

98. The strain fell particularly heavily upon the A.O.C., who despite the great increase of work which was caused by the expansion of his Command, undertook much supervisory staff work which he would have delegated to others in normal circumstances. He did so in order to ensure that it was properly carried out. This reacted unfavourably on his health, which was poor even when he arrived. He overtaxed his strength, and was a tired man when war descended on Malaya.

Equipment Problems

99. The equipment position was bad in many important items. Except for Buffaloes there were no reserve aircraft whatsoever in the Command. There was an acute shortage of spares, especially for Blenheims and even more for Hudsons, and also of all tools. M.T. was very short, with an effect on mobility that has already been noted. Small arms were insufficient to arm more than a proportion of R.A.F. personnel. All these were items which were badly needed during 1941 in Europe and Africa, and the requirements of the Far East had necessarily to take second place.

On the other hand, stocks of petrol and bombs laid in with G.H.Q.'s particular assistance were good.

Personnel Problems.

100. The following major personnel problems affected the efficiency of the Command:—

(i) There were no reserve aircrews.

(ii) The strength of the Command in airmen was doubled during the last six months of 1941, but most of these reinforcements came direct from training establishments in the United Kingdom and needed further training. At the same time, a number of time-expired airmen were relieved, with the result that at the outbreak of war three-quarters of the strength was new to Malaya.

(iii) A number of the reinforcements were posted to the Command in anticipation of the completion of the expansion programme. They arrived faster than the expansion programme could absorb them. A surplus was therefore built-up, which was employed partly as infantry guards on Singapore Island to relieve the Army of such duties.

(iv) Special courses were organised in musketry and, in the expectation of the defection of native employees, in cooking and M.T. driving.

Other Measures.

101. The following preparatory measures were also put in hand:—

(i) An Air/Sea Rescue Service was organised. It was given six launches, and some light aircraft of the Malayan Volunteer Air Force. It commenced operations in mid-December, 1941, and altogether saved the lives of 24 aircrew. Five of the launches were provided locally.

(ii) A Bomb Disposal Unit was formed in June, 1941, to serve all Services, including Civil Defence.

(iii) Welfare Services were organised. Holiday facilities were provided at Butterworth and Malacca. A fund of 20,000 dollars was raised and used by a central welfare committee. Mobile canteens were made and equipped locally.

(iv) Arrangements were made for hospitalisation and evacuation of R.A.F. sick and wounded; these facilities were provided by the Army everywhere except within the bounds of R.A.F. stations, where they were provided by the R.A.F.M.S.

RELATIONS WITH G.H.Q.

102. The Commander-in-Chief, Far East (Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham) being an Air Force officer naturally took a keen personal interest in the R.A.F.; and relations between G.H.Q. and A.H.Q. were correspondingly close.

103. But G.H.Q., had no administrative staff, only an operational one. It was felt at A.H.Q. that the lack of the former prevented the latter from fully appreciating the day-to-day impacts of the multitude of administrative problems which arise in the subordinate command during the period of preparation for war. Without this full experience the operational staff must have found it hard to grasp in their full significance the difficulties which faced the subordinate command. This statement is made in no critical spirit of G.H.Q.'s staff, who were sympathetic and helpful about matters which came their way, but merely to disclose the weakness of an organisation which is vested with operational responsibility but which has no administrative branches of its own through which to keep its finger on the pulse of the administrative problems arising at the level of the subordinate command.

104. The difficulty which G.H.Q. experienced in obtaining full and accurate intelligence about air matters in the Far East has already been referred to (paras. 67 and 68). Its estimation of the Japanese Naval Air Arm was high. Its estimation of the Japanese Army Air Forces was that, although numbers were great and they were known to possess long-range fighters, efficiency was low and that, despite their fanatical bravery, reasonable opposition would turn them from their targets.

105. To turn to the enemy's probable actions. For most of 1941, G.H.Q. was in doubt about the date and place Japan would challenge the Allied position in the Far East. The chance that she would do so early was reduced when in the late summer of 1941 the U.S.A. decided to reinforce the Philippines. Further support for this view came from the Chinese, who, in the early summer of 1941, considered that the next major Japanese effort would be made on the line Hanoi-Kunming to cut the Burma road. Nevertheless, throughout the summer, G.H.Q. stressed the need for pressing on with all preparations necessary for meeting an attack, realising that Japan could strike at her selected moment so long as no British fleet was based on Singapore.

Early in November, 1941, the C.-in-C. reaffirmed the opinion that Japan was unlikely to attack Malaya now that the N.E. monsoon had set in, because the heavy surf, which beats upon the beaches of the East coast of Malaya throughout the season, would make it difficult for assaulting troops to land. It was reckoned that the attack, although possible, was unlikely before February, 1942; by which time the monsoon would be over.

By 22nd November, however, the Japanese intention of further aggression had become clear to the C.-in-C. (para. 140).