

In November, 1937, having, as G.S.O.I. Malaya, made a careful study of the problem of the defence of Singapore, I prepared on the instructions of the General Officer Commanding (Major-General, now Lieut.-General Sir W. G. S. Dobbie) an appreciation and plan for an attack on that place from the point of view of the Japanese. In this appreciation it was pointed out (a) that, as a result of the political situation in Europe, it was unlikely that the British Fleet would be able to reach Singapore in 70 days, (b) that in consequence, a more deliberate form of attack could be undertaken. The plan recommended consisted of preliminary operations to seize the aerodromes in South Thailand and in Kelantan, the Island of Penang and the naval and air facilities in Borneo, followed by the main operation to capture Singapore itself. From this appreciation deductions were made as to the main points in the defence plan which required attention. These deductions stressed the probability of the Japanese making use of territory in South Thailand, the increased importance of the defence of North Malaya and of Johore, the urgent need for the strengthening of our Air Forces and Local Naval Craft, and for more infantry, and the unsatisfactory situation as regards food stocks. A copy of the deductions made is attached as Appendix A to this Despatch. The Appreciation and deductions were forwarded by the G.O.C. to the War Office.

In May, 1938, General Dobbie in another appreciation of the defence problem wrote:

"It is an attack from the northward that I regard as the greatest potential danger to the fortress. Such attack could be carried out during the period of the north-east monsoon. The jungle is not in most places impassable for infantry."

He further stated that defensive positions were being reconnoitred on the general line Johore River—Kota Tinggi—Kulai—Pulai River. Subsequently defences were constructed on the west bank of the river north and south of Kota Tinggi.

22. *Development of the Defence Plan.*—Up to the summer of 1939 the defence policy continued to be based on the assumption that the British Fleet would sail from Home waters immediately on the outbreak of war with Japan whatever the situation in Europe might be. It was then, however, officially recognized that this might not be possible. The "Period before Relief" was increased from 70 to 180 days and authority given for reserves to be built up on that scale. In August, 1939, the 12th Indian Infantry Brigade Group, which had been held in readiness for this purpose, was, in view of the threatening political situation, despatched from India to Malaya.

23. In April, 1940, the G.O.C. (Lt.-Gen. Sir Lionel Bond) submitted a new appreciation in the light of the new situation and especially of the increase of the period before relief from 70 to 180 days. In it he pointed out that the Japanese could now afford to establish their base at a much greater distance from Singapore and possibly in South Thailand. He considered therefore that the northern frontier might have to be held against a considerable force for several months. He estimated that the forces now required for the defence of Malaya

were of the order of 40 battalions (say 4 divisions) with 3 machine gun battalions and 2 tank regiments. He realised that it would be impossible at that time to provide this force, and suggested, as an alternative, that the Royal Air Force "could and should be made absolutely responsible, if not for the detection and destruction of a Japanese expedition before it landed, at least for ensuring that no base can be maintained and no line of communication can be operated within striking distance of our aerodromes." If this could be done, he estimated that the land forces then required would be in the nature of 25 battalions with supporting arms, which should include 3 anti-tank batteries and one company of armoured cars or tanks.

It was at this time that the problem, which had hitherto remained one of the defence of Singapore Island and of a portion of Johore, developed, as had appeared inevitable as early as 1937, into one of the defence of the whole of Malaya. The G.O.C. asked for official confirmation of this. The problem was further complicated by the collapse of France in June, 1940, the immediate result of which was that Malaya was exposed to a greatly increased scale of attack.

24. In August, 1940, the Chiefs of Staff, in their Far East Appreciation, officially recognised that both the fundamental assumptions of the C.I.D. 1937 Appreciation had broken down because it was now impossible to send the Fleet to the Far East, and the Japanese advance southward, the development of communications and of aerodromes in Thailand, and the increased range of aircraft, had all contributed to the development of the overland threat to Malaya. The necessity for holding the whole of Malaya, with reliance primarily on Air Power, was now recognised. It was laid down that the rôle of the land forces was to be (a) The close defence of the naval and air bases, (b) Internal security, (c) To deal with any enemy land forces which might succeed in gaining a footing despite the action of the Air Force. Until the necessary air forces could be provided, their absence must be made up for as far as possible by the provision of additional land forces. It was estimated that a minimum of 336 1st Line aircraft would be required for the defence of Malaya and British Borneo, and for trade protection in the north east half of the Indian Ocean. It was laid down that the aim should be to complete this programme by the end of 1941. It was considered that, when this target was reached, the total land garrison required would be the equivalent of 6 brigades with ancillary troops. Meanwhile approximately three divisions would be necessary. It is to be noted that this appreciation was made before the entry of the Japanese into Indo-China. The Commanders in Singapore were instructed to make a tactical appreciation based on the Chiefs of Staff strategical appreciation.

25. In September, 1940, the Japanese occupied the northern portion of Indo-China, thereby greatly increasing the threat to Singapore. In fact, the whole conception of the defence problem had again been changed because a Japanese invading force, instead of having to be transported all the way from Japan, could now be concentrated and prepared within close striking distance of Malaya.