

instructions to the effect that, as our troops withdrew, an unrestricted Scorched Earth Policy was to be applied throughout Malaya. It was at once apparent that our problem differed in some important respects from that which had a few months previously confronted the Russians. This was due in the main to the fact that, whereas their armies were withdrawing through a country inhabited by their own people, our forces were withdrawing through a country inhabited by Asiatic peoples to whom we had by treaty promised our protection. If we deprived these people of the necessities of life such as food, water, etc., or destroyed the symbols of modern civilisation, such as the power supplies of their hospitals, they would claim that we were not treating them in accordance with our promises and they would become fertile ground for the seeds of the enemy's propaganda. On the other hand the machinery, most of which was owned by British firms and individuals, and the rubber stocks could quite properly be destroyed. Of greater importance from the military point of view was the destruction of road and railway bridges. This was obviously essential if we were to succeed in our efforts to delay the enemy and it had in fact been done since the beginning of the operations.

234. Two other aspects of the problem which received consideration were the practicability of applying a Scorched Earth Policy and the moral effect it would have, if applied, on both soldiers and civilians.

As regards the former, widespread destruction of property is not an operation which can be carried out effectively at the last minute. To be effective it must be both prepared and put into execution in advance of the final withdrawal. In that case, however, the explosions and fires give to the enemy a sure indication of the intention to withdraw. It was impossible also for the military authorities to carry out or supervise the destruction in so large an area. The best that could be done was to appoint officers to tour the country to see that adequate preparations had been made. The executive work had to be left to the owners or agents on receipt of orders from a central authority.

235. The moral effect on both soldiers and civilians would be, it was anticipated, extremely adverse. At a time when we were doing our utmost to raise the morale of our troops we feared that the noise of explosions and the sight of smoke in their rear would have the opposite effect. As regards the civilians, we wanted all the help we could get from the Asiatic population but, as is well known, Asiatics tend to take the side of the more powerful and we feared that the sight of destruction being carried out well behind our lines would induce them to help the enemy rather than ourselves.

236. With these considerations in mind the Far East War Council, after referring the matter to London, issued instructions that a scorched earth policy would be enforced, but that it would not apply to foodstuffs already distributed to the civil population, to water supplies or to power plants.

SECTION XXVIII.—WOMEN AND CHILDREN.

237. The situation as regards Army Families at the outbreak of hostilities has already been explained in Part I, Section IX, "Married Families." A similar situation existed in the

Royal Air Force. There were also in Malaya a number of families of naval personnel who had shore appointments. On the civil side no restrictions had been imposed on the entry of families into Malaya, so that there were some thousands of women and children, the families of both officials and unofficials. Many of these had made their home in Malaya for a number of years.

238. In December, on instructions from Home, the question of the evacuation of women and children from Malaya came before the War Council. It was at once apparent that important issues were involved. In the first place many of the European women were engaged in essential war work—either in offices or in hospitals or in the Passive Air Defence Organization. In many cases it would be difficult to release them without weakening the organization. Moreover, many of them, especially in the Passive Air Defence Services, were working side by side with Eurasian and Asiatic women. It was in fact the European women who had in many cases taken the lead in building up the local organizations. If these women were to be withdrawn now that war had broken out and there was work to be done, the effect on the Eurasian and Asiatic population would clearly be little short of disastrous and a severe blow would be dealt to British prestige. Again, if European women were to be evacuated, why should not those Eurasian, Chinese, Indian and other Asiatic women, who were not natives of Malaya, also be evacuated if they wished to go? Although Japan's policy was to try to rally all Asiatics to her flag with the cry of "Asia for the 'Asiatics'" our political object was clearly to hold Malaya for the British Empire. It was not to gain a victory of Europeans over Asiatics. If, therefore, we evacuated immediately all European women, leaving the Eurasian and Asiatic women to do their work, we should, it seemed, be playing into the hands of the Japanese and provide a fertile ground for the seeds of their propaganda.

239. An analysis of the European women in Malaya showed that they could be divided broadly into the following categories:—

(a) *Married Families of Service Personnel.—(Rank and File).*

Not very many of these were employed on essential war work. Moreover, many of them were occupying Government accommodation which would shortly be required for reinforcements. They were for the most part "bouches inutiles." Their evacuation was therefore both possible and desirable.

(b) *Families of Officers and Civilians who wished to leave.*

It was considered undesirable to force these to stay against their will.

(c) *Families of Officers and Civilians who did not wish to leave but who were not engaged in essential war work.*

These could be ordered to leave on the grounds that they constituted "bouches inutiles."

(d) *Families of Officers and Civilians who did not wish to leave and who were engaged in essential war work.*

There were a large number in this category. For reasons given above there were strong objections to their evacuation.