

106. Meanwhile, during the autumn, preparations were initiated for giving air support to the Chinese, on the assumption that the next Japanese move would probably be towards Kunming. It was the intention to form an International Air Force, consisting of R.A.F. bombers and fighters and of an American Volunteer Group under Col. Chennault, to operate in South China. Administrative preparations were begun, petrol stocks were sent to the Chinese airfields, and bombs and components were prepared for despatch. Early in November, 1941, an R.A.F. Commission was sent from the Far East to investigate operational conditions: it included several senior staff officers of A.H.Q. and the station commander of Tengah, who were still away when the Japanese landed in Malaya. The project was no small commitment for A.H.Q., as G.H.Q. had insufficient staff to undertake all the detailed planning and administration which would normally have been done at the level of the higher command: much of this had necessarily to be done by the staff of A.H.Q., which was already insufficient for dealing with its own work (paras. 96-98).

CO-OPERATION WITH NAVY.

107. A.H.Q. had advocated a combined Naval/Air Operations Room in Singapore to co-ordinate and control the seaward air operations of the Command with the naval forces of the Commander-in-Chief, China Station, but it was decided that such co-operation would be better conducted on a G.H.Q./C-in-C. China Station level. To ensure liaison, however, a Naval liaison officer was attached to A.H.Q., for some months before war broke out: later a Naval air-maintenance officer was added.

108. It was recognised that should a full scale Eastern Fleet be based on Singapore, many detailed arrangements for liaison would become necessary. But a full Eastern Fleet staff could not be assembled owing to a shortage of naval officers; indeed, it was considered unwise to assemble one in Singapore before the situation cleared, namely until a fleet arrived in Singapore and its future role could be estimated.

Five days after the outbreak of war, however, a staff of junior Naval officers was provided for watchkeeping in the Army/Air Combined Operations Room, a step made possible when additional officers were thrown up by the loss of H.M.S. *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*. They proved adequate for subsequent needs, but had the Far Eastern Fleet remained in being in Singapore it would have been necessary to strengthen them in order to provide the close co-operation which would have been then essential.

109. Co-operation with the C-in-C, East Indies was close, and a Combined Operations Room had been established at Colombo. There was real understanding of the problem facing the R.A.F., particularly the difficulty, owing to shortage of flying boats, of assisting in the control of sea communications in the Indian Ocean. There were never more than two Catalinas, often only one, available in Ceylon for this work.

110. Invaluable memoranda about Naval/Air matters, obtained by G.H.Q. from Coastal Command and other sources, were available at A.H.Q. These were collated and revised to suit

local conditions and a Far East Command handbook was printed. It was issued in August, 1941, to R.A.F. Units and Naval Commands for guidance in carrying out all types of operations over the sea.

CO-OPERATION WITH ARMY IN MALAYA.

Close Support.

111. Co-operation with the Army in Malaya had not been highly developed or exercised in the past. No. 21 Squadron, R.A.A.F., when it was equipped with Wirraways, had been regarded in part as an A.C. Squadron, and had carried out some limited exercises with troops in the field. The methods of co-operation which had been practised were, however, not in line with recent developments in Europe and the Middle East.

112. There was much material available at A.H.Q. of the experience gained in other Commands but, owing to lack of staff, the lessons had not been digested. Active steps were taken to remedy this, and instructions for the joint information of Army and Air Force Units to cover the operations of bombers in support of troops were produced and issued in September, 1941, with the concurrence of the G.O.C., Malaya Command. Similarly, instructions were compiled and issued for joint information to cover the operations of fighter aircraft employed on tactical reconnaissance.

113. Classes were started for training aircrews in Army organisation and tactics. Each bomber and fighter squadron in the Command was affiliated to an Army formation and was allotted so many flying hours per month for combined training. But owing to lack of signals equipment, communications were improvised and primitive, which severely restricted the type of support which could be given.

Aerodrome Defence.

114. For some years before war broke out, considerable difference of opinion had existed between the Army and the R.A.F. about the siting of aerodromes on the peninsula of Malaya. Until 1937 the army's policy had always been to have the East Coast undeveloped as far as possible because insufficient forces were available to defend the long coast-line.

The need then arose for aerodromes on the peninsula well forward of the Naval base at Singapore. Sites for them on the eastern side of the mountainous backbone of the peninsula, hitherto undeveloped, were essential for two reasons. Firstly to obtain maximum air range over the sea to the east, from which direction the threat to Malaya was greatest. Secondly in order to avoid the cloud-covered mountainous backbone which, in those days, effectively prevented aircraft based on aerodromes on the west side from operating over the sea on the east, the threatened, side.

Unfortunately there had been insufficient co-operation on the spot in Malaya between the two interests involved, with the result that some of the sites selected were tactically weak to defend. But in the Spring of 1941 the necessary full co-operation was established between the services on the spot, in this important matter of selecting aerodrome sites.

115. However, those aerodromes that were located in the Singapore fortress area were well sited for defence. They were, furthermore,