

equipment, the Intelligence lay-out, the size and organisation of the staff, the administrative system and the defensive arrangements were quite inadequate. So dangerous to India did I consider the situation to be that on my return I initiated the despatch to Burma of an additional Indian Infantry Brigade and battery and arranged for a senior administrative staff officer to visit Burma and to ascertain their most pressing needs. Though the administration of Burma was the responsibility of the War Office, it was obvious that, if Japan entered the war, it would be quite impossible for Burma's requirements to be met in time from the United Kingdom; and since any failure in Burma would endanger India, it was essential for the India Command, in spite of its own grave shortages, to put the defence of Burma on a reasonable basis. I also took up the question of the construction of an all-weather road from Assam to Burma as a matter of immediate urgency. (See also paragraph 39.)

4. The neglect of Burma's defences during the early part of the war was understandable. There seemed little pressing danger even should Japan decide to attack Great Britain. Burma was protected on the east by two neutral states, Thailand and Indo-China, both of which professed their intention to defend themselves against Japanese aggression, and by the natural difficulties of the mountainous undeveloped country on her border. So long as Singapore remained in British possession, there was little danger of a threat from seaward. Troops, equipment and staff were badly needed elsewhere, and it was only natural that Burma's requirements were placed by the War Office very low in the scale of priority. When Japan entered Indo-China in July, 1941, and her aggressive intentions became obvious, Burma became more nearly threatened and more attention should have been paid to her deficiencies. The cardinal mistake seems to me, however, to have been in placing Burma in the Far East Command instead of under India. Except as a subsidiary air base, Burma hardly entered into the strategical plans of the Far East Command, which was concerned with the defence of Hong Kong and Malaya; whereas for India Burma was a vital bulwark. Similarly in administration the War Office was too far away and too occupied with other matters to concern itself with, or even to understand, the needs of Burma, to which India would have given sympathetic consideration as part of her own defence problem.

In Burma itself more might have been done, in spite of all the deficiencies, to place the country on a war footing. Political considerations, the climate, under-estimation of the enemy, over-estimation of the natural strength of the frontiers, the complacency of many years of freedom from external threat, all combined to prevent the defence problem being taken sufficiently seriously.

#### BURMA PLACED UNDER COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, INDIA.

5 On 12th December, five days after the entry of Japan into the war, I received a telegram from the Prime Minister placing Burma under the Commander-in-Chief, in India for defence. In this telegram I was allotted the 18 British Division, then on passage to Mid-east, for the defence of India and Burma; I was released from the commitment to send 17

Indian Division to Iraq; and I was promised a special allotment of anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns. I was also told that four squadrons of fighter aeroplanes would be diverted from Mid-east to India. In a later telegram I was informed that Mideast had been instructed to prepare plans to send six squadrons of Blenheim IVs to India for Burma.

I at once prepared to despatch to Burma the leading brigade group of 17 Indian Division which was about to embark for Iraq. I had asked the C.I.G.S. at the end of November to consider sending me some African troops for Ceylon or Burma, now that Gondar had fallen and the campaign against Italian East Africa was over; he replied on 16th December that two Brigades could be made available, the first of which could be ready to embark at the end of January. Thus when I visited Rangoon on 21st December I had, as I thought, ample forces in sight for the defence of Burma.

6. In Burma itself there were at this time two British infantry battalions, two Indian infantry brigades, and eight battalions of Burma Rifles (four of which had been raised since the beginning of the war). The Burma Rifles who composed practically half the available force were of doubtful fighting quality (see para. 4 of General Hutton's report). The artillery in Burma comprised only four mountain batteries and one four-gun 18 pr. battery. The Administrative services were so inadequate that they might almost have been termed non-existent.

There was also the Burma Frontier Force, the equivalent of approximately six battalions, divided into a number of detachments. They were composed not of Burmans but of Indians enlisted from the same classes as the Indian Army. This should have been a most valuable force but in actual practice proved disappointing and had little fighting value. It was normally under the control of the Civil Power and only came under army control for operations shortly after the outbreak of war with Japan, whilst remaining for other purposes subject to their own Inspector-General.

It should be realised that the Burma Army had had a very short existence and only dated from the separation of Burma from India in April, 1937. The inhabitants of Burma have shown themselves brave and tough fighters in defence of their country but as irregulars in guerilla warfare. Regular soldiering and discipline make no appeal to them.

7. The air forces nominally available in Burma at the outbreak of war were one fighter squadron equipped with Brewster Buffaloes and one bomber squadron of Blenheims. Actually the aircraft of the bomber squadron were in Malaya for armament training and were taken by Far East Command for Malayan operations. None ever returned to Burma. It may be noted that this Blenheim squadron was one of two borrowed from India by Far East Command (the only modern aircraft India possessed). There was thus only one squadron in Burma, armed with a type of fighter which proved unable to compete with the Japanese fighters.

The War Cabinet's proposals for air reinforcements were an immediate programme of four Fighter Squadrons, six Bomber Squadrons, two Army Co-operation Squadrons and one G.R. Squadron. On the 1st January Air Vice-Marshal Stevenson arrived to command in Burma. The forward elements of three