

1940, an estimate was made of the total armed forces required on the supposition that 582 aircraft would be available for the defence of the Far East. The estimate was as follows:—

26 infantry battalions, including 3 for Borneo.

5 field regiments.

3 light tank companies.

In addition anti-tank units, troops for local defence of aerodromes, volunteer units and ancillary troops. This figure of 26 battalions was agreed to by the Chiefs of Staff in January, 1941.

On his arrival, General Percival went thoroughly into the question of the strength of the Army and, in August, 1941, sent his estimate of the strength required, which he summarised as:—

48 Infantry Battalions.

4 Indian Reconnaissance Units.

9 Forward Artillery Regiments.

4 Light A.A. Regiments.

2 Tank Regiments.

3 Anti-Tank Regiments.

2 Mountain Artillery Regiments.

12 Field Companies.

This was based on my forecast of the strength which our Air Forces would reach by December, 1941, namely 186 first-line aircraft as against the accepted figure of 336. I was asked for observations and my general conclusion was that no drastic reduction in General Percival's estimate was acceptable until the strength of the Royal Air Force was materially increased not only in numbers but in quality of aircraft and in reserves of air crews and aircraft. Also that before General Percival's new target was reached in Malaya, the question of increasing forces in other areas of my command, especially Burma, would have to be considered. The Chiefs of Staff commented: "We accept estimate by General Officer Commanding, Malaya, as reasonable figure for land forces required in present circumstances. Nevertheless, this target cannot be fulfilled in foreseeable future."

91. In December, 1941, while the actual strength of the Royal Air Force (*see Appendix J*) approached very closely to my forecast, the Army strength (*see Appendix E*) fell far short of the figure which it had been agreed was required to compensate for the deficiency in aircraft. The main deficiencies were:—

17 Battalions;

4 Light A.A. Regiments; and

2 Tank Regiments.

The strength in A.A. weapons in the Far East on the 7th December, 1941, is given in Appendix F.

92. The fact that we were entirely without tanks in Malaya was a serious handicap to any offensive land operations, whether on a small or a large scale. There were also very few armoured cars. Many efforts were made to obtain both tanks and armoured cars from various sources. On the 14th August the War Office offered forty light tanks from the Middle East. These tanks were at the time being employed for aerodrome defence, and they were offered to the Far East on the condition that they would be employed in an operational role, and that we could man them from local resources. Some delay occurred at Singapore in finding the best method of meeting the latter

condition. Eventually Australia agreed to provide the necessary men and to train them up to a reasonable standard in Australia, this training to be completed by the 1st January, 1942. On the 13th November, 1941, however, Middle East reported to the War Office that they could not provide forty tanks for the Far East except at the expense of operational requirements. After war had broken out, War Office ordered Middle East to send fifty light tanks to India, their subsequent destination to be decided later.

With regard to armoured cars, a model of an armoured vehicle mounted on an American chassis was obtained from the Dutch and six were made in Singapore, chiefly at the Naval Base; drawings were also made and sent to Burma. No more, however, could be made owing to a shortage of boiler plate, which was used for the armouring. By the 24th November, 1941, a total of 84 Marmon-Harrington armoured cars had been shipped from South Africa for Singapore. Some of these arrived a few days before war broke out, and the drivers had not become accustomed to them before they had to go to the front.

The number of anti-tank weapons had improved considerably by the time war broke out, but there was still a shortage of the 0.5 anti-tank rifle in infantry units.

The lack of mobile A.A. weapons was serious, especially in view of the shortage of fighters. A constant anxiety to the General Officer Commanding, also, was the continual drain on the Army for men to protect aerodromes. Indian State troops were brought over to assist, but it would have been a great help if we had had more armoured cars or even tanks of an obsolete pattern for this duty. This would have enabled us to have a mobile defence and to substitute mechanical vehicles for a large proportion of the men required. The reserve of small-arms ammunition was well below the authorised figure. In November, 1941, General Headquarters informed the War Office that, with releases in sight, we should be short of our authorised holding of 150 million rounds by 57 million on the 1st January, 1942. Australia, who were already sending us 3 million rounds per month, agreed to increase this to 8 million.

X.—EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE WAR.

The Problem of Japanese Intentions.

93. As the Japanese spread South into Cambodia and Cochin China, the potential danger to Burma, Malaya, the South China Sea, and even the Philippines, increased; this danger had been realised from the start, and was referred to in a telegram in December, 1940. But it was difficult to judge whether this movement signified definite plans for an offensive against us in the near future, whether it was merely the acquisition of a strategic asset to be used in negotiation, or whether it was the first step towards occupation of Siam. This applied even to the construction of aerodromes, of which we were kept fairly well informed; what we were particularly on the look-out for was any indication of movements of long-distance bombers, or of the Zero-type fighters fitted with detachable petrol tanks. These, of course, could be concentrated on the aerodromes at short notice.

94. Another difficulty in getting any long warning of the Japanese intention was due to the restriction on exports to, and imports from,