

SECTION LXVIII.—LOCAL FORCES.

656. The local Forces played their part in the Malayan campaign in the Navy, in the Army and in the Air Force. The newly formed Malay Regiment in particular acquitted itself with distinction, as did others of the locally raised units.

657. As in other parts of the Empire, which are peopled by coloured races, the resources of European manpower in Malaya were limited. The problem was to make the best use of these resources. In accordance with the principle that every part of the Empire should be responsible for its own local defence, as far as its resources permit, Local Forces, mostly on a voluntary basis, were raised and maintained by the Governments of Malaya. In the light of experience, it cannot be said that the best use was made of the material available.

A proportion of the Europeans were of course required to carry on the Government and other essential activities. Others, for various reasons, were not available for military service. It is with the balance, i.e. those who were available for military service, that this report deals. Many of these men were possessed of special qualifications, such as knowledge of the country, of the people and of the language. The problem was to make full use of these qualifications.

658. In the Malayan campaign the reinforcing units suffered much from lack of local knowledge and from their inability to converse with the inhabitants. As the campaign progressed and more of the local Europeans became available, this difficulty was met by attaching them to the reinforcing units, but in the earlier stages most of those available were employed with units of the Local Forces.

I recommend that each reinforcing unit on arrival in Malaya, from whatever part of the Empire it comes, should have attached to it an intelligence platoon of local Asiatics with European or Asiatic leaders and a team of interpreters, either European or Asiatic. These men should be supplied by the Local Forces, a proportion of which should accordingly be specially organized and trained for this purpose.

659. Another activity which might well devolve upon the Local Forces is the provision of commando groups whose role would be, in case of invasion, to harass the enemy's communications and rear installations. This is a task which could suitably be allotted to residents of the country districts who would in many cases be able to organize their commandos from among their own employees.

660. Those of the Local Forces, apart from the regular units, which are not employed in either of the above ways should be either organized and trained as specialist units, i.e. engineers, signals, armoured car units, railway units, dock units, etc., or for coast defence or garrisons of vulnerable localities.

There should be no attempt made to train the Local Volunteer Forces in ordinary mobile operations. They do not normally have the time for such training and in any case they would, in the case of major operations, be only a very small proportion of the total forces engaged.

661. Local Forces may be called upon to take their part in ensuring internal security or in the defence of the country in a major conflict. In the latter eventuality, the defence of Malaya

must ultimately depend on troops from outside acting in co-operation with the other Services. They will want all the assistance they can get from the Local Forces who should be trained primarily for this purpose.

SECTION LXIX.—AIR.

662. The experience of modern war shows that superiority in the air is necessary before victory can be gained and at least parity in order that defeat may be averted. The Malayan campaign was no exception to this rule. From the opening of hostilities the Japanese Air Force was immeasurably superior to our own. The effect of this on our strategy was, as has been shown, disastrous. The reason for this lay primarily in the inferiority of our aircraft both in quality and in quantity and in the complete absence of many types of aircraft required in modern war. The shortage of aircraft as compared with what had been considered necessary has been shown in Sections VI and XV of this Despatch. The responsibility for these shortages definitely did not lie with the Air Officer Commanding Far East at the time of the campaign, the late Air Vice Marshal Pulford. He was, I know, fully alive to the inadequacy of the material at his disposal and did not fail to represent the situation.

663. Plans to reinforce the Air Force in Malaya by the air route from India and the Middle East were partly frustrated by the capture by the Japanese of the Victoria Point aerodrome in South Burma in the early days of the campaign. This made it impossible for fighters to reach Malaya by air, while the longer range machines had to fly via Sumatra. Fighters had to be brought by sea with the resultant delay.

The Dutch carried out the plans for mutual support in spirit and in letter. No praise is too high for their co-operative spirit during those critical days.

664. The influence of the aerodromes on the initial Army dispositions and on the subsequent strategy of the campaign has already been fully explained. It was only in 1941 that a combined Army and Air Force plan for the siting of aerodromes was agreed upon. It is of the utmost importance that the strategical and tactical problems of their defence should be fully considered before sites for aerodromes are finally settled.

During the campaign the aerodromes became a liability rather than an asset progressively from north to south as the enemy advanced. It was found impracticable to deny them to the enemy by demolitions for more than a very few days. We were therefore faced with the problem, not of holding them for the use of our own Air Force, but of holding them to deny their use to the enemy Air Force. The psychological effect on the troops who were ordered first to protect the aerodromes for the use of our Air Force and then, after seeing them evacuated and destroyed, to hold them in order to deny them to the enemy, needs no stressing.

665. It is to be hoped that British troops will never again be asked to fight with so little air support as was the case in Malaya. There had never, even before the war, been a sufficiently strong Air Force either in Malaya or within reasonable reach of it. If in future the defence