

Outlook in Malaya Towards War.

631. A word on this subject is necessary because it had its effect upon preparation for war in the Far East.

Considerable criticism, much of it unjust, has been levelled against the civil population of Malaya, although, unfortunately, there was justification for much of it. But it must be remembered that Malaya had been enjoined to spare no effort to raise business output to a maximum in support of the war in Europe, particularly of rubber, tin and of dollars for financing foreign exchange. It was thus natural that many in Malaya should have felt that Malaya's best contribution to the war in general lay in this direction—and no one will deny that the response they gave was a great contribution to the war in Europe.

Nevertheless their efforts in this direction had its effect on Malaya's preparations for her own defence, because the calls of the latter could only be met by diverting effort from the former. It must have been most difficult at times for those in responsible positions, in administrative and business circles alike, to hold the correct balance between these diametrically opposed interests.

In short, the calls of the war in Europe had its effect upon the civilian side of preparation for war in Malaya as it had on the fighting services.

632. Despite these difficulties much was done on the civil side towards preparing for war. Yet much remained to be done when war came. Shortages of equipment and, still more important, lack of thorough training resulted in voluntary organisations not being ready, some more some less, when war broke out. Credit is due to those who volunteered to play their part and who, when war overtook them, played it despite many a handicap. But it is unfortunate to have to state that there were appreciable sections of the community, particularly amongst its Asiatic element, which might have been more interested and might have done more towards putting Malaya's defences on a sound footing.

In this respect a belief was widely held that Singapore defences were in reasonably good order, and that war was not imminent in any case. More than one official pronouncement on the subject had the unintentional effect of fostering a false sense of security and of supporting the view that business output came first, despite other official pronouncements which were made with the express object of combating complacency. Again that statement is made in no critical spirit. The former pronouncements were made for very good reasons. But they must be mentioned because of their effect on civilian and service personnel alike. The general atmosphere inevitably affected the latter, who had to live in it from day to day. Only the more informed and imaginative of both communities could be expected to foresee the future with accuracy and to remain unaffected. Nevertheless there were many, amongst the civil community as well as in the services, who foresaw the danger and who strove to accelerate readiness for war. To them the greatest credit is due. But despite their efforts the general atmosphere militated against the progress of which they aimed and had a grave effect upon preparations for war.

633. Two lessons were learned:—

Firstly, the most drastic and comprehensive measures are necessary to shake up a community which has long lived in peace into a realisation of the dangers of war and of the need to take timely action to prepare for it. This is particularly true if a community is of such a complex political and economic structure as that which existed in Malaya.

Secondly, the success of the fighting services is largely dependent upon the wholehearted, thoroughly organised and, where necessary, trained support of the civil community.

UNITY OF COMMAND.

634. In the Far East the Higher Direction of War, and of preparation for it, was not unified until the formation, in January, 1942, more than a month after war had broken out, of H.Q. Supreme Command, S.W. Pacific, under General Sir Archibald Wavell.

635. Before this date many and complicated channels of control had existed between Ministries and the Chiefs of Staff in the United Kingdom on the one hand, and, on the other, the Civil Government and Service Commanders in Malaya. They varied in degree. G.H.Q. had operational but not administrative responsibility for the army and the air forces; while in the case of the navy its responsibility was limited to co-operation with the naval C.-in-C. in the Far East. G.H.Q. had no administrative staff, which handicapped its operational staff in appreciating in full detail the true state of affairs in the subordinate commands (para. 103). The situation was further involved by additional channels of communication with the Australian and Dutch Governments, and by varying control of the forces which they contributed to the defence of Malaya.

636. Such complicated machinery is unlikely to work efficiently during times of emergency when speed in preparing for war is paramount. It has even less chance of success in war itself.

637. From this emerges the lesson that responsibility for the defence of any region which is exposed to attack is better centralised in a Higher Command, both during the preparatory period before war and during war itself. This Higher Command should have full operational and administrative authority over the three fighting services, and also strong representation in all matters affecting the civil population.

638. In short, control should be comprehensive, and, in particular, administrative responsibility should not be divorced from operational responsibility. The outcome of war is likely to be in proportion to the observance of this lesson. Unity of Command enhances the prospect of success: lack of it invites failure.

POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS BEFORE OUTBREAK OF WAR.

Handicap imposed on Air Striking Force.

639. At the outbreak of war, political circumstances, which made it imperative for us to avoid any action that might precipitate war, or that might make us appear to be the aggressors, were partly responsible (but only partly—see paras. 641 and 671) for preventing the small air striking force that was available in Malaya being used in the role for which it had