

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 underestimated.

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.