

Allies, they would have no more aircraft left and the second landing would therefore have been easy.

468. I refute the Japanese contention that the first attempt at landing by the Allies would have met with reverse. On impartial examination of the facts made available by the Japanese after surrender, there were several major factors which the Japanese most decidedly overlooked. Briefly these factors were:—

(i) No attacks were to have been made by Japanese suicide aircraft until dusk on D-Day, thus giving our air forces taking part in the large scale invasion of Malaya at least twelve hours to neutralise, as they would have done, Japanese aircraft in the Penang/North Sumatra area.

(ii) R.A.F. Intelligence had estimated that 175 Japanese first line aircraft would be immediately available in Malaya and Sumatra. Of this number, only 20 were thought to be bombers, and 120 fighters—the remainder being reconnaissance and floatplanes.

The general preparation of all the trainer units in these areas for suicide attacks was well known to the R.A.F., and the estimated number available in Malaya and Sumatra was 245 in Malaya and 20 in Sumatra. The estimated number of trainer aircraft in Java was 346.

By early September, the intended move of the Japanese trainer aircraft in Java to airfields in North Sumatra and Central Malaya had only just got under way, so that it seems fairly certain that many of these trainer aircraft would never have been able to leave Java, as the Japanese had quite overlooked the Allied threat by our air forces established in the Cocos Islands which had started operations in August.

(iii) It was unlikely that any reinforcements of aircraft could have been withdrawn from French Indo-China and Siam. In any event, the numbers and types of aircraft available from that source were negligible—a fact borne out on the entry of the R.A.F. into French Indo-China during the course of occupation after the surrender.

(iv) Without exception the Japanese officers interrogated after surrender were well aware of the fact that their communications were so unreliable that no High Command such as 3rd Air Army could have hoped to control operations once “Zipper” had started. Decisions, it should be noted, were to have been left to subordinate commanders and even to unit commanding officers. This undoubtedly would have meant a great deal of wasted effort.

(v) The Japanese had planned to rely on air reconnaissance for advance information on “Zipper” and the location of targets for suicide attacks in the preliminary stages of the invasion. They were so short of aircraft for this essential commitment, however, that it would have been exceedingly difficult for them to spot and hold any of the Allied Forces. Indeed, it is more likely that complete surprise would have been achieved on D-Day by the R.A.F. units taking part in “Zipper” and that large numbers of Japanese aircraft would most certainly have been destroyed on the ground.

(vi) Lastly, the Japanese Air Force had anticipated a breathing space between the air attacks on the Penang area and the attacks on Singapore. It is doubtful, however, if they could have withdrawn and re-deployed many of their aircraft from that area as well as from Sumatra without our knowledge through superior photographic reconnaissance.

MAINTENANCE.

Meeting the needs of overhaul in face of advancing front

469. The Maintenance Organisation in South East Asia was faced with two major issues during the period May to September, 1945, following upon the re-occupation of Rangoon and, later, the sudden termination of hostilities in August.

470. The influencing factors were:—

(a) The need for a re-orientation of the Maintenance Organisation as the result of the battle front having moved further away from the static repair and overhaul bases which had been built up in India.

(b) The termination of Lend/Lease by America to the United Nations following upon the surrender of Japan, this causing acute difficulties in providing replacements and spares for American types of aircraft in operational use within the Command.

471. On the one hand, the re-organisation of maintenance to meet the needs of the advancing front was not an insuperable task and soon righted itself once necessary changes had been effected, but the denial of spares, on the cessation of Lend/Lease, was distinctly serious as there were some 1,600 American aircraft and gliders in India and South East Asia for which spares were absolutely essential.

472. With the arrival in Southern Burma of the victorious Air Forces in May, it was considered that a reversion from the existing centralised system of maintenance in the Theatre should be initiated. The six months rapid advance down through Burma had been a testing time for every branch of maintenance. Burma could not be compared to the great flat desert stretches of the Middle East. Transport of the mobile units negotiated appalling roads after an equally difficult journey from India. At one time, indeed, it was doubtful if transport would last until Rangoon was reached.

473. These difficulties must be emphasised because it was to this mobile ground organisation, embracing Repair and Salvage Units, Air Stores Parks, Motor Transport, Maintenance Units and Motor Transport Light Repair Units, that the Air Forces in Burma were tied and were fully dependent upon for their servicing if not their very existence during operations.

474. The re-organisation of Maintenance which took place after our arrival in Southern Burma can be summarised as follows:—

(a) The Forward Repair Depots in the operational areas were abolished and Salvage units built up.

(b) Group Commanders were invested with the responsibility of repair and overhaul of their squadron's aircraft.