

431. The climate of Singapore, though not unhealthy for most people once they become acclimatized, is damp and enervating. Seasonal changes are slight, though during the period of the north-east monsoon (October-March) the weather is slightly cooler than during the rest of the year. The excessive moisture, however, prevents high temperatures. Rainfall is normally high and spread fairly evenly throughout the year, mostly in the form of thunder-storms. It seldom rains at night. During the period of the Malayan campaign, however, the weather in Singapore was exceptionally dry.

SECTION XLV.—THE SINGAPORE FORTRESS.

432. Before explaining the plans for the defence of Singapore Fortress an outline of the organization for defence as it existed before the withdrawal from the mainland must be given.

The Singapore Fortress area, as previously explained, comprised the Island of Singapore, the adjoining islands and the Pengerang area in South Johore. It was not a fortress in the old sense of the term. It was rather a large defended and inhabited area, with a maximum length of about 35 miles and a maximum width of about 15 miles, which included the large town of Singapore.

The organization for defence can be divided broadly into three categories: (a) The Fixed Defences, which included both guns and searchlights; (b) The Beach Defences, and (c) The Anti-Aircraft Defences. The first two categories were under the command of the Commander, Singapore Fortress (Major-General Keith Simmons). The third, for reasons which have already been explained in Section VI, were directly under me through the Commander, Anti-Aircraft Defences (Brigadier Wildey), though their action during operations was co-ordinated with that of the fighter aircraft by Group Captain Rice, R.A.F. The Headquarters of Singapore Fortress were at Fort Canning.

433. *The Fixed Defences.*—As stated in Section VI, the Fixed Defences were divided into two Fire Commands, i.e. the Changi Fire Command which covered the approaches to the Naval Base, and the Faber Fire Command which covered the approaches to Keppel Harbour and to the western channel of the Johore Straits. In each Fire Command was one 15 in. and one 9.2 in. battery and a number of 6 in. batteries; also searchlights and smaller equipments.

There was an elaborate system of buried cable communications linking headquarters with batteries and lights. Observation of fire was either from Observation Posts which had been constructed at points of vantage along the coast or from aircraft. An Anti-Aircraft Co-operation Flight was maintained by the Royal Air Force for this purpose.

After the Japanese landed in Malaya arrangements were made by which fire from the fixed armament could be brought to bear quickly on a limited number of localities selected as likely landing places for an enemy force attacking the sea-front of the Fortress of Singapore. This involved little difficulty.

As the Japanese advanced southwards, it became evident that the anti-ship guns must be prepared to engage targets on the land front of Singapore. Such a requirement was not easy to meet. The chief difficulties were:—

(a) Only a limited number of guns were available, the remainder being ruled out

either from lack of range or on account of limited bearing.

(b) The guns most likely to be available were the 15 in. guns (Forts Johore and Buona Vista) and the 9.2 in. guns on Blakang Mati (Fort Connaught), but the 9.2 in. guns only had about 30 rounds each of H.E. ammunition while the 15 in. guns had none at all.

(c) Observation of fire was likely to be difficult as the topography was highly unfavourable to ground observation, while air observation would not be available in view of the local superiority of the Japanese Air Force.

Nevertheless, an improvised but workable counter-bombardment organization was built up and fields of fire were cleared. A demand was made for more ammunition suitable for engaging land targets, but it did not arrive in time.

During January the Fixed Defences suffered some casualties from air bombing.

434. *The Beach Defences.*—The Beach Defences were designed to protect the Islands of Singapore and Blakang Mati, Pulau Brani and the Pengerang area in South Johore from a sea-borne attack. On Singapore Island they extended along the South Coast from Pasir Panjang to Changi, a distance of 20 miles. Concrete pill-boxes for machine guns and light automatics had been constructed at intervals of about 600 yards along the beaches. There were also a few 18-pounder field guns. The defences were well equipped with beach lights.

The material defences comprised anti-boat, anti-tank and anti-personnel defences. They included timber-scaffolding, timber tank obstacles, mines and barbed wire.

Two switch lines had been partially prepared to protect the centre of the Island from enemy landings in the east and west of the Island respectively. The eastern line, known as the Serangoon Line, was sited between the Civil Airport at Kallang and Paya Lebar. The western line filled the gap between the Rivers Kranji and Jurong. In addition, the western front of the Changi area had been wired.

435. Prior to the outbreak of hostilities with Japan no defences had been constructed on the northern or western shores of Singapore Island. This has been imputed in some quarters to a lack of foresight on the part of successive General Officers Commanding. It has, however, perhaps not been fully realised that the object of the defence was, not to hold Singapore Island, but to protect the Naval Base. To do this it was necessary at least to prevent the enemy bringing that base under observed fire and also, as far as possible, to keep the enemy out of close bombing range. Such resources, financial and material, as had been available had therefore been applied to the preparation of defences at a distance from Singapore, beginning with the Mersing area and subsequently extending further north. On the eastern front defences had been constructed as far back as Kota Tinggi. Major-General Dobbie, the then G.O.C., had intended these defences to be part of an extensive system covering the Naval Base. The estimate of cost was, however, so ruthlessly cut down by the War Office that the defences were never completed. The financial restrictions under which defence work in