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

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

I.—FORMATION OF GENERAL HEADQUARTERS, FAR EAST.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Instructions and General Policy.

3. My Directive is given in Appendix A.

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

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

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