bulk of the force.

Mobility.

669. Few units were properly organised for mobile warfare. M.T. was very scarce and there were no transport aircraft. Each move involved appreciable interruption in operations, caused loss of valuable equipment and subsequent reduction of efficiency. The lack of transport aircraft was particularly felt when squadrons had to be transferred from Malaya to Sumatra, and thence later to Java: they suffered considerable loss and disorganisation during the enforced sea passage in the face of the enemy and without naval cover, the provision of which was quite impossible at the time.

670. The lesson was demonstrated that ability to take part in mobile operations, without loss of operational efficiency, is dependent on correct organisation and provision of suitable transport. A liberal scale of air transport is essential in those cases where long distances, sea crossings or other natural obstacles are involved.

INCIDENTS DURING THE CAMPAIGN.

Air Reconnaissance of approaching Japanese Convoy, 7th/8th December.

671. Contact with the Japanese expedition at sea was lost on 6th December and was not regained, except for a few ships sighted on the afternoon of 7th December. Admittedly weather conditions were bad in the Gulf of Siam during this vital period. Nevertheless only a small air reconnaissance effort was made for re-establishing contact. No. 8 (R.A.A.F.) Squadron at Kuantan had to be directed to continue its initial role of searching

in an area far to the south and eastward of the probable position of the lost Japanese expedition for fear of a still more dangerous but possible attack, namely one directed against southern Malaya where a successful landing, particularly on the Endau/Mersing beaches, would have been very dangerous indeed. It is impossible to resist the inference that reconnaissance dispositions were strongly influenced by a conclusion at the time that the lost Japanese expedition might be proceeding against the Bangkok area of Siam. It is easy to be wise after the event, but the reconnaissance effort which was directed into the Gulf of Siam appears to have been small, bearing in mind its great area and the possible courses open to the Japanese convoys which were known to be in it.

Initial Action at Kota Bahru.

672. Only those who have given insufficient thought to the matter could venture to criticise the station commander at Kota Bahru for not having launched his aircraft to the attack on receipt of the news, at 0030 hours on 8th December, 1941, that ships were lying off the coast. It is equally easy to criticise the A.O.C. for ordering away only a reconnaissance to clear up the situation. But that both were correct in doing as they did, in the circumstances which existed at that particular moment, is beyond doubt. War had not broken out: Pearl Harbour had not been attacked and the U.S.A. was still neutral: there was grave risk that the Japanese might stage a bait in order to induce us to strike the first blow, and by doing so reinforce that section of the American Public which was then strongly opposed to America entering the war, a danger against which all in Malaya had been warned emphatically by G.H.Q. Admittedly 45 minutes were lost before the first air action was taken, but it is merely academic to conjecture what might have happened if it had been taken at once.

Main Japanese Landing at Singora not attacked.

673. It may fairly be asked why the initial Japanese landing at Singora was not attacked on 8th December, as this was the best target for our air striking force. The answer is that it was not realised, until too late, that it was in fact the enemy's main effort, although Singora had long been recognised as the area in which a Japanese expedition against Malaya was likely to be landed. The enemy, moreover, achieved a tactical surprise because our air reconnaissance failed to maintain contact with the main Japanese convoy, which was not found again until landings at Singora were well under way. By the time that the situation was fully realised, all our available aircraft had been launched against the Kota Bahru subsidiary attack. Before their objective could be changed to Singora, our own aerodromes in Northern Malaya were undergoing so heavy a scale of air attack that another effective force for opposing the Singora landing could not be launched from them.

Attempt to Neutralise Enemy Air Bases.

674. As soon as our Squadrons had been driven out of the aerodromes in Northern

Malaya, our army was in turn subjected to heavy air attack. Its A.A. protection was quite inadequate and it had no fighter cover. Our own aircraft were therefore employed in the early stages of the campaign against enemy aerodromes, in an effort to give immediate relief to our troops. This was not successful. The enemy's reserves were sufficient to replace at once the small casualties which our attenuated squadrons could inflict. Moreover, he had the means to repair rapidly the damage our squadrons inflicted on his aerodromes.

675. The lesson was again learnt that little relief can be obtained by attacking the aerodromes of an enemy who has the means for replacing or repairing damage, particularly if such attacks are of little weight.

Reinforcements.

676. The reinforcements which the R.A.F. received arrived too late to save the situation. By the middle of January, when the first few came on the scene, the aerodromes which they had to use in Singapore were already under constant and heavy bombing. Reinforcements which came later had to use aerodromes in Sumatra which were little more than clearances in the jungle, for by this time, namely late January and early February, the enemy was in possession of the whole of the mainland of Malaya, and three out of the four aerodromes on the Island of Singapore were under observed artillery fire.

677. Hurricane reinforcements arrived in batches at intervals, and had to be thrown into the battle against greatly superior numbers and at tactical disadvantage caused by the lack of effective warning or efficient R/T control. The great majority of their pilots had never been in action before, and some had been at sea for as long as three months.

678. About half the bomber reinforcements that were despatched reached Malaya. They arrived in dribblets of two and three aircraft at a time – the result of circumstances along a lengthy and insufficiently developed air reinforcement route. They had to be used piecemeal, without their own ground crews, and not as complete units. No time could be allowed for acclimatising and training them in local conditions. Extremes of weather caused navigational difficulties to which crews were strange. Adequate ground and radio aids, to which many were accustomed, were lacking.

679. The very important lessons were demonstrated that reinforcements must, in order to be effective, arrive as complete units, with aircraft, aircrews, specialised equipment, servicing crews and sufficient stocks and reserves. They are merely frittered rapidly away if they arrive piecemeal. They must have adequate bases from which to work, and they gain much if they are given time to obtain experience of local conditions before being engaged in battle. In short, the more orderly and methodical their arrival and their preparation for battle, the greater their chances of success – and vice versa.

POSTSCRIPT.

The Army in Malaya.

680. I wish to pay a tribute to the help which the R.A.F. received from the army in Malaya. Despite its own acute needs and shortages it gave ungrudging help – in defence of aerodromes at cost to its vulnerable points; in working parties and native labour to repair aerodromes at cost to the construction of military defences; in maintaining signals communications and in many other ways. In particular, thanks are due to Lieutenant-General A.E. Percival for all that he did, in conjunction with the late Air Vice-Marshal Pulford, during the months immediately before war broke out, to re-establish good relations between the two services. Had the latter officer survived I know how strongly he would have expressed these views.

The Royal Navy in Malaya.

681. The R.A.F. owes much to the Royal Navy also. Nothing that was requested was refused if it was available; frequently it was given at cost to itself – working parties for aerodrome repair, for replacing stevedores and labour which had deserted the docks under bombing; facilities in the dockyard workshops, and in many other ways. Thanks are particularly due to the late Rear Admiral Spooner, R.N., who lost his life in attempting to escape with the late Air Vice-Marshal Pulford, and whom the latter would wish to commend to your notice for all that he and his subordinates did for the R.A.F. in Malaya.

The Merchant Navy.

682. Much credit is due to the Merchant Navy. It rendered the R.A.F. devoted service in bringing into Singapore reinforcements and supplies at a critical time, in transferring units to the N.E.I., and in evacuating several thousands of personnel from Singapore and later from the N.E.I. This work was done at great hazard in waters exposed to surface, submarine and air attack. A number of ships and seamen were lost in the doing of it. I wish to record our deep appreciation to the masters and crews who did so much for us at such cost to themselves.

Civilians in Malaya.

683. A tribute is also due to the civilians, men and women, who put themselves and their means at the disposal of the R.A.F. Of them there were many – nurses, business men, clerical staffs, tradesmen, welfare workers, contributors of material and money, and others. Their assistance and good-will were invaluable at a most difficult time. To them the R.A.F. owes a real debt of gratitude.

The Dutch in the Far East.

684. It must be remembered that the Dutch pinned their faith to collective Allied resistance in the Far East, and that they lost part of their Air Force and of their Navy to the common cause before the Japanese reached Java at all. When their hopes of successful resistance disappeared, and only a small British force remained to replace the forces the Dutch themselves had sacrificed, their isolated position came home forcibly to them.

685. Moreover, everything that the Dutch community possessed was in the N.E.I. Towards the end it was obvious to them that the whole of it, including their families, must inevitably fall into the hands of the Japanese. They had already experienced incidents of Japanese savagery in Borneo. They were consequently reluctant to continue guerilla resistance in Java in the circumstances in which they finally found themselves. It was only then, when the British wanted to go on fighting after the general capitulation in Java, that differences arose as to the best line to pursue.

686. Nevertheless, I want to express my thanks to the Dutch. Their wish to help was unbounded. They fulfilled their planned undertakings to the full. Special recognition is due to those of them who, as a result lost their lives in Malaya's defence. When arrangements had to be made to transfer the R.A.F. to the N.E.I., their Army, Air Force and Civil Administration placed everything at our disposal. As a community the Dutch refused the British nothing – labour, materials, money and help of every kind were ungrudgingly given – frequently at considerable sacrifice. The devotion of their doctors and nurses to our sick and wounded was outstanding. The Royal Air Force owes a debt of gratitude to these people.

Recommendations for meritorious service.

687. I have already reported to the appropriate branch of the Air Ministry the names of those whose services were particularly meritorious, and whom I recommend for honours, awards and mention in despatches. But I want to bring to your notice here the units mentioned hereunder, and also to name a few individuals who rendered particularly meritorious service but who, I regret to report, are no longer alive.

Air Vice-Marshal C.W. Pulford, C.B., O.B.E., A.F.C.

688. This officer, despite ill health, worked unceasingly and uncomplainingly to overcome the many difficulties with which he was faced when preparing his Command for war and after hostilities had broken out. He never flinched from meeting an overwhelming situation with very inadequate means. No man could have striven more wholeheartedly to carry a burden which was far beyond one man's capacity. All his decisions were reached with complete disregard for self and entirely in the interests of what he felt to be his duty according to the situation and to his instructions.

689. He refused to leave Singapore himself until all his men had been evacuated. He lost his life in a last minute attempt to follow his Command to the N.E.I. (see [para.](#)

394). His selfless devotion to duty and his loyalty to all those around him, both senior and junior, were an inspiration to all.

Personnel of the R.A.F. Far East Command.

690. I am confident that the late Air Vice-Marshal Pulford would wish me to place on record the praiseworthy manner in which the personnel, of all ranks, under his Command carried out their duties. I know how deeply he appreciated the loyal support they gave him.

Aircrews.

691. The aircrews of our squadrons, of the Royal Air Force, Royal Australian Air Force and Royal New Zealand Air Force alike, consistently met the calls that were made upon them despite the enemy's great superiority in numbers and equipment, especially in the matter of fighters. Their own aircraft, on the other hand, were many of them obsolete and old, and were difficult to maintain owing to technical shortages and poor facilities for over-haul work. Their aerodromes possessed little protection against air attack, sometimes none at all. They flew long distances by night over jungle-clad country in the face of violent tropical thunderstorms with the help of only rudimentary navigational aids; towards the end with none at all. It is difficult to overstate the cumulative effect of the hazards which they faced. They deserve the very greatest praise for the way in which they consistently carried out their missions despite these hazards and despite casualties.

692. At the risk of selecting examples which may prove invidious to other units, against whom no reflection is intended, I would particularly mention the following:-

Fighter Defences of Singapore.

693. Credit is due to the spirited leadership of the late Group Captain E.B. Rice, Fighter Defence Commander of Singapore, and of the late Wing Commander R.A. Chignell, his Chief Air Staff Officer. Both were outstanding in their selfless devotion to duty. They were primarily responsible for the good morale which the small fighter force at Kallang maintained throughout the campaign in the face of a numerous and better armed enemy. The steadiness of the ground personnel of this fighter station is also worthy of mention.

No. 4 Photographic Reconnaissance Unit.

694. This flight, flying unarmed and unarmoured Buffaloes, unfailingly carried out their photographic missions deep into enemy territory dominated by a very superior enemy fighter force. Its service throughout the Malayan campaign was most valuable.

No. 232 (F) Squadron.

695. This unit, under the leadership of the late Squadron Leader R.E.P. Brooker D.S.O.,

D.F.C., who volunteered to take command at a critical moment, was in constant action from the time it arrived in Singapore in mid-January 1942 until fighting ceased in Java. It inflicted severe casualties on the enemy in the air, in landing craft and on the ground. It volunteered to remain in Java as the last fighter squadron. Great credit is due to all ranks of a magnificent squadron, drawn as they were from the ranks of several different fighter units.

Nos. 36 and 100 (TB) Squadrons.

696. These two squadrons attacked the enemy landing at Endau on 26th January, 1942, covered as it was by numerous Zero fighters, whereas their own fighter escort was unavoidably small. They pressed home their attacks on their obsolete Vildebeeste torpedo-bombers regardless of casualties, amongst whom I regret to report were lost the Commanding Officers of both squadrons, the late Squadron Leaders R.F.C. Markham and I.T.B. Rowland. After being reorganised into a composite squadron in Java, and after having patched up their old aircraft, they again pressed home attacks against the enemy convoys which were invading that island, this time at night, again suffering casualties and the loss of their squadron commander, the late Squadron Leader J.T. Wilkins. Such gallant conduct speaks for itself.

No. 84 (B) Squadron.

697. This unit arrived as a reinforcement much strung out after a long flight from the Middle East. Its crews set a fine example of throwing themselves into the fight at once under many handicaps. Particular credit is due to the Commanding Officer, the late Wing Commander J.R. Jeudwine D.S.O., O.B.E., D.F.C., whose leadership and courage were a great inspiration to others. He led a small party which escaped from Java in an open boat across the 1000 mile crossing of the Timor Sea to Australia, a typical example of his spirit.

M.V.A.F.

698. At a critical time of the fighting in Southern Malaya, a number of successful reconnaissances were carried out by this unit to locate bodies of our troops who had been cut off by the enemy, and to locate the enemy's infiltrating forces. These reconnaissances were performed in unarmed Moth aircraft (originally the property of Malaya's flying clubs) at tree top height over a battle field dominated by Japanese Zero fighters. Their value was great to the Army, then closely engaged with the enemy. Pre-eminent in this work was the late Flight Lieutenant Henry Dane, M.V.A.F., whose qualities as a leader and a man were a byword amongst those who knew him. His example was largely responsible for the excellent work done throughout by the M.V.A.F.

Technical Personnel.

699. A word of recognition is due to the Technical Personnel of the Command.

700. Before war broke out they handled great quantities of stores and equipment which arrived in Malaya greatly in excess of the new stations' power, and that of the Command's backward maintenance organisation, to absorb them. Many aircraft were erected and rapidly passed into commission and many others were overhauled during the period of the Command's expansion.

701. During the war itself, technical personnel worked untiringly in most difficult circumstances. Aircraft and equipment had to be dispersed as a protection against bombing, mostly to improvised dispersal points in rubber plantations or scrub. There they were erected, overhauled and serviced with little or no protection against tropical downpours.

702. An example of such work was the erection of the first 50 Hurricanes which arrived in Singapore in mid January 1942; it was a particularly fine feat. Within a few days all were ready to take the air, the first in under 48 hours: during that time they had been unloaded in crates at the docks, conveyed many miles by road to scattered hide-outs in rubber plantations, and there rapidly erected despite tropical rain, blackout conditions at night and a great shortage of specialised tools.

703. It would be invidious to select any particular unit for special mention. Suffice it to say that most meritorious technical work of all kinds was performed by units throughout the command at all stages of the operations in Malaya and the N.E.I. under very severe conditions. Not least of these handicaps was an almost complete breakdown of the backward maintenance organisation of the command which was brought about by circumstances that first overloaded and then disrupted it.

704. I will mention only one name, that of the late Wing Commander E.B. Steedman, whose unflagging efforts did much to inspire others to overcome their difficulties. He subsequently lost his life as a prisoner of war for refusing, it is believed, to divulge technical information about Spitfires. His spirit remained unbroken to the end.

Personnel in the N.E.I.

705. Those who landed in unavoidable disorganisation in the N.E.I. were required to reorganise into a fighting force within a few days with very limited resources indeed. I wish to express my gratitude to them for the very loyal manner in which they gave their best services, in particular to our squadrons who had to face a well organised enemy in overwhelming numbers. Their behaviour is particularly creditable, coming as it did after many reverses, and was in the best tradition of the Service.

Finally, I am indebted to all those who, at the end, were willing, despite shortage of arms, lack of training, and lack of most essentials, to fight in the hills in a form of warfare about which they knew nothing, namely in infantry warfare and in the jungle at that, and to do so against an enemy whom they knew to be well-equipped and highly trained in this form of fighting. That they were unable to put their willingness to the test

was no fault of theirs. I wish to place on record my gratitude for the loyal response they gave to the call made upon them. Their conduct deserves the highest praise.

SUMMARY.

706. One can summarise in a few words the reason for the initial reverses in the Far East.

707. 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.

708. Mistakes undoubtedly occurred, as they always do in war when the unexpected happens on the scale that it did in the Far East. But credit should be given to those on the spot who did their best to take the first brunt of the enemy's overwhelming strength with inadequate means, and who gained thereby the necessary time for other forces to be collected to prevent his further advance towards Australia and India.

P.C. MALTBY,

Air Vice-Marshal.

London,

26th July, 1947.

APPENDIX “A”.

To Report on R.A.F. Operations in Malaya and N.E.I. 1941-2.

SITUATION AT R.A.F. STATIONS IN MALAYA – 8TH DECEMBER, 1941.

Location	(a) Peace Scale of Accommodation (b) Concentration Scale of Accommodation	Runways	(a) Aircraft Shelters State of Accommodation	Defences (b) A.A. Guns (c) Troops	Bombs (Approx weight)
North-West Malaya					
Alor Star	(a) 1 B Squadron	Hard 1-1 400 yds	1 Squadron	(a) Yes. (b) 4-3" guns. (c) 1 Coy. Infantry (Bahawalpur).	250 tons.
Butterworth	(a) 1 GR Squadron	Hard 1-1,600 yds, being extended to 2,000 yds. 2nd in hand.	Hutted 2 Squadrons. Occupied.	(a) Yes Incomplete. (b) None until 10.12.41. Then 8 Bofors. (c) Bahawalpur Inf. Bn (less 2 Coys).	250 tons.
Jabi	(b) 1 B Squadron	Hard 1,400 yds Graded but not Surfaced.	1 Squadron only. Just commenced.	(a) – (b) – (c) –	Nil.
Kuala Ketil	Satellite for Sungei Patani.	Tarmac 1,400 yds	Guard Room; Petrol, oil and bomb stores.	(a) Nil. (b) Nil. (c) 1 Coy. Bahawalpur Inf.	Nil
Lubok Kiap	(a) 1 B Squadron	Hard 1-1,600 yds 1-1,200 yds partly graded.	Hutted – 2 Squadron nearing completion. Partly occupied.	(a) – (a) – (b) Nil. (c) Nil.	Nil. Nil.
Malakoff	Satellite for Lubok Kiap.	600 yds Grading not complete	No buildings completed.	Nil.	Nil.
Panang	Civil Airfield	Limited grass Airfield.	Nil.	Nil.	Nil.
Sungei Bakap	Satellite for Butterworth.	2,000 yds (1,400 yds soled but not surfaced)	No buildings completed.		
Sungei Patani	(a) 2 F Squadrons	Grass 1-1,400 yds 1-1,200 yds	Hutted : 2 Squadrons. Partly occupied.	(a) Not quite finished. (b) 7-3, 7" guns. (c) Bn HQ and 1 Coy. Indian State Troops	250 tons.
North-East Malaya					
Gong Kedah	(b) 1 B Squadron	Hard 1-2,000 yds	Hutted 1 Squadron Ready and partly occupied	(a) Yes nearly 100%. (b) 2-3". (c) 1 Pltn Mysore Inf.	250 tons.
Kota Bahru	(a) 1 B Squadron	Grass 1-1,600 yds Being extended	Hutted 2 Squadrons. Being extended.	(a) Yes nearly 100%. (b) 4-3" guns. (c) 1 Bn Inf (less 1 Coy).	250 tons.
Machang	(b) 1 F Squadron	Hard 1-1,600 yds 1-1,200 yds in hand.	Hutted 2 Squadrons partly completed.	(a) Just started. (b) Nil. (c) 2 Coys Mysore Inf	50 tons.
East Malaya					
Kuantan	(b) 1 B Squadron 1 GR Squadron	Grass 1-1,500 yds. 1-1,200 yds	Hutted 2 Squadrons Complete.	(a) In hand. (b) Nil. (c) 3 Coys 5th Sikhs.	100 tons.
Central Malaya					
Ipoh	(b) 1 B Squadron	Grass plus tarmac 1-1,400 yds	Hutted 2 Squadrons Nearly completed. Partly occupied	(a) Nil. (b) Nil. (c) 1 Coy Indian State Troops. 1 M.G. Platoon.	Nil.

Sitiawan	Civil Airfield	Grass 1-1,000 yds. 1-800 yds	Guard Room only.	(a) Nil. (b) Nil. (c) 1 Coy (less 1 Pltn) Indian State Troops.	Nil.
Taiping	Satellite for Ipoh	Grass plus tarmac 1-1,400 yds	Requisitioned cottages. Hutments in hand	(a) Yes. (b) Nil. (c) 1 Coy and 1 M.G. Pltn Indian State Troops.	Nil.
South Malaya					
Batu Pahat	Civil Airfield Satellite for Kluang	Grass 1-1,400yds	Petrol and oil stores Only	(a) Nil. (b) Nil. (c) 1 Pltn A.I.F. Inf.	50 tons.
Bekok (Labis)	(a) 1 Squadron	2,000 yds 1,400 yds Surveyed only	Nil	Nil	Nil
Kuala Lumpur	Civil Airfield	Grass 1,315 yds	Completed Occupied by 153 M.U.	(a) Nil. (b) Nil. (c) 1 Coy Indian State Troops 1 M.G. Pltn.	50 tons.
Kluang	(a) 2 F Squadrons, 1 F Squadron (Dutch).	Grass 1-1,200 yds 1-1,600 yds. Hard runway Commenced	Hutted. 2 Squadron Nearing completion Mostly occupied.	(a) Nil. (b) Nil. (c) 1 Btn (less 1 Coy and 1 Pltn) and Johore Military Forces Details	50 tons.
Kahang	(b) 1 GR Squadron	Grass 1-1,400 yds. 1-1,300 yds	Hutted. 2 Squadrons. In hand.	(a) In Hand. (b) Nil. (c) 1 Coy A.I. F. and Johore Military Forces Details.	50 tons
Port Swettenham	Civil Airfield	Grass (tarmac in centre). 1-1,000 yds.	Nil	(a) Nil. (b) Nil. (c) 1 Coy and 1 M.G. Pltn Indian State Troops.	10tons.
Tebrau		Hard 1-1,200yds. 1-2,000 yds. in hand	1 Squadron only. 2nd Squadron in Hand.	(a) In hand. (b) Nil. (c) A. I. F. Infantry in Vicinity.	Nil.
Singapore Island					
Kallang	(a) 1 B Squadron	Complete (Civil Airfield) Grass 1,400 yds	2 Squadrons	(a) Yes. (b) Under cover of A. A. defences Singapore Town (c) 1 Coy Jind Inf.	10 tons (plus ammunition).
Seletar	(a) 2 TB Squadron	Complete. Grass 1,400 yds	3 Squadrons and M.U. Dispersed Hutted accommodation partly completed.	(a) Yes. (b) 8 Bofors. Within defended zone of Naval Base A.A. cover. (c) 1 Btn. (less 1 Coy) Kapurtala Inf.	500 tons.
Sembawang	(a) 2 B Squadrons	Grass 1,380 yds Construction of 2 hard runways deferred.	2 Squadrons F.A.A. adjacent	(a) Yes (b) Nil. Within defended zone of Naval Base A. A. cover. (c) 1 Coy Kapurtala Inf.	1,000 tons.
Tengah	(a) 3 B Squadrons 2 GR Squadrons (for Borneo).	Grass L.G 1-1,400 yds Concrete runway.	2 Squadrons	(a) Partly finished. (b) Nil. Under extended A.A. cover of Island Defences. (c) 1 Btn Jind Inf.	750 tons.

NOTE

1. Aerodrome Operational Equipment – serious shortages existed at Stations in North and Central Malaya, other than Alor Star and Kota Bahru, despite local manufacture and purchase.
2. Adequate stocks of P.O.L. were in position at the Stations where required.

RADAR UNITS – FAR EAST COMMAND – 8TH DECEMBER, 1941

Location (1)	Unit No. (2)	Type (3)	Degree of Completion on 8th December, 1941 (4)	
MALAYA EAST COAST.				
Kota Bahru		C.O.L.	Not technically complete.	
Kota Bahru		T.R.U.	Some construction done.	
Kuantan			Under construction.	
Endau			Under construction.	
Mersing	243	M R U	Operational.	
Bukit Chunang	511	C.O.L.	Operational.	
Ayer Besar		T.R.U.	Under construction.	
MALAYA WEST COAST				
Penang			Three stations. One partly complete.	
Batu Phat		C.O.L.	Partly completed.	
Tanjong Kupang	512	C.O.L.	Operational.	
MALAYA JOHORE				
Kota Tinggi	518	C.O.L.	Operational late December, 1941	
Bukit Dinding			Crews on site. Not quite complete	} Over-run by } Enemy.
Sungei Kahang			Work nearing completion	
SINGAPORE ISLAND				
Seletar		R.I.M.U.	Operational.	
Tuas	243	T.R.U.	Operational 15. 1. 42.	
Tanah Merah Besar	250	M.R.U.	Operational.	
Serangoon	308	T.R.U.	Operational December, 1941	
Changi Jail		LD/CHL	Operational December, 1941	
JAVA WEST				
Batavia (East)		T.R.U.	Operational February, 1942.	
Batavia (West)		T.R.U.	Operational February, 1942.	
Angelor			Army G.L.	Operational February, 1942.
Lebuan			Army G.L.	Operational February, 1942.
Tanara			Army G.L.	Operational February, 1942.
JAVA EAST				
Modong			American G.L.	Operational 22. 2. 42.
Parmakassen			American G.L.	Operational 22. 2. 42.
Sitoebondo			American G.L.	Operational 22. 2. 42.

APPENDIX “C”

to Report on R.A.F. Operations in Malaya and N.E.I. 1941-2

R.A.F. ORDER OF BATTLE IN MALAYA

22nd November, 1941

AIR HEADQUARTERS, SINGAPORE

A. OPERATIONAL UNITS

SINGAPORE ISLAND

1. *Seletar* Station Commander – Group Captain H.M.K Brown.

- (a) No. 36 (TB) Squadron – Commander - Wing Commander R.N. McKern - 12 Vildebeestes.
- (b) No 100 (TB) Squadron - Commander - Wing Commander A.W.D. Miller - 15 Vildebeestes.
- (c) No 205 (GR) Squadron - Commander - Wing Commander L.W. Burgess - 3 Catalinas.
- (d) P R Flight - Commander - Squadron Leader C.G.R Lewis - 2 Buffaloes.

2. *Sembawang* Station Commander - Group Captain J.P.J. McCauley (R.A.A.F.).

- (a) No 8 (GR) Squadron, R.A.A.F. - Commander - Wing Commander F.N. Wright - 8 Hudson II.
- (b) No 21 (F) Squadron, R.A.A.F. - Commander - Squadron Leader W.F. Alshorn. - 10 Buffaloes.
- (c) No 453 (F) Squadron - Commander - Squadron Leader W.J. Harper - 12 Buffaloes.

3. *Tengah* Station Commander - Group Captain F.E. Watts.

- (a) No 34 (B) Squadron - Commander - Wing Commander G.P. Longfield - 17 Blenheim IV.
- (b) No 4 A.A.C.U. - Commander - Squadron Leader N.W. Wright - 5 Sharks, 5 Swordfish, 2 Blenheim I.

4. *Kallang* Station Commander - Wing Commander R.A. Chignell.

(a) No 243 (F) Squadron - Commander - Wing Commander G.B.M. Bell - 12 Buffaloes.

(b) No 488 (F) Squadron - Commander - Squadron Leader W.G. Clouston - 9 Buffaloes.

5. *Fighter Control* in Singapore - Group Captain E.B. Rice.

MAINLAND OF MALAYA

6. *Kota Bahru* Station Commander - Wing Commander C.H. Noble.

No. I (GR) Squadron, R.A.A.F. - Commander - Wing Commander R.H. Davis - 7 Hudson II.

7. *Kuantan* Station Commander - Wing Commander R.B. Councill.

No 60 (B) Squadron - Commander - Wing Commander R.L. Vivian (From Rangoon for training at Armament Practice Camp) - 7 Blenheim I.

8. *Alor Star* Station Commander - Wing Commander R.G. Forbes.

No. 62 (6) Squadron - Commander - Wing Commander J. Duncan - 10 Blenheim I.

9 *Sungei Patam* Station Commander - Squadron Leader F.R.C. Fowle.

No 27 (NF) Squadron - Commander - Squadron Leader F.R.C. Fowle - 10 Blenheim I.

10. *Butterworth* - Care and Maintenance - i/c - Flight Lieutenant R.D.I. Scott.

11. *Kluang* Station Commander - Wing Commander W.R. Wills-Sandford -Improvised O.T.U.

12. *Kuala Lumpur* Norgroup H.Qs - Wing Commander R.G. Forbes.

NOTES.

(a) Aircraft shown are those serviceable as at 22nd November, 1941.

(b) A further 40 Buffaloes were repairable within 14 days.

(c) For other Squadrons, there was an average of 2 or 3 aircraft per Squadron repairable within 14 days.

B. MAINTENANCE UNITS.

I3. No I5I M.U. *Seletar*. Group Captain C.T. Walkington.

I4. No. I52 M.U. *Bukit Panjang, Singapore* Squadron Leader S.G. Aylwin.

I5. No. I53 M.U. *Kuala Lumpur* Group Captain M.W.C. Ridgway.

I6. No. 8I R. & *Kluang* Wing Commander H. Stanton.
S.U.

17. "Z" M.U. *Batak Quarry, Singapore* Flight Lieutenant J.H. Cocks.

18. R.I.M.U. *Seletar.* Squadron Leader T.C. Carter.

C. MISCELLANEOUS UNITS

19. Radar Units (Four operational) Wing Commander N. Cave.

20. R.N.Z.A.F. Aerodrome Construction Unit Squadron Leader Smart.

21. Transit Camp, Singapore Squadron Leader O.G. Gregson.

22. S.S. "Tung Song" Pilot Officer G.T. Broadhurst.

23. S.S. "Shenking" Pilot Officer C.E. Jackson.

Footnote

1 i.e. - an R.A.F. as distinct from a Dominion squadron but manned by Dominions personnel.

2 6 Beauforts had recently been delivered, but 5 were sent back to Australia owing to "teething" troubles with the aircraft. Nos 36 (TB) and 100 (TB) Squadrons were due to be rearmed with this type.

ABBREVIATIONS

A&AEE	Aeroplane and Armament Experimental Establishment
A/MTB	Anti-Motor Torpedo Boat
A/T	Anti-Tank
A/TK	Anti-Tank
AA	Anti-Aircraft
AACU	Anti-Aircraft Co-operation Unit
Abdacom	Code-name for the Supreme Allied Headquarters, S.W. Pacific, which formed on 15 January, 1942, and absorbed GHQ
Abdair	Codename of the Air Section of Supreme Allied H.Q., S.W. Pacific
ADA	Anglo, Dutch and Australian (agreement)
ADB	American, Dutch and British (agreement)
ADC	Aide-De-Camp
ADMS	Assistant Director Medical Services
Adv	Advanced
AFC	Air Force Cross
AFV	Armed Fighting Vehicle
AHK	Headquarters of the Dutch Commander-in-Chief at Bandoeng, Java
AHQ	Air Headquarters
AIF	Australian Imperial Forces

ALG	Advanced Landing Ground
AME	Air Ministry Experimental (station – Radar)
AOA	Air Officer in charge of Administration
AOC	Air Officer Commanding
AP	Armour Piercing
ARP	Air Raid Precautions
ASP	Air Stores Park
(B)	Bomber
BAF	Burma Auxiliary Force
Bde	Brigade
BFF	Burma Frontier Force
Bn, Btn	Battalion
Britair	Code-name for AHQ in Java after the dissolution of Supreme Allied HQ, S.W. Pacific
Bty	Battery
CAAD	Commander, Anti-Aircraft Defence
CB	Companion of the Order of Bath
CBE	Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire
Cdr	Commander
C-in-C	Commander-in-Chief
CMG	Companion of the Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George
CNAC	China National Aviation Corporation
CO	Commanding Officer

Comd	Command
COS	Chiefs of Staff
CRE	Commander Royal Engineers
CSF	Commander, Singapore Fortress
DAAG	Deputy Assistant Adjutant General
D/F	Direction Finding (Radar)
DFC	Distinguished Flying Cross
DGCD	Director General of Civil Defence
Def.	Defence
Div	Division
DSC	Distinguished Service Cross
DSO	Distinguished Service Order
(F)	Fighter
(FB)	Fighter Boat
FDC	Fighter Defence Commander
FECB	Far East Combined Bureau (a combined service intelligence organisation for obtaining intelligence, under Admiralty administration, throughout the Far East)
FFR	Frontier Force Rifles
FMS	Federated Malay States
FMSVF	Federated Malay States Volunteer Force
GC	George Cross
GCVO	Knight Grand Cross of The Royal Victorian Order
GHQ	General Headquarters

GL	Ground Locating/Gun Locating
GOC	General Officer Commanding
GSO	General Staff Officer
gp	group
(GR)	General Reconnaissance
GSOI	General Staff Officer, Intelligence
HAA	Heavy Anti-Aircraft
HE	High Explosive, His Excellency
HKSRA	Hong Kong and Singapore Royal Artillery
HKVDC	Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps
HMAS	His Majesty's Australian Ship
HMS	His Majesty's Ship
HQ	Headquarters
HQMC	Headquarters of the General Officer Commanding, Malaya Command
i/c	in command
IE	Initial Equipment
in	inch(es)
inc, incl	included
Ind	Independent
IR	Immediate Reserve
KBE	Knight Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire
KCB	Knight Commander of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath
KOYLI	King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry

LNC	Local Naval Craft
MC	Military Cross
MG	Machine Gun
mph	miles per hour
MRNVR	Malayan Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve
MT	Motor Transport
MTB	Motor Torpedo Boat
MU	Maintenance Unit
MVAF	Malayan Volunteer Air Force
MVO	Member of the Royal Victorian Order
NAAFI	Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes
NCO	Non Commissioned Officer
NEI	Netherlands East Indies
(NF)	Night Fighter
NLO	Naval Liaison Officer
Norgroup	Code-name for Group HQ controlling air operations in Northern Malaya
OBE	Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire
OC	Officer Commanding
Op, Ops.	Operation(s)
OTU	Operational Training Unit
PAD	Passive Air Defence
posns	positions
PRU	Photographic Reconnaissance Unit

RA	Royal Artillery
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAMC	Royal Army Medical Corps
RAN	Royal Australian Navy
RAOC	Royal Army Ordnance Corps
RAPC	Royal Army Pay Corps
RASC	Royal Army Service Corps
RAVC	Royal Army Veterinary Corps
rd/rds	round(s)
RDF	Radio Direction Finding (Radar)
RE	Royal Engineers
Recgroup	Code-name for the Allied Air Reconnaissance Group responsible for seaward reconnaissance of whole sphere of Supreme Allied Command, S.W. Pacific
Regt	Regiment
RN	Royal Navy
RSU, R&SU	Repair and Salvage Unit
RT, R/T	Receiver-Transmitter/Radio Transmitter/Radio Telephony
SAA	Small Arms Ammunition
SAO	Senior Administrative Officer
SASO	Senior Air Staff Officer
Sitrep	Situation Report(s)

SL	Squadron Leader
SS	Steam Ship/Straits Settlements
SSVF	Straits Settlements Volunteer Force
(TB)	Torpedo Bomber
tp, tps	troop(s)
TK	Tank
UMS	Un-federated Malay States
US	United States
USN	United States Navy
VAD	Voluntary Aid Detachment
VC	Victoria Cross
VHF	Very High Frequency
WD	War Department
WDV	Wreck Dispersal Vessel
Westgroup	Code-name allotted to AHQ on the formation of Supreme Allied H.Q., S.W. Pacific