

SECTION LX.—JAPANESE STRATEGY.

606. The Japanese attack on Malaya was very carefully planned and there is now no doubt that preparations had been going on for a very long time before hostilities actually started. The Japanese themselves admitted that the terrain of Malaya, our battle methods and our equipment were all carefully studied for years before the outbreak of war. The Commander-in-Chief of the 25th Japanese Army detailed for the Malayan campaign had spent six months in Germany before taking over command. He was given the best possible senior staff officers. The Japanese Divisions employed in Malaya are known to have been among the best in the Japanese Army. In particular the Guards Division and the 5 Division, both of which had been very highly trained for the type of warfare to be undertaken in Malaya, had been specially sent from Japan. To give them further experience they took part in April, 1941, in a landing operation on the coast of China followed by a quick thrust inland. They then went to Hainan where they did further training in landing operations and jungle warfare. The Island of Hainan was for a long time used as a springboard for the southward advance.

607. The Japanese strategy consisted in a continuous land and air offensive pressed with the utmost vigour with the object of advancing into South Malaya and capturing Singapore before our reinforcements could arrive. This offensive was supported by their Navy on the east coast of Malaya. Their Navy also co-operated with coast-wise operations on the west coast as soon as landing craft could be made available. These special craft were originally landed at Singora and transported across the peninsula by road to the west coast in the State of Kedah where they were launched on the 22nd December. These sea-borne operations had good and continued air cover. Had there been available at Singapore some flotillas of fast armoured and properly equipped coastal craft it is certain that the enemy would not have been able to exercise the constant threat to our communications with sea-borne forces which they did in fact succeed in doing.

In carrying out this strategy the Japanese undoubtedly took risks as regards the security of their Lines of Communication and the maintenance of their supplies. They relied to a great extent on the resources of the country.

608. The immediate object of the Japanese at the outset of the operations appears to have been (a) to cripple our Air Force and (b) to cut off and destroy the whole of our forces in Kedah by a rapid thrust from Patani via Kroh to cut the west coast communications west of the River Perak. In this way they hoped to reach the line of the River Perak in two days.

The campaign opened with intensive air operations in which the Japanese Air Force based on Indo-China made full use of the aerodromes which it had occupied in South Thailand. In the course of the first three days the Japanese succeeded in inflicting serious losses on our Air Force and driving it back off the northern aerodromes. The Japanese, however, did not succeed in cutting off and destroying our forces in Kedah, though we suffered very severe losses both in men and material. For a time the situation was very critical and it

was only by a great effort that the Japanese plan was frustrated. It actually took them sixteen days instead of two to reach the line of the River Perak.

The Japanese attack on the State of Kelantan appears to have had the double object of capturing the three aerodromes located there and of providing a base from which land operations against Kuantan could be developed.

609. After crossing the River Perak the Japanese continued their drive down the west coast arteries of communications and supported it by sea-borne operations on the west coast and by a land advance against Kuantan on the east coast. All these operations were closely supported by the Japanese Air Force which attacked our aerodromes in Central Malaya, our troops in the forward areas and columns on the move, as well as providing cover for their sea-borne operations and carrying out strategical and tactical reconnaissances.

During January the Japanese Air Force attacked objectives in the Singapore area, first by night and later, when they were able to support their bombers with fighters based on the Central Malaya aerodromes, by day. The aerodromes continued to be the main target but the Naval Base and, in the later stages, the Singapore Docks were also heavily attacked. There was bombing also, possibly not intentional, of areas in Singapore Town.

Towards the end of January a Japanese force landed at Endau on the east coast of Johore.

610. On reaching the Straits of Johore the Japanese, pursuing their previous strategy, attacked Singapore Island with the least possible delay with the results already recorded in Part III of this Despatch. That they were able to assemble their forces, bring forward a large number of special landing craft and launch the attack in little more than a week was without doubt a remarkable performance. The landing craft were transported by road from Pontian Kechil on the west coast of Johore to the rivers which flow into the western branch of the Straits of Johore.

611. The Japanese, in commenting on the Malayan campaign, have attributed their success to their pre-war preparations, to the fact that this campaign was the centre of interest throughout their whole Army, to the fact that their commanders, senior staff officers and troops were specially selected, and to the fact that their land operations were closely supported by their Navy and by their Army and Navy Air Forces.

Other important factors in their success were undoubtedly:—

(a) The great superiority, both as regards the quantity and quality of their machines, of the Japanese Air Force;

(b) The freedom of manoeuvre conferred on the Japanese Army, and conversely the crippling effect of the ever present threat to our own communications and bases, resulting from the Japanese strategical naval supremacy off the east coast of Malaya and, to a lesser degree, from their tactical supremacy off the west coast also;

(c) The inclusion in the Japanese Army of a strong modern Armoured Component, while we on our side had to rely on armoured cars and Bren gun carriers.