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OPERATIONS OF MALAYA COMMAND, FROM 8TH DECEMBER, 1941 TO 15TH FEBRUARY, 1942.

The following Despatch was submitted to the Secretary of State for War on 25th April, 1946, by LIEUT.-GENERAL A. E. PERCIVAL, C.B., D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C., formerly General Officer Commanding Malaya

FOREWORD

The preparation of this Despatch on the Operations in Malaya which took place between the 8th December, 1941, and the 15th February, 1942, has been influenced by the fact that since the conclusion of those operations a great deal of literature has appeared on the subject. Statements have been made and opinions expressed by writers, many of whom had but a cursory knowledge of Malayan conditions or of the factors which influenced decisions. Often these statements and opinions have been based on false or incomplete information. It has therefore become necessary, in the interests both of those who made the preparations for the campaign and of those who took part in it, that a full and comprehensive account should be given both of the operations themselves and of the events which led up to them. A knowledge of events in Malaya prior to the outbreak of hostilities in the Far East is also essential for a proper understanding of the conduct of the operations because the initial dispositions for the defence of Malaya were to a large extent dictated by those events. The Despatch therefore is more detailed than would otherwise have been the case.

2. The Malayan campaign had two novel features (a) It was the first large-scale campaign for a very long time to be fought within British or British-protected territory, and (b) It was our first experience of a campaign fought with modern weapons in jungle warfare conditions. Many lessons were learned from this campaign under both these headings and many more have been learned since in other theatres of war. In

reading this Despatch it should be borne in mind that the knowledge which now exists was not at that time available to those responsible for the conduct of the operations, whose task it was in consequence to attempt to solve many new and novel problems.

3. The preparation of this Despatch after a period of four years has naturally presented certain difficulties, especially as some of the relevant documents were lost either by destruction at the time of the capitulation of Singapore or at sea or from other causes. Every possible endeavour has, however, been made to ensure accuracy by reference to such documents as are in existence, to individuals, and by other means. In particular I have had the advantage of being able to refer to such War Diaries as reached Home safely and also to a very detailed narrative of the operations compiled under my instructions by the late Lt.-Col. F. R. N. Cobby, the Loyal Regiment, while a prisoner-of-war in 1942 when memories were still fresh.

I believe, therefore, that the facts as presented are substantially correct.

PART I. THE PERIOD PRIOR TO THE OUTBREAK OF HOSTILITIES WITH JAPAN.

SECTION I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE.

1. Malaya is some 400 miles long as the crow flies. The length of the main road and the west coast railway from Singapore to the Malaya-Thailand frontier is approximately 600 miles. The width of the country varies from about 200 miles in the widest part to about 60 miles in the narrowest. Singapore Island lies at the southern end of the peninsula and is separated from it by the narrow Straits of Johore. Malaya is bounded on all sides, except on the North, by sea.