

Burma, arrangements had been made for re-organising the Public Works Department so that it could undertake supervision of construction, which was immediately begun.

53. In March, 1941, H.Q. No. 221 Group (Commander, Group Captain E. R. Manning) was established at Rangoon to develop these bases and to command the Air Forces located in Burma. Although the Group staff was very small, progress was so good that all bases were completed by the end of 1941 with accommodation at each for some 450 all ranks. Facilities for dispersal were reasonable, pens being provided, as were some satellite strips. There was a measure of A.A. protection in the Rangoon area but none elsewhere.

54. Co-operation with the Army in Burma was excellent. Army H.Q. in Burma and No. 221 Group R.A.F. were in close proximity and the G.O.C. and his staff could not have done more to assist the R.A.F. in its preparations. From the outset of planning in November, 1940, the G.O.C. was in the picture of R.A.F. development. The raising and training of aerodrome defence troops was consequently conducted in parallel with construction.

55. During 1940, an air observer system was developed by the G.O.C. under the active direction of the Postmaster-General. From the outset, its functions were made clear and, despite difficulties of training, it developed and operated usefully on the outbreak of hostilities; control of it passed to the R.A.F. on the formation of 221 Group Headquarters. One Radar Station was completed at Moulmein and two others in the Rangoon area were nearing completion when war broke out. A Fighter Control Operations room was designed and constructed in Rangoon.

56. No. 60 (B) Squadron (Blenheim I's) ex India, was located at Rangoon from February, 1941. G.H.Q. considered it important to ensure some measure of fighter defence at Rangoon; consequently, pending the availability of an established fighter squadron, half of No. 60 was re-equipped with Buffalo fighters for the period August-October, 1941, somewhat handicapping the squadron's operational efficiency. As soon as No. 67 (F) Squadron (Buffaloes) in Malaya was fully trained it was transferred to Rangoon; the transfer took place in October, 1941.

Heavy demands on No. 60 (B) Squadron for communication flights occupied much of its flying effort; and although it had a very high standard of flying in monsoon conditions over Burma, it became desirable to transfer the squadron to Malaya to bring it operationally up-to-date in practice. All its aircraft and crews were therefore sent to Kuantan, the new Air/Armament Station of the Command, where they arrived shortly before the Japanese attacked Malaya.

57. In addition there was a flight of six Moths used for training Burma's Volunteer Air Force. The aircraft of this flight were allotted the role of maintaining communications and carrying out certain limited reconnaissance.

58. A plan was drawn up in co-operation with the Army in Burma, the object of which

was to destroy communication facilities in the Siamese Isthmus. Land forces were to advance across the isthmus and conduct a "burn and scuttle" raid on port, rail and air facilities at Prachuab Kirrikand. Their arrival was to synchronise with air attack from Malaya under A.H.Q. arrangements.

59. The question of the Command of the forces in Burma had been raised on more than one occasion. Those who considered it from the angle of India's defence recommended that control should be by India. A.H.Q. supported the opposite view, namely the retention of Burma in the Far East Command, because it considered that effective co-ordination of the air forces operating from Burma and Malaya in defence of the Far East could only be achieved by unified command. This view was accepted. In the actual event, however, the control of Burma had to pass to India seven days after war broke out—at 0630 hours on 15th December, 1941.

60. Finally, reference must be made to the American Volunteer Group under Colonel Chennault, who was given all possible assistance, particularly in relation to maintenance, training and accommodation. R.A.F. Base, Toungoo, the training aerodrome for the Force, was visited by the A.O.C. and Staff Officers from A.H.Q.; officers who had had fighter experience in Europe were sent to lecture and to assist in training. Excellent work was later done by this Force, in co-operation with the R.A.F., in the defence of Burma.

#### DEVELOPMENTS IN N.E.I.

##### *Dutch Borneo.*

61. In accordance with the mutual reinforcement plan, the Dutch allocated Sinkawang and Samarinda in Dutch Borneo for use as bases for four R.A.F. bomber squadrons. Each of these bases was to be provided with accommodation for two bomber squadrons and to be stocked in peace with supplies peculiar to the Royal Air Force. Their only method of supply was by means of transport aircraft provided by the Dutch, who deliberately avoided making roads to them through the dense jungle in which they were situated, and which thus remained an undisturbed defence. By December, Sinkawang was ready and had been inspected by the C.O. and Flight Commanders of one of the squadrons allocated to it. Samarinda was not ready.

##### *Sumatra.*

62. Permission was also obtained from the Dutch in the summer of 1941, to reconnoitre all aerodromes in Sumatra. This was required because A.H.Q. anticipated that, in the event of war, Sumatra would be required for:—

(a) An alternative air reinforcement route from India owing to the vulnerability of the old route to Singapore via Burma and N. Malaya once the Japanese had penetrated into Siam.

(b) Potential advanced landing grounds for operations against the flank of a Japanese advance down Malaya.

The main preoccupation was therefore with those aerodromes which were situated in the Northern half of Sumatra.