

types. There was therefore little previous experience on which to draw as a guide for the conduct of this peculiar type of warfare. It is well-known that such country favours the attacker. It makes the defence of a position a difficult and hazardous operation unless the flanks of that position rest securely on natural obstacles. In Malaya there were in fact no positions, sufficiently narrow to be held by the forces at our disposal, which fulfilled this condition. The positions which approached most nearly to it were those in North Perak and in North Johore, but even these were far too extended. In order to impose the required delay on the enemy, therefore, it was necessary to adopt a more mobile form of defence.

620. The Japanese, in accordance with their strategy of a vigorous offensive, invariably attacked with the least possible delay. They seldom made frontal attacks. Their usual tactics were to probe the front and search for the flanks. Having found the flanks they would then push mobile forces round to attack our communications which usually followed a single road. They also employed widely infiltration tactics by individuals and small parties of men as a means of creating alarm, the use of trees as fire positions, and the use of noise, i.e., fire-works and crackers resembling machine-guns in action, as a weapon of war. For the mobility of their forward troops they relied chiefly on bicycles commandeered in the country. Supporting fire, until they reached Singapore Island for the attack on which a large amount of field artillery was employed, was provided chiefly by the infantry gun and by mortars. Tanks, although able to traverse rubber plantations in which the trees are normally planted in straight rows, were used for the most part for "blitz" tactics on the roads. In order to keep up a relentless pressure the Japanese staged attacks both by day and by night. It is believed that, in order to maintain the momentum of the attack, they relieved their forward troops regularly at short intervals.

The Japanese displayed an ability to cross natural obstacles, i.e., rivers, swamps, thick jungle, etc., much more rapidly than had been thought possible. Their engineers also showed themselves adept at the quick repair of bridges of which some 300 were destroyed to a greater or less degree, though it should be stated that in most cases there was plenty of material available close to the bridge site. The ability of the Japanese to live on the country for long periods was a great asset to them.

The close co-operation between the Japanese infantry and the supporting arms and the co-operation between the ground troops and the air forces, chiefly by W/T, were of a high order.

621. After our initial reverse at Jitra we adopted a policy of defence in depth astride the main channels of communication combined with local offensives as opportunity offered. We also employed ambush tactics and took steps to harass the enemy's communications. In these offensive operations we had on several occasions, as has been recorded in Part II, a considerable measure of success. That they were not more successful was due to the inability of some of our unseasoned troops to employ successfully tactics which demand the highest degree of skill and training. This inability became more pronounced as exhaustion, accentuated by our lack of reserves, overcame the front line troops.

The most successful ambushes were those where it was possible to combine the action of artillery, engineers and infantry.

The employment by the enemy of tanks as the spearhead of his attack made it essential that any position occupied should be covered by a natural or artificial anti-tank obstacle. The existence of an anti-tank obstacle thus became a primary consideration in the selection of our temporary defensive positions and frequently a great deal of ground which might otherwise have been suitable for delaying action had to be given up to the enemy.

Efforts on the part of forward bodies and detachments whose communications had been cut to fight their way out and efforts to re-open communications to them from behind were seldom successful. This was due chiefly to the lack of strong and fresh reserves with which to make the attacks and also to the lack of tanks to support them.

622. The Japanese troops, especially their reconnaissance parties, were frequently disguised as local inhabitants. In this they had an advantage over our troops, the majority of whom could not well be mistaken for natives of the country.

There is no evidence to show that there was any extensive fifth column organization in Malaya, but there is no doubt whatever that the Japanese obtained considerable assistance at times from the local inhabitants. On many occasions arrows indicating the position of headquarters or other important air targets were found on the ground. Information as to the dispositions and movements of our troops was undoubtedly passed to the Japanese and guides were provided, possibly sometimes under compulsion. The Japanese also impressed what labour they required and did not hesitate to use ruthless methods to attain their ends.

623. The enervating climate of Malaya, which is unfavourable for long and sustained effort, had a considerable effect on the powers of endurance of our troops, many of whom had not been in the country long enough to become acclimatized before going into action. It is probable that the climate had less, though undoubtedly it had some, effect on the seasoned and more highly trained Japanese troops.

624. Specially selected officers were despatched from Malaya before the close of operations to spread the tactical lessons of the campaign to other theatres of war in the East. Since that time many other lessons have been learned in those theatres. It would be unprofitable, therefore, to discuss the tactical lessons of Malaya at any length in this Despatch, more particularly as the conditions were in many respects abnormal. Nothing, however, occurred to disprove the old axiom that thick country favours the attacker and that therefore the offensive should be seized at the earliest possible moment, but for this fresh and well-trained troops are necessary.

SECTION LXIII.—ORGANIZATION.

625. In view of the more recent experience gained in similar theatres of war it would be superfluous to report in any detail on the shortcomings of our organization, which was based on normal British and Indian war establishments, for operations in Malaya. It will be sufficient to comment only on those items which had the greatest influence on the operations.