

approaching sea-borne expedition, and no transport aircraft, the type essentially required for the maintenance of forward troops in jungle warfare. In addition, there were for reasons already stated comparatively few trained pilots and there was a great shortage of spare parts.

114. The Army dispositions are most easily explained by comparing Malaya again to England and Wales (see Section I). It may further be assumed that an enemy with a superior fleet is in occupation of Norway and that Scotland is a neutral State, whose territory may not be entered unless the enemy is advancing with the obvious intention of landing in the South of Scotland or has violated any part of that country.

In Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire, then, there is one Division watching the main road and railway approaches from Scotland. On the east coast there is a strong brigade group in Northumberland and a weak brigade group at Hull. The Headquarters of this northern area are at Crewe. In the South of England there is one Division consisting of two brigade groups only. One of these is on the east coast about the mouth of the Thames, while the other is about the Oxford area. The Isle of Wight, where the Army Headquarters is situated, is strongly defended on the seaward side and has reasonably strong anti-aircraft defences.

The Command Reserve, which consists of one brigade group only, is situated partly on the Isle of Wight and partly in the area of the Cotswolds where it has recently been carrying out training.

The object of the defence is to protect the Naval Base of Portsmouth which, for purposes of the comparison, it must be assumed is situated on the north coast of the Isle of Wight.

115. The dispersion of the land forces and the lack of reserves needs no stressing. The dispositions on the mainland had been designed primarily to afford protection to the aerodromes, most of which had been sited without proper regard to their security. The situation was aggravated by the fact that there was no adequate Air Force to operate from them. It is true that, even without this commitment, it would have been necessary, in order to protect the Naval Base, to hold at least most of Malaya but, had it not been for the aerodromes, better and more concentrated dispositions could have been adopted.

116. As soon as the threat to Malaya developed in the summer of 1940 everything possible was done, both at Home and in Malaya, to strengthen the land defences. The fact that more could not be done was no doubt due to our Imperial commitments elsewhere. The time proved too short to put a country almost the size of England and Wales, in which there was no surplus labour, into a satisfactory state of defence. The financial control also had a restrictive effect.

117. As regards the Army itself, the troops generally were inexperienced and far too large a proportion of them were only partially trained. There was a shortage of experienced leaders, especially in the Indian and Australian units.

Instead of the 48 infantry battalions and supporting arms (excluding the Volunteer

Forces and troops required for aerodrome defence) which had been asked for, we had only 32 infantry battalions and supporting arms. There were no tanks which, as the operations developed, proved a very serious handicap.

118. Nevertheless, there was throughout the Fighting Services, in spite of these weaknesses, a firm resolve to do our best, with the limited means at our disposal, to ensure the security of the great Naval Base. The Japanese did not gain either strategical or tactical surprise. Our forces were deployed and ready for the attack.

119. As regards Civil Defence, much had been done but, viewed as a whole, the preparations were on too small a scale. There were many who responded nobly as soon as the call came but it cannot be said that the people of Malaya were fully prepared for the part they were to play in a total war.

PART II. THE OPERATIONS ON THE MAINLAND OF MALAYA.

SECTION XVII.—THE OPENING OF HOSTILITIES 6-8TH DECEMBER, 1941

120. At about 1130 hrs. on the 6th December, 1941, the morning air reconnaissance, which was watching the approaches to the Gulf of Thailand, reported having sighted Japanese convoys consisting of warships and transports approximately 150 miles S.E. of Pt. Camo (South Indo-China) steaming westward. Information that there were two separate convoys was received at 1400 hrs. The position of these convoys was about 80 miles E.S.E. of Pul Obi. At that time I was at Kuala Lumpur, whither I had gone by civil air line that morning to confer with the Commander 3 Indian Corps. I received the information by telephone at about 1500 hours. At 1515 hrs. I ordered the Commander 3 Indian Corps to assume the First Degree of Readiness, and, anticipating that Operation MATADOR might be ordered, to instruct the Commander 11 Indian Division to be ready to move at short notice.

121. On returning to my Headquarters at Singapore at 1830 hrs. that evening I was informed that the C.-in-C. Far East appreciated that the Japanese convoys had probably turned North West with a view to demonstrating against and bringing pressure to bear on Thailand; that in consequence he had decided not as yet to order Operation MATADOR, also that one convoy consisted of twenty-two 10,000 ton ships escorted by one battleship, five cruisers and seven destroyers, and the other of twenty-one ships escorted by two cruisers and ten destroyers. Two Hudson reconnaissance aircraft had been sent out at 1600 hrs. to shadow the convoys until relieved by a Catalina flying boat which would continue the shadowing throughout the night. These Hudsons failed to make contact owing to bad weather, which prohibited relief Hudsons being sent.

122. The Combined Army and Air Force Operational Headquarters had already been opened at Sime Road. The Administrative Branch of Headquarters Malaya Command and the Headquarters of the Services remained at Fort Canning, partly because their accommodation at Sime Road was not complete and partly because it was desirable for them to remain in close contact with Government Departments.