

These under-estimates were not attributable solely to errors on the part of F.E.C.B., but also to those of other bodies, including my own General Headquarters.

Japanese Army Tactics and Training.

135. With regard to tactics, in general the Japanese endeavoured to infiltrate or outflank. They made use of certain novelties such as:—

(a) A type of light infantry screen acting in advance of their main body. The men were very lightly clad, had but little equipment and were armed with a light automatic weapon, the calibre of which was something under 0.3; they carried only about forty rounds of ammunition and a few hand grenades. These light infantry parties used to work individually, would get round to the rear of our advance troops, and resorted to such expedients as climbing trees from which to fire their automatic or throw hand grenades. Our men frequently mistook these light troops for Malays or Chinese, but it is doubtful if the Japanese soldiers were deliberately disguised as Malayan natives;

(b) The use of noise, including Chinese crackers and strange cries at night; these tricks, though laughable when one knew about them, had a certain amount of moral effect, especially on young Indian troops at the commencement of the campaign; and

(c) Inflatable rubber belts to enable men to cross creeks and small rivers.

To combat these tactics the General Officer Commanding, Malaya, stressed the importance of discipline and steadiness, the necessity for alertness and cunning on the part of the individual, and that the way to defeat the enemy was to attack or counter-attack him on every possible occasion. "Essentially war of movement and attack, and too much digging creates defence complex."

136. An anti-white campaign had started in Japan in 1936, and it was evident that for long before the commencement of the war the spirit of hatred of Europeans, particularly the British, had constantly been inculcated into the Japanese soldiers. They appear to have been taught that the killing of Europeans by any method was a patriotic action.

It is possible that had we adopted the same course some men might have fought harder at the start, but it is difficult to inculcate the spirit of hatred into the Englishman. This is partly due to his peculiar faculty of seeing a jest in the most depressing circumstances, and partly to the fact that hatred is ultimately based on fear, which is not a natural characteristic of our race.

Factors affecting Morale of our Forces.

137. The majority of the Indian regiments laboured under some disability on account of the inexperience of most of their British officers. As a rule, there would be two or three senior officers, with fifteen or more years' experience, then a gap until we came to officers who had joined after September, 1939. Somewhere about half these officers had experience in India and could talk the language, but having only from one to two and a half years' service they did not carry the weight which more experienced officers would have done.

In both British and Indian units there was only a small leaven of war-experienced officers

and men, and it was under these conditions that young soldiers had to meet the first shock of the Japanese attack.

138. A factor which had some effect on morale generally was that, strategically, we were on the defensive; everyone knew that it was to our interests to avoid war with Japan, which meant that the initiative and especially choice of moment for opening hostilities rested with them.

As stated above, the Matador plan provided for a tactical offensive, provided adequate warning could be obtained. As events turned out, the execution of Matador was impracticable, and later events confirmed that the decision not to carry out this operation was correct.

Then, owing to the comparative weakness of our forces in Malaya we could neither afford heavy losses up North nor send up there more than limited reinforcements, because of the necessity for retaining a force to defend Southern Johore and in the last resort the island of Singapore itself. This was not the result of a sort of fortress-complex, but because the essential factor was preservation of the repair and other facilities in the Naval Base. The opinion held in London on this point was made perfectly clear in the latter part of December when the Chiefs of Staff telegraphed: "His Majesty's Government agree your conception that vital issue is to ensure security of Singapore Naval Base. They emphasise that no other consideration must compete with this."

Holding Northern Malaya was not an end in itself; it was with reference to the Naval Base that Northern Malaya acquired its importance. This meant that Commanders in the North had to bear in mind the possibility of withdrawal in the face of superior forces, their action—at any rate until Johore was reached—being mainly a delaying one to gain time for the arrival of reinforcements from overseas. This applied particularly to the Kelantan area, and to a lesser extent, to Kuantan, since in both cases (as stated in para. 12 above) the line of communication was a single one and vulnerable to air bombing.

139. It is easy to talk of the lack of an offensive spirit and of a "retreat complex," but under the conditions described above withdrawals from the North were necessary; and the adverse effect induced by having to carry out a continuous retreat over some hundreds of miles starting from the early days of the campaign must be attributed to the general situation rather than to any fault in the original morale of the troops themselves.

It is possible however, that the need for offensive action even during a retreat had not been so stressed during the training of officers and men as to become a second nature. For instance, there appeared to be a tendency to use reserves for supporting a weak portion of a defensive position rather than retaining them at all costs for bringing about a counter-attack. Again, up to the time I handed over command, there was a tendency to use the Independent Company in Malaya as a reinforcement and not to carry out the functions for which it was specially intended. Further, officers and men must be taught that occasions will arise when some parties have got to hold on to the last man, even though the main body of the force may be moving back.