

of his Command with the Naval and Military Commands throughout the area, nor did it alter his position vis-à-vis these Commands or the Air Ministry and the several Civil Governments with which he dealt.

#### THE BASIS OF DEFENCE IN THE FAR EAST.

##### *General Plan.*

5. The general defence plan was based on an appreciation written by the Chiefs of Staff in July 1940. Briefly stated, this paper laid down that defence was to rely, in the absence of a Fleet, primarily on air power.

The Chiefs of Staff recognised that, for the defence of the Naval Base, it was no longer sufficient to concentrate upon the defence of Singapore Island but that it had become necessary to hold the whole of Malaya. Their intention now was to replace, by the end of 1941, the existing establishment of 88 obsolete and obsolescent aircraft by an air strength of 336 modern first-line aircraft backed up by adequate reserves and administrative units. This strength was allocated to the defence of Malaya and Borneo and to trade protection in the N.E. half of the Indian Ocean; it did not include aircraft necessary for the defence of Burma.

6. On the basis of this C.O.S. paper, the three Services in Malaya produced a tactical appreciation, which became the agenda of a conference held at Singapore in October 1940 attended by representatives from all Commands in the Far East. This conference recommended that the C.O.S. figure of 336 aircraft should be increased to 582, which it considered the minimum strength of Air Forces required to meet defence commitments in the Far East. The Chiefs of Staffs' reply on this point stated "we agree that 582 aircraft is an ideal, but consider 336 should give a fair degree of security taking into account our experiences in Middle East, Malta, and Air Defence of Great Britain". The conference also recommended that until the additional air forces were provided, the Army in Malaya should be substantially reinforced.

7. Meanwhile, talks had been initiated between the British, U.S.A. and Dutch Staffs with the object of obtaining concerted action in the event of war breaking out with Japan. After the appointment of the Commander-in-Chief, Far East, in November 1940, further Allied conferences were held in Singapore. By April 1941 agreed general plans had been drawn up.

##### *Allied Air Plans.*

8. For the purpose of planning, it was assumed that the Japanese would not be able to attack simultaneously at several widely dispersed places in the Far East, in particular that they would not challenge the combined British, American and Dutch might. It was assumed, therefore, that Allied air forces would be able to reinforce one another. Preparations for mutual help were to be made as follows:—

(a) For Malaya to reinforce the N.E.I.—4 Bomber Squadrons, R.A.F.

(b) For N.E.I. to reinforce Malaya—3 Bomber and 1 Fighter Squadrons, Dutch Army Air Service.

(c) For the Philippines to reinforce Malaya—All U.S. Army and Navy Air Service Units available, but only if the Philippines were evacuated.

Each service accepted responsibility within its own territory for providing the necessary bases, where stocks of bombs, petrol and lubricants, peculiar to the respective air forces which might use them, were to be laid down.

9. Further matters of importance which were settled at these conferences were:—

(a) Responsibility for air reconnaissance over the South China Sea; this was co-ordinated and defined.

(b) Allied cypher and signal procedure.

(c) Allied Naval/Air recognition signal procedure.

10. Concurrently with the above, the Far East Command R.A.F. was authorised to provide the means for operating general reconnaissance aircraft in the Bay of Bengal, Ceylon and the Indian Ocean.

##### *Implications of the Plans.*

11. Here it is opportune to stress the implications of the expansion programme authorised by the Chiefs of Staff; for the mere statement that the strength was to be raised from 88 obsolete or obsolescent aircraft to 336 modern types conveys no true impression of the extensive preparatory measures required before this force could be accommodated and operated.

12. It should be remembered that until the new policy had been decided by the Chiefs of Staff, defence had been largely confined to the vicinity of Singapore Island; thereafter it included the whole of Malaya.

13. The first step was the construction of bases. Sixteen new ones had to be found and built in Malaya, a country largely covered with secondary jungle remote from human habitations. Of the bases in existence in the colony 5 needed modernisation and 2 reconstruction. Concurrently, construction of new maintenance, repair and storage units was necessary, also throughout the colony.

Fighter defence had to be built up *ab initio*; none whatever had existed hitherto. In addition to bases for fighter squadrons, provision was necessary for an extensive radar system, for a modernised Observer Corps expanded on a primitive one already existing, for communications throughout the colony, and for Fighter Headquarters to control the whole.

At the same time, 8 new bases had to be built in Burma and 3 in Ceylon. Refuelling bases for flying boats were needed at numerous islands in the Indian Ocean from the Andamans to the coast of Africa.

14. The second step was to provide the authorised increase—the new units, the new aircraft; the ancillary services and the staffs for operating them on modern lines; and finally the modern equipment, supplies and local reserves for all.

15. The third step was to train the whole Command in conjunction with the Navy, Army and Civil Defences under the circumstances existing in the Far East, and concurrently to introduce up-to-date methods of operating.

16. The whole presented a truly formidable expansion programme, made still more formidable by the fact that time was short. The end of 1941 was the date by which the Chiefs of Staff planned for the expanded force to be ready for war. A combination of circumstances was, however, to result in realisation falling far