

RESTRICTED

R.A.F. NARRATIVE
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THE CAMPAIGNS IN THE FAR EAST

VOLUME I

FAR EAST DEFENCE POLICY AND PREPARATIONS FOR WAR

R.A.F. NARRATIVE

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at 0001 hours 8th December 1941.

VOLUME I

Part I

Chronological Summary of Principal Events

- | | | |
|---------------|---|--|
| May 1905 | - | Battle of Tsushima |
| 16 June 1921 | - | Decision to establish a Naval Base at Singapore |
| 21 Dec. 1921 | - | Committee chooses sites for Naval and Air Bases |
| March 1924 | - | Labour Government abandons work on the Naval Base |
| 26 Nov. 1924 | - | Conservative Government decides to recommence work |
| Feb. 1925 | - | The Curzon Report |
| June 1926 | - | Committee of Imperial Defence consider the First Stage Defences |
| March 1927 | - | The Gillman Report |
| March 1928 | - | Chiefs of Staff recommend Fixed Gun defence |
| 11 Dec. 1928 | - | No. 205 (F.B) Squadron arrives at Seletar |
| July 1929 | - | Labour Government retards work on Base |
| Jan. 1930 | - | London Naval Disarmament Conference |
| 13 Dec. 1930 | - | No. 36 (T.B) Squadron arrives at Seletar |
| Oct. 1932 | - | The Baldwin Coast Defence Report |
| April 1933 | - | First Stage Defences are accelerated |
| 1 Dec. 1933 | - | H.Q.R.A.F. Far East established : Air Commodore Smith appointed A.O.C. |
| 8 Jan. 1934 | - | No. 100 (T.B) Squadron arrives at Seletar |
| 24 July 1935 | - | Cabinet approve Second Stage Defences |
| 25 March 1936 | - | Straits Settlements Volunteer Air Force is established |
| 6 Nov. 1936 | - | No. 230 (F.B). Squadron arrives at Seletar |
| 6 Nov. 1936 | - | Air Commodore Tedder appointed A.O.C. R.A.F. Far East. |
| Dec. 1936 | - | Anglo-Dutch Staff Conversations in London |
| 12 June 1937 | - | Kallang Airport opened |
| March 1938 | - | Period Before Relief-defined as 70 days |
| 1 Aug. 1938 | - | No. 4 A.A.C.U. established |
| 9 Sep. 1938 | - | A.V.M. Babington appointed A.O.C. R.A.F. Far East |

- 1939:
- May - Anglo-French Staff Conversations
 - 22 June - Anglo-French Conference at Singapore
 - June - Chiefs of Staff extend Period Before Relief to 90 days
 - 8 Sep. - No. 34 (B) Squadron arrives at Singapore from U.K.
 - 14 Sep. - S.S.V.A.F. embodied
 - 22 Sep. - No. 62 (B) Squadron arrives at Singapore from U.K.
- 1940:
- 28 Feb. - Governor of Singapore advocates a stronger R.A.F.
 - 1 May - No. 230 (F.B) Squadron transferred to Middle East
 - 28 June - Chiefs of Staff Far East Appreciation
 - 4 July - No. 1 (G.R) Squadron arrives at Sembawang from Australia
 - 30 July - No. 21 (G.P) Squadron arrives from Australia
 - August - Malayan Volunteer Air Force formed
 - 9 Aug. - No. 8 (G.R) Squadron arrives from Australia
 - 16 Oct. - Far East Commanders' Tactical Appreciation
 - 17 Oct. - Appointment of Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham as C - in - C. Far East
 - 22 Oct. - The Singapore Conference
 - 26 Nov. - Anglo-Dutch Staff Conversations
- 1941:
- 17 Feb. - Buffalo fighters start to arrive from U.S.A.
 - 17 Feb. - No. 27 (N.F) Squadron transferred from India
 - 22 Feb. - The 'A.D.A.' Conference
 - March - No. 67 (F) Squadron formed
 - April - No. 243 (F) Squadron formed
 - ✓ 20 April - A.V.M. Pulford appointed A.O.C. R.A.F. Far East
 - 21 April - The 'A.D.B.' Conference
 - July - Observer Corps the responsibility of Air Headquarters
 - " - Japanese forces move into Southern Indo-China
 - " - Operation 'Matador' first planned
 - 11 August - No. 223 Group formed and Nos. 222 and 224 Groups established as cadres
 - 21 August - No. 453 (F) Squadron formed at Sembawang
 - September - An O.T.U. formed at Kluang

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<u>1941:</u>	13 Oct.	-	No. 67 (F) Squadron transferred to Burma
	10 October	-	Nos. 488 formed at Kallang
	November	-	A P.R.U. formed
	12 Nov.	-	'Plenaps' drawn up
	22 Nov.	-	R.A.F. Units move to Battle Stations
	30 Nov.	-	No. 60 (B) Squadron attached from Burma

PART I

MALAYA, BORNEO AND N.E.I.

Early History

Russia's powerful Baltic Fleet sailed from Kronstadt in October 1904. It was bound for the Far East, 21000 miles distant, in order to engage the Japanese Fleet in an action which was expected to decide the issue of the Russo-Japanese War. The greater part of the fleet, after incidents in the North Sea, sailed around the Cape of Good Hope and nearly six months after leaving Russia steamed slowly past Singapore. Those Russian seamen could not foresee their coming defeat; still less might they look into the future when the same Island, clearly discernable a few miles to the North, would shelter a great naval base, keypoint of the British Empire in the Far East, and fortified to compare with that other stronghold - Gibraltar. But at Tsushima in May 1905, mainly through devastatingly accurate gunfire, the Czarist Fleet suffered decisive defeat, losing practically all its ships to the same, newly civilized enemy, who, some thirty-six years later was to reach for the greatest prize in the Pacific. Sweeping down the mainland of Malaya, and disposing of Britain's limited naval strength in the Far East, the Japanese were to capture Singapore and so inflict on our Imperial Forces the most ignominious defeat since the loss of the American Colonies.

C.I.D.
143-C
dated 7th
June 21.

C.I.D. 346-C
dated 4th
June 30.

Prior to 1914 Singapore was of secondary importance, being only a war anchorage and merchant shipping port. Hong Kong was the principal naval base around which naval policy in the Far East centred, and for defence relied mainly upon the presence of the British Battle Fleet in the China Seas. After the defeat of Russia, the British Fleet was withdrawn and Hong Kong left without naval protection; in the event of a sudden outbreak of war with Japan it could not have been relieved for a month or more. Although the Government realised this risk and decided to increase the fixed defences and local naval forces, they deliberately declined to station in Hong-Kong the large garrison required to enable the fortress to hold out, in the event of war with Japan, until relieved by the Fleet. Instead, entire reliance was placed on the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, with the intention of reinforcing the Fleet if and when the Alliance came to an end. British naval requirements were met by the combination of forces of the two nations which were superior to any likely to be met in the Pacific. At that time the rise of Germany as a naval power had necessitated the concentration of our main fleets near the United Kingdom, but the importance of naval bases in the Far East was never overlooked. It was fully recognized that even if it were not possible or necessary to maintain a fleet in the Far East of equal power to the Japanese, it was essential in view of British prestige and the defence of Australasia that the British Fleet could be moved at short notice to those waters if the situation so required.

After the 1914/18 War, when the position in the Far East was re-examined, it was clear that many new factors had arisen. Concurrently with the disappearance of Germany as a naval power, the Japanese Fleet had grown enormously and the Navies of the United States of America and Japan had become the second and third most powerful in the world. With the end of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in sight considerations of economy made it impossible to maintain a British Fleet in any but a central position in European waters whence it could quickly reinforce either the East or the West. It was similarly impracticable to station a garrison in Hong Kong strong enough to hold the fortress in the event of war with Japan, until it could be relieved by a fleet normally stationed in Home Waters or the

/Mediterranean

Mediterranean. Furthermore such action would not have been possible as the transition from coal to oil fuel was almost complete in the British Navy: There were few stocks of oil along the route and insufficient in the Far East to maintain a fleet after its arrival. The size of capital ships had also increased so there were no dry docks in Eastern waters of sufficient size to hold them.

Decision to establish a Naval Base

In 1921 these circumstances were examined by the Committee of Imperial Defence and its Sub-Committee, the Overseas Defence Committee, who reached the conclusion that Hong-Kong was too exposed to continue to be the principal naval base in the Far East. Furthermore as it was essential to provide an alternative base, Singapore should be regarded as more suitable than Hong-Kong for, providing its defences could be strengthened, it possessed all the qualifications of a great naval base, in size, anchorage, secure entrance etc. In addition it was admirably situated as a base for the fleet charged with the protection of Imperial interests in the Indian Ocean and the South Pacific.

C.I.D. 346
dated 4th
June, 1930.

This policy was adopted in principle by the Cabinet 16th June 1921 and the projects made known to the Imperial Conference which was aiming at an understanding in the Pacific to replace the Anglo-Japanese Alliance (the Four Power Treaty was the result). Subsequently, British Delegates at the 1921 Washington Conference were instructed not to agree with anything which might interfere with the already overdue development of the Singapore Base. A committee was then formed by the Admiralty to report on the possibilities of the formation of a naval base. It arrived in Singapore 21st December 1921: four sites were considered and after careful examination a position in the Johore Strait, 3 miles East of the Causeway was selected as being the most suitable for the establishment of a dockyard, floating dock, fleet anchorage etc. W/Cmdr. Hewlett, the Air Ministry representative on the Committee, made an extensive examination of the Island and selected a site at Seletar about 3 miles East of the proposed Naval Base, suitable both as an airfield and seaplane station. This base had the operational advantage of accommodating land planes and seaplanes; also it was near the Naval Base which simplified the task of embarking and disembarking carrier-borne aircraft. Its ground defences could be co-ordinated with those of the Naval Base, whilst the position on the north side of the island made it suitable for air defence.

C.I.D. 170-C
dated 24th
May, 1922.

C.I.D. 174-C
dated July,
1922.
182 - C
dated 7th
December, 1922

C.I.D. 176-C
dated 28th
July, 1922.

In 1922 an Admiralty Memorandum was sent to the Dominions; the strategic position in the Pacific was outlined, stressing that the Washington Conference had left the British Empire to counter any aggressive tendencies on the part of Japan. Certain Dominions and India were invited to assist in the development of Singapore.

C.I.D. 189-C
dated 27th
March, 1923

C.I.D. 346-C
dated 4th
June, 1930.

In the autumn of 1922 the Conservative Government came into office and decided to proceed with the Singapore project, although financial considerations dictated limited expenditure over the following two years. This decision was discussed at great length by the Imperial Conference of 1923, deep interest being shown by India, Australia and New Zealand, the latter to the extent of offering £100,000.

Work on the Defences Abandoned.

C.I.D. 223-C
dated 31st
March, 1924.

A Labour Government came into power in 1924, and a decision was made to abandon the scheme as it was considered the project would jeopardize the policy of international co-operation sponsored by the League of Nations, and would inevitably lead to an armaments race in the Far East. There was marked difference of opinion amongst the Dominion Governments on this reversal of policy; those in the Pacific re-affirmed their faith in the proposed Base, whilst the more remote supported the view of the Labour Government.

C.I.D. 228-C
dated 10th
Sept. 1924.

At the time the decision was taken not to proceed with the Naval Base, the Joint Overseas and Home Defence Committee was engaged on a survey of the defences of the British and Indian ports east of Suez. Notwithstanding the suspended progress of the Base the Joint Committee were required to complete their report. This recommended, amongst other matters, that Penang should be defended as a Convoy Assembly Port because in conjunction with Singapore it would enable the Malacca Straits to be controlled, and as a naval anchorage it would be favourably situated for the defence of trade and troop movements in the Eastern Indian Ocean. It was also remembered that during the Great War Penang was one of the few British ports abroad to be attacked.

The Curzon Report.

C.I.D. 236-C
dated 5th
December 1924.

Minutes of 193rd
meeting of C.I.D.
5 January, 1925.

C.I.D. 243-C
dated 3rd
March, 1925.

On 26 November, 1924 the new Conservative Government decided the Singapore Base should be proceeded with on principle. A Sub-Committee, presided over by Lord Curzon was set up to re-examine the sites approved in 1922; also to consider the rate of construction and the future programme. It is interesting to note that the terms of reference included the possibilities of air forces as alternative deterrents to heavy batteries - a point raised by Mr. Churchill at a meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence. The first interim Report was issued in February, 1925 in which it was recommended that the site for the Floating Dock should be in the Johore Strait and not in Keppel Harbour. The site for the proposed airfield and seaplane base at Seletar was also recommended. Questions of military defence of these sites were well considered and it is noteworthy that in the opinion of both the C.I.G.S. and recent G.O.C. Malaya the approach of an enemy through the mainland of Johore would be exceptionally difficult, and that conditions would favour the defence.

C.I.D. 253-C
dated 23rd
October, 1925.

S.P.(25)
10 Annex to
C.I.D. 253-C

The second interim Report of the Singapore Sub-Committee recommended that authority should be given to the Admiralty for the construction and conveyance to Singapore of a new floating dock in preference to using an ex German Dock. Certain other defence measures were recommended in addition to the authority for the establishment of an airfield and accommodation at Seletar. With regard to the heavy defences, a difference of opinion arose between the Chiefs of Staff which is of interest in the light of subsequent events. The Chief of Naval Staff and Chief of Imperial General Staff firmly believed the defence could be entrusted to 6 or 8 x 15 inch guns, but the Chief of Air Staff (Lord Trenchard) considered an adequate defence at a lower cost could be provided by the alternative of an air force consisting of one fighter and two torpedo-bomber squadrons, together with one flight of seaplanes. This air defence would be mobile and not locked up like the fixed defences, and therefore could be used elsewhere in the Empire when required. The C.A.S. wanted four years in which to develop the R.A.F. in this role of coast defence and recommended that the emplacement of the heavy guns should be deferred. Both the C.N.S. and C.I.G.S. dissented from this view, their main objection being that no reliance could be placed upon the unknown factor of air co-operation for coast defence; and an air force not based permanently in Singapore would have no deterrent effect. However, the Sub-Committee decided to recommend that the decision concerning the heavy defences should be deferred until the following summer in order to give the Air Ministry time to work out in greater detail a scheme concerning the responsibility they wished to undertake.

/Conflicting

Conflicting Policies.

C.I.D. 273-C
dated 9th
July 1926.

The C.I.D. met again in June 1926 to consider this detailed scheme. The proposals made by the C.A.S. were similar in principle to his previous suggestions in the Chiefs of Staff Report, but in addition he proposed the development of the Calcutta - Singapore air route, together with the establishment of a flying - boat squadron at Singapore. The C.A.S. emphasized that his scheme was by no means definite owing to the probable development of aircraft in the next four years; the squadrons which were to form his mobile force were stationed in India and were primarily bomber units which would need to be adapted for torpedo dropping; the dual purpose torpedo-bomber in fact would not be in service until 1929. The C.N.S. and C.I.G.S. continued to differ from the C.A.S. in their conception of adequate defence preferring the use of 15 inch guns - a weapon of proved efficiency - to the problematical use of air power coupled with a plan which the C.A.S. himself admitted was necessarily vague and could not be realized for another four years. A compromise was then reached in the conclusions that the first stage of the defence should provide for 3 x 15 inch guns; that before the second stage was approached there should be a re-examination of the question of substitution of aircraft for the balance of the 15 inch guns: The Calcutta - Singapore air route should be opened and that a torpedo-bomber aircraft should be developed.

C.I.D. 275-C
dated 20th
July 1926.

The Singapore Sub-Committee then submitted to the C.I.D. a Third Interim Report which embodied these proposals. Also the contribution of £2,000,000 by the Malay States was acknowledged as a means of advancing the defence scheme, and a proposal by the Admiralty for a substantial reduction in the cost of the Naval Base was similarly recommended. These conclusions were approved by the Cabinet 5 August 1926. Later, at the Imperial Conference the representatives of India, Australia and New Zealand were especially interested in the Government's defence scheme for Singapore.

C.I.D. 277-C
dated 5th
August 1926.

C.I.D. 290-C
dated 20th
January 1927.

In early 1927 the Admiralty reconsidered the proposals for naval defence generally, in view of the need for reducing the costs of Singapore, and particularly because Japan was not developing coastal motor boats; certain modifications were recommended involving a reduction in expenditure. Shortly afterwards New Zealand made an offer of £1,000,000 towards the cost of the Base.

C.I.D. 296-C
dated 29th
April, 1927.

The Gillman Report.

C.I.D. 304-C
dated
October 1927

A year later, in March 1927 a military commission under Lt. Gen. Sir Webb Gillman was sent to Singapore to investigate details of the proposed defences of the Naval Base, and in October the Admiralty stated the date of completion of the Naval Base should be accepted as 1937. In March 1928 the Chiefs of Staff reviewed the question of the scales of attack and defence, taking into consideration the Gillman Report. Recommendations were made that the first stages of the defences, which included 3 x 15 inch guns, should be proceeded with; the time allowed for completion was extended from 3 to 5 years: and consideration of the later stages of the defence scheme was to be postponed owing to factors which were expected to be more definite within a year or two. The Chiefs of Staff also expressed the view that the

C.I.D. 306-C
dated 31st
October 1927.

C.I.D. 312-C
dated 7th
March 1928.

/possibility

Note: Between 1927 and 1939 the air forces in the Far East were augmented by Fleet Air Arm Units aboard either aircraft carrier H.M.S. "Hermes" or "Eagle". There were also Flights on ships of the East Indies Station. Details may be found in Chapter III but all references to establishments in this chapter on Malaya are exclusive of F.A.A. Units.

possibility of invasion from the mainland of Johore might be excluded.

C.I.D. 331-C
dated 14th
February 1929.

The Cabinet approved of a C.I.D. recommendation in December 1928 that the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee should enquire into recent bombardment trials at Portsmouth and Malta and that during 1929/30 there should be no expenditure on 9.2 and 15 inch guns in order to allow time for an investigation.

The Defences begin to Materialize.

C.I.D. 336-C
dated 15th
July, 1929.

According to a report made by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee, July 1929, the general situation of the Singapore defences was then as follows:-

Naval The Floating Dock had been constructed and was at Singapore; the modified scheme for the completion of the Naval Base by 1937 had been approved and seven year contracts placed.

Military The first stage of the defence plan (which included 3 x 15 inch; 4 x 9.2 inch and 4 x 6 inch guns) had been approved and work was proceeding, although there was to be no expenditure on the 9.2 inch and 15 inch guns during 1929/30 in order to allow for investigation of bombardment trials. Consideration of later stages of the defence plan had been postponed.

R.A.F. A Flying-Boat squadron (No. 205) which had carried out a cruise in Eastern waters was now stationed at Seletar.⁽¹⁾ The airfield was practically complete and good progress was being made on accommodation for 2 Flights of Fleet Air Arm or 1 Torpedo-Bomber squadron. Landing grounds on the air route to India had been surveyed and work commenced in some cases.

New factors had arisen since the Chiefs of Staff meeting in June 1926; briefly, the Floating Dock was in position but without adequate defence by heavy guns. With the flying-boats already at Seletar and the airfield nearing completion it was considered that a torpedo-bomber squadron should be stationed there for defence of the Naval Base. Such a course was recommended, and although it was a provisional arrangement without prejudice to the ultimate scheme for heavy gun defence, it was at least a slight realization of Lord Trenchard's earlier proposals.

The Slow Down for Ten Years of Peace.

The question of the Singapore Base once again came under review soon after the assumption of office of the Labour Government, and although there was no sudden stoppage of the scheme as in 1924 it was obvious that the new Government wanted a co-ordinated defence related to their new international policy. The Prime Minister made a statement to the Committee of Imperial Defence in July 1929 in which

C.I.D. 337-C
dated 25th
July, 1929.

/he

(1) No. 205 (F.B) Squadron commanded by G.C. Cave-Browne-Cave - 4 Supermarine Southamptons - left England 14 Oct. 1927 on a cruise to the Far East which was to include Singapore, Australia, and Hong Kong. The cruise finished at Seletar 11th December 1928.

he said conditions in the international situation had changed since the Base was first projected; consideration had been given to commitments made with the Dominions, contracts placed and progress made, and when all these factors had been assessed it had been decided the scheme should proceed for the time being even to the extent of sending a Torpedo-Bomber squadron to Singapore in the following autumn. (1)

Towards the end of 1929 the Government's disarmament policy was re-affirmed by an invitation to all the Powers concerned for a Naval Disarmament Conference to be held in London, January 1930. In anticipation it was decided to slow down work on the Base and not to undertake any new work.

C.I.D. 354-C
dated 27th
October 1930.

This same policy was urged when the Conference met. The view held was that the development of machinery for the peaceful settlement of disputes had reduced the risk of any outbreak of war; similarly the economic depression which followed the last war would act as a deterrent, and finally, Japan was unlikely to disturb the peace as she had been a signatory to the London Naval Treaty. Whilst the Prime Minister of Australia only partly agreed with these views, the New Zealand premier took a firmer stand, pointing out that naval opinion had for many years advocated the Base at Singapore as essential for the protection of the interests of the British Commonwealth in the Pacific, and that he could not share the British Government's faith in the various, and as yet, untried instruments for the maintenance of peace. Despite these objections the policy adopted was that although the ultimate establishment of a defended naval base was to remain unchanged and the present contracts were to stand, the expenditure for completing the docks and defences was to be postponed for 5 years.

The Baldwin Coast Defence Report.

C.I.D. 370
dated 24th
May, 1932.

C.I.D. 374
dated 12th
October 1932.

The decision to postpone work in Singapore until 1935 was based mainly on the assumption there would be no war for ten years. In the meantime a new situation had arisen: trouble had occurred between Japan and China, which, if it broke out again might ultimately threaten Singapore, whose defences were very weak. So after an interval of nearly three years important decisions were made by the Cabinet in October 1932 as the result of recommendations to the Committee of Imperial Defence by a Sub-Committee presided over by Mr. Stanley Baldwin; this had examined the question of Coast Defence and the security of defended ports throughout the Empire with especial reference to the introduction of air forces. There was immediate divergence of opinion between the Chiefs of Staff, for the Air Staff had revived the view of Lord Trenchard in 1925 that torpedo aircraft should be substituted for 15 inch guns. The Chief of Air Staff (A.C.M. Sir John Salmond) enlarged upon the original theme, claiming that air forces were required to meet the growing menace of air attack; that combined with light gun and local naval defences they could resist invasion, bombardment and raids; and that where additional striking aircraft were needed to meet the increased scale of ship bombardment, these extra aircraft would be better insurance than expenditure upon artillery defences, which in any case needed air forces for 'spotting' duties.

/The

(1) On 13th September 1930, 8 Hawker Horsley aircraft of No. 36 (T.B) Squadron were shipped out from Sealand to Karachi; from there they flew to Singapore arriving Seletar 13th and 17th December, 1930. The squadron was re-equipped with Vildebeeste III on 2nd July, 1935.

The proposal for the supersession of the heavy guns in favour of defence by aircraft became the high-light of the controversy, the Army and Navy being in complete disagreement with the C.A.S. However the Air Staff's view was not entirely overwhelmed by the weight of argument of the two older Services, for one of the first conclusions arrived at by the Sub-Committee was the necessity for co-operation between the Services; aircraft were to be considered a valuable and essential addition to the fixed defences as well as a means of attack, and accordingly the R.A.F. were to participate in all aspects of the defence, including fighter defence and offensive action against ships. But the gun was to retain its place as the main deterrent against Naval attack; in consequence the first stages of the defence plan, which included the provision of 3 x 15 inch guns, should proceed.

C.I.D. 375-C
dated 12th
October, 1932.

Concurrently with these recommendations by the Committee of Imperial Defence the Ministers of the three Defence Services made certain proposals. The First Lord of the Admiralty suggested that the Cabinet should give approval for work to proceed on the Naval Base in addition to the defences, because if the essence of naval strategy in the Far East were to depend on the arrival of the main fleet in Singapore, then that fleet could not operate without the facilities of a Base.

The Chief of Imperial General Staff emphasized that if the armament for the first stage of the defence were to be installed it should not be at the expense of other economies in the Army, and furthermore that the money should be assured for a period of 5 years in order to properly manufacture and instal the 15 inch guns.

C.I.D. 383-C
dated 18th
Jan. 1933.

To these suggestions the Cabinet agreed, but the proposal by the Secretary of State for Air for the building of a second airfield was reserved for further consideration. A little later, in an exchange of letters between the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Air, it was agreed that owing to the financial burden the question of raising extra R.A.F. units need not be brought up until the third year in the first stage of the defences. So once again the efforts of the R.A.F. were curtailed by higher policy, but international events were soon to revive the incentive which so often in the past had been checked by the dictates of finance or government policy.

Stage I Defences Accelerated.

C.I.D. 1103-B
dated 31st
March, 1933.

The weakness of our military position in the Far East had been brought to the notice of the Committee of Imperial Defence every year since 1919 by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee. The defences at Singapore had not been properly built up, consequently the Naval Base was liable to destruction or capture before our main fleet could arrive: recapture would be a difficult operation and in the meantime Hong-Kong would be exposed to the same fate. The situation with regard to Japan had deteriorated, for since 1931 she had intervened in Manchuria and Shanghai and was pursuing this policy with disregard to both the League of Nations and America. It was thought the imposition of sanctions by the League of Nations would lead to War and the weakness at Singapore invited attack; in fact it was known that Japan had prepared such a scheme and a force had actually been ready to embark at the time of the Shanghai crisis in 1932.

These circumstances were the matter of gravest concern for the Sub-Committee, whose first recommendation in April 1933 was that the programme for Stage I defences should be

/expedited

expedited from 5 to 3½ years (i.e. mid 1936)⁽¹⁾ Similarly provision should be made for additional air forces and a second airfield; ⁽²⁾ the hastening of Naval Seaward Defences consisting of anti-submarine and torpedo nets; and work started on Ammunition Stores, Signal and Mine Control Stations.

Immediate measures would require redistribution of the Naval Seaward Defences and the establishment of an additional R.A.F. squadron as a deterrent against seaborne attack. It was not possible to increase the garrison of one British and one Indian Battalion owing to lack of barrack accommodation and the fact that extensive troop movements might aggravate the political situation.

Emergency measures were also proposed to cover the possibility of trouble arising before the full defence programme was completed. These were to comprise the redistribution of naval forces in order to delay any Jap seaborne expedition, together with military and R.A.F. reinforcements from India (two squadrons) and one squadron from Iraq. All these suggestions were approved by the Committee of Imperial Defence and subsequently the Cabinet.⁽³⁾ The Committee of Imperial Defence were aware that since the break of the alliance with Japan our relations with that country had become poisoned and that the Japanese regarded us with increasing suspicion. It was recognized that Japan's aim was to become a great Power in the East which would require territory and raw materials. Japan and Germany had left the League of Nations and the possibility was considered that when Germany was sufficiently strong the two countries might come together against us. It was even anticipated that Japan might turn upon China, only to be thwarted, and so have to look elsewhere in order to expand.

C.I.D. 261st
meeting 9th
November 1933

C.I.D. 394-C
dated 20th
April 1934.

A year later, with such immediate measures in hand, the Chiefs of Staff made a general survey in order to determine the strength of the air forces required in Singapore in war and peace conditions. Their conclusions are of great interest in the light of subsequent events for they still adhered to the belief that an attack by shore-based aircraft was to be discounted owing to the difficulties of the enemy establishing an air base whilst under attack by the defending forces. Carrier-borne aircraft were thought to be the more likely form of attack, but owing to the hazards entailed by the long sea passage and the subsequent attack on Singapore it was thought the Japanese would not risk their entire carrier force, the loss of which would place them at a disadvantage in a sea battle: the force was therefore anticipated as two large aircraft carriers.

/The

(1) First Stage Gun Defences to comprise:-

Three 15 inch guns
Six 9.2. inch guns
Ten 6 inch guns
Twenty-four anti-aircraft guns.

(2) On 1 Dec. 1933 Headquarters Royal Air Force Far East was formed. Officer Commanding, G.C. Smith. The Units administered were: R.A.F. Base Singapore; No. 36 (T.B) Squadron; No. 205 (F.B) Squadron; R.A.F. Base, Kai Tak; R.A.F. Units in the H.M.S. "Eagle"; No. 403 (Fleet Fighter) Flight, 5th Cruiser Squadron.

(3) No. 100 (T.B) Squadron (Vickers Vildebeestes II) was shipped to Singapore December 1933 and arrived Seletar 8th Jan. 1934.

The necessity for distant and close sea reconnaissance was fully recognized as an essential means of locating the sea borne expedition to allow the striking force to make contact; it was considered that three flying-boat squadrons were needed for this purpose in war time. The aim would then be for the torpedo-bombers to engage the carriers before the first attacking aircraft were flown off, but as such a contingency was by no means certain, a squadron of fighter-bombers would be required to intercept the attackers.

Spotting aircraft for co-operation with the Island's gun defences had not previously been recommended owing to the proposed system of land observation for which excellent facilities existed, consequently it was anticipated that only one flight of such aircraft would be required and this could be formed as an auxiliary unit from the existing civilian flying club.

The strength of the R.A.F. in Singapore at that time (April, 1934) was No. 205 Flying Boat Squadron (1) No. 36 Torpedo-Bomber Squadron and No. 100 Torpedo Bomber Squadron all stationed at Seletar. The Sub-Committee's proposals were that these air forces should be increased in peace time by the addition of a fighter-bomber squadron, another flying boat squadron and a flight of spotting aircraft (2) the wartime strength was to be appreciably stronger with a total of 6 landplane squadrons, 3 flying boat squadrons and the spotting flight. Facilities would have to be provided on a war basis and in order to accommodate the force the existing airfield at Seletar would need to be augmented by the recently authorized airfield site, together with the civil airfield under preparation, plus an additional service airfield. The war-time reinforcements would be drawn from other commands, therefore it was essential an adequate air route to the Far East was developed. These proposals were later approved by the Committee of Imperial Defence, the Secretary of State for Air making the proviso that the type of the additional aircraft should be left open as it might be possible to provide more efficient reconnaissance by land-plane than by flying boat. Thus for the first time in the history of Singapore the R.A.F. was fully recognised as a potential striking force and a major factor in the Island's defence which could reach out to locate and destroy an enemy long before it came within the range of the fixed defences.

C.I.D. 264th
meeting 31st
May, 1934

F.540 - "R.A.F.
Seletar, Spotter
Unit, and
S.S.V.A.F".

/Summary

- (1) No. 205 (F.B) Squadron (Southampton) was re-equipped with 4 I.E. Singapore III Flying Boats on 2 April, 1935.
- (2) On 26th March 1935 the Co-operation Flight was formed at Seletar with one Audax. This was the forerunner of the Straits Settlements Volunteer Air Force, established a year later, 25th March, 1936. It took over the Audax and gradually acquired 2 Tutor and 2 Hart aircraft for training purposes as well as several more Audax. The S.S.V.A.F. was embodied 14 September 1939 when most of its personnel were absorbed into the R.A.F. The training aircraft were transferred to No. 4 A.A.C.U. and the 5 Audax taken over by the newly-formed (1 Oct. 39) Spotter Unit, which, in addition was to have 6 I.E. Swordfish.

Summary - Period 1905 - 1935.

Japan's first victory over a Great Power took place in 1905 when her Fleet decisively beat the Russians in the battle of Tsushima. This event allowed the British Fleet to be withdrawn from the China Station, and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was accepted as an insurance against war with that nation. After the 1914/18 war it was clear how the navies of Japan and the U.S.A. had grown enormously, in consequence the Far East position was reviewed and it was decided that a new Base at Singapore should supersede the exposed fortress of Hong Kong. In 1921 a Committee selected sites for the Naval and Air Bases, and a year later a Conservative Government agreed to the project, their decision being endorsed by the Imperial Conference of 1923. But a year later a Labour Government, convinced that the building of a Naval Base at Singapore would jeopardize the principles of the League of Nations, summarily abandoned the scheme. With the return to power of the Conservatives in 1924 the matter was re-opened and the Curzon Report confirmed the findings of the previous Committee. A year later authority was given for the construction of a Floating Dock and the establishment of an air base. The defences, however, were a subject of immediate controversy: the Army and Navy wanted fixed heavy gun defences, whilst the R.A.F. preferred to rely upon the hitherto untried factor of torpedo-bomber aircraft. After a year of planning such revolutionary ideas were again propounded in 1926 and a compromise was reached by which the First Stage defences should consist of 3 x 15 inch guns, but before the Second Stage was approached consideration was to be given to the substitution of torpedo-bomber aircraft for the balance of the 15 inch guns. In order to further the defence schemes the Admiralty agreed to reduce the costs of the Naval Base, and large monetary contributions were offered by the Malay States and New Zealand. The Gillman Report of 1927 led to the recommendation that the 15 inch gun defences should proceed, but with an extension from 3 to 5 years. Within 2 years the Floating Dock was in position, the gun defences were proceeding and No. 205 Flying Boat Squadron was established at Singapore, but the return of a Labour Government in 1929 led to a slow-down in the defences in anticipation of the coming Disarmament Conference. Although No. 36 Torpedo-Bomber Squadron was sent to Singapore that year to defend the Naval Base, the Disarmament Conference, with the exception of the Australian and New Zealand representatives, approved the Government's view, and so the completion of the defences was postponed for five years. In 1932, trouble between Japan and China arose, and subsequently the Baldwin Report caused the work on the defences to be resumed, but this time with weightier consideration being given to the claims of the R.A.F. Once more in 1933, the potential threat of Japanese aggression and the obvious weakness of Singapore gave prominence for the need to complete the defences. Consequently the First Stage was accelerated from 5 to $3\frac{1}{2}$ years and provision was made for additional air forces, together with a second airfield; as an immediate measure No. 100 Torpedo-Bomber Squadron arrived in Singapore early in 1934. The enemy forces at this time were expected to be carrier-borne, and attack from land-based aircraft or an overland invasion was discounted, therefore emphasis was placed upon the need for an ample air reconnaissance force, backed by aircraft suitable for attacks against shipping. Furthermore the air reinforcement route from the Middle East and India was to be developed, and to accommodate such a force three additional airfields would be needed.

Second Stage Defences.

C.I.D. 266th
meeting
22 November, 1934.

C.I.D. 408-C dated
9 July, 1935.
C.I.D. 412-C dated
20 November, 1935.

C.I.D. 270th
meeting
11 July, 1935.

C.I.D. 271st
meeting
14 October, 1935.

C.I.D. 412-C
dated
20 November, 1935.

It was the opinion of the Committee of Imperial Defence that the year 1936 was likely to be a critical one in the Far East, for by that time Japan would have almost completed the modernisation of her capital ships and the expansion of her air forces, whereas the British Fleet would be unready and the garrison of Singapore incomplete. Whilst Stage II of the defence was awaiting consideration by the Committee of Imperial Defence the Sultan of Johore made a gift of £500,000 towards the acceleration of the defences. At this time (July '35) it was expected Stage I, including the provision of three 15 inch guns would be completed by 1936 - 37. Five R.A.F. squadrons had been approved for the peace establishment; of these, three were already at Singapore, one at home awaiting the necessary accommodation on the Island, and the fifth was to be formed in England in 1938; the reinforcement air route could be used, and in Singapore the second service airfield was expected to be ready in 1936; a site was chosen for the third, but the civil airfield at Tanjong Rhu would not be finished earlier than 1937.⁽¹⁾

The Sultan's gift together with the unfavourable situation which was expected to arise the following year prompted the Chiefs of Staff to suggest that a small Ministerial Committee, similar to the Curzon and Coast Defence Committees, should be formed to enquire into the broad issues of Stage II. The Committee of Imperial Defence agreed to allow the Sub-Committee on Defence Policy and Requirements to enquire into the matter, even though the Chancellor of Exchequer (Mr. Chamberlain) was not desirous of arriving at hasty conclusions - an opinion somewhat discounted by the High Commissioner for New Zealand, who was eager that Stage II should commence. However, the report of the Sub-Committee was favourable; it acknowledged that the Admiralty were ready to waive any claim to the Sultan's gift in order that work on the gun defences should not be prejudiced, but even so the sum was insufficient to meet fully the claims of the other two Services. It was decided, therefore, to recommend an allocation of £400,000 to the War Office for the completion of the total of five 15 inch guns;⁽²⁾ but only £100,000 to the R.A.F. to meet the cost of accelerating the preparation of the second and third airfields, together with the provision of accommodation for the spotting flight at the civil airfield. It was also recommended that the Overseas Defence Committee should report on the measures required by the Services to complete the defences subsequent to Stage I. These proposals were approved by the Cabinet 24th July, 1935.

The Overseas Defence Committee subsequently recommended the detailed requirements of the three Services. The Admiralty wished to complete the local Naval Defences with a minefield and the War Office wanted to instal further 6 inch guns for close defence as well as to strengthen the garrison with a third infantry battalion. The needs of the R.A.F. were a little more involved for they were mainly based on the availability of reinforcements from other Commands. If at any time the despatch of such units was in doubt then the question would have to be considered of obtaining squadrons either from the home establishment or from a strategic reserve based, for example, in the Middle East; either contingency would require a very adequate

/air

(1) The Civil Airfield (Kallang) was opened 12th June, 1937

(2) Two 15 inch guns at Buona Vista
Three 15 inch guns at Bee Hoe.

air route to Singapore. Providing these factors were fully reorganized then no increases in the purely defensive forces were required. Apart from that, it was estimated that the reconnaissance aircraft were insufficient and that a further squadron of landplanes for such duties was required to augment the existing flying boat squadron, together with the second flying boat squadron, (1) (which was to be re-equipped with reconnaissance landplanes) due at Singapore in the autumn. Although this additional squadron would be located at the third Service airfield, such disposition which would cause congestion in the event of arrival of reinforcing squadrons from other Commands. Consequently a further two airfields would be required either in Singapore or Johore: this measure would also provide the depth of defence necessitated by the recent Japanese increase in ship-borne aircraft. The plan for reconnaissance called for landing grounds in Sarawak and the East coast of Malaya. The former would be provided at Kuching, which was being prepared in connection with the air route to Hong-Kong, but unless civil aviation developed a landing ground on the East coast of Malaya it would be necessary to propose its establishment at some future date.

C.O.S. 404
D.P.R. 39 dated 10 October, 1935. All the foregoing recommendations were strongly supported by the Chiefs of Staff, who realized that although Stage I of the defences was calculated as sufficient to allow Singapore to hold out until the arrival of the British Fleet, it was in fact based on an assumption that the Fleet was immediately available and came via the Mediterranean. With the defences increased to Stage II the Island would be able to hold out considerably longer and so increase the hitherto small margin of safety.

C.I.D. 426-C
dated 24 July, 1936. Some nine months later the War Office made yet another proposal for coast defence guns. This time it was for two 6 inch guns to cover the Colder Harbour Channel which gave access to water intended as the main anchorage for Fleet Auxiliaries. It had always been assumed that this Channel was too difficult for navigation, but more recent experience had shown it was in fact navigable for 8 inch cruisers. A defence scheme became essential and was presented by the Overseas Defence Committee to the Committee of Imperial Defence, who approved it.

Defences of Penang.

C.I.D. 427-C
dated 27 July, 1936. No action had been taken to implement the earlier proposals to fortify Penang, which had been approved by the Committee of Imperial Defence in 1924, consequently the port remained in the same undefended state as existed in the Great War when the German cruiser Emden sailed unopposed into the harbour and sank a Russian warship. With Stage I defences of Singapore nearing completion, it was felt by the Overseas Defence Committee that work should be commenced in 1937 on the coast and anti-aircraft defences of Penang, and in view of the increased scale of attack modifications were required to the originally proposed defences. The main weight of attack was expected to be from 8 inch cruisers, so as a counter measure two 9.2 inch guns should be included in the total defences. (2) It was anticipated a General Reconnaissance

/ Squadron

(1) No. 230 (F.B) Squadron - 5 Singapores (4. I.E.), arrived Seletar from England 6th November, 1936. On 22nd June, 1938 re-equipment with 6 I.E. Sunderlands commenced. Later, on 1st May, 1940 it was transferred to the Mediterranean from its detached base in Ceylon where it had been co-operating with C. in C. East Indies. Consequently the Squadron took no part in the Malayan Campaign.

(2) Gun defences to comprise:- two 6 inch 15° guns; two 6 inch 45° guns; two 9.2 inch 35° guns; 8 anti-aircraft guns; 6 defence lights.

Squadron was to be allotted to Penang before the end of 1939 and would be situated 11 miles inland. This, together with the coast defences would act as a sufficient deterrent to naval attack. The weight of possible air attack was expected to be small, consequently no provision was to be made for searchlights and only a few anti-aircraft guns were needed. The existing weak battalion of Straits Settlements Volunteers would suffice once the coast defences were installed.

Early Anglo-Dutch Conversations

A.M. File
S.38476
Encl.1B dated
2nd May, 1936
"Defence of
Dutch East
Indies"

Ibid
Encl.5A. 7A
dated 19th
and 25th May,
1936

C.I.D.
280th Meeting
10th July, 1936

Prior to 1936 the Netherlands defence policy had been that of a minimum naval and military expenditure, but in that year there was evidence that the Dutch were beginning to reconsider their defences both in Holland and the Netherlands East Indies. Holland's long-standing neutrality precluded any measures which might savour of open collaboration with Great Britain, therefore contact was sought through the medium of the Air Attache at the Hague. The Dutch Prime Minister (Dr. Colijn) discussed with this officer the problems of defence of the N.E.I. in conjunction with those of Singapore. In view of the coming re-armament of those colonies the relative merits of ships and aircraft were also debated and this led to the possibility of Great Britain selling military aircraft to the Dutch. As was the intention of Dr. Colijn, these hints were passed to the Secretary of State for Air (Lord Swinton) who, whilst declining to give official advice, was agreeable to friendly conversations with the Dutch Prime Minister. The latter next raised the question with the British Minister at the Hague, enlarging on his belief that it was of vital importance to Great Britain that the N.E.I. should not be taken by Japan. Since the Netherlands Government could not provide complete defence he was in favour of mutual assistance between the two nations in the Far East and he was eager to provide a defence which would be suitable both to the N.E.I. and Singapore. The Foreign Secretary (Mr. Eden) held the view that the Dutch should be in a position to defend themselves and that we should give technical assistance without committing ourselves to their defence. The Secretaries of State for War and Air preferred the matter to be examined by the Committee of Imperial Defence who, on the advice of the Chiefs of Staff decided that the Dutch should be encouraged to improve their defences, as the integrity of the N.E.I. was a major British interest, even though it was inadvisable to announce this fact; furthermore we could make no suggestions based on the principles of collaboration. The Cabinet approved these recommendations.

The Netherlands Government then placed orders for Dornier flying boats with Germany and bombers with America and wished to complete their rearmament with 30 flying boats of British manufacture. Actually their policy in respect of purchases from Great Britain was divided between the choice of flying boats and landplanes, so a Mission was sent to England in December 1936 to enquire into the matter. Whilst in this country they

/took

A.M. File
A. 38476
Enc. 32A.
dated 21st
December,
1936.

took the opportunity to enter into highly confidential discussions with the Deputy Chief of Air Staff on the defence of the N.E.I., not in contemplation of any commitment or understanding but simply as an interchange of information for the purpose of buying aircraft. Our defence problem in the Far East was explained to the Dutch representatives. The integrity of the Singapore Naval Base was the keypoint of naval supremacy in those waters; but it was stressed that concern was felt lest the Japanese should obtain a shore base for their aircraft within range of Singapore and retain control for sufficient time to destroy the Naval Base. Therefore adequate reconnaissance was necessary to locate a Japanese seaborne expedition, and then attack it with a striking force. The Dutch were in no position to challenge the Japanese with sea power, therefore the funds available should be spent to provide reconnaissance with striking aircraft, especially as the south was well supplied with airfields and landing grounds were under construction in the north. At the time the Dutch Naval air arm was used for reconnaissance and the army air force for striking. Our Air Staff recommended that a multi-engined landplane could perform both roles, thus allowing considerable economy. The Dutch envisaged a striking force of 39 Glen Martin aircraft, already on order, but at the same time they were particularly impressed with the R.A.F. Blenheim and Wellington. The question of bomb supply was also discussed. The Air Staff were convinced, as a result of this secret discussion that the Dutch were fully aware of the need for air forces as a defence, and that in the event of a threat to our combined interests in that area they would prove useful allies.

C. I. D.
307th
Meeting
20th January,
1938

At this stage the matter rested and the discussions were not to show results for some years to come. In January 1938 the Dutch were to raise the question of technical discussions once again, but the Chiefs of Staff were apprehensive lest such conversations should involve us in a defensive commitment for the N.E.I., for until the main fleet arrived in Singapore we could offer no undertaking of concerted action. Accordingly the Committee of Imperial Defence would not authorise conversations between British and Dutch Staffs in the Far East, although technical information might be given through the Dutch Attache in London. These views persisted, and although in early 1939 the high level policy at the Air Ministry was for a re-opening of the talks, the proposals were not at that time submitted to the Chiefs of Staff.

A.M. File
S. 38476
Encl. 59A
22nd February,
1939

/The local defences are extended

The Local Defences are Extended.

C.I.D. 436 -
C. dated
4 Dec. 1936

It was evident that the Joint Oversea and Home Defence Sub-Committee were becoming more and more apprehensive of sea-borne attack, for in December 1936 two papers were submitted to the Committee of Imperial Defence containing proposals for increased defences against air bombardment and torpedo-boat attack. The latter threat was anticipated as the transportation of these boats by ship to an advanced base up to 400 miles distant; the torpedo-boats could then travel under their own power to deliver an attack against H.M. ships in the Main Harbour and shipping in Keppel Harbour. The proposal was to protect these harbours with anti-torpedo-boat booms at their entrances, supported by 6 pounder guns and defence lights. But no estimate of costs accompanied these proposals so consideration was deferred until such details were produced. Even when this was done some two months later the scheme was again shelved because of the expected R.A.F. expansion, and it was not until March 1937 that the C.I.D. approved in principle.

C.I.D. 290th
meeting.
11 March 1937.

C.I.D.
435 - C.
dated
2 Dec. 1936.

The proposals for anti-aircraft defence however, received ready approval, which was perhaps a further indication that the Committee of Imperial Defence were beginning to appreciate the growing menace of air attack, although they still held to the belief that such an attack would come from carrier-borne aircraft. The existing scale of such defence was 24 anti-aircraft guns and the necessary searchlights, but new factors had arisen which required an appreciable increase in strength. Aircraft performance was increasing and was assessed as an attack at a minimum speed of 240 m.p.h. (day) or 200 m.p.h. (night), from 20,000 feet. The airfields were soon to spread from the original at Seletar, to five additional locations. Sembawang and Tanjong Rhu would be within the area originally covered, but the projected airfields at D.2.A. and Tengah in the North-West would be without protection, as would be the unspecified fifth site on the mainland. The airfields were conspicuous as clearings in the bush and the terrain of the Island precluded the use of satellites. This coupled with the fact an enemy would be quick to realize the vulnerability of his sea transports and carriers to attack by shore-based aircraft, and in consequence would strive for immediate air superiority, emphasized the necessity for adequate anti-aircraft defence of the airfields. Other vital areas requiring similar defence were to include the Naval Base (requiring double gun density), Normanton and Mandai oil fuel depots, Woodlands petrol depot, Keppel Harbour, and Singapore town. The defences recommended were a total of 72 anti-aircraft guns together with 114 searchlights; the possibilities of Balloon aprons (barrages) were also to be considered. A year later the Joint Oversea and Home Defence Sub-Committee had under consideration the problem of defending vital points against low flying attack, and in respect to Singapore recommended the installation of 32 x 2 pounder equipments. The C.I.D. approved these recommendations.

C.I.D.
456 - C.
dated
10 Dec. 1937

The Stimulation of Far East Policy and Strategy.

C.I.D.
444 - C.
dated
6 April 1937.

Apart from the detailed considerations of defence, the authorities were becoming increasingly concerned with the major strategical aspects, and an important query was raised when the Oversea Defence Committee, whilst engaged upon examining the problem of the reserve of stores to be held in

/Singapore

NOTE: On 6th November 1936 Air Commodore Tedder became A.O.C. R.A.F. Far East, and on 1st April 1937 his H.Q. moved from Seletar to Union Building, Collyer Quay, Singapore.

C.I.D.
292nd
meeting
15 April
1937.

Singapore, asked the Chiefs of Staff for guidance as to the "period before relief". This was in effect a period beginning from the first day of attack and ending when the Main Fleet arrived; upon such definition the Malaya Defence Scheme would be based, but in actual fact no period of relief had ever been laid down although 42 days had been assumed. (1) There was therefore a need for assessing this time, and the calculations for the period would need be accurate, for not only would the reserve of stores and supplies be affected but also the strength and composition of the garrison. With such factors in mind the Naval Staff reckoned for the "worst case", which was an assumption that the Mediterranean would be closed and the passage made round the Cape of Good Hope. By allowing 10 days for preparation and concentration of the Fleet, 45 days steaming and 15 days refuelling a total of 70 days was reached. The Chiefs of Staff were unable to finally recommend this figure in view of the future political aspects which might delay the movement of the Fleet. They applied to the Committee of Imperial Defence who in turn would not decide upon an actual "period of relief" and consequently referred the question back to its originators, the Oversea Defence Committee to examine the implications and costs involved in selecting alternative periods of 50, 70 and 90 days.

C.I.D.
450-C. &
451-C.
dated
15 June
1937.

This was followed by the Australian and New Zealand Delegations to the 1937 Imperial Conference raising a series of questions relating to the defence of the Pacific. These were answered in two reports by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee which did much to define our policy of Far East defence. The Government aimed at the establishment of friendly relations with Japan, although not at the expense of our interests in China and Hong Kong which would be defended to the utmost ability. The integrity of the Netherlands East Indies was also a major British interest. But when it was evident that these Dominions wanted the protection of the British Fleet it was explained that a naval force could not be stationed in the Far East in peace time, mainly because the policy was to maintain a Navy which could be despatched to any threatened area. It was recognised that war with Japan was most likely to occur in the event of our being at war in Europe, and the presence of a powerful fleet in home waters was a strong factor for the preservation of peace. However the basis of our strategy was the establishment at Singapore of a fleet as soon as possible after the outbreak of hostilities with Japan in order to secure Australia, New Zealand and India against attack. Therefore it was promised that in the event of that country's aggression occurring simultaneously with war in Europe a fleet sufficiently large to contain the Japanese Fleet would be sent to the Far East, although a defensive policy would need to be maintained until the issue with Germany had been settled. The new standard of naval strength would enable us to aim at placing adequate fleets in both Far Eastern and European waters: in fact a provisional allocation of heavy ships was made, for apart from weakness occurring in 1938/39 through withdrawal for modernizing of three ships, it was expected that in 1939/40 the Far East strength would be 10 battle ships.

China was to be encouraged to take active hostility against Japan, but it was admitted our position in Hong Kong was inherently weak, and the garrison would not be reinforced at the expense of Singapore.

/If

- (1) Assumed "period before relief". - 28 days sailing time via the Mediterranean plus 14 days for such contingencies as bad weather, enemy action or delays in refuelling.

NOTE: On 3rd January, 1938, the King George V Graving Dock was opened at the Naval Base.

If war with Japan took place it would primarily be a naval one depending on an early and successful sea action: If this did not take place economic pressure would bring Japan to terms in two years providing her trans-Pacific trade could be severed, and to this end, in addition to naval operations, we should try to enlist the sympathy and aid of America.

C.I.D.
468 - C.
dated
8 June 1938.

A year later the Oversea Defence Committee drew up a review of Imperial Defence for the guidance of Colonial Governors, which however contained such vitally secret information that the Committee of Imperial Defence at first decided it should not leave the country, but later allowed its circulation subject to stringent precautions for secrecy. The policy outlined covered many nations, but in respect to the Far East was very similar to that which existed at the time of the Imperial Conference, although the opinion had been formed that Singapore would not be attacked. This was based on the supposition that Japan, whilst realizing the capture of Singapore would deny the base to the British Fleet and so remove the dominating factor in the strategical situation, would not undertake the eventual certainty of an unsuccessful fleet action in Singapore waters which would in turn imperil their own country. In all probability Japan would capture Hong Kong and the potential fleet bases in China, as well as attacking bases in the Netherlands East Indies and Borneo. Also it was realized that to counter any Japanese attempt to establish shore-based air forces in any particular area our only adequate source of reinforcement would be from the Metropolitan Air Force, where any serious reduction would leave the United Kingdom dangerously inferior in the air to Germany. The important features of the policy at that time may therefore be summarized as follows:-

- (a) The provision at Singapore of all facilities necessary for its use by the Fleet as a base, and the organization of the defences so that, even if the Japanese attempted major operations against it, they would have small prospect of establishing themselves in a position from which to deny the use of the base to the Fleet on its arrival.
- (b) The immediate despatch of the Fleet to the Far East.
- (c) Action against the trans-Pacific trade route of Japan.

The Oil fields in Borneo.

C.I.D.
469 - C.
dated
14 June 1938.

From time to time the Oversea Defence Committee had given thought to the defence of the oil fields of Miri and Seria on the northern coast of Borneo. Earlier recommendations were primarily concerned with defence by a local Volunteer Force, but later considerations were to revise this policy.

Japan was mainly dependent on overseas supplies of oil and in fact drew a considerable portion of her stocks from British and Dutch fields in the area. On the other hand the Oil Board did not count on the availability of any oil from Borneo. In those circumstances it seemed probable that the seizure of the oil fields, rather than their destruction would be one of the first Japanese objectives. The forces locally available were insufficient to defend the oilfields against an attack in force. It was therefore essential to deny their use to the enemy, and a Denial Scheme was evolved for this purpose. This was to consist of removing vital parts of the machinery, inserting hidden stoppages in the complicated pipe-lines and generally making the products useless by polluting the oil. The essential parts removed were to be taken out of the country to Singapore, either by sea or air, or as a last resort, destroyed and not merely hidden. The time factor was all-important to success, since the Scheme would require a total of 96 hours

to complete and would be difficult to put into motion in sufficient time to be fully effective.

The Committee therefore recommended - and the Cabinet ultimately agreed, that this Scheme should automatically be put into force on the receipt of the warning telegram announcing the start of a precautionary stage against Japan. When the Government knew the relations with Japan were very strained it might be necessary to start the Denial Scheme before the precautionary stage was adopted, in which case an entry would be made in the Government War Book. The third possibility was that of a local and unexpected act of hostility which would be the prelude to general hostilities. To cover this contingency the High Commissioner at Singapore was given standing authority to order the Scheme to be put into motion on his own authority and without reference to the home Government.

Anglo-French Staff Conversations.

Annex II
to
D.P.(P) 61
dated
4 May 1939.

During these Conversations in 1939 the following conclusions in regard to Allied strategy in the event of Japanese intervention were agreed between the British and French Delegations:-

The active participation of U.S.A. on the side of the Allies would be of vital importance, but at least an understanding should be reached that the American fleet be despatched to the Western Pacific on the out-break of war, even if Japan were not committed. Similarly the participation by U.S.S.R. would have the strategical advantage of containing Japanese divisions in Manchukuo. Also the neutrality of Siam and the Netherlands East Indies would be to Allied advantage.

It was recognized that the operations of a British or Allied Fleet in the Far East were dependent on the integrity of Singapore which was vital both to Allied defence policy and to the strategical situation in the Indian Ocean, Far East and Australasia. In view of pre-occupation in the West, British strategy in the Far East would at first be defensive, with preparation for the eventual despatch of naval reinforcements. On the other hand it was realized that if the Allies were defeated in the West then the Far East would inevitably fall. Guarantees to Eastern Mediterranean Powers could not be over-looked, in which connection it was hoped that operations against Italy would yield early results.

Whilst it was acknowledged that the issue could not be decided in advance, the weakening of the British Eastern Mediterranean Fleet should not lightly be undertaken; the future Government would have to decide, in consultation with the French, the re-distribution of British naval forces. In the meantime plans for Anglo-French co-operation would provide for two extreme contingencies - temporary abandonment of naval control either in the Far East or in the Eastern Mediterranean. In connection with the land forces, plans were to be prepared for French forces in Indo-China to operate with the Chinese against the Japanese in South China, with a view to freeing the Hong Kong area and generally supporting Chinese irregular forces. French and British garrisons in North China were to act identically, and it was accepted that these garrisons would be withdrawn before the start of hostilities.

The Anglo-French Naval, Military and Air Force Conference

As an outcome of the London Anglo-French Staff Conversations, Commanders in the Far East were authorised to hold discussions in order to co-ordinate plans, exchange information, and arrange for liaison. Singapore was to be the rendezvous, "Conversations with the C. in C. China presiding over a conference which was between to include G.O.C. China, A.O.C. Far East, G.O.C. Malaya, G.O.C. British and French Burma, A.O.C. India and the appropriate French representatives. Commanders in Far East".

/It

Ibid
Enc. 32. d/a.
29 June 1939

It was held during the period 22nd to 27th June, 1939; British and French interests were intimately connected, and it was found possible to reach an early agreement. The main issues discussed included: the attitude of Siam, which was of paramount importance to the security of Indo-China and Malaya; this would require diplomatic action backed by the existence of a strong Allied force. Allied military, naval and air force strength would be required to keep open the communications in the Bay of Bengal and between Singapore and Southern Indo-China; such forces would also deny advanced bases to the Japanese.

The measures recommended as being necessary at the outbreak of war (with Japanese intervention), were: the co-ordinated policy of with-drawal of garrisons in North China. The immediate despatch of land reinforcements to Singapore, for in the event of war, the China Fleet could not guarantee their protection. Defence programmes should be accelerated, and local naval and A/A defences in Singapore completed. The strength of the R.A.F. in Malaya should be immediately increased to a total of 16 squadrons⁽¹⁾ and the air forces in Indo-China enlarged.

Should Japan not intervene after the outbreak of war in Europe, it would be necessary to support any diplomatic action to ensure a correct attitude on the part of Siam; and to evacuate the civil population of China.

The Conference was gravely concerned with the general inadequacy of Allied Naval and Air Forces in the Far East, which placed the Japanese in a superior position. This situation had arisen through naval commitments in Europe; as no naval reinforcements would be spared for the Far East in peace time, it was considered essential that provision should be made for an appreciably larger Allied Air Force to be stationed permanently in the Far East.

Apart from the main conclusions of the Conference, it is of interest to study the minutes of the Air Sub-Committee, for they reveal the policy which existed at the time. It was agreed that co-operation between the two Air Forces was of the greatest importance, yet it would not be achieved on the strengths at the time. The primary British interest was the security of Singapore; enemy attack was expected in the form of carrier operations against R.A.F. bases, with supplementary attacks by shore-based aircraft from North Malaya, Siam or Borneo. The role of the R.A.F. would therefore be to locate and attack shipping especially carriers, to the eastward of Singapore, and to oppose the establishment of enemy air bases within range of the Island. The air strength at 1st July 1939 was 5 squadrons⁽²⁾, comprising 40 first-line aircraft. The French Delegation was particularly suspicious of Siam, and urged the necessity of being able to threaten or attack that country in the event of a hostile attitude, or the Japanese seizure of a base within Siam. Coordinated Allied air action could take place from Burma (for the R.A.F.) and Cambodia (for the French). But to achieve these objects it was essential that both Air Forces should be substantially augmented.

Ibid
Enc. 25A d/a
1 July 1939

The Director of Plans, A.M., reckoning for air cover over Borneo, the east and West Coasts of Malaya and the

/Gulf

(1) 7 C.R. (landplane), 2 torpedo-bomber, 4 bomber, 1 fighter, 1 Flying boat, 1 Spotter Flight.

- (2) No. 36 (T.B.) Squadron, 12 I.E. Vildebeeste III)
No. 100 (T.B.) Squadron, 12 I.E. Vildebeeste III)
No. 205 (F.B.) Squadron, 4 I.E. Singapore III) Training aircraft
No. 230 (F.B.) Squadron, 6 I.E. Sunderland) not included
Spotter Flight (S.S.V.A.F.) 6 I.E. Audax)

In addition, there had been established 1 August 1938 No. 4 Anti-Aircraft Co-operation Unit with an I.E. of 6 Shark and 4 Queen Bee aircraft.

Ibid
23A d/d
30 June 1939
IIM/8D9/1
- "F540 of No.
4 A.A.C.U."
C.I.D. 312nd
meeting
4 March 1938.

Gulf of Siam, had envisaged a strength of over 250 aircraft, which, by expanding the squadron strengths could still be contained within 16 units. These plans had yet to receive the approval of C.A.S., when H.Q.F.E., quickly following-up the recommendations of the recent Conference, proposed details for accommodation urgently needed for the enlarged air forces.

The "Period Before Relief" is reconsidered.

It will be recalled that in March 1937 the Oversea Defence Committee were required to calculate the reserves of commodities and stores to be held in Singapore to cover the period before the arrival of the Main Fleet. This Committee took nearly a year to investigate these matters, and one of their main conclusions was that the "period before relief" was not necessarily identical with the "period before re-provisioning" (i.e. the time which would elapse before the arrival of supply ships from England), but in any case the latter period would not be shorter since supply ships could not put into Singapore until the Main Fleet had arrived. The Committee of Imperial Defence agreed that a "period before relief" of 70 days was acceptable, but reserves for 90 days, costing nearly £3 million, should be held to allow a margin for the supply convoys to arrive. This period of 70 days was based on the assumption of a single-handed war with Japan and the despatch of the Fleet immediately on the out-break of war; but some doubt was expressed whether it would in fact be possible to send the fleet so promptly. The Chief of Naval Staff emphasized that it was essential to adhere either to the 70 day period, or alternatively, if immediate despatch of the Fleet were not guaranteed, then Singapore should be restocked for 6 months in order to allow the sailing date to be quite open.

C.I.D.
502 - C.
dated
6 June 1939.

A year later the Chiefs of Staff re-considered the "period before relief" because examination had shown that in the event of war with Japan breaking out either simultaneously with, or following the out-break of war with Germany and Italy, conditions in European waters might prevent the Fleet being despatched in less than 90 days. Furthermore the probability of Italy entering the war had to be considered, and it was thought that the removal of a large portion of the Fleet from the Mediterranean in the early stages of the war might not be possible. The Committee of Imperial Defence had finally decided that there were so many varied and unpredictable factors that it was not possible to state definitely how soon after Japanese intervention a Fleet could be despatched to the Far East; neither was it possible to specify the size of this Fleet. In these circumstances the Chiefs of Staff considered that a complete re-examination of the Far East situation was necessary, and the Joint Planning Sub-Committee were instructed to undertake this task. As an interim measure it was recommended that the "period before relief"

/should

should be extended to 90 days and the "period before re-provisioning" to 105 days, measures which would entail a complete review of the defences, including the size of the garrison. It was also recommended that the implications of stocking Malaya with reserves for the population, and the garrison for a period of 6 months should be investigated.

Japan Aggravates the Situation.

Encl. I to
Annex. I of
D.P.(P) 61
dated
16 June 1939.

Since 1932 when the Japanese had almost provoked a war over the Shanghai incident, the danger zone was in the Far East, until four years later the aggressive attitude of Italy focussed attention to the Mediterranean. But in mid-1939 the pendulum had swung once more; this time, as the result of humiliations inflicted on British nationals in the Teintsin Concession it appeared likely that the initial out-break of hostilities would be in the Far East. This, together with further Japanese threats against our policy in China prompted the Cabinet to consider retaliatory measures. These were to be in the nature of economic steps which might be met by the Japanese with corresponding measures or by more hostile actions against our concessions in China. Therefore, if retaliatory measures were to be commenced it was necessary to support them with a display, and if necessary, the use of force. It was realized that the decision was a political one since our forces in the Far East could only be strengthened by weakening the position in Europe, but the Chiefs of Staff were asked to advise whether, if the Fleet was sent to Singapore our position in Europe would be so weakened that retaliatory measures would be militarily inadvisable, even though humiliation must arise out of our dilemma in China. Questions of the size of the Fleet, its time of despatch and the need for mobilization were also involved.

Annex. I to
D.P.(P) 61.

The report by the Chiefs of Staff is worthy of closer examination for it reveals the earlier policies of disarmament had so weakened the Navy that when the Cabinet of the day required the assurance of force to back its foreign policy it could only command a fleet of two battle-ships.

During the previous two years the Chiefs of Staff had been expecting simultaneous war with the three Axis Powers, and even with the aid of France it was not reckoned that we should be strong enough to defend our interest against all three nations. The crux of the Far East problem lay in naval strength, in which respect our guarantees to Greece and Roumania, together with the pact with Turkey made it difficult to quit the Eastern Mediterranean. At this time only 11 capital ships were available, with 2 more in dockyard hands which would not be ready until September. To support economic measures a fleet of ships would have to be sent to the Far East representing the minimum strength to meet the Japanese fleet of 9 capital ships. Having regard to the strengths of the German and Italian Fleets (1) it was clear that the despatch of 3 capital ships would endanger our position in Europe. If the position in the Home Theatre was not to be endangered, then at least 6 capital ships would need to be retained in those waters, together with 3 in the Eastern Mediterranean (it being assumed France would control the Western Mediterranean). Consequently not more than 2 ships could be sent to reinforce the China Squadron. Such a force could only secure the Indian Ocean communications and act as a deterrent to the Japanese from undertaking operations in Australasian waters. If Japan started hostilities after the arrival of our two capital ships, and we were without the active co-operation of the United States

/Fleet

(1) German Fleet - 2 battle cruisers, 3 pocket battleships.
Italian Fleet - 2 battleships.

Fleet, the China Fleet would firstly have to withdraw to Singapore, leaving Hong Kong to its own resources, then later if the enemy fleet moved into the Singapore area we should again retire with the majority of our naval forces to Ceylon. Singapore would be invested and we should be faced with the necessity of sending a relieving force of not less than 8 capital ships, so denuding the Eastern Mediterranean of 3 ships and the Home Fleet of an equal number. Therefore, without the support of the U.S.A. the force of 2 battle ships in the Far East could achieve only limited results, and it would not be justifiable to take any avoidable action which might lead to hostilities with Japan. Only if war were forced upon us would it be essential to take steps to protect the sea communications in the Indian Ocean by sending capital ships to the Far East. Although such a commitment could be met with partial Naval mobilisation it would not be sound to take any action which might lead to general hostilities without full mobilisation of the naval forces; in fact it would be desirable to undertake general mobilisation of all three Services.

C.I.D.
362nd meeting
26 June 1939.

The Committee of Imperial Defence debated at some length the implications of taking economic action against Japan, and some interesting opinions were recorded. The Prime Minister (Mr. Chamberlain) agreed that the attitude of both U.S.A. and Russia would remain doubtful, and that once war broke out the Axis Powers would all sooner or later be ranged against us with France as our only ally; we should not be strong enough in all three parts of the world simultaneously. Six capital ships in Home Waters was the absolute minimum, and a Far Eastern Fleet must be at least strong enough to accept action with the Japanese. Lord Halifax, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, took the view that the Japanese would not force war upon us, but at the same time they would not be impressed by the despatch of a Fleet to Singapore; and even if the Fleet were at Singapore it could do nothing to prevent us being humiliated nor even relieve Hong Kong. Lord Chatfield, Minister for Co-ordination of Defence and Sir Dudley Pound, Chief of Naval Staff, were in favour of reinforcing our submarine strength in the Far East as an alternative measure of naval strength. The Prime Minister summed up by stating we were in no position to take retaliatory action which might lead to war against Japan and the Axis Powers. Whilst recognising that there would be marked public feeling, and that it was impossible to prevent the continuance of local insults in China, he felt that the negotiations proceeding in Tokyo offered some chance of improvement in the situation. In this view he was strongly supported by Lord Halifax and Sir John Simon, although Lord Chatfield was in favour of taking economic action followed by the assembling of the Fleet in the Eastern Mediterranean. In the end it was decided that no retaliatory measures would be taken in order that the success of the Tokyo negotiations would not be jeopardised; 6 capital ships in Home Waters was an absolute minimum, but the reinforcing of our Far Eastern submarine strength was to be examined. Finally the Chiefs of Staff were asked to consider the possibilities of withdrawal from Peking and Tientsin: and if the Tokyo negotiations failed whether it would be advisable to carry out beforehand any of the war-like preparations they had at first envisaged.

C.I.D. 373rd
meeting dated
3 August 1939.

The Chiefs of Staff duly examined these requirements and found it was not possible to reinforce our submarine strength in the Far East. They had always advocated the withdrawal of the Peking and Tientsin garrisons, but the issues involved had been political. Certain preparatory measures should be implemented in the event of the situation deteriorating; these were the despatch abroad of personnel necessary to bring overseas garrisons up to war establishment, and the move from Hong Kong to Singapore of 500 dockyard workmen required to put the naval base in a state of readiness for use; apart from these measures it was not recommended that other war-like preparations should be undertaken. So, to all intents and purposes the Government's proposals

/for

for taking firm action against Japanese aggression. Although it was only to have been in the form of economic measures, England was not strong enough at the time to incur the risk of war.

C.I.D. 367th
meeting dated
21 July 1939.

Whilst the decision concerning economic measures had been in abeyance the Chiefs of Staff had realised that the prospect of a successful outcome to the Tokyo negotiations did not appear hopeful, and in consequence they reviewed the question of reinforcements for overseas garrisons. The Prime Minister was inclined not to accept their view and preferred to await developments of the negotiations. But the Chiefs of Staff were firmly convinced there was a possibility of war breaking out within two or three months. The feeling was that the Singapore defences should be strengthened to deter the Japanese and to restore our prestige. It was therefore decided by the Committee of Imperial Defence that the Government of India's offer to release force "Emu" (a brigade), and two bomber squadrons should be accepted, and that in addition two bomber squadrons (1) should be sent out to Singapore from England.

Summary - Period 1936 to 1939.

The unfavourable position expected in 1936 vis-a-vis Japan prompted the C.I.D. to recommend the programme of the Second Stage Defences which was to include the completion of the 5 x 15 inch guns and the preparation of two more airfields. At this time, to complete the First Stage the Navy required a further minefield; the Army a third Battalion for the Garrison, whilst the needs of the R.A.F. were slightly more involved. The assurance of air reinforcements from other Commands was required, together with the establishment of an adequate air route into Singapore. The necessity for reconnaissance aircraft was again stressed, and the question of opening landing grounds on the East coast of Malaya for their use was raised for the first time. No. 230 Flying-Boat Squadron arrived in Singapore November 1936 to augment the reconnaissance force. The Chiefs of Staff were greatly in favour of the Second Stage Defences being implemented for such a measure would enable the Island to hold out until the arrival of the Fleet for a much longer period than provided by the earlier Defences. Additionally, the plans for the defence of Penang were revived and were to include 2 x 9.2 inch guns as well as the expectation of a G.R. Squadron.

/At

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- (1) No. 34 (B) Squadron, 16 I.E. Blenheim I arrived Singapore
8th September 1939.
No. 62 (B) Squadron, 16 I.E. Blenheim I arrived Singapore
22nd September, 1939.

At this time the Dutch raised proposals for collaboration in the Far East, but nothing happened beyond an exchange of technical information for the Chiefs of Staff were opposed to any policy of mutual assistance. By the end of 1936, realizing how the performance of aircraft was improving the C.I.D. had raised the existing scale of anti-aircraft defences from 24 to 72 guns, with the necessary searchlights; but apart from local defence plans, the "period before relief", (which has always been assumed as 42 days) was reconsidered and lengthier alternatives investigated. At the 1937 Imperial Conference representatives from Australia and New Zealand caused the Government to define their Far Eastern policy, and promise was made that even with simultaneous hostilities occurring in the Far East and Europe, a Fleet would be sent to Singapore to contain the Japanese; these principles were re-affirmed by Oversea Defence Committee a year later. The oilfields in Borneo were next to receive attention; up to this time they were to be defended by local forces but this idea was revised in favour of a Denial Scheme which would render the oil fields useless to an invader.

The Anglo-French Conversations in mid-1939 defined the principles of collaboration in the Far East, and the detailed conference of English and French Commanders which followed at Singapore emphasized the need for a substantial increase in naval and air forces, and recommendations were made for the existing Royal Air Force strength to be raised from 5 to 16 Squadrons. In the meantime the question of the "period before relief" was being investigated at great length but without conclusive results, until in 1939 the Chiefs of Staff, in assessing the chances of war with Italy were obliged to re-consider the policy of sending a Fleet to the Far East. As an interim measure the "period" was extended to 90 days, with a forecast of the possibility of 180 days. The Japanese were now doing so much to aggravate the situation that the Cabinet was obliged to consider retaliation in the form of economic measures backed by a display of force. But upon examination it was revealed that not more than two capital ships could be sent to the Far East without endangering our position in Europe. The project therefore had to be dropped and reliance placed on negotiations in Tokyo. The Chiefs of Staff were less hopeful than the Cabinet on the outcome of those talks, consequently they pressed for re-inforcements for Singapore; India's offer of a Brigade and two air squadrons was accepted, and two Bomber Squadrons - Nos. 34 and 62 were sent out from England in September 1939.

/The Defence Policy Begins to Change

The Defence Policy Begins to Change

O.D.C.(40)13
d/d
28 Feb. '40.

Early in 1940 the various authorities in Singapore began to realize the need for drastic revision of the defence policy. There were two conflicting calls upon the manpower of Malaya: industry and defence. Shortly before the outbreak of war, the G.O.C. had advised the Governor, Straits Settlements (Sir Shenton Thomas)⁽¹⁾ that the Volunteers needed more training to increase their efficiency. The Governor was obliged to appeal to the Colonial Office, for such a measure seriously alarmed those engaged in the tin and rubber industries, as well as the shipping and mercantile firms. Business was beginning to improve after a period of pre-war depression, and the possibilities of war with Japan were considered to be receding, mainly because of Japan's exhausting war in China. Economic warfare was under development, and the Malayan contribution was very substantial. Under these circumstances the Governor conceived it his duty to give absolute priority to the claims of industry, and whilst admitting the failure of the peace-time Volunteer system, he would not agree to the Army's demand for compulsory service. This action had focussed attention on defence generally, and it had been realized that if the Air Defences were increased there would be less need for conscription, with the resulting improvement in the industrial situation. He envisaged five possible methods of attack: directly upon Singapore; a landing at Mersing on the East Coast of Johore; the establishment of a base in Borneo, or in the Netherlands East Indies; and lastly, in Siam. All such methods, he considered, were dependent upon the ability of the enemy to overcome our sea and air defences, but any landings at a distance from the fortress could only be opposed by air action. He therefore advocated that the R.A.F. in Malaya should be appreciably increased, with a consequent reduction in the land forces, apart from A/A units. A stronger Air Force would be the primary means of defence, as well as acting as a deterrent and a stabilizing influence.

A.M. Filo
S.3915
"Far East Defence
Policy - Part I"

Enc.13A
d/d
13th March, 1940.

Similar views were held by the A.O.C. Far East (A.V.M.Babington)⁽²⁾ whose conception of air strength in Malaya was based on the conclusions of the recent Anglo-French Conference. In a memorandum to the Air Ministry he pointed out that whilst in the past Far East defence plans had been evolved around the despatch of the main Fleet, such assumptions were no longer feasible. Defence of Singapore must now be included within the general defence of Malaya, including provision against attack through Siam and Borneo; but the military garrison were unable to undertake any commitment outside the Island of Singapore; the strip of Johore bounded by the Mersing-Kluang line, and Penang. Enemy landings were physically possible in many places in Malaya, Siam and Borneo, yet if it was impossible for the Army to dispute such attempts, then their defence must be entrusted to the other two Services. With no naval forces available for the Far East, the defence would therefore depend exclusively on the R.A.F. It was the A.O.C's. opinion that such a state of affairs should be properly realized, for he was in no doubt that if the enemy obtained a foothold in Malaya, the fate of Singapore was sealed. Consequently, not only did he advise the strengthening of the R.A.F., but he went further to suggest that such an extension of the defences would free the Army from their localised role, and so allow them to support a defensive organisation based primarily upon the use of air forces.

Ibid.

/The

- (1) Sir Shenton Thomas had assumed office 9 Nov.1934 vice Sir Cecil Clementi.
- (2) A.V.M.Babington had become A.O.C. Far East on 9 Sep.1938.

Enc. 35A d/d
13th April,
1940.
39A d/d
16th May, 1940

The Army had revised their defence plan to one involving the retention of the whole of Malaya by a policy of extended defence, requiring adequate reinforcements, specially in aircraft. The views of the G.O.C. (Major General Bond) were contained in an Appreciation, and were based on many new factors. He considered the increase of the "period before relief" from 90 days to 180 days would allow the enemy to embark upon a more deliberate operation at greater distance from the fortress. The great experience in landing operations gained by the Japanese enabled them to land at any East or West coast port. Since Hainan and South China had been occupied by the Japanese it was possible for them to assemble an expeditionary force ostensibly for use in China, but which in reality would be employed in a "coup de main" against Singapore. Also their southward advance had made it possible for the enemy to fly bombers into advanced bases, from which might be staged land-based attacks on the Island. In this respect there would be no technical difficulty in moving large forces into the frontier provinces of Siam, for the Japanese had made increased economic penetration into that country. Lastly, the fighting efficiency of the Volunteers had to be discounted, for they would not be called out owing to the necessity of maintaining Malayas' contribution towards economic warfare. To offset these new contingencies the G.O.C. calculated that reinforcements to a scale in excess of 3 Divisions would be required. But recognising that such forces were considerably greater than he might expect, and also that the Navy could not play an effective part in the defence, he formulated a new plan. By this the R.A.F. would be made absolutely responsible, if not for the detection and destruction of any force before it reached Malaya, then at least for ensuring that no base was maintained. The responsibility of the Army would then be confined to: the defence of Singapore and Penang; the defence of the northern area to safeguard the airfields at Kota Bahru, Alor Star and Sungei Patani; the beach defences at probable points of attack at Mersing, Endau and Kota Bahru; defence in depth to prevent any penetration from the East and West coasts reaching the north to south communications; and the anti-aircraft defences of the Base. To accomplish such a programme the G.O.C. was of the opinion that reinforcements could be reduced to establish a garrison of 4 Brigade groups and 4 battalions.⁽¹⁾

The Governor's Despatch was placed before the Oversea Defence Committee whose conclusions were as follows:-

O.D.C.(40)19
d/d 20th March,
1940.

- (a) Although the security of Singapore is vital to the safety of the British Empire, it is not proposed to refer the matter to the Chiefs of Staff, as it is out of the question to make any change in present policy.
- (b) Owing to the need to expand the R.A.F. to achieve superiority over the Germans, only a minimum can be spared for such places where danger is not imminent. Preparations are in hand for an increase in the Middle East and India, which would form a strategical reserve for the Far East.
- (c) Whilst it is realized that R.A.F. strength in Singapore is only half the war time establishment, it is

/impracticable

(1) Proposed Army Distribution

Singapore	- 3 battalions
Penang	- 1 battalion
Northern Front	- 1 brigade group plus A/A group; for Kelantan, 1 battalion and 1 anti-tank battery.
Western Coast	- 1 brigade group
Central Reserve	- 1 mechanised brigade group, 2 anti-tank batteries, 1 coy. tanks and Armoured cars.
East Johore	- force EMU as at present.

impracticable to consider any increase in the near future of the responsibilities borne by the R.A.F. in Singapore.

(d) Thus it is more than ever necessary to make certain the existing defences are as efficient as possible. It is realized the efficiency of the Volunteer Defence Forces is far below war time level, and whilst it is recognised that Malayas' economic contribution is of first importance, some scheme should be devised to improve the standard of efficiency of the Volunteers; consideration should again be given to the introduction of conscription.

(e) There is no source from which troops might be drawn to replace the Volunteers.

A.M. File
S.3915 Pt.I
Enc.20A
d/d 10th
April, 1940.

O.D.C.(40)30
d/d
9th May, 1940.

O.D.C.(40) 5th
Meeting d/d
16th May, 1940.

A.M. File
S.3915 Pt.I
Enc.18A d/d
26th March 1940.

Ibid
Enc.50A d/d
23rd June 1940

The reaction from Singapore concerning the O.D.C.'s ruling deplored the fact that no air force reinforcements would be forthcoming, and that reliance must be placed on the Volunteers. In the knowledge that the Civil Administration endorsed his views, the A.O.C. once again drew the attention of Air Ministry to his opinion that ground forces could not hold Malaya or Singapore, and in consequence their role should be adjusted to Air Force requirements. But realizing that he could only hope for air reinforcements from the strategic reserve being formed in India, he asked that he be informed of its strength and composition in order that preparations might be made to receive the squadrons in Malaya. The Governor also was far from satisfied with the O.D.C. decisions, and wished to discuss the matter in England. He seemed particularly concerned with the civilian manpower situation, and offered a paper in which he stated that in an emergency every civilian would be used for special duties, but in the meantime no portion of the man-power could be immobilised in training or waiting on the development of the invaders' plan of attack; in fact, spare-time training was all that could be offered. Despite these various protests the O.D.C. were unable to offer any definite measure of help. They could only repeat that no land or air reinforcements would be made available for Singapore, although the Chiefs of Staff were making an urgent strategical appreciation of the Far East situation. They again urged the need for conscription to be considered, and because the Governor's visit had revealed that no action had been taken (as a result of their earlier recommendation), to train the Defence Force, the O.D.C. called for an early report from the acting Governor of Singapore.

Meanwhile, the A.O.C. and G.O.C., realizing that hope of reinforcements had disappeared with the recent decisions of the O.D.C., were obliged once more to consider their meagre resources. Earlier in the year, an exchange of letters had revealed marked differences in their conception of the defence of Malaya. Although the G.O.C. had conceded that the defence of all Malaya was essential, he had maintained that such defence should be the responsibility of the R.A.F., since his regular troops would be required for the concentrated defence of Singapore. He had, in fact, invited the A.O.C. to contribute towards an Appreciation, but the latter had declined to do so. Now, with little hope of reinforcements, the position was further aggravated, and the Commanders began to submit their problems to the Air Ministry and War Office. Faced with such conflicting opinions, which reached a climax at a Defence Committee Meeting, the Acting Governor (in the continued absence of Sir Shenton Thomas)⁽¹⁾ appealed to the

/Chiefs

(1) The Governor returned to Singapore from U.K. leave on 6 Dec.1940.

72A d/d
27th June 1940

Chiefs of Staff for arbitration. His summary of the problem was as follows: The G.O.C. considered the fate of Malaya and Singapore interdependent after two months, yet the security of Singapore against direct naval attack or from landings within striking distance did not permit any reduction or deployment of the garrison of the fortress. Were the defences extended and then the R.A.F. fail to disperse enemy attacks, the position of Singapore would be gravely endangered. Consequently he wanted practically all the garrison concentrated in the Singapore and south Johore area⁽¹⁾, and only one battalion at Alor Star, (which even then would denude Penang of troops), with the Volunteers, totalling 5757 men at various points on the mainland for security and airfield defence duties. In the view of the A.O.C. the period of endurance of Singapore and Malaya was governed mainly by air action, the controlling factor of which was the arrival of reinforcements along the air route, and the safeguarding of the airfields for use of the new squadrons. It was therefore of utmost importance that such airfields as Alor Star, Sungei Patani, Kota Bahru and Kuanton should be guarded by ground forces. Yet despite the fact the G.O.C. relied upon the R.A.F. plus one battalion to prevent an attack via Siam, (and contrary to his earlier Appreciation) this officer refused to give protection to mainland airfields. Whilst the Acting Governor could sympathise with the G.O.C.'s principle of concentrated defences as an insurance against failure by the R.A.F. in the north, he realised such a policy would mean the loss of all facilities for air operations outside the Singapore area, whereupon the R.A.F. would be exposed to attacks by land-based enemy aircraft, from which neither they, nor the Island could long survive. He was therefore convinced that the weaknesses disclosed were so vital that the only hope lay in strong reinforcements. The Colonial Office in their reply, could only state, as a result of the Chiefs of Staff Appreciation, that the defences of Malaya should be put at a state of 5 days warning, and that the Government of Australia had been asked to send reinforcements to the scale of one division and two squadrons. This, it was hoped would partially remedy the lack of resources, and in turn, the differences of opinion of the A.O.C. and G.O.C.

Ibid
Enc. 57A d/d
3rd July 1940

Ibid
Enc. 53A
28th June 1940

At this stage there occurred one of the major events of the War - France was defeated. The Chiefs of Staff, in an Appreciation on the Far East strategy, stated that the balance of naval strength in the Mediterranean and home waters had completely altered. Whilst formerly the French would have remained in the Mediterranean to contain the Italians and so allow the departure of the British Fleet to the Far East, such course of action was no longer possible for it would allow the Italian Fleet command of the Mediterranean, as well as freedom to reinforce the German Fleet in home waters. Furthermore there were indications of Japan contemplating moves to improve her economic and strategic position, in spite of her military commitments in China and the potential hostility of U.S.A., U.S.S.R. and the British Empire. French Indo-China was no longer a bastion of defence as envisaged by the Anglo-French Conference; any further advances by the Japanese into that country - or the N.E.I. and Siam, would gravely endanger the security of Singapore. Airfields were being developed in Siam, and the range of aircraft was increasing so that it was evident that defence could no longer be concentrated in Singapore but would have to be spread throughout Malaya. The Fleet could not be spared for the Far East, consequently, (and as a complete reversal of the O.D.C. decisions earlier in the year) the land and air forces would have to be strengthened. As an urgent measure, Australia was asked to send one division and two squadrons R.A.A.F. to Malaya. Their response

A.M. File
S.2563
Enc. 1A d/d
16th Aug. '40
and
C.O.S.(40)592

/was

(1) Singapore Garrison

A.M. File
S. 3915 Part I
Enc. 73A d/d
15th August,
1940

S. 2563 'C.O.S.
Appreciation'
Enc. 1a
d/d 16 Aug. '40.

Ibid
Encs. 81A d/d
24th August
1940, and
82A d/d
26th August
1940.

Ibid
Enc. 83A d/d
5th September
1940.

Enc. 96A d/d
18th September
1940

A.M. File
S. 2563
Enc. 4A d/d
16th Oct. 1940.

was immediate, and by the end of July, 2 squadrons were in Singapore⁽¹⁾, whilst another was to follow in August⁽²⁾. The Air Ministry, in reply to the Acting Governor's appeal concerning the differences of the two Commanders, as well as to the A.O.C.'s explanation of the affair, advised H.Q. Far East of the new defence policy. It was emphasized that the air forces proposed by the C.O.S. were in the nature of a long-term policy, and until they could be provided their absence would be made up by additional land forces. The recommended establishment totalled 336 aircraft⁽³⁾, which would not be achieved until the end of 1941 at the earliest. As an intermediate programme it was the aim to re-equip the existing squadrons at Singapore, and to provide in addition, 2 G.R. and 2 Fighter Squadrons. But even such a programme was ambitious, and was dependent on the claims of the Middle East whose active operations would take precedence over the claims of the Far East, unless the situation in that theatre should deteriorate. As a result of this likelihood of reinforcements the A.O.C. pressed for the early despatch of ground personnel and stores, but the Air Ministry could promise nothing beyond the concurrent arrival of personnel and aircraft. He was more successful, however, in his suggestion to enlarge the accommodation at Alor Star and Kota Bahru to receive the imminent reinforcements, for authority was given to expand these establishments by twice their previous size.

The Far East Commanders Tactical Appreciation

The Chiefs of Staff now instructed the Commanders in the Far East to produce a Tactical Appreciation based on their own Appreciation. The authorities concerned were: C. in C. China, A.O.C. in C. Far East, G.O.C. Malaya and C. in C. East Indies. This paper was to be in three parts depending on the reinforcements available - the addition of 1 division; or 2 divisions and 4 squadrons; or 6 Brigades and 22 squadrons. Conversations with the Dutch were to be considered as part of the reinforcement programme. Recommendations were to be made on other subjects, including the defence and provision of air forces at Kuching; the proposed garrison of Malaya (assuming the Japanese to be established in Indo-China); scale and distribution of A/A defences; modifications to coast defences and local seaward defences; and the role and organisation of the Volunteers. On completion of this Appreciation a Joint Conference was to be convened by the Governor of Malaya, and conducted by Commanders in the Far East, with invitations to representatives from India, Burma, Australia and New Zealand. At the time the Chiefs of Staffs originated the Terms for this Conference they decided that the defence of the Bay of Bengal and Burma should remain the responsibility of Commanders in the Far East, and not be vested in the Indian Government.

In accordance with Chiefs of Staff instructions the three Far East Commanders, A.V.M. Babington, Lt. Gen. Bond and Vice Admiral Layton produced a Tactical Appreciation on 16th October, 1940. They were without the full text of the C.O.S. Appreciation and in consequence their report was based on the

/telegraphed

(1) No. 21 (General Purpose) Squadron, Wirraways arrived 30 July, 1940 by sea.
No. 1 (G.R.) Squadron, Hudsons arrived Sembawang 4 July, 1940 from Australia via Sourabaya.

(2) No. 8 (G.R.) Squadron, Hudsons arrived Sembawang 9 Aug. 1940.

(3) North Malaya - 4 Bomber Sqdns. (64 a/c) ; 2 Fighter Sqdns. (32 a/c))
Singapore - 2 Torp. Bomber Sqdns. (32 a/c); 2 Fighter Sqdns. (32 a/c))
East Malaya - 2 G. Recce. Sqdns. (42 a/c) ; 1 Flying Boat Sqdn. (6 a/c)) 22 Squadrons; 336 Aircraft
N.E. Indian Ocean - 3 G. Recce. Sqdns. (42 a/c) ; 2 Flying Boat Sqdns. (12 a/c)
Borneo - 2 Bomber Sqdns. (32 a/c) ; 2 G. Recce Sqdns. (42 a/c)

telegraphed summary. One of the basic principles upon which they worked was the policy to rely primarily on air power; and the necessity to hold all Malaya rather than a concentrated defence of Singapore was emphasized. They were aware that the most probable form of attack was from Thailand, and not only did they realize how Japan had ample forces, despite her commitments in China, but Singapore would be within range of heavy bombers based in Thailand. Although the course open to the Allies was purely defensive, they drew attention to the fact that because a Japanese landing in Thailand was not to be regarded as an act of war, the enemy would be able to mount an attack upon the Northern Frontier before counter action could be taken. In this respect it was urged that the British should advance into South Siam once the Japanese had landed. The roles of the three Services were then defined: the R.A.F. would be responsible for repulsing the attacks at sea and during landing; or attacking advancing troops or landing grounds and bases. The Army would undertake the close defence of naval and air bases and the defeat of any Japanese forces which despite R.A.F. or Naval action, had gained a footing. It was recognised that until the R.A.F. were reinforced their deficiencies would be made up by land forces. The Appreciation was prepared in the three parts stipulated by the varying reinforcements, but the final R.A.F. strength recommended called for an increase over the C.O.S. figure of 366 aircraft. Allowances were made for the unreliability of air reinforcements and the expectation of simultaneous attacks from Siam together with a seaborne expedition further south. The minimum total required therefore, was 566 first-line aircraft for the defence of Malaya, including Borneo and Burma.⁽¹⁾

The eventual requirements in land forces amounted to a total of 26 regular infantry battalions and other elements. There were to be 4 Brigade Groups of 3 battalions each in Malaya, with fixed garrisons at: Singapore, 5 battalions; Penang, 2 Battalions; Kota Bahru and Kuantan, 4 Battalions; and Borneo, 3 battalions.

With regard to conversations with the Dutch, the Commanders pointed out how in September they had already suggested such collaboration with the N.E.I. authorities. It was not anticipated that air forces would be based on Kuching and Miri (Borneo) until the reinforcement programme was virtually complete (at which stage troops should be stationed there also); in the meantime aircraft for reconnaissance could be flown over to Borneo within 4 to 6 hours. The A.A. defences were also considered, and the totals recommended were: heavy guns 176; light guns 100; searchlights 186.

/The Singapore Conference, October 1940.

(1)	Reconnaissance and attacks on seaborne forces	186
	Bombers for striking land based enemy	192
	Fighters for protection of vital areas	144
	Army Co-operation	44
	Total	566

The Singapore Conference, October 1940.

Ibid
Enc.69A d/d
31st October
1940

The date of the Singapore Conference was eventually arranged for 22nd October, 1940, and as it was hoped the representatives from U.S.A. and N.E.I. would attend the chairmanship was altered so as to allow the C. in C. China to preside. When the Conference sat, their conclusions had to be based on the telegraphic summary of the C.O.S. Appreciation because the full text had not then reached Singapore. Their main assumptions were the neutrality of U.S.A., and the probable intervention of N.E.I., and the foremost consideration was to ensure the security of Malaya. It was agreed that the Army and Air Forces in Malaya including the reinforcements then being provided, were both in numbers and equipment, far below those required, especially in view of the inadequacy of naval forces. Such deficiencies needed immediate remedy, and it was recommended that the further co-operation of India, Australia and New Zealand should be sought. Concentration of an adequate force at any threatened point was the only way to make the best use of the aircraft available, and to further this aim it was essential to make immediate provision for the usual facilities and ground organisation. The minimum air strength in the Far East was recommended as follows: Burma and Malaya, 582; Australia, 312; New Zealand, 60; New Guinea, Solomon Islands and New Hebrides, 8; Fiji and Tonga, 9; Indian Ocean, 87. The air forces in Australia, New Zealand and India at the time, were considered to be so inadequate that it was impossible further to reduce them except to meet an extreme emergency in Malaya.

Ibid
Enc.119A
d/d 1st
December
1940

The Australians, whose security was especially dependent upon that of Singapore, were gravely concerned by the weaknesses in Malaya as revealed by the Conference. They had been led to believe, particularly by advice from the United Kingdom Government in the 1937 discussions, that the situation would have been much better. They remembered the defence policy of that time, which had been directed to secure the Base from attack, and to ensure that it would indeed hold out. Nevertheless they were ready to help once again. Three squadrons had already gone to Singapore, but further reinforcements were not possible; on the contrary Australia urged the allotment of modern type aircraft to implement the expansion of the R.A.A.F. They were better equipped with land forces, however, for a brigade was offered as a temporary measure for Singapore as well as large quantities of small arms and ammunition; also 8 x 3.7 inch A/A guns which would need to be diverted from despatch to the United Kingdom.

Air Ministry
File
S.2563
Enc.6a
d/d
10th Jan. '41.

II 250/30/4
Signal
d/d
9th Jan. '42
A.925

The Chiefs of Staff duly examined both the Commanders Tactical Appreciation and the report on the Singapore Defence Conference. They appreciated the weakness in land and air forces, and every effort was to be made to remedy the situation, having regard to the demands of theatres which were already the scene of war. They agreed the figure of 582 aircraft was an ideal, but considered their own estimate of 336 should give a fair degree of security when taking into account experience in the Middle East, Malta and Great Britain, (where our Air Forces were always inferior in number). The target of 336 could not be increased before the end of 1941, but the aim⁽¹⁾ would be to form 5 Squadrons of Fighters during that year.

/The general

(1) It is not unlikely this decision was known by the Japanese as well! On 9th January, 1942, F.E.C.B. advised Air Ministry that a document obtained from a Japanese aircraft crashed in China showed their estimate of the strength of the R.A.F. in the Far East, by the end of 1941, as "336" aircraft.

The general principle of airfield policy was that there should be sufficient airfields to allow a concentration of two-thirds of the air forces recommended by the C.O.S. (336), in either North or South Malaya. They considered the provision of aircraft specially for Army co-operation to be uneconomical, although the A.A. co-operation unit would continue to be available for spotting for fixed defences.

They were agreeable to the recommendation for the final land strength of 26 Battalions (including 3 for Borneo), in fact this figure would be reached by June 1941 after the arrival of the Indian Division. The proposed scale of A.A. Defence was also approved and in addition, light A.A. regiments for the defence of divisions operating on the mainland would also be provided; but generally, A.A. equipments, like small arms, could only be sent gradually.

The Start of the War Effort in Malaya.

A.M. File
S. 3915 Pt. II
Enc. 26A
d/d
9th October
1940.

Whilst defence measures were being urged at higher levels, there arose a growing awareness throughout Malaya of the need for detailed preparations. On the naval side there is evidence to show how the United States Navy Department made enquiries as to the availability of the Singapore Naval Base for the use of their ships; and the Base and its facilities were put at the disposal of the U.S. Fleet at any time.

Ibid,
Enc. 67A.
d/d
1st October
1940

An indication of the increasing interest in defence measures was shown in the action of the Ex-Service Association of Malaya. This body considered the measures for the defence of the population and the security of the tin and rubber industries to be totally inadequate; they wanted the immediate appointment of an officer of the fighting services in supreme control of defence and security. Such resolutions were passed to the Acting Governor who not only completely disagreed with these proposals, but considered them to be offensive. He was actually satisfied with the existing arrangement which placed the defence responsibilities on the Heads of the Service, yet at the same time he was strongly opposed to a military administrator taking over civil defence. However, the Colonial Office did not, as the Acting Governor had suggested, express disapproval or resentment at the keen interest shown by the Association. Not only were certain trustworthy leaders to be given knowledge of the plans to extend the defence measures to the whole of Malaya, but they were to be encouraged to make practical suggestions for improving both civilian defence measures and the efficiency of the Volunteer Forces. In addition the Colonial Office were not averse to the appointment of a Military Commander to replace the civilian organisation.

A.C.M.
Brooke-
Popham's
Despatch
Appendix "L"

The expansion of the R.A.F. in Malaya was also proceeding. The air strength in November 1940 was only 8 operational squadrons totalling 88 aircraft⁽¹⁾ but plans for re-equipment

/and

- | | |
|--|-------------------|
| (1) Bombers; Nos. 34 and 62 squadrons | - 24 Blenheims |
| Reconnaissance; Nos. 1 and 8 squadrons, R.A.A.F. | - 24 Hudsons |
| Torpedo Bombers; Nos. 36 and 100 squadrons | - 24 Vildebeestes |
| General Purpose; No. 21 squadron, R.A.A.F. | - 12 Wirraways |
| Flying Boats; No. 205 squadron | - 4 Singapores |

Note: In addition No. 4 A.A.C.U. had an Establishment of 6 Shark II, 6 Swordfish and 4 Queen Bee - the Swordfish had been taken over from the now defunct Spotter Unit.

File
S.3915 Pt.II
Enc.103A
dated
22nd November
1940.

Ibid
Enc.130A
d/d 7th
December 1940

105A
d/d
23rd November
1940.

and expansion were in hand, for in an Air Ministry signal a programme was shown by which the Vildebeestes of Nos.36 and 100 Squadrons were to be partly replaced by 21 Beauforts; whilst Nos.34 and 62 Squadrons would be re-equipped with Glen Martin 187s.⁽¹⁾ In addition, 2 Fighter squadrons, Nos.243 and 67, each with 16 I.E. + 8 I.R. Buffaloes were due for delivery to the Far East in February 1941, for location at Sungei Patani and Singapore⁽²⁾, whilst a further signal forecasted a reserve of sufficient aircraft to raise two more fighter squadrons. It was pointed out by H.Q. F.E. that to meet the sudden influx of fighter aircraft there was no local experience of operating these aircraft; similarly no specialised personnel existed, nor radio equipment or sufficient S.A.A. to allow of intensive training. In Sarawak, Kuching airfield was to be extended, and the G.O.C. had already agreed to supply, in an emergency, an Indian Platoon as a guard. Also a further platoon would guard Miri (Borneo) in order to ensure the functioning of the oil demolition scheme.

Ibid
Enc.9A
d/d
1st October
1940.

There was no doubt of the policy of H.Q.F.E. to extend the air defences to the Northern Frontier, for it was proposed to station 3 of the 4 squadrons (expected by the end of the year), at Sungei Patani; permission was sought from Air Ministry, not only to provide accommodation for these squadrons, but to put up other temporary buildings for a further three units. The authorities at home, however, could not agree to such proposals for the Chief of Air Staff had directed that future lay-outs of airfields and buildings must incorporate the lessons learnt in the attacks on England and the Continent, and full dispersal must be adopted for all aircraft, material and personnel. The A.O.C. was therefore required to reconsider his dispositions on the Frontier.

Ibid
Enc.34A
7th October
1940.

The Appointment of a Commander-in-Chief.

Brooke-Popham
Despatch
Para.1.

On 17th October, 1940, the post of Commander in Chief, Far East was established, and Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham was selected to fill the appointment. This officer, after a distinguished career in the Royal Air Force retired in 1937 to become Governor-General of Kenya, but later rejoined the R.A.F. at the outbreak of war. Under his command, General Headquarters, Far East started to operate on 18th November, 1940. His directive from the Chiefs of Staff made him responsible for the operational control and general direction of training of all British land and air forces in Malaya (including Brunei, Sarawak and North Borneo), Burma and Hong Kong; and for the co-ordination of plans for the defence of these territories. He was also responsible for the British Air Forces in Ceylon, and the general reconnaissance squadrons of the R.A.F. which were to be stationed in the Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal. Subordinate to him were the General Officers Commanding Malaya, Burma and Hong Kong, also the Air Officer Commanding Far East. He was to deal primarily with matters of major military policy and strategy and not relieve the G.O.Cs. and the A.O.C. of any of their administrative, financial or normal functions; in fact they would continue to correspond with their respective Ministries in the United Kingdom. The C. in C's staff was to consist of only 7 officers. He was

Ibid
Appendix "A"

/required

(1). This re-equipment never materialized; at the opening of the campaign, these 4 squadrons still had their original aircraft.

(2). The two squadrons did in fact arrive at Singapore March/April 1941.

required to co-operate and consult with C. in C. China, C. in C. East Indies, and C. in C. India; and on matters of routine interest he would communicate with the Defence Departments of Australia and New Zealand, although major policy would go to the Service Departments of H.M. Government. Contact was to be maintained with H.M. representatives in Japan, China, U.S.A., Siam, N.E.I. and Indo-China. The Far East Combined Intelligence Bureau, under the Control of the Admiralty, would supply current and special intelligence. Communication would normally be with the Chiefs of Staff, with the right to correspond direct with an individual Chief of Staff on matters particularly affecting his Service. In addition, two main principles were to guide his actions; firstly that it was the policy of H.M. Government to avoid war with Japan; secondly, that reliance for the defence of the Far East was to be placed on air power until the Fleet was available. He realized that requirements in Home Defence, the Battle of the Atlantic and the Middle East must take precedence over those of the Far East, but he always regarded the strength of 336 aircraft (the figure recommended in the C.O.S. Appreciation) as an irreducible minimum. To carry out his directions he considered the following steps were necessary; to avoid action provocative to Japan, but at the same time to convince her that our strength was too great to be challenged; to strengthen the defences, and especially to build up the air forces, not only by obtaining new aircraft, but also by making all preparations to ensure mutual reinforcement in the Far East area; to ensure effective co-operation between the fighting Services, and between them and the Civil Services; to stiffen the Chinese; and to establish the closest co-operation with the Dutch and the Americans, as well as with Australia and New Zealand. He considered the problem of defence was fundamentally a naval one, for although the Army and R.A.F. might defend the land areas and repel an enemy, his definite defeat could not be brought about without sea control, which in turn would necessitate air superiority.

Ibid
Para.3

A.M. File
S.3915 Pt.II
Enc.129A
d/d
7th December
1940.

Within a space of three weeks from assuming command, the C. in C. produced a lengthy Appreciation which was signalled to Air Ministry. In his opinion the likelihood of Japanese aggression might be countered by a policy of firmness entailing closer relations with China, N.E.I. and Siam; lack of confidence would only be interpreted as weakness. He advocated closer relations with China in order to encourage her to fight, and to this end a Mission, to deal primarily with air questions, should be ready to join Marshal Chiang Kai Shek immediately war broke out. Similarly the development of communications between Burma and China needed to be pushed on in order to provide a support route. With regard to N.E.I., our propaganda should aim at convincing the Japanese that an attack on the N.E.I. would mean war with the British Empire and vice versa. At the same time he had under consideration the feasibility of occupation of the Siam section of the Tenasserim Isthmus under guise of giving protection should the Japanese make an ostensibly peaceful penetration into that country. He was convinced that Japan would meet tough resistance before the security of Singapore was threatened; and considered the position was probably better than it appeared on paper. Such difficulties which did exist could be overcome with the support of Air Ministry. In particular he called for certain immediate measures in air defence. These included: fighter aircraft with adequate reserves; long range flying boats to replace the "Singaporeans" which were worn out; the provision of sufficient aircraft reserves, the lack of which was restricting flying practice and training; and authority to proceed with airfield construction and accommodation.

/Summary.

Summary - Events of 1940.

At the beginning of the year conflicting calls upon the civilian manpower of Malaya forced the Governor to appeal to the Colonial Office to uphold his decision to give priority to the claims of industry as against the requirements of the G.O.C. who wanted every available man to augment his regular forces. As an alternative to the Volunteer system, the Governor advocated a stronger Air Force. Attention was thus focussed upon the defence requirements, and the views of the air and land commanders were brought into prominence. The A.O.C., recognizing that a Fleet was no longer available, conceived the defence of Singapore to be interdependent with the defence of Malaya as a whole. And because the Army was confined to the defence of the Singapore area only, his contention was that the R.A.F. should guard the whole of Malaya, with the Army subordinate to air requirements. The G.O.C. considered the extended "period before relief" would enable the Japanese to embark upon a more deliberate operation and from a greater distance, such as Hainan or Siam. Reinforcements to oppose such an expedition were beyond his expectations, and realizing that a Volunteer Force would not be available he wished to place the responsibility for the defence of Malaya entirely upon the R.A.F., so allowing the land forces to be concentrated for the defence of Singapore, Penang and the northern airfields. The Oversea Defence Committee, in response to the Governor's appeal declined to strengthen the R.A.F. or the land forces; the medium for defence should be found in the Volunteer system. The Far East authorities protested against such a ruling, but no help was forthcoming beyond a promise that the Chiefs of Staff would draw up an Appreciation. The Commanders were obliged to reconsider their meagre resources: the G.O.C. narrowed his earlier conceptions down to what was virtually the defence of the Singapore area only, with the mainland and airfields left to the care of the Volunteers. But in the A.O.C.'s view the adequate defence of the northern airfields and the security of the reinforcement route was the primary factor in the defence of Malaya. Faced with such conflicting opinions the acting Governor appealed to the Chiefs of Staff, but even then the situation was only to be partly eased by a request to Australia to send land and air reinforcements to Malaya.

At this stage France was defeated; not only had the balance of naval power in the Mediterranean altered to preclude any chance of a Fleet being sent to the Far East, but the guardian of the back door of Malaya - French Indo China - was no longer available. The policy of depth of defence throughout Malaya was recognized, and as an immediate measure reinforcements were sent from Australia: one Division together with Nos. 21, 1 and 8 Squadrons, R.A.A.F. The long-term policy, which could not be realized until the end of 1941, was to send 22 squadrons to Malaya, with an intermediate aim to re-equip the existing Squadrons and provide in addition 4 more units. The Far East Commanders were then required to produce a Tactical Appreciation in the light of the proposed reinforcement programme. This was done in October; the basic principle was to rely upon air power for the defence of Malaya, and to do this the Commanders recommended that the C.O.S. estimate of 22 squadrons (336 aircraft), should be raised to 566 aircraft, with an Army requirement of 26 Battalions. The A.A. defences were also to be increased. This Appreciation was quickly followed by the Singapore Conference which mainly endorsed the Commanders' Appreciation, but raised the air requirement to 582 aircraft. Australian representatives deplored the fact that earlier promises of a Fleet had been withdrawn, nevertheless they were ready to help. The Chiefs of Staff, having examined the recommendations of the Conference preferred to consider their figure of 336 aircraft would give a fair degree of security; 5 Fighter Squadrons were to be formed

in 1941, and airfield construction was authorised to allow for a concentration of two-thirds their proposed air force in either North or South Malaya. The land forces estimate and scale of A.A. defences were approved. Air strength at this time was only 8 squadrons, but plans were made for the re-equipment of the two Vildebeeste Torpedo-Bomber Squadrons with Beauforts, whilst the two Blenheim units were to be re-armed with Glen Martins. Nos. 243 and 67 Fighter Squadrons were expected to form early in 1941 with sufficient reserves for a further two units. H.Q.F.E. then began to make urgent preparations for the reception of the new Squadrons.

In November a Commander-in-Chief, Far East was appointed to control Army and Air operations in Malaya, Burma and Hong Kong. He had no administrative command, neither was the C. in C. China Station subordinate to him. His guiding principles were the avoidance of war with Japan, and the reliance upon air power for defence until the Fleet was again available. In consequence his aim was to convince Japan of our strength, and at the same time to improve the defences by building up the air forces, ensuring inter-Service co-operation, and fostering mutual collaboration between the Allies.

A Series of Conferences at Singapore

"Far East Defence Policy" -

A.M. File
S 3915 Pt II
Enc 131A d/d
9 December 1940.

A.H.B. File
IIJ 50/13/I
"Staff conversations with N.E.I."

Far East Defence Policy.

A.M. File
S.3915A III
Enc. 5A d/d
25 December 1940

In October 1940 the Dutch Commander-in-Chief requested that Staff Conversations might be opened in Singapore.⁽¹⁾ There had been some hesitation in making this suggestion because of the absence of any undertaking of assistance by H.M. Government should the N.E.I. be attacked by Japan. The Conversations did take place however, from 26th to 29th November 1940. The British officers included the C.-in-C. Far East, C.-in-C. China Station, G.O.C. Malaya, and A.O.C. Far East. The Dutch representatives were Chief of General Staff, Chief of Naval Staff and one other General Staff Officer. The Dutch were ready to co-operate and although no commitments were made, the principles of collaboration were agreed in the event of Japanese attack on Malaya, Borneo or N.E.I. The only practical form of co-operation by redistribution of forces was by air, and to implement this the Dutch would send 3 squadrons of 9 I.E. aircraft to Malaya, whilst the R.A.F. would operate 4 reinforcing squadrons from Sumatra. Reconnaissance areas were defined and the following points requiring the approval of both Governments were subsequently authorised or implemented by the British Chiefs of Staff: the exchange of liaison officers; the use of an inter-Allied code; inter-Allied facilities at selected airfields; and the delivery of armaments to the Dutch, but on a low priority. The C.C.S. could not however, define in advance what movement by the Japanese would constitute an act of war - such would have to be decided by the Government at the time.

/Next

(1) It will be remembered how in 1936 and again in 1938 the Dutch were eager to promote staff conversations, but the British Chiefs of Staff would not agree to any programme of collaboration.

A.H.B. File
II J 50/46A
"Anglo-Dutch
Australian
Conversations"

A.H.B. File
No. 4184
"A.D.A." Discus-
sions February
1941. II J50/
39/13

"Far East Defence
Policy" A.M. File
S.3915 part III
Enc. 134A d/d
13th March 1941.

Ibid.
Enc. 148A d/d
27 March 1941.

Ibid.
Enc. 168b d/d
12th April, 1941
and 171B d/d
23 April 1941.

Next followed the "A.D.A." Agreement. This was a conference between British, Dutch and Australian representatives, which took place at Singapore 22nd to 25th February, 1941. Its main feature was the realization of the necessity for collective action against Japanese aggression, and agreement was reached on what acts would constitute such aggression. The principles of mutual reinforcement were that the Dutch would provide 6-8 submarines for the South China Sea, together with one fighter and three bomber squadrons to reinforce Malaya; the British in turn would supply four bomber squadrons for the defence of the N.E.I. Australia was prepared to assist with Army units (1) and an air striking force (2) at Darwin to reinforce Ambon and Koepang. Administrative arrangements to prepare these reinforcements were to be put in hand immediately. The Chiefs of Staff were in general agreement with the report, although the question of military co-operation with the Dutch in the event of Japanese aggression was still to be kept in abeyance; and the definition of an act of war should be decided only by H.M. Government. The Government of Australia, upon considering the report of the Conference, were greatly concerned that no co-ordinated military plan for the Far East had been drawn up, and asked that a further conference should be convened to rectify this omission.

However it was not until 21 April, 1941 that the next conference took place. It arose from staff talks in Washington, and was known as the "A.D.B." Conference; its purpose was to prepare plans for the conduct of military operations in the Far East, on the basis of Anglo-United States-Dutch co-operation in conformity with the Washington conversations, but without political commitment. The C.-in-C. Far East was nominated as

/Chairman,

- (1) Two forces of 1200 troops each.
- (2) 2 Bomber Squadrons and possibly 1 re-inforcing Squadron, the latter consisting of Wirraway aircraft.

Chairman, and in attendance would be representatives of: U.S.A. Australian Chiefs of Staff; New Zealand Chiefs of Staff; N.E.I. Defence Authorities; C.-in-C. China; and C.-in-C. East Indies. The terms of reference required that no political commitments were to be implied; any agreement was subject to ratification by the Government concerned; and the conversations were to be conducted in a spirit of complete frankness. The Conference, when it took place, stressed that although the main strategy must for the time being be defensive, preparations were to be made for air operations against Japanese occupied territory and Japan herself, from both China and Luzon. The principles of the earlier "A.D.A." Agreement were re-affirmed, and it was recognised that the British and U.S.A. should support the Chinese Army. The C-in-C. Far East was to control the air forces. The air forces available were to be the same as in the "A.D.A." Agreement;⁽ⁱ⁾ but with the addition of all U.S. air units from the Philippines, although only in the case of evacuation. Arising out of "A.D.B" a detailed plan was drawn up on 12th November, 1941 for the employment of naval and air forces of Great Britain, N.E.I. and U.S.A. This was known as "Plenaps".

A.H.B. File
"Singapore
Conference A.D.B"
II J50/13/3
Enc. 398/2 d/d
27 April 1941.

A.H.B. File
"Plenaps"
II J50/41/9

A.H.B. File
III J50/46
"American-British
Dutch Conversa-
tions" Enc. d/d
30 Aug 1941.

Brooke Popham
Despatch para 45.

Even though the report was signed by representatives of U.S. objections were raised in Washington, mainly on the grounds that certain political matters had been introduced. An amended agreement was therefore drawn up in London in August (known as "A.D.B.2"), but even this did not satisfy the U.S. authorities, and eventually it was decided that a further Conference should be held in the Far East. This information was given to C.-in-C. Far East on 25th November 1941, but war had started before action could be taken, therefore "A.D.B" and "Plenaps" remained as the basis for subsequent operations.

These then were the plans, which, founded on the Chiefs of Staff Appreciation of July 1940, were to be the basis of the expansion of the R.A.F. in the Far East. The implications of raising the strength from 88 obsolete or obsolescent aircraft to 336 modern types were enormous. The primary need was for new airfields to be built throughout Malaya, whilst the few in existence on the Island of Singapore needed modernization. Maintenance units were required to supply the new units, whilst further bases had to be constructed in Burma, Ceylon and the Indian Ocean. When the airfields were ready, the aircraft had to be put into them, backed by adequate reserves, and manned by personnel as yet untrained in the circumstance and conditions of the Far East. In this respect an important factor was that fighter defence, with its radar system, communications and control had never before existed. Such a formidable programme had to be accomplished within the space of less than a year. The end of 1941 was the date planned by the C.O.S. for Malaya to be ready for war, and in the event their forecast was amply proved although their expansion programme never fully materialized.

The Work of Air Headquarters, Far East Command. (ii)

A.H.B. File "Defence
Policy" II J50/18/1
Encs. d/d 8 Feb 1941.
and 18 Feb 41.
Brooke Popham
Despatch para 143

There was little decentralization within the Command beyond the formation of a group and two operational group cadres. In March 1941, No. 221 Group, with a full staff, was established in Burma, whilst in August an operational group

/cadre

- (i) From Malay to reinforce N.E.I. - 4 bomber squadrons.
From N.E.I. to reinforce Malaya - 3 bomber and 1 fighter squadron
From Australia - 2 bomber squadrons for Ambon - Timor area.
- (ii) The title of "Air Headquarters Far East" superseded "Headquarters Far East" on 10 January 1941 in order to avoid confusion with General Headquarters Far East. It had moved its location from Collyer Quay to Sime Road, Bukit Timah, on 24 October 1940.

Maltby Despatch
paras. 95 to 98.

File D.S.D.

(M.R.S.) 2012

Enc 13a d/d

13 Aug 42

"Report by O.C.

No. 224 Group"

Ibid Enc 4a d/d

1 Jan 46 "Report

by Staff Officer

No. 224 Group"

File D.S.D.

(M.R.S.) C 2026

Enc 7a d/d

2 May 46

"Malaya Ops".

A.H.B. File

No. 4187

"R.A.F. F.E. Org.

and Requirements".

II J50/39/16

Enc. d/d

20 March 1941

Ibid.

Encs. d/d

14 March 41

and

12 June 41.

IIN/A19/3A

"O.R.B. Appendi-

ces A.H.Q.F.E. 1941"

Appendices

H & K of

Nov. 41.

Ibid.

Enc. d/d Aug 41.

A.M. File

S. 3915 Part III

Enc 107A d/d

12 February 41.

Brooke Popham

Despatch.

paras 12, 52.

Maltby Despatch

para. 17.

"O.R.B.

Appendices

A.H.Q.F.E. 1941"

May, Appendix "D".

cadre (No. 224 Group) was formed to supervise fighter training and the air defence of Singapore; a similar group was also formed to control the flying boat operations based on Ceylon. Neither of these two cadres had an administrative staff. A.H.Q. retained administrative control of all units except those in Burma, and operational control of all those other than in Nos. 221, 224 and 222 Groups. The expansion programme made the lack of decentralization acutely felt, especially by the Administrative Staff and A.M.W.D., but suggestions for the appropriate increases in staff were not acceptable to G.H.Q. who already felt that staffs in Malaya were excessive. It was necessary however to fill vacancies in the enlarged G.H.Q. and the new Stations. To supply this need personnel were enrolled from Australia and New Zealand, whilst a proportion of business men from Singapore were commissioned. Their qualifications were varied, but although willing and able, their value was limited by their lack of service knowledge and experience. There were few regular officers with Staff training so that not only did the brunt of the work devolve upon a few, but the position was aggravated by the inexperience of officers at stations. When the A.O.C. left on 31 May 1941, there was a long interval before his replacement arrived (10th June 1941). In the interim the A.O.C. (Air Vice Marshal Pulford) centralized under his personal control many of the administrative preparations of the Command. To ensure continuity he retained such control, to the detriment of his health, which was poor even when he arrived in the Far East. Until July 1941 squadrons had been uninformed of their operational role, and training instructions had not been issued. This was remedied to obtain full value from all training based on the new syllabi. Alternative locations for squadrons were prepared in accordance with the principle of concentration of defence. Night flying arrangements were co-ordinated to ensure standardization of flare path layouts, airfield lighting and procedure.(1) Operations rooms were opened at every available base, with a uniformity of layout, information and procedure. A.H.Q. queried the Initial Reconnaissance Plan in July 1941 (when the Japanese occupied Indo-China). The main threat had been sea-borne invasion from the North-East, and a plan to detect its approach had been drawn up by the allies. The R.A.F. were allotted the area Kota Bahru - Southern tip Indo-China - Great Natunas - Kuanton, with the employment of one G.R. Hudson Squadron based at Kota Bahru and another at Kuanton plus 2 Catalinas to ensure an over-lap into the Dutch area to the south. This plan made no provision for searching the Gulf of Siam, but G.H.Q. preferred the limited force to be concentrated in the more likely area.

Development, Construction and Defence of Airfields.

The principle of mainly relying upon air power for defence was the basis for the location and the number of airfields to be built in Malaya. Sufficient airfields had to be provided to allow for the strategic concentration of the air forces in any threatened area, yet at the same time the sites were to be chosen as far forward as possible to enable these forces to reach out to the maximum distance both for reconnaissance and offensive action. The actual siting of the airfields was greatly influenced by geographical features and communications. Down the centre of Malaya runs a mountain chain, heavily wooded, and rising in places to 7000 feet.

/This

(1.) Night flying arrangements must have been urgently in need of re-organization, for as late as November 41 a directive was issued from A.H.Q. to Stations, in which details of the flare-path lay-out were based on an article in A.M. Publication

This high ground falls away in the North after crossing the Thai border, and in the South when it reaches the State of Johore. Communications in the West are good; a railway extends from Singapore to beyond the northern frontier, and the roads are generally straight and well metalled. There are no west-to-east communications above the latitude of Kuantan, and flying across the mountain range is made hazardous by the constant cloud formations and heavy rainfall. Therefore, in order to provide air reconnaissance and striking forces over the South China Sea a number of airfields had to be sited on the East Coast. The defence of this coast was simplified by the lack of communications. Places needing defence were Mersing and Kuantan, from which roads ran into the interior (and eventually south-wards); Kota Bahru, which besides being a railhead was also the position of an airfield; and the airfields at Gong Kedah and Machang. The total number of airfields to be prepared was based on the figure of 336 aircraft.

File D.S.D.
(M.R.S.) 2012,
Enc 13a d/d
13 Aug 42 -
"Report by O.C.
No. 224 Group".

Brook-Popham
Despatch para.
52.
Maltby Despatch
Paras. 18, 114,
19, 21, 22, 23,
24, 28.

D.S.D.
(M.R.S.) 2024
Enc. 6a d/d
28 Nov 45 -
"Report by O.C.
Kota Bahru".

D.S.D.
(M.R.S.) 2161
"Organization"
Enc. 4a d/d
16 Jan 46.

D.S.D.
(M.R.S.) 2168
Enc. 1a d/d
8 Jan 46 -
"Report by Chief
Engineer
A.M.W.D.".

The C.-in-C. Far East calculated his airfield requirements on a total of 26 squadrons (1) with a concentration of two-thirds this force (16 squadrons) in either North or South Malaya; each airfield was to have temporary or permanent accommodation for 2 squadrons, although permanent accommodation was limited to the 18 squadrons forecast by the C.O.S. Appreciation. Because the very nature of the terrain made the construction of airfields a lengthy and difficult task, the work had to be put in hand despite the uncertainty of the forecasted development of air strength.(2) The divergence of plans for the defence of Malaya, prior to the C.O.S. defence policy of July 1940, had resulted in insufficient consultation between the R.A.F. and Army Commanders on the selection and defence of mainland airfields. Consequently a number of airfields were sited with little reference to the needs for defence. Kota Bahru (once a civil landing ground) and Kuantan were situated close to long and excellent landing beaches. Full co-operation was not achieved until April/May 1941 when the R.A.F. and Army Commanders were changed, thereafter no airfield was sited or planned without the aid of an Army Staff officer. The buildings on some of the original airfields had been laid out in straight lines, without dispersal; this was particularly the case at Alor Star. During 1941 every effort was made to accelerate construction but there were many delaying factors. Until emergency powers of acquisition were invoked, negotiations with separate provincial government authorities were necessary. Labour was insufficient to meet the needs of expansion of the three services; it was voluntary and not conscripted. Negotiations were opened with the Civil Government in May to raise uniformed works units, officered by Europeans. It took three months to obtain approval, and finally sanction by Air Ministry came too late - in December 1941. The majority of sites were remotely situated in the jungle so that it was first necessary to build roads; and anti-malarial measures had to be taken to protect the labour. Supplies of material fell short of demands despite the efforts of a Joint Priorities Committee; sawn timber was particularly /scarce

- (1) 26 squadrons made up as follows:
 - 18 recommended by C.O.S. Appreciation, July 1940.
 - 3 Dutch re-inforcing squadrons.
 - 1 additionally from Australia.
 - 4 reinforcement from Middle East.
- (2) See Appendix "A", columns 1 & 6. The figure of 336 aircraft was never attained, consequently at the outbreak of war there were more airfields than could be filled by the existing air forces (178 R.A.F. operational aircraft). In fact, of the 27 airfields throughout Malaya, only 9 were occupied with R.A.F. operational units at 7 Dec 41. These surplus airfields then proved to be a liability rather than an asset.

A.H.B. File
No. 4181 "Malaya-
Policy & Defence"
Enc. d/d
4 April 1941.

Maltby Despatch
paras 114, 115
116, 117, 118,
29, 120, 122.

A.H.B. File
II J55/15/112
"Wing Cdr
Martin's
papers".
Enc. d/d
27 October 41.

A.H.B. File
II J50/24/7
"Defence of
Aerodromes"
Enc. d/d
9 January 41.

Brooke-Popham
Despatch
para 54.
Maltby Despatch
paras 31(d), 80,
81, 82, 83, 94.
"M/19/31" "O.R.B.
Appendices,
A.H.Q.F.E. 1941"
Appendix D Aug 41.
A.H.B. File
II J50/39/16
"Org & Require-
ments - G/C
Darvall" Enc. d/d
13 August 41.

Ibid.
Enc. d/d
24 Feb 41.

scarce, as was metalling for runways - a serious matter on airfields subjected to tropical rainfall. The original airfields and the first of the new programme had no camouflage. They were clearly discernible against the surrounding countryside for no attempt had been made to use natural surroundings or irregular outlines; this had arisen mainly as a result of financial control which had restricted the acquisition of land to a minimum. In the later airfields, however, excellent concealment was obtained by retaining natural surroundings, and using a type of construction indistinguishable from native huts.

Reference has already been made to the fact that sufficient attention had not always been given to the tactical siting of airfields from the point of view of their defence. The four airfields on Singapore Island were covered by the general A/A umbrella, but those on the mainland presented a more difficult problem. (1) On the West Coast (down which the main enemy thrust was expected) large Army detachments were required for protection. On the East Coast, the defence of the airfields was the prime responsibility of the Army, and the Brigadiers, at Koto Bahru and Kuatan were appointed Airfield Defence Commanders; but at other airfields the quality and numbers of the defence forces were much under requirements, being mostly composed of Indian State Troops. There were few A/A guns and their equipment; the C.-in-C., Far East had directed that each airfield was to have the protection of 8 heavy and 8 light A/A guns, yet in no instance was this scale achieved, in fact some airfields had no A/A guns at all. Dispersal areas and splinter-proof pens were arranged on a scale in accordance with the anticipated attack and the expected weight of A/A defences. (2) Every effort was made to provide against ground attack; old tanks, armoured cars and any form of weapon were sought from other Commands, but the men and material required were not available. In late summer the first two airfield defence exercises were held; one at Tengah in co-operation with Fortress troops, and the other at Kuang with the Australian Division.

Aircraft Warning Systems and Operational Control.

There was no Observer Corps in Malaya at the end of 1940. Its organization was at first the responsibility of the G.O.C., with Headquarters at Kuala Lumpur; in July 1941 it was transferred to A.H.Q. control. It had been organized as part of the civil air raid warning system and needed extensive development for war time use. There remained little time to train personnel in their new duties, and it was impossible to establish Observer Posts in the mountainous country of Central Malaya, which caused a serious gap in the warning system. Observer Corps Operations Rooms were established in Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, and linked to the Dutch system.

The intention was to have a total of 20 radar stations throughout Malaya, with priority in development for Singapore, followed by the East and finally the West Coasts. (3) But by 1st December 41 only 6 stations had been completed; 4 were in the vicinity of Singapore Island (Mersing Tanah Merah Besar on the East of the Island; Bukit Chunang, South-East tip of Johore; and Tanjong Kupang on the South-West tip.

/A further

- (1) See Appendix "A", column 5.
- (2) See Appendix "A", column 5, and Appendix "C".
- (3) See Appendix "A" for further details of locations and progress of construction.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)2012
Enc. 4a d/d 1 Jan 46.
- "Report by Staff
Officer, No.224 Group"
D.S.D.(M.R.S.)2019
Enc.10a d/d 15 Mar.46
- "Report by Chief
Radio Office, Far
East"
11M/A19/2A, "O.R.B.
Appendices
A.H.Q.F.E. 1939/40".
- Appendix "A"May 40.

A further station at Kota Tingi in Johore was nearly ready. The sixth at Kota Bahru had been built, but no radar installed. Whilst the Japanese were confined to Northern Malaya, Singapore could rely upon 30 minutes warning.

D.S.D.(M.R.S.)2012
Enc. 5a d/d 10 Jan 46.
- "Report by O.C.
Kallang".
II 250/39/16
Enc. d/d 12 June 41.
D.S.D.(M.R.S.)2019
Enc. 7a d/d 23 Jan 46
- "Report by Chief
Signals Officer".
Brooke-Popham Despatch
paras. 81, 88.
Maltby Despatch
paras. 88, 89, 90.
A.H.B. File II 250/3
No. S2563 - "C.O.S.
F.E. Appreciation and
Tactical Appreciation"
Encs:
10A d/d 30 June 41
13A d/d 14 Aug 41.
A.M. File
S.3915 Part III
Enc. 108A d/d
13 February 41.
A.H.B. File
II J50/15/8
"Expansion and
Re-equipment" d/d
11 Sep. 41 28 Oct.41.

There was a shortage of W/T equipment, and although teleprinter lines connected the Island airfields to A.H.Q. there was no such communication with mainland airfields. To cover the joint needs of the Army, R.A.F. and Civil Service there existed only two telephone lines to North-West Malaya, and one to North-East; these went through civil exchanges. Generally, material for the construction of land lines was in very short supply.

The control of fighter aircraft was greatly restricted by the absence of V.H.F.; control was limited to a radius of about 10 miles, and even then it might be affected by atmospheric conditions during thundery weather. The Fighter Group Operations Room at Kallang came into being almost too late to allow for training the squadrons - it was not built and manned until December 1941.

The Strength of the Air Forces in Malaya.

It has already been shown how in November 1940 the strength of the Air Forces in Malaya was only 88 first line aircraft (1) which figure fell far short of the requirement of 336 in the Chiefs of Staff Appreciation (1940). Of these 88, only the Blenheims and Hudsons, totalling 48, could be considered modern aircraft. The Vildebeeste torpedo-bomber of Nos. 36 and 100 Squadrons at Seletar were considered by C.O.S. to be obsolete, (which was surely a logical conclusion in view of the fact these aircraft were first seen in the Far East in 1934). The training and experience of these two squadrons had raised them to a high pitch of efficiency, their main role being that of attacking enemy convoys well out at sea. But their aircraft were almost of another age, being all-metal biplanes with a speed of 90 knots, and a range of 400 miles. In the opening days of the war, when facilities for operating torpedo aircraft had been established at Kota Bahru, these two squadrons could have given invaluable service had they been equipped with modern aircraft. The squadrons were to have been re-armed in late summer 1941 with Beauforts of Australian manufacture. A total of 90 was to have been supplied, but with the exception of the tardy arrival of a few (2) they failed to materialize, mainly through the delay in supplying raw material and spare parts in England and U.S.A.

A.M. File
S.3915, Part III
Enc. 21A d/d
1 January 41.
A.H.B. File
II J50/15/8
"Expansion and
Re-equipment". Encs.
d/d 14 Jan 41;
4 July 41.

The Singapore III flying boats of No. 205 Squadron Seletar, were obsolete in 1940, but by July 1941 they were replaced by 9 Catalina I (P.B.Y.5). This raised the squadron establishment, yet no additional crews were provided, and in consequence they had to be trained by the unit. Furthermore, two crews were based at Ceylon for work in the Indian Ocean, and training was generally hampered by the communications requirement of flying authorities to Manila, Borneo, Ceylon and Hong Kong.

/The

- (1) See paragraph: "The Start of the War Effort in Malaya".
- (2) 6 Beauforts were flown from Australia and landed Seletar 5 December 1941 (for No. 100 (T.B.) Sqdn.), but neither the aircraft nor the crews were operational, so with the exception of one, retained for photographic work, they were returned to Australia for further training. Four Beauforts left Seletar 19 December 1941 and the remaining aircraft 3 days later.

Brooke-Popham
Despatch para 88.

Maltby Despatch
paras 85, 86,
87, 56.

A.H.B. File
II J50/31
"Buffalo Fighter
Squadrons"
Enc. d/d
17 June 41.

A.H.B. File
II J50/3 S.2563
Enc. 41.
d/d 20 Nov. 41.

A.M. File
S.3915 Part III
Enc.108 d/d
13 Feb.41.

Brooke-Popham
Despatch para. 85,
86, Appendix "O"
Maltby Despatch
paras. 73 to 79,
56.

D.S.D.
(M.R.S.)2012
Enc.8a d/d
28 Jan 46 -
"Report by O.C.
No. 243 (F) Sqdn.
Ibid: Enc. 6a
d/d 14 Jan 46 -
"Report by O.C.
No. 453 (F) Sqdn.

A.H.B. File
II J50/15/8
"Expansion &
Re-equipment"
Encs d/d 3 May 41
& 30 May 41.

The strength of the bomber and G.R. squadrons in Malaya fluctuated with the movement of 60 (B) Squadron (1) but at the outbreak of war the strength was virtually the same as in November 1940 i.e. No. 62 (B) Squadron, Blenheim I at Alor Star; No. 34 (B) Squadron, Blenheim IV at Tengah; No. 1 (R.A.A.F.) Squadron, Hudson II at Kota Bahru; and No. 8 (R.A.A.F.) Squadron Hudson II at Sembawang. In addition, No. 60(B) Squadron, Blenheim I, was detached from Rangoon for training at the Amament Practice Camp at Kuantan. Although the Hudsons and the Blenheims were designed for different roles their tasks in Malaya were virtually integrated owing to the small size of the force. The Hudsons were mainly used for sea reconnaissance because of their longer range, but Blenheims were also practised in these duties. Similarly, both types were trained for day and night bombing. The C.-in-C. Far East had always pressed the need for long-range bombers, and when the Japanese advanced into Southern Indo-China the objective was clarified. But these targets were only just within the reach of the few Blenheim IV from Northern Malaya, whilst the Hudsons were required for reconnaissance. From May 1940, for nearly a year, lack of aircraft spares had restricted the training of Blenheim crews; 5 hours per month for each I.E. aircraft was the maximum. The formation of the first two fighter squadrons in Malaya (No. 67 and 243) mulcted the Blenheims of selected pilots, while another factor detracting from the bomber effectiveness was the necessity for the Australian Air Board to withdraw crews from No. 1 & 8 (G.R.) Squadrons, as they became fully trained, leaving the squadrons with a wide variation in the capabilities of their crews. A high standard of flying was required (in all squadrons) owing to the prevalence of tropical storms at night.

A weakness in the defence of Malaya had been the absence of any fighter aircraft, but in February 1941 the shipment of 170 Brewster Buffalo aircraft commenced. These started to arrive from U.S.A. on 17th February 1941, and in the following two months, two fighter squadrons (each of 16 I.E. and 8 I.R. aircraft) were formed at Singapore. No. 67 (F) Squadron started at the end of March, with the Squadron Commander and two Flight Commanders appointed from U.K. The majority of the pilots were drawn from the Blenheim squadrons, with a proportion of pilots from New Zealand F.T.S.s. As soon as the squadron was fully trained it was transferred to Mingaladon 13 October 1941 (for defence of Burma) and so was not available in Malaya when war broke out. (2) No. 243 (F) Squadron was formed in April, 1941, also with Buffalos. Its personnel, like the other fighter squadron, were mainly drawn from the Blenheim units, although with a greater element of F.T.S. pilots. A total of 167 Buffalos were received in Singapore, and authority was given on 30th May to build up two more fighter squadrons. Both formed in October, with Squadron and Flight Commanders from U.K. No. 453 Squadron was filled from F.T.S.s in Australia; some of the personnel were not entirely suitable and when hostilities commenced the C.O. was in Australia selecting the necessary replacements.

/No. 488

- (1) No. 60 (B) Squadron arrived at Rangoon from India on 15 February 1941. It was used to a great extent in Burma for communication flights so that it became necessary to bring it operationally up-to-date by transfer to Kuantan. Consequently on 29 November 1941 nine Blenheims left Mingaladon arriving Kuantan the following day. On 26th December its personnel were returning to Burma by sea, the aircraft being retained in Malaya to replace wastage in other squadrons.
- (2) Personnel of No. 67 (F) left Singapore 9th October 1941 by sea, having transferred its aircraft to No.488(F) Sqdn.

A.H.B. File
II J50/17/3
"formation of Nos.
453 & 488 Squadrons".
Encs. d/d 30 June 41.
22 Aug. 41.

A.H.B. File
II J50/15/8 "Expansion
& Re-equipment" Enc.d/d
17 Aug. 41.
A.M. File S.2563
Enc.16A d/d 17 Aug.41.

A.M. File S.3915
Part III Enc.110A
d/d 15 Feb. 41.

A.H.B. File
II J50/31 "Buffalo
Fighter Squadrons"
Enc.d/d 20 June 41.
D.S.D.(M.R.S.) 2012
Enc. 3a d/d.
30 Dec 45 - "Report
by O.C. No.243 (F)
Sqn.

A.H.B. File
II J50/17/3
"formation of No. 67
and 243 Squadrons"
Encs. d/d 20 June 41
27 July 41.

11M/A19/1 "O.R.B.,
A.H.Q.F.E. 1933 to
1941" - Entry d/d
12 May 41 and
subsequent entries.

Brooke-Popham Despatch
para. 89.

Maltby Despatch
paras. 92, 669
70, 47, 91.
File: D.S.D.(M.R.S.)
2022. Enc.1a d/d
13 Dec 45 - "Report
by Command Photogra-
phic Officer".

A.M. File S.2563
Enc. 7A d/d
25 June 41 and
Enc. 21A d/d
25 August 41.

No. 488 Squadron was manned by New Zealand pilots of fundamen-
tally excellent material but with a low standard of flying
experience, for some of them had flown nothing more advanced
than the Hart. Under these circumstances it took several
months before the two squadrons became fit for operations; in
fact No. 488 squadron was not ready until late December. In
addition, there was one other Buffalo unit - No. 21 squadron,
R.A.A.F. This had arrived in the Far East from Australia in
July 1940 equipped with Wirraway aircraft for a General Purpose
role. In October 1941, at the request of Australia, the unit
was re-equipped and converted into a Fighter Squadron with 12 I.E.
and 6 I.R. Buffalos; Some of the old aircraft were returned
to Australia whilst the remainder were used to train Nos. 453
and 488 Squadrons. Apart from the 4 Buffalo squadrons in
Malaya at the outbreak of war, one Dutch fighter squadron
arrived on 9th December, and there was one Blenheim I night
fighter unit - No. 27 Squadron, with old aircraft in poor
condition, which had left India to be stationed at Kallang,
17 February, 1941. Training and assessment of operational
readiness however, had been based on an underestimation of the
enemy, and the tactics proved unsuitable and costly against
greatly superior Japanese Navy "Zero" fighters. The standard
of gunnery was generally low, mainly through the lack of suitable
towing aircraft, inadequacy of cine gun equipment, and trouble
with the armament. The Buffalo aircraft had a disappointing
performance when compared with the Japanese fighter. (1) It was
heavy and underpowered, with a poor rate of climb; whilst the
Zero fighter appeared to have sacrificed armour and armament
to obtain the advantage of rate of climb and manoeuvrability at
heights. Attempts were made to improve the Buffalos' perfor-
mance by substituting two fuselage .303 inch guns for the
.5 inch, (which together with the synchronizing gear had been
a source of trouble). Wastage during squadron training was
high and the maintenance demands exacting. The fighter defence
of Malaya was therefore quite inadequate to the task. Its
aircraft, in quantity and quality were inferior to those of the
enemy, and the majority of the pilots were without war experience
whilst many had not long left their flying training schools
and were without O.T.U. training.

A requirement which was realized too late was that of
special photographic reconnaissance aircraft. Long range
Hurricanes had been requested in August, but were not available,
consequently a P.R.U. was formed in November, with 2 I.E.
Buffalos drawn from local resources. Stripped of non-essential
equipment and provided with additional tankage these aircraft
had a range of 1400 miles; the Flight was a valuable asset,
and was later raised to 4 I.E. aircraft. Personnel were
trained in photographic reconnaissance and a Photographic
Interpretation unit was also formed. Yet another deficiency was
the complete lack of transport aircraft, which caused appreciable
interruption in operations and later was particularly felt when
squadrons had to be transferred from Malaya to Sumatra, and
subsequently to Java. The Dutch were unable to help in
this respect as they were making full use of their transport
aircraft, (20 Lodestars) for their own purposes. Communication
flights had to be undertaken by the G.R. Squadrons, which
interfered with training and expended vital flying hours.

/The

(1.)			
	Rate of Climb to 13000 ft	Zero	Buffalo
	Speed at 10000 ft	4.3. mins	6.1. mins
	Speed at 20000 ft	315 mph	270 mph
		295 mph	292 mph

These figures were derived from A and A.E.E. Boscombe Down, and
official intelligence figures of the Japanese Naval fighter.

A.H.B. File
II J/53/4
"Malayan Volunteer Air Force".

The Malayan Volunteer Air Force, (which later took part in the defence of Malaya and N.E.I.) was formed in August 1940, with personnel recruited from the Flying Clubs of Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Perak and Wearness Air Services. (1) In addition to the five Flights an Elementary Flying Training School was run by the M.V.A.F., and altogether about 100 pilots were trained. The Force was self contained in its administration and maintenance of aircraft. The Flying Club aircraft were fitted with bomb racks and the crews trained in low level bombing. With the exception of one Rapide carrying a Lewis gun, no defensive armament was installed. In December 1941 the five Flights were situated at Singapore ('A' & 'B'), Kuala Lumpur ('C'), Ipoh ('D'), Penang ('E') with a total strength of 32 aircraft. (2) Prior to the outbreak of hostilities the M.V.A.F., although limited by its size, gave considerable help to both the R.A.F. and Army. Communication flights for Service passengers throughout Malaya were almost a daily occurrence; they also took part in exercises for anti-aircraft and A.R.P. training, and their affiliation exercises with Army formations were particularly successful.

A.M. File
S.2563 Encs. 37A
d/d 16 Oct 41.
Brook-Popham
Despatch paras.
85, 81, 82.
Maltby Despatch
paras. 69, 70,
71, 667.
D.S.D.
(M.R.S.) 2013
Enc. 16 d/d
13 Dec 45. -
"Report by O.C.
O.T.U. Kluang".
A.H.B. File
II J50/15/8
"Expansion &
Re-equipment"
Encs. d/d
3 May 41.
30 May 41.

The scarcity of operationally trained flying personnel has already been emphasized. There was evident need for an O.T.U. in Malaya, yet during 1941 the Air Ministry had been unable to approve the establishment of such a unit. But such large numbers required training that the capacity of the squadrons was outstripped in this respect; so in September a makeshift O.T.U. was formed at Kluang from Command resources. Its threefold task was to train the inexperienced New Zealand pilots for Fighter Squadrons; to convert the personnel of Nos. 36 and 100 Squadrons to twin-engined aircraft; (3) and to train New Zealand pilots to fill vacancies in the Bomber Squadrons. The training aircraft were provided by Wirraway aircraft thrown up by 21 (F) Squadron when it rearmed with Buffalos, and by Blenheims borrowed from No. 34(B) Squadron. The unit had to be disbanded on 8 December 41, but during its short life valuable work had been accomplished.

Just as there were inadequate facilities for air training, so did armament training fail to supply the needs of the expanded air forces in Malaya. Until 1941 the only ranges in existence were on Singapore Island, with an improvised range at Penang, but in October of that year a new Command Armament Training Station was opened at Kuantan; it was too late however, to be really effective, for only two squadrons (4) completed a course before the outbreak of war.

To conclude this review of the shortcomings of the air forces in Malaya it must be emphasized that the major weaknesses were the lack of fighter defences, and the small size of the reserves. This latter factor had already restricted the number of flying hours devoted to training, and when war broke out even the first casualties could not be fully replaced. In consequence squadron strengths became abnormally low at the outset and remained at such level. The C.-in-C. Far East, after his arrival, drew attention to the importance of remedying these weaknesses. He anticipated that by the end

/of

A.H.B. File
II J50/15/8.
"Expansion &
Re-equipment"
Enc. d/d
3 March 41.

- (1) The M.V.A.F. was a reincarnation of the S.S.V.A.F. (see Footnote 2, page 9).
- (2) The largest aircraft in the M.V.A.F. were 2 D.H. Rapides and one Dragonfly; the remainder were mostly D.H. Moths and Avro Cadets.
- (3) In preparation for replacement of the Vildebeosts by Beauforts - which never materialized.
- (4) 62 (B) Squadron from Alor Star (6th to 25th November 1941)
60 (B) Squadron from Rangoon (30th November to 8th December 1941).

A.H.B. File
II J50/39/9
"Cables to
C.O.S." Encs. d/d
2 Aug. 41.
A.M. File
S.2563 Encs 10A
d/d 30 Jan 41 &
13A d/d 14 Aug 41.
Ibid.
Encs. 28A d/d
17 Sep 41.
A.H.B. File
II J50/11
"Weekly Return
of Operational
Aircraft".
Enc. d/d
6 Dec. 41.

of 1941, there would be an absolute maximum of only 186 aircraft, together with 39 Dutch reinforcements. This position was appreciated by the Chiefs of Staff, but they advised the C.-in-C. Far East how the production figures of aircraft had been disappointing, whilst in addition, the Middle East had to be reinforced still further to meet the probable scale of attack in Spring 1942. Furthermore the necessity for supporting Russia was likely to impose an additional strain on British and American resources. Neither could the target figure for the Far East be achieved, nor could any substantial reinforcements be sent before the end of 1941. On 6 December 41, two days preceding the outbreak of war the total strength of squadron aircraft in the Far East (Malaya, Burma, Hong Kong and Ceylon) was 294 aircraft against an Initial Establishment of 211 aircraft. (1) It will be remembered how the Chiefs of Staff gave an estimate of 336 I.E. aircraft for the Far East (excluding Burma and Hong Kong). The comparable establishment attained in Malaya and Ceylon was 178 I.E. aircraft, and if to this total is added the 31 Dutch reinforcing aircraft which were to arrive in Malaya 9 December 41, the resulting potential of 209 aircraft reveals a discrepancy of 127 against the C.O.S. estimate.

Equipment Problems.

A.H.B. File
II J50/18/1
"Defence Policy -
General"
Enc. d/d 16 Dec 40.
Brooke-Popham
Despatch para 94.
A.H.B. File
II J50/39/16
"Org. and
Requirements
by G.C. Darvall"
Enc. d/d
19 January 41.

The equipment position was bad in almost all important items. There was an acute shortage of aircraft spares, especially for Blenheims and Hudsons; motor transport, (there were insufficient vehicles even to form a Command Pool); and all tools. Only a small proportion of R.A.F. personnel could be armed owing to the insufficiency of small arms, and the reserve of small-arm ammunition was 57 million rounds short of the authorised figure of 150 million rounds. Australia agreed to increase the monthly supply from 3 million to 8 million rounds. In December 1940 aircraft bombs were far short of the needs for expansion, but by the outbreak of war stocks had been made good. There was also an adequate reserve of petrol.

Co-operation with Other Services.

Maltby Despatch
paras. 107 to
110.

To achieve closer co-operation with the Navy A.H.Q. had advocated a combined Naval/Air Operations Room to control the seaward air operations with the forces under C.-in-C. China Station, but this arrangement never materialized because it was decided that such co-operation should remain at G.H.Q. level. Shortly after the outbreak of war however, a Liaison staff of 5 junior naval officers was provided in the Army/Air Combined Operations Room, and although this arrangement proved adequate, the A.O.C. was doubtful of its sufficiency had the Far Eastern Fleet remained in being. Co-operation with the C.-in-C. East Indies, was close, with a Combined Operations Room at Colombo. There was real understanding of the R.A.F. difficulties in assisting with the control of sea communications in the Indian Ocean using a force of only two Catalinas. Coastal Command had supplied invaluable memoranda covering maritime operations, and these, when adapted to suit local conditions, were compiled in book form and issued to all R.A.F. Units and Naval Commands for guidance in operations over the sea.

D.S.D.
(M.R.S.) 2020
Enc. 1a d/d
24 Dec 45 -
"Report by
Command Naviga-
tion Officer".

Maltby Despatch
paras. 130,
131.

The Combined Army/Air Operations Room (referred to above) was built adjacent to A.H.Q. in Sime Road, Singapore, and was ready just before war broke out. Its wooden buildings were very vulnerable so alternative accommodation was put in hand.

/It

(1) For details of Establishments and Strengths see Appendix "B" Part I.

A.H.B. File
II M/A19/1
"O.R.B. of
A.H.Q.F.E."
Entries d/d
5 Aug. 41.
11 Aug. 41.

It functioned at a level of Air Headquarters and Headquarters Malaya Command. For the control of Army air support in the north a nucleus Operations Group H.Q. was formed 11th August 1941, designated No. 223 Group ("Norgroup"); in war it was to be located with H.Q. IIIrd. (Indian) Corps. Its function was to command air forces allotted by A.H.Q., and to act as air adviser to G.O.C. IIIrd. Corps. The combined H.Q. was established at Kuala Lumpur, and after being exercised was disbanded and held in readiness for mobilization.

Maltby Despatch
para. 111.

The question of airfield defence by the Army has already been dealt with. (1) Apart from this aspect, co-operation with the Army had not been highly developed in the past. Limited exercises had been carried out with the troops by No. 21 (G.P.) Squadron, which when it was equipped with Wirraways was regarded partly as an Army Co-operation squadron. Its methods, however, were not consistent with developments in Europe and the Middle East. The records of experience gained in other Commands was available at A.H.Q., but through lack of staff these lessons had never been disseminated. This omission was remedied in September 1941 when instructions were issued for the joint information of Army and R.A.F. units, covering the operations of bombers in support of troops, and the work of fighter aircraft employed on tactical reconnaissance. Aircrews were given instruction in Army organization and tactics, whilst bomber and fighter squadrons were affiliated to Army formations, with a monthly allotment of flying hours for combined training.

II M/A19/1
"O.R.B. -
A.H.Q.F.E.
1939/1941"
entry d/d
8 July 41.

Maltby Despatch
para. 124.

During the latter half of 1941, Anti-Aircraft equipments were rapidly increasing, particularly in Singapore, and a heavy strain was thrown upon air resources by the demands for air co-operation in training the A.A. crews. The aircraft available were few, (2) with the result that operational units had to expend flying hours from their own training requirements, and even then the needs of the A.A. Defence Commander were never properly fulfilled.

A.M. File
S.2563
Enc. 26A d/d
16 September 41.

Developments in Netherlands East Indies, Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal.

Maltby Despatch
paras. 61, 62,
63, 64, 66.

II M/A19/1
"O.R.B.,
A.H.Q.F.E.,
1933 to 1941"
Entry d/d
23 Oct. 41.

The Anglo-Dutch reinforcement plan provided for 4 R.A.F. Bomber squadrons to be based in Dutch Borneo. Two airfields at Sinkawang and Samarinda were allocated by the Dutch, and they were to be stocked with supplies required by the R.A.F. The only method of communication with these airfields was by Dutch transport aircraft. By October 1941, Sinkawang was ready and was inspected by the C.O. and Flight Commanders of one of the squadrons allocated to it; the other airfield was still unprepared.

II M/A19/3a
"O.R.B.
Appendices -
A.H.Q.F.E. 1941"
Appendix "C",
June.

A.H.Q. had anticipated that Sumatra would be required for an alternative air route from India owing to the vulnerability of the old reinforcement route through Burma and North Malaya. Also the island would be required for advanced landing grounds for operations against the Japanese in their advance down Malaya. Attention was concentrated upon those airfields in the northern part of Sumatra; extensions to Lho'nga and Sabang were put in hand, at the request of A.H.Q., to adapt them for modern aircraft. Facilities at Sabang were given to B.O.A.C. in order to organize an alternative route from Rangoon - Port Blair - Sabang, instead of the normal one through Bangkok.

/In

- (1) See paragraph on "The Development, Construction and Defence of the airfields".
- (2) No. 4 A.A.C.U., Stationed at Tengah, with 6 Sharks, 6 Swordfish and 2 Blenheim I.

D.S.D.
(M.R.S.) 2168
Enc. 1a d/d
8 Jan 46. -
"Report by
A.M.W.D."
A.H.B. File
II J50/15/8
Enc. d/d
4 July 1941.

In June 1941, A.H.Q. issued a detail of the bases to be used in the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal. At Port Blair in the Andaman Islands, and Nancowry in the Nicobar Islands, moorings and petrol were laid for operating flying boats. Port Blair was also prepared by B.O.A.C. for their alternative route to Sabang. In Ceylon was established H.Q. No. 222 Group with a Naval/Air Operations Room at Colombo. In China Bay one Flight of Vildebeeste aircraft were located for target towing and local reconnaissance. (1) It was also to be a permanent base for 1 G.R. Squadron and 1 F.B. Squadron and accommodation was practically completed. Ratmalana airfield was under construction for 1 G.R. squadron; and Koggala as a main base for Flying boats operating in the Indian Ocean. Fuel and moorings were laid and limited accommodation provided for the operation of flying boats from the following stations: Christmas Island, Cocos Islands (Direction Island), Maldives (Male), Seychelles (Mahe), Chagoas (Diego - Garcia), Mauritius and Tanganyika (Lindi). Permanent bases for one F.B. squadron each were being developed at Durban and Mombasa.

A.H.B. File
II J50/18/1
"Defence Policy-
General" Enc.
d/d 15 Jan 41.
Brooke-Popham
Despatch
paras. 40, 7, 11,
13, 14, 15, 8,
134, 135.

The Problems and Work of G.H.Q. Far East.

Maltby Despatch
paras. 650,
102, 103,
67, 68.

General Headquarters, Far East, came into being 18 November 1940 and orders were issued to the three General Officers Commanding and the Air Officer Commanding defining their relations to G.H.Q. The selection of the site for G.H.Q. was a compromise. The Army Headquarters had long been established at Fort Canning, with Air Headquarters some five miles away in Sime Road; the C.-in-C China Station had his headquarters at the Naval Base, where the Far East Combined Bureau was also located, whilst the Governor and the civil authorities were in Singapore town. The C.-in-C. decided that the primary consideration was to ensure close touch with the C.-in-C. China Station, (who was in no way subordinate to C.-in-C. Far East), accordingly he moved his headquarters to the Naval Base in January 1941, but continued to reside in Singapore, and so maintained contact with the Service and Civil authorities.

A.H.B. File
II J50/39/5
"Org of G.H.Q. -
G.C. Darvall"
Enc. d/d
21 August 41.

The size of G.H.Q. Staff precluded any direct form of operational control except in the widest sense, therefore it was decided that each Command, (Malaya, Hong Kong and Burma), would be regarded as of equal status, with the respective G.O.C.s (2) controlling operations in their own areas. Also, the activities of the A.O.C. Far East would not be restricted. Thus the operational control of G.H.Q. would be limited to the movement of reinforcements and to the issue of directives. Following repeated requests to the Chiefs of Staff, the establishment of G.H.Q. was raised in August 1941, from 7 to 14 officers, (3) together with the necessary clerical and cypher staff; this establishment was not completed by the outbreak of war. The smallness of staff resulted in overwork, which in conjunction with the climate led to a serious degree of sickness. The Chief of Staff, after a period in hospital, had to return to England, and the appointment was vacant for ten and a half weeks. For some time before the appointment of the C.-in-C. Far East

/the

A.H.B. File
II J50/18/1
"Defence Policy"
Encs. d/d
25 April 41.

- (1) One Flight only (4 I.E. Vildebeestes) of No. 273 Squadron.
- (2)

G.O.C. Malaya	- Lt. Gen. Bond
G.O.C. Hong Kong	- M. Gen. Grasett
G.O.C. Burma	- Lt. Gen. McLeod
A.O.C. Far East	- A.V.M. Babington.
- (3) Chief of Staff: 1
 Staff Officer, 1st Grade: Navy 1; Army 2; R.A.F. 2.
 Staff Officer, 2nd Grade: Navy 1; Army 3; R.A.F. 3.
 Staff Officer, 3rd Grade: Navy 1.

the relations between the Army and the R.A.F. were poor. Jealousy and lack of co-operation, even though provoked by quite sincere differences of opinion, had resulted in weaknesses in the defence. These - the siting of airfields and degree of Army/Air support - have already been examined in detail; but the fact remains that even though these officers were replaced in Spring 1941 by Commanders who worked in perfect accord, (1) the deficiencies could not be fully rectified by the time war broke out. This same tradition of bad feeling between the two Services had repercussions, for the first six months, on the working of G.H.Q. There was some reluctance at first, on the part of Army Headquarters, to accept advice from an R.A.F. Officer on matters which were normally the function of the G.O.C. On the other hand relations between C.-in-C., F.E. and C.-in-C. China Station (Vice Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton) were close and friendly throughout, although incidentally they were not clearly defined by higher authority. Apparently, by mutual agreement, the C.-in-C. China Station continued to deal with the Free French, for relations with Indo-China were mainly concerned with economics and shipping. He also controlled the Press, until after a change in command, (2) when this matter was taken over by C.-in-C. F.E. G.H.Q. dealt with Siam; but the control of the Miri oil denial scheme was passed to C.-in-C. China Station, since problems of oil supply and possible evacuation were more closely connected with the Navy than the other two Services. It was agreed that the Navy should be responsible for patrolling the open sea, whilst the Army would undertake similar duties on the rivers.

Relations between G.H.Q. and A.H.Q. were cordial, as might be expected, for A.C.M. Sir Robert Brook-Popham naturally took a keen personal interest in the R.A.F. But despite the desire of the C.-in-C. Far East not to restrict the functions of the A.O.C., a practice arose at A.H.Q. of consulting G.H.Q. on all important signals to Air Ministry; in consequence the C.-in-C. was involved in nearly every aspect of the R.A.F. Command, so in effect the main channel of communication on air matters was through G.H.Q. to Air Ministry. Furthermore, as G.H.Q. contained only an operational staff, it was difficult for them to realize the administrative problems of the subordinate Command, and it was felt by A.H.Q. that the Air Ministry were not made aware of the time implications of the numbers and types of aircraft available, the standard of aircrew training and the state of the Command as a whole.

G.H.Q. relied upon the Far East Combined Bureau for Intelligence. This was under Admiralty control with branches of Naval, Army and Air Force Intelligence; but with the head of Naval Section being in charge of the Bureau the F.E.C.B. was somewhat unbalanced. Attention was concentrated on naval intelligence, to the detriment of the other two Services, and especially the R.A.F. Although this state of affairs was corrected, A.H.Q. were far from satisfied with the arrangements and considered that F.E.C.B. were so understaffed that they could not adequately deal with G.H.Q. requirements. Consequently representations were made for the need of a thorough system throughout the Command. In July 41 G.H.Q. wished to create a second Intelligence Centre to serve the needs of H.Q.M.C. and A.H.Q. Such an arrangement

/was

A.H.B. File
II J50/39/5
"Org. of
F.E.C.B. etc."
Encs. d/d
2 August 41
1 August 41.

- (1) A.V.M. Pulford arrived Singapore 20 April 1941 to relieve A.V.M. Babington who left 26 April 1941, Lt. Gen. Percival succeeded Lt. Gen. Bond as G.O.C. Malaya, 16 May 1941.
- (2) Admiral Sir Tom Phillips replaced Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton 6 December 1941.

was not acceptable to A.H.Q. however, but instead an establishment for an Intelligence organization for the whole Command was submitted to Air Ministry, and in anticipation of approval, personnel were appointed to H.Q. and Units. This nucleus was in being when hostilities commenced, but naturally it had not been greatly developed and the information available for crew briefing was poor. Both the C.-in-C. and A.O.C. have quoted specific examples which underline the shortcomings of the F.E.C.B., and the lack of adequate Intelligence. The C.-in-C. complains that the Secret Intelligence Service failed to supply any information as to what was happening in Camranh Harbour (Southern Indo-China). (1)

On the broader issues of intelligence he emphasizes many serious errors. The foremost was the assessment of the intentions of the Japanese Government to wage war: until the end of November 1941 G.H.Q. did not believe that Japan might be on the verge of war. There were also errors concerning the intentions of the Siamese Government. The strength of the forces that Japan could deploy for an attack on Malaya, in the event, proved to be accurate, but the main under-estimation lay in the opinion that Japan could not attack in several theatres simultaneously. The efficiency of the enemy forces was badly depreciated. Amongst the unexpected factors were: the disregard of the Japanese for weather conditions and their ability to land on beaches in bad weather; their extreme mobility - they depended little on mechanical transport, and with their simple food requirements were able to live on the country; the initiative of the average soldier; and the rapidity with which repairs could be carried out on bridges and airfields. And the A.O.C. deplures the current intelligence which, because of its assessment of the low morale and efficiency of the Japanese air services, effected the training and tactics to be adopted by the fighter squadrons. In fact the strength of the Japanese Air Force came as a complete surprise - in quantity, performance, mobility and experience of its personnel. Both the fighters and the medium bombers had ranges of 1500 to 1600 miles which enabled them to operate from bases beyond the reach of the R.A.F. Their operational height was 20,000 to 24,000 feet, where they were immune from the majority of the A.A. defences.

D.S.D.
(M.R.S.) 2012
Enc. 3a d/d
30 Dec. 45 -
"Report by O.C.
No. 243 (F) Sqdn.

Brooke-Popham
Despatch
Paras. 48, 49.

A matter of vital urgency on which G.H.Q. had to make an early decision was the method of defence of vital portions of the East Coast. Previously, except on Singapore and Penang Islands, the first lines of defence were going to be sited inland, with the beaches occupied only by watching posts. This scheme was based on the argument that the insufficiency of troops to defend a great length of beach would result in outflanking by the enemy, and a linear defence without sufficient troops for counter-attack. On the other hand, G.H.Q. considered it essential to defend the beaches because during this period of the landing the enemy was most vulnerable; once inland he would be on terms of equality with the defenders. Furthermore, during landing operations the co-operation between the three Services would be most effective. The C.-in-C. had to issue orders for the principle of first line defence on the beaches, but it was found that the work and preparation of obstacles and defence posts at Mersing, Kuantan and Kota Bahru took up so much time that it interfered with training. Consequently a programme was drawn up to allow a compromise between field training and work on the fixed defences. (2) A portion of the Singapore

/garrison

- (1) Southern Indo China was the location of the bases in which the Japanese invasion forces were gathered.
- (2) In retrospect the C.-in-C. realizes how it might be claimed that a lot of the preparation was wasted, as for instance at Mersing, which was never heavily attacked. Nevertheless had those defences been weak they might have invited early attack and an easy access to Singapore.

garrison had to be ready to counter any sudden raid on Singapore, yet at the same time, the C.-in-C. admits the defences of the north and north-western sides of the Island should have been strengthened before war broke out.

Brooke-Popham
Despatch
Paras: 58,62.

The C.-in-C. considered the Malayan War Committee, presided over by the Governor, was not on a satisfactory basis. No agenda or minutes were kept, and although this state of affairs was corrected by the introduction of new members it does not appear to have been a very effective body. On two occasions the Committee decided that a scheme of food rationing in war time must be prepared, yet sub-committees reported the difficulties too great, and even suggested that if the rationing were a military necessity, then the military should themselves prepare a scheme. Ultimately no food rationing existed when war started. A six month's supply of food for the whole population, (including the Services) had been laid down as a minimum requirement. Rice had to be imported from Burma, as the Malayan yield was insufficient, and this raised difficulties, (which were eventually overcome) in storage and distribution. The question of the Islands' water supply was investigated; the main supply for the Singapore reservoirs came from Johore, but it was calculated, if this were cut, the rainfall would be sufficient to meet the requirements of the whole of the anticipated population.(1)

Ibid
paras: 63, 64.

The Air Raid Precautions organization in Singapore was good and functioned well, with the one exception of the first bombing raid on Singapore when there was a failure to man the A.R.P. Headquarters. In consequence Fighter Group Headquarters could not pass the warning, and it was only a matter of minutes before the bombs fell, that the sirens sounded to give the warning for black out. (2) A proper black-out in Malaya was impracticable because a full black-out would deprive houses of ventilation. A system was adopted which proved satisfactory; this consisted of restricted lighting, with a complete black-out being enforced on the actual warning of approach of hostile aircraft. Also the construction of air raid shelters was not a simple matter and there were not enough for the total population. Any excavations, because of the low level of the ground, soon filled with water and became a breeding place for mosquitos, whilst surface shelters blocked the narrow streets and prevented ventilation. The only practical shelters were the arcades formed by the overhanging first floors of the buildings; these were adapted by filling the spaces between the pillars with stones or bricks. But there was a policy to provide accommodation outside the town where it was anticipated the population could move once the bombing started; compulsory evacuation was not enforced.

In early 1941 a Denial scheme was prepared against the event of invasion, and the necessary instructions issued. This scheme did not envisage a complete "scorched earth" policy - for example, in the tin mines only the essential parts of the dredging machinery were to be brought away. The guiding principle was the destruction or removal of everything that might facilitate the movement of the enemy; this included the removal or dispersal of food stocks; the

/destruction

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- (1) Rainfall in Singapore averages 100 inches per year. A heavy rain fall can be anticipated every 24 hours, and in fact it is so torrential that special drainage is incorporated in buildings, airfield layouts, etc.
- (2) See also in section "First Bombs on Singapore" (Chap. III).

destruction of repair facilities, vehicles or boats; and the demolition of bridges.

Brook-Popham
Despatch
paras; 68, 69,
70.

Maltby Despatch
para. 631.

The Civilian and the Service Communities.

The question of the attitude of the civilian population, both European and native, to the impending war, has been a subject of so much controversy that a narrative on the Far East campaigns would be incomplete without a passing reference. Apart from the main issues however, there is no doubt that the relations between the civilian community and the Services were not happy, especially in Singapore, and this may well have had some indirect bearing upon the campaign. The Services felt that the civilians took little notice of them socially; and they objected to the fact that whilst they were paying full income tax on their pay, the civilians complained when they had to meet a small tax of 8%. On the whole the civilians resented the presence of the Services as a disturbing influence on their way of living. The C.-in-C. was of the opinion that there was reluctance on the part of certain sections of the British community to join the Volunteers, and he quotes the expression used locally of men being "successful" in obtaining official exemption from service. Whether or not his opinion was biased, the fact remains that the Colonial Office had certainly endorsed the views of the Governor which were that the rubber and tin industry was of greater importance than the training of local forces. (1) On the other hand the fact that Malaya did not prepare for war may well have been encouraged by the belief that the defences were in good order, and that war was not imminent. Official announcements had the unintentional effect of fostering this sense of false security, and encouraging those who were not anxious to disturb the normal routine of business life. Indeed, this mood of easy optimism, persisted to the opening day of hostilities and is clearly illustrated in the C.-in-C's Order of the Day. (2) In regard to the attitude of the native population there is divergence of opinion; two opposite schools of thought are quoted. Sir Robert Brooke-Popham was convinced that the European population had very little affection for Malaya itself; they had come to the country solely with the object of making money, then settling down elsewhere. Similarly the Chinese, (who formed the largest element of the native population) were there to make money and had no roots in the country. There was difficulty in manning the Chinese companies of the Volunteers, for they had no patriotic motives connected with Malaya itself, on the contrary their incentive was the thought that in a remote way they were helping China to fight Japan. On the part of the British however, little effort was made to establish contact with the leading Chinese citizens. The whole attitude of the Malays themselves was summed up by considering them indifferent to the question of ultimate control of their country. The Indians, mostly Tamils from Southern India, were a law abiding race; manual work offered good wages, and their creed was an early return to India; they had no feelings of patriotism towards the country of their employment. Lord Strabolgi, in the Spring of 1939, visited Malaya, and later, in 1942, wrote an extremely well informed study of the Pacific Campaigns. (3) His views concerning the native population are somewhat different to those of the C.-in-C., for he believed that the Asiatics should have been trained to defend Malaya. He admits that the Malays were easy-going agriculturists, and the Tamils hardly

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- (1) See earlier paragraph on the "Defence Policy Begins to Change".
 - (2) See also in section "Order of the Day" (Chap. III).
 - (3) "Singapore and After" by Lord Strabolgi.

a fighting race, yet there were minorities amongst both peoples who gave fine service. But the Chinese alone could have provided excellent fighting material. From the first day of the war they rendered great service during the air raids and in civil defence, and a small defence force was belatedly recruited. But they had been at variance with the Colonial Government because of the existence of a Communist Party, combined with the fact that the Kuomintang party were also out of favour. And above all it was against every principle of the British Colonial office to raise Asiatic armies in the defence of Malaya lest they should demand political concessions, besides lowering the prestige of the Englishman. (1)

From these expert opinions perhaps some conclusion may be drawn, but if this is done it must be borne in mind that both authorities may have been biased. Sir Robert Brooke-Popham considered the natives' feelings were purely mercenary, yet his views may well have been influenced by his earlier and perhaps happier associations as Governor of Kenya. Lord Strachey's experience of Malaya was not gained in the heat of war; his conception of an Asiatic army was probably more idealistic than that of the C.-in-C., but in any case his opinions are weighed with an overall condemnation of the officials of the Colonial Office in London, whom he blames as being primarily responsible for the Malayan disaster.

A.M. File
S.2563
Enc. 25B d/d
16 September 41.

Brook-Popham
Despatch
paras: 92, 93,
81.
Appendices "E"
and "F".

Army Strength and Requirements

In November 1940 the Army strength in Malaya was 17 Battalions, (2) but in the Commanders Tactical Appreciation of October 1940 an estimate of the total land forces required in Malaya, based on the figure of an Air Force of 566 I.E. aircraft, was 26 Infantry Battalions (3 for Borneo), 5 Field Regiments R.E., and 3 Light Tank Companies. The C.-in-C. had forecasted that by December 1941 the strength of the R.A.F., including Burma, would be 186 I.E. aircraft. General Percival on his arrival thoroughly investigated the question of the strength of the Army, and he based his new estimate on that of the R.A.F. But whilst in December 1941 the establishment of the R.A.F. (211 I.E. aircraft) (3) slightly exceeded the C.-in-C's forecast, the Army strength fell far short of the figure required to compensate for the deficiency in aircraft, which had been accepted by the Chiefs of Staff. In fact the main deficiencies were; 17 Battalions, 4 Light A.A. Regiments and 2 Tank Regiments. (4)

A.H.B. File
II J50/19/4
"Malaya - Land
Forces".
Encs. d/d
14 August 41
18 October 41.
24 October 41.

The complete absence of tanks and the scarcity of armoured cars was a handicap to the probable land operations. In August 40 tanks were offered from the Middle East on the condition they were employed in an operational role. A delay occurred whilst the method of training the crews was being considered, and during that time the offer was withdrawn. A few armoured cars of Dutch design were made in Singapore, but quantity was restricted by the lack of boiler plate. A total of 84 armoured cars were shipped from South Africa; some /arrived

- (1) These opinions are endorsed by the Managing-Editor of the Malaya Tribune Group of Newspapers - E.M. Glover. He lived in Malaya from 1927 onwards and was a consistent champion of the Asiatics. His views may be read in "IN 70 DAYS".
- (2) British Battalions : 6 (including 1 M.G. Battalion)
Indian " : 10
Malay " : 1
17
- (3) Mountain Regiment R.A. 1
- (3) See Appendix "B".
- (4) See Appendix "C" for comparative figures.

arrived a few days before war broke out and the drivers had not become accustomed to them before they left to go to the front.

Plans for Allied Reinforcements

Maltby Despatch
paras. 32 to 38.

The number of United States aircraft which might be expected to reinforce Malaya should the Philippines be evacuated was, of course, indefinite. So reconnaissance was carried out and dispersed moorings planned for 20 Catalinas of the U.S. Naval Air Service, as well as the preparation of a maintenance plan. In September 1941 it was directed by the C.-in-C. that 4 bases in Malaya and 2 in Burma were to be prepared for the accommodation of B.17's of the U.S. Army Air Corps. Extensions of the runways were put in hand, but only that of Gong Kedah was completed. Plans were made to receive the Dutch reinforcements of three Bomber Squadrons (27 Glen Martins) at Sembawang and one Fighter Squadron (9 Buffaloes) at Kallang. The Dutch Squadron and Flight Commanders visited these stations, toured Malaya and were given a short course on R.A.F. operational methods. Stocks of Dutch bombs were laid down. The Dutch Naval Air Service had been allotted responsibility for the area Kuantan - Great Natunas - Kuching (British Borneo) in the initial seaward reconnaissance plan. This was to the immediate south of the R.A.F. area, and to execute this plan 3 Catalinas were to be based at Seletar. Moorings and stocks of petrol were put down both at the latter station and Kuantan. Liaison officers of the R.A.F. and Dutch Army Air Service were interchanged and attached to the Air Headquarters in Singapore and Java.

A.H.B. File
II J50/39/16
"Org. &
Requirements -
G.C. Darvall"
Enc. d/d
August 41.

A.M. File
S.2563
Encs. 26a d/d
16 September 41.
Brooke-Popham
Despatch
para. 16.
Maltby Despatch
para. 51.

Factors Affecting the Defence of British Borneo.

Without command of the sea it was impossible to defend Borneo as a whole, and the Governor was informed accordingly in order that he could use volunteers and police for internal security. There was no attempt to defend Labuan, the cable and wireless station; but it was decided to hold Kuching where there was an airfield which, though not large enough for bomber aircraft, had extensions in hand; there were also flying boat moorings in the nearby river. Enemy occupation of Kuching might also give access to airfields in Dutch Borneo on the North-west of the island, an area which was only 350 miles from Singapore - much nearer than South Indo-China. The oilfields at Miri and Seria supplied crude oil to the refineries at Lutong in Sarawak. Although one company of the 2nd/15th Punjabis (less one platoon at Kuching who had gone there in May 1941) had been moved to Lutong in December 1940 and 2 x 6 inch guns had been mounted there, it was finally decided not to defend the refinery or the two oilfields. In consequence a partial denial scheme was carried out before the start of hostilities, thereby reducing the output of oil by 70%; and only a small number of items were left to complete the denial scheme when war broke out. (1)

Political Activities in Siam and French Indo-China.

A.M. File,
S.3915 Part I
Enc. 71B, d/d
7 August 40.

The attitude of Siam in connection with Far East strategy had been recognized at the Anglo-French Conference of June 1939; in fact the French had been particularly suspicious, and had urged the necessity of being able to threaten the country should pro-Japanese sympathies be demonstrated. (2) Later, in July 1940, an exchange of letters between the A.O.C. Far East

/(A.V.M. Babington)

- (1) See paragraph: "The Oilfields in Borneo" for details of the Demolition Scheme.
- (2) See also in section "The Anglo-French Naval, Military and Air Force Conference".

(A.V.M. Babington) and the British Minister in Bangkok (Sir Josiah Crosby) clearly reveals the state of affairs in Siam. The A.O.C. was prompted to open the subject because it was then recognized that Siam was likely to become a stepping-stone for the invasion of Malaya. He was eager to promote an arrangement whereby he might have early warning of the arrival of the Japanese off the coast of South Siam; his suggestion was, that at the first sign of a threat, the Siamese Government should appeal to the British. In his reply, the British Minister not only gave little re-assurance, but summed up the whole attitude of the Siamese. Although they respected our honesty and good intentions, they inclined to the side of the Japanese through fear. They appreciated the power of Japan, and at the same time had not faith in the power of the British to assist them, for with a war in Europe and the inability, even in pre-war years, to keep a Fleet in the Far East, our military prestige had fallen very low. Until the Far East was adequately garrisoned the Siamese would not side openly with the British Empire; and in the meanwhile the most that could be expected was a strict and impartial neutrality which they were not likely to defend against the Japanese, but which they were only too likely to defend by force against the British. On the other hand, Sir Josiah was confident that genuine goodwill existed towards us on the part of the Siamese Government, and by tactful handling not only their neutral attitude might be maintained, but they would not publicly go over to the side of Japan.

Brooke-Popham
Despatch
para. 79.
A.M. File
S. 3915 Part III
Enc. 144B
d/d 28 March 41.

Towards the end of 1940, Siamese ministers had stimulated their country to demand the return of certain areas which, some years before, had been taken by the French. A mild form of hostilities broke out, and after an unsuccessful attempt at reconciliation by the Governor of Malaya, C.-in-C. China and C.-in-C. Far East, the Japanese were recognized as mediators, and thus scored a diplomatic success. The Siamese, whilst not fully realizing their ambitions, gained much and were highly satisfied, although they were placed under an obligation to the Japanese. As mediator and guarantor, Japan was then able to consider keeping military and naval forces in both Indo-China and Siam. Undertakings were made by France and Siam, that they would not enter into any political, economic or military co-operation against Japan. The immediate danger in Siam was that Japan would exact an economic price in tin and rubber, of which a proportion would go to Germany. In order to prevent the Siamese falling completely under Japanese domination our only action - since a show of military and naval strength was impracticable would be to offer some economic and financial assistance on suitable conditions; to this end the co-operation of the United States was of the greatest importance. It so happened at this time that the British Minister at Bangkok represented the urgent requests of the Siamese Prime Minister for a loan and a supply of oil and armaments; without such equipment there was little they could do but comply with Japanese demands. But their requests for help could not be met: Britain was short of arms and the United States was already committed to a re-armament programme as well as supplying the democracies. The question of a loan, involved the co-operation of the U.S.A.; whilst the oil position was complicated by a dispute between British and American oil companies. Furthermore the Siamese Prime Minister did not react favourably to the stipulation that such economic aid would require in return an assurance to us similar to that given to Japan over the conclusion of agreements aimed against that country.

Ibid
Enc. 143B
d/d 25 Nov. 41.

Brooke-Popham
Despatch
paras. 77, 78,
80.

Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, before his arrival in the Far East was warned, (and the information subsequently proved correct) of the attitude of the French officials in Indo-China

/who

who were definitely pro-Vichy. At the time the Japanese had troops in Tongking in North Indo-China; this was not a direct threat to Burma or Malaya, and it was believed that the original purpose for the despatch of these troops was to extricate their forces in Kwangsi, who were malaria-ridden and in a difficult position. Then came the Siamese-French dispute, and as already recounted, the Japanese mediators were in a very favourable position. An economic agreement between the Vichy French and the British had been concluded but despite this, (and as was expected by the British Foreign Office) an agreement between them and the Japanese was announced in July 1941. By this the Japanese were allowed to maintain forces in Southern Indo-China. At the end of the month the Japanese were well established in Saigon, and this gave them full control of Camranh Harbour. They quickly started to make airfields to the south and west of Saigon; the limitations of the agreement were soon exceeded, and the French made practically no effort to oppose either the original terms or the successive encroachments.

Air Ministry
File S. 3915,
Part III Enc.
114B d/d
28 Mar. 41.

A.H.B. File 4093
II J50/39/6
"Far East Policy"
Enc. d/d
26 Sept. 41.

Events Preceding the Outbreak of War in the Far East.

Brooke-Popham
Despatch
para. 61.

Towards the end of September 1941 several Far East authorities were in Singapore; these were: Sir Earle Page from Australia, the British Ambassador in Chungking, Sir A. Clark Kerr, and the British Minister from Bangkok, Sir J. Crosby. The opportunity was taken for a combined meeting between them and Mr. Duff Cooper and the Governor of Malaya in order that the two Commanders in Chief might discuss with them the situation in the Far East. It was generally agreed that Japan's principle asset in the Far East was her foothold in Indo-China from which an attack on Malaya might be launched, although at the same time it was thought that Japan wished to avoid war in the South for the next few months, in which case pressure might be brought for her to withdraw from Indo-China. The propoganda value of one or two battleships at Singapore was stressed, for without such protection Japan could strike at the time most favourable to her.

A.H.B. File
II J50/18/1
"Defence Policy"
Enc. d/d
22 Nov. 41.

As late as 19 November 41 the Chiefs of Staff began to reconsider the system of unified command in the Far East, and enquired of the C.-in-C. Far East whether the command might be replaced by a system of joint command by the three Commanders. Sir Robert Brooke-Popham not unnaturally replied that in his opinion, (endorsed by his subordinate Commanders) the C.-in-C. should remain an airman.

Maltby Despatch
Paras. 126, 127,
128.

At the outset of his command in the Far East Sir Robert Brooke-Popham had considered the feasibility of occupying the Siam part of the Tenasserim Isthmus as a counter to Japanese penetration. (1) In July 1941, after the Japanese occupation of French Indo-China the project became even more significant, and under G.H.Q. directions, the G.O.C. held an Army Conference attended by an A.H.Q. representative, to consider a plan for an advance into the Singora - Patani area of South-East Siam. A.H.Q. favoured a raid to destroy the airfield facilities in this locality which were being developed by the Siamese to meet the requirements of Japanese fighter aircraft, but the conference finally adopted the plan of seizing and holding the area in an Operation to be known as "Matador".

A.H.B. File
II J53/2 "Opera-
tion Matador"
Encs. d/d
7 August 41.
20 Aug. 41.

A signal to the War Office reveals how G.H.Q. were in favour of such an operation. Singora was considered as the only port of any consequence of the East coast of Siam, and

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(1) See also in Section "Appointment of a Commander in Chief".

through it could be built up and maintained an enemy force of 3 or 4 Divisions; it also offered the easiest way of establishing a shore-based air threat to Malaya. The scale of attack expected against our forces, (when established in the Singora area) was one Division from Bangkok, largely dependent on a single track railway exposed to air attack, together with a seaborne force of up to 2 Divisions anywhere Northward of Kota Bahru, supported by naval and air forces. To meet these attacks a force of 3 Brigade Groups was required, supported by 4 G.R./Bomber squadrons and 2 fighter squadrons. By assuming the Dutch would honour the A.D.B. Agreement in sending air reinforcements, the 6 R.A.F. squadrons would be released for the Operation, but the full land forces could not at the time be found, the main deficiency being 2 Brigade Groups. The first Brigade Group would become available in mid-September on arrival from India, whilst the second could only be provided by using the Command Reserve. It was considered that the North-east Monsoon would make enemy landings difficult from October onwards.

Again, on 20 August the C.-in-C. re-affirms his need for a strong force for "Matador". He anticipated the enemy plan for the capture of Singapore as one which would involve the establishment of landing grounds progressively nearer the "fortress". Long-range fighters operating from French Indo-China could support an attack on Southern Thailand from where most of Malaya would become liable to air attack; the capture of airfields in Kedah and Kelantan would then follow whilst East Coast landing grounds would be objective for sea-borne expeditions. Our inability to attack shipping both by naval and air forces was deplorably weak, and without reserves for the inadequate air striking force, the air effort would soon diminish and the enemy's chance of landing increase. Because long stretches of beach could not be properly defended, inland fighting was certain to occur with little air support. Lack of communications would preclude a defence based on the rapid movement of central reserves, but such a factor would not apply to an enemy initially intent upon gaining control of airfields in the North and East. The C.-in-C. therefore supported the G.O.C.'s wish to strengthen the East Coast garrisons and provide a strong force for "Matador"; in addition he urged as a paramount necessity, the need for more air power to strike at shipping.

Ibid.
Encs. 19 Aug. 41
28 Aug. 41.

Ibid.
Enc. d/d
2 September 41.

The Chiefs of Staff then drew up an Appreciation in which alternative and more far-reaching advances into Thailand were proposed, but the C.-in-C. preferred his original plan mainly because a more ambitious advance would strain his lines of communication. Thereafter followed reconnaissances in the Singora area itself by staff officers in plain clothes whose subsequent reports emphasized the great differences existing between defence problems in the wet and dry seasons. During the latter the terrain was suitable for armoured fighting vehicles, and the rivers provided poor anti-tank obstacles, but the reverse held during the wet period. It was therefore estimated that 4 Brigade Groups, fully equipped with artillery and anti-tank weapons would be required in the dry season, but only 3 Brigade Groups were needed during the wet period. Therefore "Matador" should not be undertaken before 1st October, i.e. one month prior to the normal breaking of the North-east Monsoon, because the enemy would require at least one month to make preparations for a counter move against our occupation of Singora. In consequence they could not then launch a major offensive with A.F.V.s until the dry season in March. But in any case the C.-in-C. thought a Japanese move against Siam was unlikely in the near future.

/The

Ibid
Encs. d/d
17 September 41
21 September 41.

The Chiefs of Staff, in replying to the C.-in-C's requests for additional forces and the need for "Matador", defined their policy as one still aiming to avoid war with Japan, consequently there was no intention of operating in Siam before its violation by the Japanese. Therefore although they agreed their project of a far reaching advance into Siam was impracticable, an advance even into Singora could not be sanctioned in advance. To their query as to the minimum period of warning required by G.H.Q. to implement "Matador" the C.-in-C. gave the answer of 36 hours after receipt of the order.

Brooke-Popham.
Despatch
paras 95, 97.

A.H.B. File
II J50/39/10
"Malaya Defence"
Enc. d/d
21 August 41,
and written
comments by
C-in-C.

The C.-in-C. was well aware of the danger of the Japanese movement southwards in Indo-China, but he found it difficult to judge whether such action signified plans for an offensive against Malaya, whether it was merely a strategic move as a potential asset for future negotiation or if it was the final move before occupying Siam. He was fairly well informed about the construction of new airfields, but his particular concern was over the movements of long-range bombers or fighters which would give a definite indication of future enemy plans. Yet despite these preparations going on in Indo-China, he was of the opinion, (at least to the end of November) that the Japanese did not contemplate immediate hostilities. Such beliefs were based upon several factors: had the Japanese intended to have attacked Malaya they would have been more likely to have done so in 1940 when our forces were much weaker; the North-east monsoon of December to February was a natural hazard to an expedition aimed against the East Coast, and finally the visit of Kurusu to negotiate in Washington convinced him that Japan was not bent upon war for the time being.

A.H.B. File
II J50/32
"Far East
Emergency"
Enc. d/d
28 November 41.

In the latter part of November, however, there was every indication of an early Japanese offensive. Naval units moved into the South China Sea, and even more significantly the long-range Zero fighters arrived in South Indo-China to swell the growing total of aircraft in that area. Finally a telegram was received from the War Office to the effect that American Army Commanders in the Pacific had been warned that the Japanese negotiations had reached a stage when their final breakdown or offensive action by the Japanese against Thailand, N.E.I. or Phillipines might be expected at any time. Until the receipt of this signal, G.H.Q. had not been informed on this matter.

IIM/A19/3A
A.H.B. "O.R.B.
Appendices
A.H.H.Q.F.E.
1941" Appendix
"D" d/d
22 November 41
and A.H.B. File
II J50/32
"Far East Emer-
gency". Enc. d/d.
1 December 41.

Enemy aircraft were seen flying over Northern Malay at high altitudes and in an endeavour to stop such reconnaissance and also to obtain positive evidence of their identity, a detachment of 3 Buffaloes of 243 Squadron was specially sent to Alor Star. (1) Faced with these ever increasing signs of the Japanese intentions the C.-in-C. realized that war was fast approaching. On the 22 November 41 orders were given for vulnerable points to be guarded, and certain R.A.F. units moved to their battle stations. (2)

Such was the position in the Far East. The Japanese were marshalling their forces in Indo-China - shortly they were to strike simultaneously against the U.S.A. and the Allies with all the added weight and advantage of the aggressor. The British were predestined to a defensive role within their own frontiers, for political considerations at home had curbed the plans to forestall the enemy at Singora. And even these defences were inadequate; the strength envisaged by the Chiefs

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- (1) On 27 November 1941 an aerial photographic plate painted with Japanese characters fell from an aircraft over Selangora, which left little doubt as to the identity of the aircraft.
- (2) See also in Section "The Last Weeks of Peace" (Chap. III).

of Staff little over a year previously had not fully materialized. It is true the land forces slightly exceeded the original C.O.S. estimate, yet they fell far short of the figure which later had been agreed was the requirement to compensate for the deficiency in aircraft. Instead of the 22 squadrons there were only 12 in Malaya and 2 in Burma. The bomber squadrons still flew their Blenheims and no Beauforts had replaced the main striking force - the antiquated Vildebeestes. The formation of fighter squadrons in Malaya had been an achievement but even then the force left much to be desired, both in aircraft performance and the inexperience of the majority of the pilots. Rapid progress had undoubtedly been made in the construction of airfields throughout Malaya; but they had been laid down on the assumption the target figure of air strength would be attained. In the end many remained empty and those which could be manned were inadequately protected by fighter cover or A.A. defences, whilst the absence of a proper warning system exposed them to surprise attack. In this manner the Royal Air Force were to receive the enemy.

For twenty years the defences of Singapore, surmounting the conflict of differing policies, and by enormous expenditure in wealth and effort, had been built up to what was thought to be an impregnable Naval Base. But the progress of modern warfare had out-moded the static defence. There were no capital ships within the Base; the fixed guns and the garrison waited whilst the land and air forces stretched forward to the Northern frontier to meet an enemy ready and well prepared to grasp the prize which had hung so long within its reach.

Summary: Events of 1941.

In late 1940, Staff Conversations, initiated by the Dutch, took place at Singapore between British and Dutch Commanders. No commitments were made, but the principles of collaboration, mainly by the redistribution of air forces, were agreed upon. This was followed by the "A.D.A." Agreement of February 1941, attended at Singapore by British, Dutch and Australian representatives; the movements of the air forces were confirmed, and in addition Australia was prepared to help by the despatch of Army and Air Units. No co-ordinated military plan was evolved, however, but this was rectified at the next Conference in April - the "A.D.B.", to which, in addition to the previous authorities, the U.S.A. sent representatives. No political commitments were undertaken, and although it was agreed that the initial policy must of necessity be defensive, the ultimate offensive was discussed. The principles of Anglo-Dutch air co-operation were reaffirmed, together with an air reinforcement plan if the Philippines were evacuated.

These plans, together with the Chiefs of Staff Appreciation were the basis for R.A.F. expansion in the Far East. In March, Air Headquarters F.E. established No. 221 Group in Burma, No. 224 Group (cadre) for air operations in Singapore, and No. 222 Group (cadre) to control flying boat operations from Ceylon. A.H.Q. itself suffered from the lack of decentralisation which was aggravated when the expansion, with its increased establishments, required the enrolment of inexperienced officers. Until July, the Squadrons were unaware of their operational role; training was put in hand, night flying arrangements co-ordinated and Operations Rooms opened. New airfields had to be built, and their locations were influenced both by the geographical features of the peninsula and the need for strategical concentration; two-thirds of the anticipated 26 land-based squadrons would have to be concentrated in either north or south Malaya. Work had to be put in hand on the assumption of the C.O.S. estimate of 336 aircraft being

/implemented.

implemented. A number of the existing airfields had been badly sited owing to the long-standing divergence in views of the A.O.C. and G.O.C., but full co-operation was achieved when they were replaced in April/May. New construction was delayed by negotiations with local government authorities, labour shortage, lack of materials and the natural obstacles of the terrain itself. Many of the earlier airfields had no camouflage or the proper dispersal lay-out. Air-field defence was an Army responsibility and generally there were insufficient troops to give adequate protection. Anti-aircraft defences were also lacking - some airfields had no guns at all; ground defence also suffered from a shortage of weapons.

The organisation of the Observer Corps, originally the responsibility of the G.O.C. was eventually taken over by A.H.Q., but there was little time in which to train personnel or establish Posts. Twenty Radar stations were to have been installed throughout Malaya, but only 6 were operational when war started. W/T. equipment was scarce, whilst the teleprinter and telephone lines to the mainland were quite inadequate; control of fighter aircraft was limited by the absence of V.H.F.

The air strength at the beginning of the year was only 88 I.E. aircraft. The two Vildebeeste squadrons were highly efficient, but their aircraft were obsolete; the promised re-arming with Beauforts was not to materialize. The Singapores of No. 205 Squadron were replaced by Catalinas, but the establishment of trained flying personnel was not increased. Apart from the attachment of No. 60 Squadron from Burma in the opening phases of hostilities, the bomber strength comprising Nos. 62, 34, 1 and 8 Squadrons remained unaltered despite the C-in-C's plea for long-range bombers. Lack of aircraft spares restricted flying training, whilst the necessary withdrawals of Blenheim pilots, (to form the new fighter squadrons), and the trained Hudson crews to Australia, detracted from the efficiency of the bomber force. In February, Buffalo aircraft started to arrive and Nos. 67 and 243 Fighter Squadrons were formed. When trained, No. 67 Squadron was transferred to Burma. Two more Squadrons - Nos. 453 and 488 - were formed in October, but unlike the earlier squadrons manned by seasoned pilots, their personnel were drawn from inexperienced Australian and New Zealand pilots, not long out of the Flying Training Schools. No. 21 Squadron, originally armed with Wirraway aircraft, was re-equipped with the remainder of the 167 Buffalos which had arrived in Singapore. In addition to these four fighter units stationed in Malaya, No. 27 Squadron arrived from India with obsolescent night fighter Blenheim I's. Apart from the general inexperience of the fighter pilots, the Buffalo aircraft was in itself disappointing, with a poor rate of climb and unsatisfactory armament. Wastage in training was very high. Transport aircraft were sorely needed, and this requirement could only be partly met by the limited resources of the M.V.A.F. A P.R.U. had to be formed from local resources in a similar manner to the O.T.U. at Kluang. Armament training was restricted by the lack of ranges, and the Training Camp at Kuantan was able to train only one squadron before war intervened. Although the C.-in-C. anticipated a strength of only 186 I.E. aircraft by December, the C.O.S. could send no further units owing to the prior claims of other theatres, combined with the disappointing aircraft output. The final establishment achieved in the Far East was 211 I.E. aircraft, to which might be added the 31 Dutch re-inforcements.

Most classes of equipment were in short supply, and especially aircraft, M.T. and tools. There was an insufficiency of small arms and ammunition, but petrol and bomb stocks were adequate.

Co-operation with G.H.Q. was maintained at the Combined Operations Room, but only a liaison staff of naval officers were on this staff; a better arrangement existed in the Combined Operations Room at Colombo however. For Army air support in the north a nucleus H.Q. was formed at Kuala Lumpur and designated "Norgroup". Army co-operation had not been highly developed even with the help of No. 21 Squadron, and later, with the increase in A.A. equipments, there were insufficient aircraft to exercise fully the anti-aircraft defences.

To implement the Anglo-Dutch Agreements the Dutch provided two airfields in Dutch Borneo, but only one was ready for use by December. Airfields in Northern Sumatra were developed as advanced landing grounds, both for operations and as an alternative reinforcement route. Bases were opened in the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal with particular reference to Ceylon for naval/air operations.

General Headquarters Far East had started on 18th November 1940; its siting had to be a compromise, and after the first H.Q. in Singapore Town, it ultimately moved to the Naval Base. The staff of G.H.Q. was small and the commanders exercised control in their own areas. Relations between C-in-C. F.E. and C.-in-C. China Station were cordial and the division of responsibility was mutually agreed upon. Similarly there was close accord between G.H.Q. and A.H.Q., but there was a tendency for G.H.Q. to diminish the initiative of the A.O.C. Intelligence was supplied by the F.E.C.B., who were inclined to concentrate upon naval matters to the exclusion of the other Services. A.H.Q. were by no means satisfied with these existing arrangements and urged an organisation of their own. It would seem that the F.E.C.B. were lacking in overall efficiency. One of the primary decisions of the C-in-C. concerned the principle of the land defences: he had to direct that first-line defence would be on the beaches and not upon inland positions. Amongst other problems confronting the C.-in-C. were food rationing, (which was not introduced); water supply from the reservoirs; air raid precautions, (black-out problems were aggravated by the heat and deep shelters impracticable); and a Denial Scheme which was not to embrace a "scorched earth" policy. Relations between the Services and the civilian population were not ideal - of this the C.-in-C. could form an authoritative judgement; but the general attitude of all classes of civilians towards the impending war raises many diverse opinions.

The Commanders Tactical Appreciation had based the land forces estimate of 26 battalions upon the complementary strength of 566 aircraft. The new G.O.C., upon assuming command reviewed the Army requirements and estimated the need for 48 battalions to compensate for the expected deficiencies of the R.A.F.; the final strength reached was only 31 battalions and in addition there was a marked scarcity of armoured vehicles.

Plans were made by G.H.Q. for the reception of Allied re-inforcements; numbers expected from the Philippines, (in the event of evacuation) were indefinite, but more detailed arrangements could be made for the four Dutch squadrons. Liaison visits were exchanged, and a reconnaissance area was defined.

It was considered impossible to defend Borneo in its entirety, but it was decided to hold Kuching. The oil refinery at Lutong and the oilfields at Miri and Serio were not to be defended, and instead a partial Denial Scheme was carried out before the outbreak of hostilities.

The British Minister in Siam considered that the country would incline towards Japan through fear and because of British military weaknesses; he could only hope for their neutrality.

In late 1940 mild hostilities had broken out between the Siamese and the French in Indo-China. The British made unsuccessful attempts at reconciliation, after which the Japanese stepped in as mediators, thereby placing both nations under an obligation. French officials in Indo-China were pro-Vichy, and in July 1941, it was agreed the Japanese should maintain forces in Southern Indo-China, which concession they soon fully exploited by the control of harbours and the construction of airfields. When the Japanese began to move into Indo-China, the C.-in-C. urged a plan for the occupation of the Patani-Singora area of Siam as a measure to forestall further encroachments by the Japanese. The port was the only one large enough to admit an invading army, in addition to which the area could accommodate a shore-based aid threat to Malaya. In August the land forces available to mount such an operation ("Matador") were insufficient, and the C.-in-C. stressed the need for the necessary re-inforcements; he also recommended that the occupation should not take place before October, after which the enemy would be prevented by the North-East Monsoon in making a counter-move until the following March. But the Government policy was to avoid any action which might provoke war with Japan, consequently the C.O.S. would not authorise any move into Siam before its violation by the Japanese.

The C.-in-C. found it difficult to assess properly the intentions of the Japanese, and until November he was of the opinion that hostilities were not imminent. But in late November events combined to show that an attack was soon to be expected. Naval and air units were moving in South Indo-China; Japanese reconnaissance aircraft flew over Malaya, and indirect yet definite warning was received from America. In consequence the Armed Forces were put at a state of readiness on 22nd November, 1941.

APPENDIX "A"

(NARRATIVE - "FAR EAST CAMPAIGNS, 1941 - 42")

R.A.F. Station Situation in Malaya, at 0001 hours 8th December, 1941

References:- Brooke-Popham Despatch, Appendix "L", Maltby Despatch, Appendices "A", "C".
Air Ministry File S.3915, Part III, Enc. 76a.
D.S.D. (M.R.S. 2168: Enc. 1a dated 8th January, 1946 - "Report by A.M.W.D."
and D.S.D. (M.R.S.) 2028, Enc. 10a - "Armament"

1	2	3	4	5	6
Location	(a) Peace or (b) Concentra- tion scales of accommodation	State of accommodation	Runways	Defences	Disposition of R.A.F. Units.
Alor Star (N.W. Malaya)	(a) 1, B. Sqdn. (one-time civil airfield).	1 squadron	Hard 1400 yds	Pens 4 x 3" A/A guns. 1 Coy infantry (Bahawalpur)	No. 62 (B) Squadron
Butterworth (N.W. Malaya)	(a) 1 G.R. Sqdn	Hutted 2 squadrons occupied	Hard; 1 of 1600 yds being extended to 2000 yds. 2nd in hand.	Pens incomplete No A/A until 10 December 41, then 8 Botors 1 Btn infantry less 2 Coys (Bahawalpur)	Care and Maintenance party.
Jabi (N.W. Malaya)	(b) 1, B. Sqdn. Satellite for Alor Star	1 Squadron only - just commenced	Hard 1400 yds Graded but not surfaced	NIL	Vacant
Kuala Ketil (N.W. Malaya)	Satellite for Sungei Patani	Guard Room P.O.L. Bomb Store	Tarmac 1400 yds.	1 Coy infantry (Bahawalpur)	Vacant
Lubok Kiap (N.W. Malaya)	(a) 1, B. sqdn	Hutted - 2 squadrons nearing com- pletion. Partly occu- pied.	Hard 1 - 1600 yds 1 - 1200 yds Partly graded	NIL	Vacant
Malakoff (N.W. Malaya)	Satellite for Lubok Kiap	No buildings completed	1600 yds grading not complete.	NIL	Vacant
Penang (N.W. Malaya)	Civil Airfield	NIL	Limited grass airfield	NIL	Vacant
Sungei Bakap (N.W. Malaya)	Satellite for Butterworth	No buildings completed	2000 yds (1400 yds soled but not surfaced)	NIL	Vacant
Sungei Patani (N.W. Malaya)	(a) 2, F Sqdn.	Hutted. 2 squadrons Partly occupied	Grass 1 - 1400 yds 1 - 2000 yds	Pens not quite finished 7 x 3.7 A/A guns. Btn H.Q. & 1 Coy Indian State Troops	No. 21 (F) Sqdn. (R.A.A.F.) and No. 27 (NF) Sqdn.

/Gong Kedah

1	2	3	4	5	6
Location	(a) Peace or (b) Concentration scales of accommodation.	State of Accommodation	Runways	Defences	Disposition of R.A.F. Units
Gong Kedah (N.E. Malaya)	(b) 1, B. Sqdn.	Hutted. 1 Squadron Ready and partly occu- pied.	Hard. 1 - 2000 yds	Pens, nearly 100%. 2 x 3" A/A guns. 1 Pltn Mysore infantry.	No. 36 (T.B.) Squadron detachment
Kota Bahru (N.E. Malaya)	(a) 1, B sqdn. (one time civil airfield)	Hutted. 2 squadrons Being extended	Grass. 1 - 1600 yds Being extended	Pens, nearly 100%. 4 x 3" A/A guns 1 Btn infan- try (less 1 Coy)	No. 1 (G.R.) Sqdn (R.A.A.F.) and No. 243 (F) Sqdn detachment
Machang (N.E. Malaya)	(b) 1, F. Sqdn	Hutted; 2 squadrons partly completed.	Hard; 1 - 1600 yds 1 - 1200 yds in hand	Pens just started. No A/A guns. 2 Coys Mysore infantry.	Vacant
Kuantan (East Malaya)	(b) 1, B. sqdn 1. G.R. sqdn.	Hutted; 2 squadrons complete.	Grass 1 - 1500 yds 1 - 1200 yds	Pens in hand No A/A guns 3 Coys 5th Sikhs	No. 60 (B) Sqdn No. 8 (G.R.) Sqdn (R.A.A.F.)
Ipoh (Central Malaya)	(b) 2, B. sqdns.	Hutted; 2 squadrons. nearly compl- eted; partly occupied	Grass plus tarmac 1 - 1400 yds	No pens or A/A guns 1 Coy Indian State Troops. 1 M.G. platoon	Vacant
Sitiawan (Central Malaya)	Civil airfield	Guard Room only	Grass 1 - 1000 yds 1 - 800 yds	No pens or A/A guns 1 Coy (less 1 pltn) Indian State Troops.	Vacant
Taiping (Central Malaya)	Satellite for Ipoh	Requisitioned cottages; hutments in hand.	Grass plus tarmac 1 - 1400 yds	Pens. No A/A guns 1 Coy and 1 M.G. pltn Indian State Troops.	Vacant
Batu/Pahat (South Malaya)	Civil airfield Satellite for Kluang	P.O.L. Stores only	Grass 1 - 1400 yds	No pens No A/A guns 1 Pltn A.I.F. infantry.	Vacant.

/Bekok (Labis)

1	2	3	4	5	6
Location	(a) Peace or (b) Concentration Scales of Accommodation.	State of Accommodation	Runways	Defences	Disposition of R.A.F. Units
Bekok (Labis) (South Malaya)	(a) 1 sqdn.	Nil	2000 yds and 1400 yds, but surveyed only.	Nil	Vacant
Kuala Lumpur (South Malaya)	Civil Airfield	Completed, and occupied by 153 M.U.	Grass 1315 yds	No pens No A/A guns 1 Coy Indian State Troops 1 M.G. Pltn.	Vacant (of operational squadrons)
Kluang (South Malaya)	(a) 2, F. sqdns 1, F. sqdn. (Dutch)	Hutted, 2 sqdns nearing completion, mostly occu- pied by No. 81 R & S.U.	Grass. 1 - 1200 yds 1 - 1600 yds Hard runway commenced.	Pens in hand No A/A guns 1 Btn. (less 1 Coy & 1 Pln and Johore Military Force Details.	Vacant Makeshift O.T.U. disbanded 8 December 41.
Kahang (South Malaya)	(b) 1, G.R. sqdn.	Hutted; 2 squadrons in hand	Grass 1 - 1400 yds 1 - 1300 yds	Pens in hand No A/A guns 1 Coy A.I.F. and Johore Military Force Details.	Vacant
Fort Swettenham (South Malaya)	Civil airfield	Nil	Grass (tarmac in centre) 1 - 1000 yds.	No pens or A/A guns. 1 Coy and 1 M.G. Pltn. Indian State Troops	Vacant
Yong Peng (S. Malaya)	2 squadrons	No work	commenced	-	-
Tabrau (South Malaya)		1 squadron only; 2nd squadron in hand.	Hard; 1 - 1200 yds 1 - 2000 yds in hand.	Pens in hand No A/A guns A.I.F. infantry in vicinity.	Vacant
Kallang (Singapore Island)	Civil Airfield (a) 1, B. sqdn.	2 squadrons	Grass 1 - 1400 yds	Pens No A/A guns but under cover A/A defences of Singapore 1 Coy JIND infantry.	No. 243 (F) Sqdn and No. 448 (F) Sqdn
Selatar (Singapore Island)	(a) 2, T.B. sqdns 1, F.B. sqdn	3 squadrons and M.U.; Dispersed hutted accom- modation partly com- pleted. Occupied by 151 M.U.	Complete Grass. 1 - 1400 yds.	Pens 8 Bofore guns; within defen- ded zone of Naval Base A/A cover 1 Btn (less 1 Coy) Kapurtula infantry.	No. 36 (T.B.) No. 100 (T.B.) squadrons, No. 205 (F.B.) squadron and P.R. Flight.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Location	(a) Peace or (b) Concentration Scales of Accommodation.	State of Accommodation	Runways	Defences	Disposition of R.A.F. Units
Sembawang (Singapore Island)	(a) 2, B. sqdns	2 squadrons F.A.A. adjacent	Grass; 1 - 1380 yds Construction of 2 hard runways deferred.	Pens. No A/A guns but within zone of Naval Base A/A cover 1 Coy Kapurtala infantry	No. 453 (F) squadron
Tengah (Singapore Island)	(a) 3, B. sqdns 2, G.R. sqdns (for Borneo)	2 squadrons	Grass; and 1 - 1400 yds concrete runway.	Pens partly finished. No A/A guns but under extender cover of Island A/A defences. 1 Btn. JIND infantry.	No. 34 (B) Sqdn and No. 4 A.A.C.U.

Note The progress made in building airfields and providing accommodation during the year 1941 might well be assessed by a comparison of the state at December 1940, when there were only 11 airfields; Seletar, Tengah, Kallang, Alor Star, Kota Bahru, Kuantan, Sungai Patani, Kluang, Butterworth, Sembawang and Penang; with total accommodation for 18 squadrons.

Radar Units in Malaya, 8 December 1941

Reference: D.S.D. (M.R.S.) 2019, Enc. 100 dated 15th March, 1946, "Report by Chief Radio Officer"

Location	Unit No.	Type	Degree of Completion
<u>EAST COAST</u>			
Kota Bahru	-	C.O.L.	Not technically complete
Kota Bahru		T.R.U.	Some construction done
Kuantan	-	-	Under construction
Endau	-	-	Under construction
Mersing	243	M.R.U.	Operational
Bukit Chunang	511	C.O.L.	Operational
Ayer Desar	-	T.R.U.	Under Construction
<u>WEST COAST</u>			
Penang	-	-	Three stations; one partly complete
Batu Pahat	-	C.O.L.	Partly completed
Tanjong Kupang	512	C.O.L.	Operational
<u>JOHORE</u>			
Kota Tingi	518	C.O.L.	Operational late December 41.
Bukit Dinding	-	-	Crews on site; not quite complete. Did not function, over-run by enemy.
Sungei Kahang	-	-	Work nearing completion Did not function, over-run by enemy.
<u>SINGAPORE ISLAND</u>			
Seletar		R.I.M.U.	Operational
Tuas (ex Mersing)	243	T.R.U.	Operational 15 January 42.
Tanah Merah Besar	250	M.R.U.	Operational
Serangoon	308	T.R.U.	Operational December 41.
Changi Jail	-	LD/CHL	Operational December 41.

Radar Units in Netherlands East Indies

Location	Unit No.	Type	Degree of Completion
<u>WEST JAVA</u>			
Batavia (East)	-	T.R.U.	Operational February 42.
Batavia (West)	-	T.R.U.	Operational February 42.
Angelor	-	Army G.L.	Operational February 42.
Lebuan	-	Army G.L.	Operational February 42.
Tanara		Army G.L.	Operational February 42.
<u>EAST JAVA</u>			
Modong	-	American G.L.	Operational 22 February 42.
Parmakassen	-	American G.L.	Operational 24 February 42.
Sitoebondo		American G.L.	Operational 24 February 42.