

*Royal Air Force problems.*

140. With regard to the Air Force, reference has already been made in paras. 79 and 88 above to the obsolescence of our Vildebeeste aircraft and to the effect of lack of reserves. Apart from this, the necessity for rapid evacuation of the Northern aerodromes had some effect on the ground personnel, many of whom were young and inexperienced. There were insufficient rifles or Thompson guns to equip all Air Force personnel, but they must be prepared to fight, and, if necessary, sacrifice themselves in the same way as the infantry; and further, must spare no effort to ensure that all material than can possibly be moved is despatched, or in the last resort destroyed, to prevent its being of value to the enemy.

141. The Royal Air Force suffered from lack of staff. It was not so much that more officers were required at headquarters as that sufficient should have been available to form another Group Headquarters. A Fighter Headquarters had been formed and operated well, but the rest of the operations had to be carried out direct by Royal Air Force Headquarters, with the result that practically all the headquarters air staff officers had to be employed in the operations room, and, including the Air Officer Commanding, were fully occupied in working out details of bombing and reconnaissance, leaving no one to plan and think ahead. This condition would have been improved had it been possible to form another group to operate the bombing squadrons, or, possibly, naval co-operation and overseas reconnaissance as well as all bombing.

142. As aerodromes in Northern Malaya became untenable there was a danger of those in the South becoming too few to allow of adequate dispersal of the Royal Air Force Squadrons. The possibility of this had also been foreseen some months before war broke out and it had been decided in such an eventuality to move the bombing squadrons to Dutch aerodromes in Sumatra, retaining most of the fighter squadrons on Singapore Island. Up to the time that war broke out this remained little more than a project owing to the Royal Air Force staff being fully occupied with other work. At the end of December, however, the plans were well advanced, not only for the move of these squadrons but also for the possible establishment of an erecting depot in Java.

143. The need for preserving an adequate force for the protection of the Naval Base (see para. 138 above) applied especially to the Royal Air Force. This accounts for the comparative weakness of the fighter strength in Northern Malaya at the start of the war and for fighter escorts not being available for our bombers. From the last week in December air protection for reinforcement convoys absorbed most of our fighter strength.

*Defence and Denial of Aerodromes.*

144. As indicated in para. 103 above, the primary object of the Japanese appears to have been to get command of the air, principally by the attack on our aerodromes by aircraft, or by their capture. The weakness of our aerodrome defence is referred to in para. 115 above. In regard to A.A. weapons, as a result of the experiences in Crete, I laid down that the defence of aerodromes was to take precedence

over everything else except the A.A. defence of the Naval Base. It was decided that the full scale of the defence would be eight heavy and eight light A.A. guns; this was altered after war broke out to four heavy and twelve light, a scale that was hardly every approached.

145. When our aerodromes had to be abandoned, steps were naturally taken to render them useless to the enemy, particularly by explosives in runways and other parts of the landing area. The effect of this action was generally of disappointingly short duration. The Japanese were certainly quick in carrying out repairs, but, even allowing for that, the results of many of the demolitions as carried out seem hardly to have repaid the energy expended and the adverse moral effect on troops of hearing explosions behind them. A system of delay-action mines would probably have been effective provided they could have been properly concealed; preparations would have been necessary for this at the time the aerodromes were constructed. A heavy tractor drawing some form of deep plough or scarifier and working in between craters would have been a very useful addition; it could not have gone on working to the last moment, unless it was intended to abandon the tractor, since these could only move very slowly and were likely to block roads if left to the last.

At aerodromes located in wet or low-lying areas, mines should be located with reference to the drainage system with the object of dislocating it and so putting the aerodrome out of action for a long period. Aerodromes in our possession were occasionally rendered unserviceable for about twenty-four hours by Japanese bombing of runways; this would have been much more effective had delay-action bombs been used.

*Left-Behind Parties.*

146. An attempt was made to organise left-behind parties in Northern Malaya with the object of obtaining information and carrying out sabotage of all sorts in the enemy's rear. This duty was entrusted to the O.M. Section of the Ministry of Economic Warfare under Mr. Killery. It was, however, started too late and there was no time to organise it thoroughly. This was in no way the fault of the O.M., but was due to the factors mentioned in para. 9 above.

*Question of a Military Governor.*

147. The appointment of a Military Governor might have been desirable for Singapore Island during the later stages, but I was of the opinion that such an appointment for the whole of Malaya at the start of the war was not a practicable proposition. The main reason was that the organisation of the Colony, with the Federated and the Unfederated States, was very complicated and that it was not a practical proposition for anyone to take it over at short notice. It would have been found far more practicable for Hong Kong.

*Australia's Assistance.*

148. The Australian Government fully realised the importance of Singapore to the defence of the Far East and especially to Australia and did everything in their power to help. In November, 1940, there were three squadrons of the Royal Australian Air Force