

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.