

as far as resources would admit. He decided to keep his force east of the Kelantan River with the exception of small mobile detachments whose task was to watch the frontier and, in face of an enemy's advance in force, to fall back across the Kelantan River. Arrangements were made to destroy the railway bridges near the frontier. The bulk of the force was therefore concentrated about the aerodromes at Kota Bharu and Gong Kedah, with beach defence troops on the most likely landing beaches. Reserves were held at Chondong and Peringat. Headquarters were in the Kota Bharu area in touch with the Sultan and British Adviser. Railhead was at Krai where the main reserves of supplies, stores, etc. were held. I approved these dispositions when I visited the area in company with the A.O.C. in July, 1941.

35. At Kuantan the small cantonment lies a mile or so from the sea in the bend of the Kuantan River. North of the river are some 12 miles of beach suitable for landing. South of the river mouth there are also good landing beaches but a tributary of the Kuantan River blocks the deployment from these beaches northwards. The road from Jerantut (100 miles distant) crosses the Kuantan River by a ferry west of the cantonment. The aerodrome was situated near this road some 7 miles west of the ferry.

The Commander of the Kuantan Force of one weak brigade group which had only moved into position in April, 1941, was instructed that his primary task was to secure the aerodrome for the use of our Air Force and to deny it to the enemy. The beaches were far too long to hold in strength, but if the enemy was allowed to land unopposed he could concentrate a large force for an attack on the aerodrome. Moreover, the slow ferry crossing of the Kuantan River was a source of great weakness. The plan, which I approved, was to deploy one battalion on the beaches, where material defences were constructed, and to hold one battalion for the defence of the river lines and of the aerodrome. I also authorised the construction of a swinging pontoon bridge across the river which, however, owing to difficulty in getting suitable material was not finished in time. Communication with Kuantan was by military wireless and by a civil land line. Both these channels of communication were subject to frequent interruption.

36. By far the greater part of the East Johore area is undeveloped forest. There are, however, two small towns of strategical importance, Mersing and Endau, situated about 20 miles apart. Mersing is 90 miles from Singapore and connected to it by a motor road. There are good landing beaches both north and south of the town but the water off-shore is shallow so that ocean-going steamers have to lie a long way out. Mersing is also connected to Kluang in the centre of Johore and thence to Batu Pahat on the west coast by a lateral road which branches from the Mersing-Singapore road at Jemaluang. Endau, a smaller town than Mersing, is connected to it by a motor road. It lies at the mouth of the Endau River on which at Bukit Langkap, some 20 miles from Endau, was situated an important Japanese owned iron ore mine.

From this mine large quantities of iron ore were shipped to Japan annually, being brought down river in a fleet of Japanese-owned barges

and loaded into Japanese steamers which lay off the mouth of the Endau River. From the mine there was also water communication with the Jemaluang-Kluang road. The whole of this area was therefore well known to the Japanese.

On the coast south of Mersing there are a number of water-ways in which a small force could be landed within striking distance of the Singapore road.

The Jemaluang road junction was clearly vital to the defence of this area. It was essential, therefore, that the main operations should take place in front of this junction. There were three contingencies to be provided for (a) an attempt by the enemy to land in the Endau area with the object of either moving on Mersing or via the Bukit Langkap iron ore mine to the Kluang road and the Kahang aerodrome situated close to it; (b) a landing in force in the Mersing area; (c) landings of small forces further south with a view to cutting communications with Singapore.

In May 1941, when I took over command, the responsibility for the defence of this area rested on the Commander, Singapore Fortress, who had allotted for this purpose the 12 Indian Brigade Group, one battalion group of which only was actually accommodated at Mersing. The general plan was to hold in force the Mersing area and the beaches to the south with a detachment at Endau and a reserve in a prepared position north of the Jemaluang road junction; other detachments watched the communications to Singapore. The beach defences in this area were more advanced than those further north. I approved this plan during a visit to the East Johore area in June 1941.

Some small minefields were laid off the East Johore coast by the Royal Navy but, owing to the limited supply of mines, it was not possible to lay them off other parts of the east coast.

In view of the possibility of enemy landings on the east coast detailed arrangements had been made with the civil authorities for the removal or destruction of all boats and other surface craft on this coast on receipt of specified code words.

37. *Air Defence.*—Prior to the outbreak of World War II, Air Defence in Malaya had been, for all practical purposes, limited to the anti-aircraft defence of selected areas on Singapore Island, though plans had also been made for the defence of Penang. With the extension of the defence problem, however, to embrace the whole of Malaya and the more imminent danger of active operations in the Far East, the plans for active air defence underwent rapid expansion, and passive air defence was organized.

38. As regards the Anti-Aircraft Artillery, the defences of Singapore had been developed in accordance with the War Office plan of 1936 as amended and extended by the plan approved by the Chiefs of Staff Committee in 1940. They were laid out for the defence of the Naval Base and of other vulnerable installations, for which an order of priority was laid down. In May 1941 there were three Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiments, one Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and one Searchlight Regiment in the Singapore area. In the autumn of that year the 1 Indian Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment arrived. A very large proportion of the