

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