

Auxiliary Anti-	
Submarine	
Vessels . .	13
Minesweeping	
Vessels . .	4
Auxiliary Mine-	
sweepers . .	12 (and 5 at Penang).
Auxiliary Patrol	
Vessels . .	5
Motor Launches	11
Boom defence,	
tugs and depot	
ships . .	6

SECTION XV—THE AIR SITUATION.

101. The Air Officer Commanding Far East, Air Vice-Marshal Pulford, on taking over command at Singapore on the 26th April, 1941, was faced with tremendous difficulties. The aircraft at his disposal were still very deficient in numbers and few of them were of modern types.

102. The bulk of the fighters were the American built Brewster Buffalos, comparatively slow machines with poor manoeuvrability. The device by which the .5 in. machine guns with which they were equipped fired through the propeller was faulty and caused a lot of trouble. A large number of the machines were also temporarily unserviceable when war started. There was also a squadron of Blenheim night-fighters. None of these machines could be classified as modern fighters. For these fighters only a limited number of trained pilots were sent from the United Kingdom. The remainder had to be found from pilots, mostly New Zealanders, who arrived in Malaya with a minimum of flying training and no fighter training, or by transferring pilots from other types of aircraft.

103. The bombers consisted of two squadrons of Hudson General Reconnaissance machines and two squadrons of Blenheims. Some of these squadrons were below strength. There were no heavy bombers in Malaya.

104. There were two squadrons of Torpedo-bombers of the Vildebeeste type. These machines were obsolete. They had a very limited range, and a speed of less than 100 miles per hour.

105. There was one Flying-boat squadron of Catalina machines, which had also become deficient in numbers owing to casualties and lack of reserves.

106. There were no special Army Co-operation aircraft in Malaya. I arranged, however, with the A.O.C. Far East for some of the fighters to be made available for training in Army co-operation work. It was only possible, in the short time available and owing to lack of resources, for the most elementary training to be carried out.

There were no transport or dive-bomber aircraft in Malaya.

107. There was a great shortage of spare parts, reserve aircraft, and reserve pilots. For this reason and in order to conserve resources flying was from May, 1941, onwards greatly restricted. In order to assist the Air Force, Army Officers, when travelling about by air, usually used light machines belonging to the Civil Transport Line or to the Volunteer Air Force.

The Air Force in Malaya was drained of trained personnel to supply shortages in the Middle East. Trained personnel were also

withdrawn from the Australian squadrons to act as instructors in Australia.

The restrictions on flying and the shortage of trained personnel militated greatly against efficiency.

108. When war broke out with Japan, the total of operationally serviceable I.E. aircraft in Malaya was as under:—

Hudson General Reconnaissance land-based	15	
Blenheim I Bombers	17	} including 8 from Burma
Blenheim IV Bombers	17	
Vildebeeste Torpedo-Bombers	27	
Buffalo Fighters	43	
Blenheim I Night Fighters	10	
Swordfish (for co-operation with Fixed Defences)	4	
Shark (for target-towing, recce. and bombing)	5	
Catalinas	3	(of which 1 in Indian Ocean).

Total ... 141

This contrasted with the 566 1st Line aircraft which had been asked for.

In addition to the above, there were a few Light Aircraft (Moths etc.) manned by the Volunteer Air Force.

109. This was the Air Force with which we started the war. There was in fact no really effective Air Striking Force in Malaya and the fighters were incapable of giving effective support to such bombers as there were or of taking their proper place in the defence.

The A.O.C. was fully alive to the weakness of the force at his disposal. He frequently discussed this subject with me and I know that he repeatedly represented the situation to higher authority.

110. In order to facilitate co-operation between the Army and the Air Force in North Malaya should hostilities break out, an air organization known as Norgroup was prepared and a commander appointed. The functions of the commander were:—

(a) to command such air forces as Air Headquarters might allot to him from time to time;

(b) to act as air adviser to G.O.C. 3 Indian Corps and to command such air forces as might be placed under the Corps Commander.

SECTION XVI.—SUMMARY OF THE SITUATION ON THE OUTBREAK OF WAR WITH JAPAN.

111. When war broke out with Japan on the 8th December, 1941, there were some glaring weaknesses in the arrangements for the defence of Malaya.

112. The Navy no longer controlled the sea approaches to Malaya and there was a great shortage of craft suitable for coastal defence.

113. The Air Force, in place of a force of 566 1st Line Aircraft asked for by the A.O.C. Far East or of 336 approved by the Chiefs of Staff, had a force of only 141 operationally serviceable aircraft, very few of which were of the most modern types and some of which were even obsolete. There were no modern torpedo-bombers and no dive-bombers, the two types required for offensive action against an