

been diverted off the East Coast of Africa to India where it had spent a fortnight. It was a war division which had not previously been overseas. On arrival it was fit but soft. It was accommodated on Singapore Island. I decided to hold it initially in Command Reserve. It was ordered to carry out reconnaissances of (a) the northern area of Singapore Island in detail (b) communications in the western area.

In the same convoy arrived a Light Tank Squadron from India, the only tanks ever to reach Malaya. The tanks, which were obsolescent, had been collected from training establishments etc. in India. On arrival several of them had to be taken into workshops for overhaul before they could take the field.

Apart from the above no other early reinforcements were expected. It was, however, forecast that an Armoured Brigade might arrive in the Far East early in March. In reply to an enquiry from the Supreme Commander, South-West Pacific, I stated that "A Cruiser Regt. might well be required to deal with tanks landed on beaches, besides having a great moral effect" and suggested that the destination of one cruiser regiment should be left for decision at a later date when we should know the situation more clearly.

408 *Arr.*—Towards the end of January 48 Hurricane Fighters were flown off an Aircraft Carrier west of Java. Of these one squadron was based on the Singapore aerodromes. The remainder went to the Netherlands East Indies. These were modern aircraft with only a small proportion of trained and experienced pilots.

SECTION XLII.—IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SCORCHED EARTH POLICY.

409. The measures decided on under the Scorched Earth Policy have already been explained in Section XXVII. These measures were carried out as far as circumstances would permit but the rapidity of the withdrawal made it impossible to ensure that all destruction was executed as planned. It would be idle for me to attempt to assess the success of the Scorched Earth Policy other than in general terms, as undoubtedly a great deal more information is now in possession of those who have returned to Malaya than is known to me. It was known, however, that the thoroughness with which denial was carried out varied in different areas, though it is probably true to say that, taken as a whole, the work was carried out as efficiently as might be expected in the prevailing conditions.

410. As regards rice stocks, it was impossible to burn them and there was not sufficient transport to remove them. In many districts they were thrown open to the people who were invited to take what they required.

411. The attempts to remove or destroy coastal craft were only very partially successful. Some owners whose livelihood depended on them preferred to hide them or to sink them temporarily in the creeks and rivers.

412. As a means of transport the Japanese troops made great use of bicycles which in peace time are widely used throughout Malaya. The removal or destruction of these presented an insurmountable problem except where ample time was available as on the east coast of Johore.

413. Both road and railway bridges were systematically destroyed as the withdrawal continued. It is estimated that some 300 bridges in all were destroyed in varying degree. The rapidity with which the Japanese made temporary repairs was remarkable, even allowing for the fact that in most cases ample material was available near the bridge site.

414. About the 20th January I received a telegram from the War Office asking for a personal assurance that, if the worst came to the worst, nothing of military value would be left intact for the enemy on Singapore Island. This was a big problem in view of the military and civil equipment and reserve stocks of all sorts which existed on the island. After careful consideration, it was clear to me that no guarantee could be given. Some of the equipment, such as coast defence guns, could in any case only be destroyed at the last minute. One of the main ammunition depots was within a short distance of the military hospital and nobody could be certain what the effect of the demolition of such a depot would be. Civil equipment and stocks would be required as long as Singapore was being held. I therefore replied to the effect that I would make all possible arrangements to ensure that, in case of necessity, the destruction of everything of military value should be carried out, but that I could not guarantee that this would in fact be done.

415. A Committee, comprising representatives of the three Services, was then set up to examine this subject in detail and to draw up plans as far as the Services were concerned. These plans clearly allocated the responsibility for executing each demolition. This work, which proved to be of some magnitude, placed a further burden on the already over-worked staff of Headquarters Malaya Command.

416. The Director General of Civil Defence was made responsible for the organization of civil demolitions on Singapore Island. The planning of these demolitions proved to be a difficult and delicate work. The plans were made with the utmost secrecy. Nevertheless, as was almost inevitable, information leaked out. This gave rise to the wildest rumours, including stories of immediate evacuation, which were damaging to morale.

SECTION XLIII.—IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EVACUATION POLICY.

417. The policy as regards the evacuation of women and children and the measures taken to carry out this policy have already been explained in Section XXVIII. The arrangements worked smoothly and by the end of January only comparatively few European women and children remained on Singapore Island. The majority of those who did remain were engaged on important war work. Practically all ships returning from Singapore to destinations within the British Empire had carried their complement of women and children. In some cases, as had been foreseen, the departure of European women, especially those engaged in the Civil Defence Services, had given rise to adverse comment on the part of the Eurasians and Asiatics.

In the end some 300 European women were interned in Singapore.

418. The difficulty as regards Asiatics was to find a country willing to accept them. There were no sailings to the China coast and ships