

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 Bukom 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.