

637. In the years preceding the war care for the welfare of the troops had been increasingly practised throughout the Army. It had perhaps to some extent tended to obscure the greater importance of the ability of the troops to endure hardships in the most trying conditions. In countries like Malaya troops must be able to operate independently of road and rail communications for considerable periods. This involves the ability to live on the country and, if necessary, to exist on short rations and with little water. Japanese columns in the Malayan campaign were frequently despatched into the jungle carrying a week's rations. They made great use of local resources and for long periods were able to dispense with the normal system of supply. It has been proved during this war, both during operations in the field and from the experiences in the prisoner of war camps, that Europeans are capable of enduring hardships under Eastern conditions and of living on Asiatic food to a much greater extent than was previously thought possible. This is a lesson which should not be forgotten. The training of troops to this standard, which was reached during the later stages of the war, should be maintained at all times.

SECTION LXV.—TRAINING.

638. While it is a fact that the Japanese troops being seasoned veterans were better trained for jungle warfare than were the British troops, it is quite wrong to suppose that no attention had been paid to this form of training in the Malaya Command. It is, however, true to say that the standard of training was uneven. The formations and units which had been in the country longest were on the whole well trained, but the great majority had arrived piece-meal within a few months of the outbreak of war. Many of them arrived with a low scale of weapons and it was only towards the end of 1941 that the authorised scale was approached. The 9 and 11 Indian Divisions only received their field artillery late in that year. This greatly interfered with continuity of training.

639. Most of our troops except those of the permanent garrison were inexperienced and semi-trained on arrival in Malaya. This was due to the rapid expansion of our forces which had taken place after the outbreak of the second World War and, in the case of the Indian units, to the fact that expansion had not started till a year later. Even the regular units had been so diluted as to lose some at least, and in some cases a great deal, of their pre-war efficiency.

In making the above statement I have no wish to blame the military authorities either in the United Kingdom, in India, or in Australia. I would rather thank them for the great efforts they made to help us with the very limited resources at their disposal.

640. Those units which had been longest in Malaya had naturally had most opportunities of training and of becoming accustomed to the novel conditions of warfare, but during the period immediately preceding the outbreak of hostilities opportunities for training had been greatly limited, partly by the construction of defence works and partly by the necessity of assuming from time to time a state of readiness in accordance with the political situation as it deteriorated. What was lacking was the ability to drop the construction of defences and take

a formation, complete with all its arms, off into new country and there carry out intensive training. It had, however, as explained in Section VII, been planned to do this during the three months commencing December, 1941, and there is no doubt that, had this been possible, many of the lessons which were learned after the war began would have been learned in time to turn them to good account.

641. Staff Rides and tactical training with and without troops had enabled the practicability of landing on the east coast during the period of the north east monsoon and also of moving through forest country to be accurately gauged but the ability of the Japanese to traverse swamps and cross water and other obstacles with little delay had not been fully appreciated.

In 1940, a Manual of Bush Fighting had been produced and circulated by Headquarters Malaya Command. This was subsequently supplemented by training instructions issued as and when required. But doctrine had not only to be disseminated but practised and it was for this that opportunity was lacking.

642. Successful fighting in jungle country is largely a question of the confidence and self-reliance of the individual. These cannot be acquired without a reasonable period of training in such conditions. Inexperienced troops from the towns and the plains opposed by seasoned troops specially trained in jungle warfare are necessarily at a disadvantage until they have had time to accustom themselves to these conditions.

643. The deduction from the experience of Malaya is that, if any parts of the British Empire, where the terrain is of the jungle type, are subject to attack at short notice by an enemy armed and equipped on modern lines, we should either maintain on the spot or be able to send there immediately when danger threatens a force fully trained and accustomed to these conditions. It is not sufficient to send in at the last minute inexperienced and semi-trained troops.

SECTION LXVI.—MORALE.

644. The lack of training and of experience of the great majority of the troops who formed the Army of Malaya has already been stressed in this Despatch. In this connection Field-Marshal Lord Montgomery has written:—

“New and untried troops must be introduced to battle carefully and gradually with no failures in the initial ventures. A start should be made with small raids, then big scale raids, leading up gradually to unit and brigade operations. Great and lasting harm can be done to morale by launching new units into operations for which they are not ready or trained and which are therefore likely to end in failure. When new units and formations are introduced to battle there must be no failure.”

Those are very true words as all who fought in Malaya will testify. Unfortunately there was no time to put these precepts into practice.

645. The effect of having to fight without tanks and with little air support against an enemy well provided with such essential modern equipment cannot be over-estimated. All troops were affected by this in varying degree but more particularly the Indian soldiers