

carry a demolition party to some suitable stretch of railroad near the Siamese coast, but it was not taken up. Otherwise, no definite allotment could be made because of the meagre air strength in Malaya and its many commitments. The force available would have to depend on the situation at the time and on the priority of tasks allotted by G.H.Q. to the R.A.F. as a whole. From the Army point of view this was a most unsatisfactory reply.

129. At this conference the chances of executing this operation successfully appeared remote, dependent as it was upon most accurate timing for forestalling the Japanese in the Singora-Patani area and for doing so without precipitating war with Japan or appearing to be the aggressors. Moreover, there seemed some doubt whether sufficient Army resources would be available to carry it out. However, the benefits deriving from it, if it were successful, were held by G.H.Q. to outweigh the risks involved. Careful and comprehensive plans were therefore drawn up with the Army to move elements of the IIIrd (Indian) Corps by road and rail to Siam, with the R.A.F. supporting from aerodromes in Northern Malaya with such units as the situation at the time permitted.

Control of Army/Air Operations.

130. For the control of operations in support of the Army in the north of Malaya A.H.Q. formed a nucleus Operations Group H.Q. It was designated Norgroup. Its functions were:—

(i) to command such air forces as A.H.Q. might allot to it from time to time;

(ii) to advise G.O.C. IIIrd Corps on air matters and to control such air forces as might be allotted to IIIrd Corps. A Combined IIIrd Corps/Norgroup Headquarters was established at Kuala Lumpur with an advanced H.Q. close to Butterworth.

Norgroup Headquarters was formed in July, 1941, was exercised in its functions, and was then disbanded. But it was held in readiness for mobilization when required.

131. On Singapore Island, under G.H.Q. orders, a combined Army/Air Operations Room was constructed alongside A.H.Q. in Sime Road, Singapore. It was ready for use just before war broke out. (As it was very vulnerable the construction of an alternative Operations Room was put in hand.) It functioned at the level of A.H.Q. and H.Q.M.C. Thus G.H.Q. and C.-in-C. China Fleet were not represented in it. Five days after the outbreak of war, however, the latter provided a staff to represent him in it.

SUMMARY OF SITUATION, 22ND NOVEMBER, 1941.

General pre-war situation.

132. Enough has been said to paint a pre-war picture of the Command and, it is hoped, of the vigorous efforts which were made to carry out the expansion programme authorised by the Chiefs of Staff. But the fact remains that by December, 1941, the R.A.F. Far East Command was not yet in a position to fulfil its responsibility of being the primary means of resisting Japanese aggression. The calls of the war in Europe had allowed it to develop only a fraction of the necessary strength.

133. Re-equipment of squadrons had not taken place and was not likely to do so in the near future; Vickers Vildebeestes were still our main striking strength. Buffalo fighters had arrived, it is true, but their performance and armament were disappointing, and inexperienced pilots were still being trained to man them.

134. The aerodromes in Northern Malaya on which so much was to depend, especially during the early stages of the war, had none of the pre-requisites of secure air bases for occupation in the face of the enemy. The number of fighters available was very inadequate for providing effective fighter cover. Both heavy and light A.A. guns were quite insufficient. Dispersal arrangements for aircraft and their protection from blast were not as complete as was planned. And, in the absence of an adequate air raid warning system the aerodromes were open to surprise attack.

135. But the role of the Command remained constant. It was not practicable to alter it. It was:—

(a) To find the enemy at sea as far away from Malaya as possible: then

(b) to strike hard and often,

(c) to continue attacks during the landing operations: and

(d) in co-operation with the Army to delay his advance.

While real progress had been made in fitting the Command for its allotted tasks, deficiencies were still apparent in almost every aspect of its functions.

136. The Army in Malaya was also still weak: its additional interim strength considered necessary to ensure security until such time as the air strength had been built up was not present in the Colony. It was over-extended in its dispositions, a state of affairs forced upon it by its many and widely scattered commitments.

137. In a country like Malaya it was not difficult for the enemy to obtain information about our forces. He was well served by a long-established system of agents.

138. For their part the Japanese had already occupied Indo-China. While no certain information could be obtained by F.E.C.B. it was patent that they were building up their forces there and were preparing operational facilities in Siam. Japanese reconnaissance flights over Borneo and Malaya had become so frequent by October 1941 that a section of Buffaloes had been stationed at Kota Bahru to curb those over Malaya.

Deterioration of the Political Situation.

139. During 1941, relations with Japan became increasingly strained. The attitude of the Siamese Government was doubtful. It professed great friendship for Britain and sent two goodwill missions to Singapore to cement this friendship. Nevertheless, the Japanese continued to reconnoitre Siam and to make preparations for utilising that country as a Base: they accelerated the provisioning of the aerodromes at Singora and Patani, which they also extended to make them suitable for modern aircraft. As November 1941 progressed, evidence of Japanese activities increased until, on 22nd November, 1941, the information at G.H.Q.'s disposal was sufficient to indicate that Japan was about to embark upon a further major