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

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

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

#### FOREWORD

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

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

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

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

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

##### SECTION I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE.

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

The area of Malaya is approximately equal to that of England and Wales excluding the western Welsh counties and the Devon-Cornwall Peninsula. The Island of Singapore corresponds approximately in size and position to the Isle of Wight. The distance from Singapore to the Thai border is much the same as that from the Isle of Wight to the Tweed.

An extensive mountain range forms a backbone to the peninsula separating the western and eastern areas. There are only a few communications between West and East. Apart from this mountain range the country is for the most part low-lying and rather featureless except for a few small hills on Singapore Island.

2. Malaya is thickly covered with vegetation. Where the country has not been brought under cultivation it is covered with jungle. This jungle is of varying types. Some of it is dense and difficult to penetrate while in other parts it consists of heavy timber and, while providing cover from view, is little or no obstacle to the passage of animals or men. Of the cultivated areas the greatest part is planted with rubber. Rubber plantations, while providing good cover from the air, can easily be traversed by men on foot, by animals and in most places by light tracked vehicles. There are also coco-nut and other plantations. Rice is grown in the north of the peninsula, which is generally more open, and also in certain areas on the west coast. In the centre and parts of the north there are rich tin-mining deposits, the working of which has resulted in more open areas. Except for the rice and tin-mining areas visibility is almost everywhere restricted to a hundred yards or even less.

The west coast area is much more developed and more thickly populated than is the east. Through it run the main road and rail communications linking Singapore with the North. There are also a coastal road, a number of lateral roads, especially in the central area, and branch railway lines linking the main line with coastal centres. The east coast railway branches from the main line at Gemas and, running east of the mountain range, strikes the coast in the State of Kelantan in north-east Malaya and then, running parallel to the coast, rejoins the main line at Haad-yai in Thailand. There are very few roads in the east coast area, the only ones of importance being those constructed to connect the ports of Mersing, Endau and Kuantan with the interior and the internal road system of the State of Kelantan. The only land communications between this latter State and the rest of Malaya are a single line railway and a fine-weather coastal track.

On the east coast there are good sandy beaches almost throughout. There are also some good stretches of sandy beach on the west coast, but a great deal of this coast line is covered by mangrove swamps.

Numerous rivers and streams, rising in the mountain range, traverse the coastal areas before reaching the sea. The largest of these is the River Perak in the northern part of the west coast area.

The Island of Penang lies off the west coast of Malaya some 350 miles as the crow flies from Singapore.

To sum up, the country generally tends to restrict the power of artillery and of Armoured Fighting Vehicles. It places a premium on the skill and endurance of infantry. As is true of most types of close country, it favours the attacker.

3. The climate throughout Malaya is humid and enervating, though not unhealthy for normal people. The temperature, which is not excessive, varies little throughout the year. Similarly the rainfall, which comes mostly in tropical storms, is fairly evenly distributed throughout the year. Between April and September the wind blows from the south-west, and between October and March it blows from the north-east. During the latter period rough seas are at times encountered on the east coast.

The efficiency of Europeans who work at high pressure for long periods is liable to be affected unless periodical visits to places where the climate is more invigorating are possible.

Malaya is a country where troops must be hard and acclimatized and where strict hygiene discipline must be observed if heavy casualties from exhaustion and sickness are to be avoided.

## SECTION II.—THE FORM OF GOVERNMENT.

4. The form of government of Malaya was probably more complicated and less suited to war conditions than that of any other part of the British Empire. This resulted in the main from the way in which it had grown up. Broadly, it was divided into three parts, i.e.

(a) The Straits Settlements of Singapore, Malacca and Penang with Province Wellesley. These formed a British Colony and were administered from Singapore by the Governor acting through the Government of the Straits Settlements;

(b) The Federated Malay States of Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang. These States were Malay territory and were governed by their own Sultans assisted by British Residents. They were federated for certain centralized services which were administered by a Federal Government at Kuala Lumpur. The Governor of the Straits Settlements was also High Commissioner for the Federated Malay States.

(c) The Unfederated Malay States of Johore, Trengganu, Kelantan, Kedah and Perlis. These States also were Malay territory, incorporated in the British Empire by separate treaties. They were governed by their own Sultans with each of whom was a British Adviser. The Governor of the Straits Settlements was also High Commissioner for these States, with each of which he communicated direct through a Secretary for the Unfederated Malay States.

In pan-Malayan matters the High Commissioner could not deal with the four Federated States as one entity. He had to consult each, either direct or through the Federal Secretariat. More often than not, he had to deal with ten separate bodies, i.e. the Colony plus the nine States, and sometimes with the Federal Government as well, making eleven. This naturally tended to cause delay when subjects affecting Malaya as a whole were under discussion.

5. The British Government had by various treaties promised to afford protection against external aggression to most, if not all, of these

Malay States. This was a factor which had to be borne in mind in the conduct of the operations. In a country where there was so little national unity, it was natural that the Sultans should be inclined to consider the security of their own territory as of primary importance.

### SECTION III.—THE HIGHER ORGANISATION FOR WAR.

6. Prior to the outbreak of World War II there was a Defence Committee Malaya, modelled on the Committee of Imperial Defence at Home. The Governor was chairman of the Central Committee, while the members were the Heads of the Fighting Services and the leading Civil Officials. The Secretary was at first an officer of the Malaya Command Headquarters. Later joint secretaries were appointed, one military and one civil.

There were a number of sub-committees. The members of these sub-committees were as a rule partly military and partly civil. In some cases, the secretary of the Central Committee acted also as secretary to these sub-committees; in other cases independent secretaries were appointed. A great deal of useful planning work, which was invaluable when war came, was done by these sub-committees.

7. On the outbreak of World War II the Defence Committee Malaya and its sub-committees were dissolved by order of the Governor and High Commissioner. In place of the Defence Committee was set up a War Committee, the chairman and members of which were practically the same as those of the Defence Committee. At a later date, however, some of the leading Unofficials also became members of this War Committee. In 1941 meetings of this Committee were summoned by the Governor and High Commissioner as and when required.

The Sub-Committees of the Defence Committee Malaya were replaced by controllers appointed by the Governor and High Commissioner.

A Secretary for Defence was appointed, responsible direct to the Governor and High Commissioner. Mr. Dawson, who held this appointment at the outbreak of war with Japan, had the confidence and respect of all.

8. Up to November 1940 the three Fighting Services worked independently, the commanders of the Army and Air Force being responsible direct to their own Ministries. The Senior Naval Officer at Singapore was originally responsible only for the sea defences of Singapore Island and for the local defence of the adjoining waters. Later he became, as Rear-Admiral, Malaya, responsible for all the coasts of Malaya. From July 1940 onwards, however, the Naval Commander-in-Chief, China Station, flew his flag on shore at Singapore and assumed responsibility for all the waters off the coasts of Malaya, except that the responsibility for those off Singapore Island was still delegated to the Rear-Admiral.

9. In October 1940 a Commander-in-Chief Far East was appointed, the position being filled by Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham. G.H.Q. Far East opened on the 18th November, 1940.

The C.-in-C. Far East was responsible to the Chiefs of Staff for operational control in Malaya, Burma and Hong Kong, and for the co-ordination of plans for the defence of these territories.

He was informed that the two main principles to guide his actions were (a) It was the Government's policy to avoid war with Japan, (b) Reliance for the defence of the Far East was to be placed on Air Power until the fleet was available. He was further instructed that the G.O.C. Malaya was to continue to correspond with the War Office, on all matters on which he had hitherto dealt with it, to the fullest extent possible consistent with the exercise of his command.

The C.-in-C. Far East had no control over any naval forces nor did he have any administrative responsibility, the various Commands continuing to deal with their respective Ministries in this respect. The C.-in-C. Far East, therefore, had only a small operational staff and no administrative staff.

In conformity with the above instructions, the C.-in-C. Far East on assuming command issued the following instructions to his subordinate commanders:—

" You will correspond direct with Headquarters Far East on questions of policy affecting strategy or operations. On other questions you will repeat to the C.-in-C. Far East such of your communications to the War Office etc. as you judge of sufficient importance."

10. On the 16th May 1941 I assumed the duties of G.O.C. Malaya Command. I had previously served as Chief of Staff Malaya Command (General Staff Officer 1st Grade) in 1936 and 1937. On taking over command I was informed of the general policy and of the instructions of the C.-in-C. Far East as recorded above.

At that time the Air Officer Commanding Far East was Air Vice-Marshal C. W. B. Pulford. He had taken over command only a short time previously.

The Commander-in-Chief China was Vice-Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton. Rear-Admiral Drew was Rear-Admiral Malaya but was shortly afterwards succeeded by Rear-Admiral Spooner.

### SECTION IV—THE LOCATION OF HEADQUARTERS.

11. The location of headquarters of the two Commanders-in-Chief and of the Fighting Services was a problem which received a great amount of attention but which was never satisfactorily settled. Probably there was no satisfactory solution.

In 1936 the headquarters of the Naval Commander were in Singapore City. The Army headquarters were at Fort Canning, also in Singapore City, but those of the Royal Air Force were at Seletar on the north side of the Island. In order to improve co-operation, the then A.O.C. moved his headquarters into Singapore City, but about the same time the Naval headquarters were moved to the Naval Base on the north side of the island, to enable the commander to supervise better the rapid developments which were taking place there.

In order to ensure co-operation in war a bomb-proof battle headquarters was constructed at Fort Canning, where it was intended that the Combined Operations Staff of the three Services should work. This headquarters, however, was already too small by the time it was completed and, although it was occupied during the operations, it was never actually used for the purpose intended.

Shortly before the outbreak of war with Japan a new headquarters for the Royal Air Force was completed at Sime Road, near the Singapore Golf Club in the centre of the island. When war broke out a temporary Army headquarters was under construction on an adjoining site with a Combined Operations Room between the two. Here the Operations and Intelligence Staffs of Headquarters Malaya Command worked during the campaign except for the last few days. The Administrative Staff, partly because the temporary accommodation was not finished, and partly to be in closer touch with the Civil Government, remained at Fort Canning.

The Commander-in-Chief China, after moving to Singapore, established his headquarters at the Naval Base.

12. When the Commander-in-Chief Far East was appointed, the problem of the location of headquarters again came to the front. If his headquarters had been located in the Singapore City area they would have been close to those of the Army and Air Force and of the Civil Government, but would have been separated from those of the Commander-in-Chief China with whom much preliminary planning had to be done. Also the Far East Combined Bureau (Intelligence) which came under the Commander-in-Chief China was located at the Naval Base. The Commander-in-Chief Far East was largely dependent on this bureau for his intelligence. He therefore decided to establish his headquarters at the Naval Base with the intention of moving to the Sime Road area should operations develop in Malaya. This is what actually happened.

13. It will be seen that when hostilities started the headquarters of the Army, the Royal Air Force and the Civil Government were grouped in one area, while those of the two Commanders-in-Chief and of the Rear-Admiral Malaya were grouped in another, some 10 miles or more apart. This was far from an ideal solution, but possibly the best under the circumstances.

This problem of the location of headquarters has been discussed at some length as showing the difficulties of reconciling the requirements of independent Services. Had there been at that time a Supreme Commander with an integrated staff probably many of these difficulties would have disappeared.

#### SECTION V.—HEADQUARTERS MALAYA COMMAND.

14. With the increase in the garrison as the defences developed and relations with Japan became more strained, so there was an increase in the strength of Headquarters Malaya Command. The senior General Staff Officer, who had been a 2nd Grade Staff Officer in 1935, became a Brigadier in 1940. The senior Administrative Staff Officer was a Brigadier i/c. Administration who, as is customary, was responsible to the War Office for control of expenditure on the administrative side. With the expansion of the Command in 1941, the "A" and "Q" Branches were separated, a Deputy Adjutant General being appointed as Head of the "A" Branch, while the Brigadier i/c Administration remained responsible for the "Q" Branch.

15. After the outbreak of war with Germany the filling of vacancies on the staff became more

and more difficult as the supply of trained staff officers in the Far East became exhausted. Regular units serving in Malaya were called upon to supply officers with qualifications for staff work until it became dangerous to weaken them any further, and selected officers were sent for a short course of training at Quetta. The supply of trained staff officers from Home was naturally limited by non-availability and by the difficulties of transportation. At the same time, even before war broke out with Japan, the work at Headquarters Malaya Command was particularly heavy, including as it did war plans and the preparation of a country for war in addition to the training and administration of a rapidly increasing garrison. In addition, the Command was responsible for placing orders to bring up to the approved scale the reserves of all supplies and stores, except as regards weapons and ammunition. In fact, Headquarters Malaya Command combined the functions of a local War Office and those of a Headquarters of a Field Force.

The Staff of Headquarters Malaya Command was a loyal and conscientious body of men who worked long hours under trying conditions.

16. Authority for the raising of new units and for all increases in establishments had to be obtained from the War Office. With the pressure of war-time business it will be appreciated that delays occurred, some of which had serious consequences. An instance of this was the delay in connection with the raising of two additional Labour Companies which, owing to the shortage of labour in Malaya, became desirable in the autumn of 1941. All arrangements had been made for the raising of these companies at Hong Kong, but, as a result of delay in obtaining sanction, the outbreak of hostilities with Japan intervened and the project was rendered void. Their presence in Malaya during the campaign would have been of very great value.

In 1941 sea voyages from the United Kingdom were taking 2-3 months so that there was a long delay in filling staff vacancies from Home even after approval had been given. In consequence, the strength of Headquarters Malaya Command was usually much below establishment. When war with Japan broke out there were less than 70 officers at Headquarters Malaya Command, including the Headquarters of the Services. This is about the war-time establishment of the Headquarters of a Corps. Our resources were thus strained to the limit.

17. It should be realized that the G.O.C. Malaya did not have a free hand in developing the defences of Malaya. In principle, the defences were developed in accordance with a War Office plan which was modified from time to time in accordance with recommendations made by the G.O.C.

By the beginning of 1941 the overall estimated cost of the War Office scheme had amounted to slightly over £5 million, and actual expenditure to 31st March, 1941, was over £4 million. Although originally the defence items were mainly in respect of coast artillery and fixed defences the scheme was later expanded to include services on landward defences. Such expansions of the main scheme had to receive War Office and Treasury approval and though they were submitted as major services, this entailed delay. On the 11th December, 1941, when Malaya became an active theatre of

operations, the War Office gave the G.O.C. Malaya a free hand with regard to such expenditure.

In circumstances such as those which existed after the outbreak of World War II it is recommended that very much wider powers should be delegated to General Officers Commanding in important potential theatres, who would naturally act in consultation with their Financial Advisers.

#### SECTION VI.—THE DEFENCE PLAN.

18. It cannot be too strongly stressed that the object of the defence was the protection of the Naval Base, and later of the Air Bases also, at Singapore.

19. *The Initial Plan of Defence*.—When in 1921 it was decided to build a Naval Base at Singapore, it was considered that the security of that base depended ultimately on the ability of the British Fleet to control sea communications in the approaches to Singapore. This it would doubtless have been able to do as soon as it had been concentrated in the Far East. For success, therefore, the Japanese would have had to depend on a "coup-de-main" attack direct on to the Island of Singapore. At that time the range of military aircraft was limited and it was considered that the only area suitable for the operation of shore-based aircraft against Singapore was a strip of land in the vicinity of Mersing on the East coast of Johore. Further, the long sea voyage from Japanese territory would both have limited the size of the expedition and greatly prejudiced the chances of obtaining surprise. It was against this type of attack that the defences were initially laid out. The problem was one mainly of the defence of Singapore Island and the adjoining waters. For this a comparatively small garrison only was required.

20. *The Influence of Air Power*.—The rapid development of Air Power greatly affected the problem of defence. Singapore became exposed to attack by carrier-borne and shore-based aircraft operating from much greater distances than had previously been considered possible. Similarly our own defence aircraft were able to reconnoitre and strike at the enemy at a much greater distance from our own shores.

In May, 1932, the Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence, after considering the relative merits of the gun and of aircraft for the defence of fortresses, laid down:

(a) Coast defences should be organized on the basis of co-operation between the three Defence Services, the gun retaining its place as the main deterrent against naval attack.

(b) The first stage of the plan of defence for the Naval Base at Singapore, modified in the light of the latest developments in coast artillery, should be proceeded with. . . . The second stage should await a further recommendation by the Committee of Imperial Defence.

(c) The Royal Air Force should continue co-operate in the defence of Singapore with such forces as might from time to time be considered desirable. Such co-operation should extend to all branches of the defence, including A.A. Defence (Fighters) and offensive operations against aircraft carriers, capital ships and other forms of attack by sea, land and air.

In April, 1933, as a result of Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations, the Cabinet decided that immediate steps should be taken to increase the defences of Singapore.

As a result of these decisions the question of the location of aerodromes arose. At that time the only Royal Air Force aerodrome was at Seletar on Singapore Island. The construction of two further aerodromes on Singapore Island was immediately taken in hand. Further, in order to obtain the greatest possible value from the range of aircraft, it was urged that new aerodromes should be constructed on the east coast, an area which it had up till then been the policy to leave as undeveloped as possible, consistent with civil requirements, so as to present the enemy with difficult transportation problems should he land on that coast. It was obvious from the start that these aerodromes, if constructed on the east coast, would present the Army with fresh commitments for their defence—commitments which the existing garrison would be quite unable to meet. The danger of constructing aerodromes in an area where the defence forces might not be strong enough to prevent them falling into the hands of the enemy was also obvious. The Army urged that the policy of the development of air facilities on the east coast, with all the military difficulties which it involved, should only be accepted if a guarantee could be given that, in the event of an attack on Malaya, sufficient modern aircraft would be available to operate from those aerodromes. To ensure this, it was felt that there should in any case be a strong Air Force cadre permanently established in the Far East, and that it was unsafe to rely on the mobility of aircraft to concentrate adequate strength there from other parts of the Empire when danger threatened. On the other hand, the siting of the aerodromes was complicated by the fact that the aircraft at that time available in Malaya had a very limited range, and also by the fact that weather conditions sometimes made it difficult to fly over the central mountain range, so that it was undesirable to rely on aircraft based on the west coast for operations off the east coast. The result of this was that, when war with Japan broke out, three aerodromes had been constructed in the State of Kelantan and a further one at Kuantan, and a landing ground at Kahang in Eastern Johore. Although these were strategically well placed for air operations, they were quite inadequately defended either by land or air forces.

In 1936 it was decided to fortify the Island of Penang, though the approved scale of equipment was not immediately available.

21. *The Influence of World Politics*.—In 1937 the defence policy was still based on the fundamental assumption that the British fleet would sail from Home waters immediately on the outbreak of war with Japan and would arrive at Singapore within a maximum of 70 days. It was further assumed that the arrival of the fleet in the Far East would automatically put an end to any danger of the capture of Singapore. It followed from these assumptions that the defence plan only had to provide against such types of operations as the Japanese might hope to complete successfully within 70 days and that the role of the garrison was confined to holding out for that period.

In November, 1937, having, as G.S.O.I. Malaya, made a careful study of the problem of the defence of Singapore, I prepared on the instructions of the General Officer Commanding (Major-General, now Lieut.-General Sir W. G. S. Dobbie) an appreciation and plan for an attack on that place from the point of view of the Japanese. In this appreciation it was pointed out (*a*) that, as a result of the political situation in Europe, it was unlikely that the British Fleet would be able to reach Singapore in 70 days, (*b*) that in consequence, a more deliberate form of attack could be undertaken. The plan recommended consisted of preliminary operations to seize the aerodromes in South Thailand and in Kelantan, the Island of Penang and the naval and air facilities in Borneo, followed by the main operation to capture Singapore itself. From this appreciation deductions were made as to the main points in the defence plan which required attention. These deductions stressed the probability of the Japanese making use of territory in South Thailand, the increased importance of the defence of North Malaya and of Johore, the urgent need for the strengthening of our Air Forces and Local Naval Craft, and for more infantry, and the unsatisfactory situation as regards food stocks. A copy of the deductions made is attached as Appendix A to this Despatch. The Appreciation and deductions were forwarded by the G.O.C. to the War Office.

In May, 1938, General Dobbie in another appreciation of the defence problem wrote:

"It is an attack from the northward that I regard as the greatest potential danger to the fortress. Such attack could be carried out during the period of the north-east monsoon. The jungle is not in most places impassable for infantry."

He further stated that defensive positions were being reconnoitred on the general line Johore River—Kota Tinggi—Kulai—Pulai River. Subsequently defences were constructed on the west bank of the river north and south of Kota Tinggi.

*22. Development of the Defence Plan.*—Up to the summer of 1939 the defence policy continued to be based on the assumption that the British Fleet would sail from Home waters immediately on the outbreak of war with Japan whatever the situation in Europe might be. It was then, however, officially recognized that this might not be possible. The "Period before Relief" was increased from 70 to 180 days and authority given for reserves to be built up on that scale. In August, 1939, the 12th Indian Infantry Brigade Group, which had been held in readiness for this purpose, was, in view of the threatening political situation, despatched from India to Malaya.

*23. In April, 1940, the G.O.C. (Lt.-Gen. Sir Lionel Bond) submitted a new appreciation in the light of the new situation and especially of the increase of the period before relief from 70 to 180 days. In it he pointed out that the Japanese could now afford to establish their base at a much greater distance from Singapore and possibly in South Thailand. He considered therefore that the northern frontier might have to be held against a considerable force for several months. He estimated that the forces now required for the defence of Malaya*

were of the order of 40 battalions (say 4 divisions) with 3 machine gun battalions and 2 tank regiments. He realised that it would be impossible at that time to provide this force, and suggested, as an alternative, that the Royal Air Force "could and should be made absolutely responsible, if not for the detection and destruction of a Japanese expedition before it landed, at least for ensuring that no base can be maintained and no line of communication can be operated within striking distance of our aerodromes." If this could be done, he estimated that the land forces then required would be in the nature of 25 battalions with supporting arms, which should include 3 anti-tank batteries and one company of armoured cars or tanks.

It was at this time that the problem, which had hitherto remained one of the defence of Singapore Island and of a portion of Johore, developed, as had appeared inevitable as early as 1937, into one of the defence of the whole of Malaya. The G.O.C. asked for official confirmation of this. The problem was further complicated by the collapse of France in June, 1940, the immediate result of which was that Malaya was exposed to a greatly increased scale of attack.

*24. In August, 1940, the Chiefs of Staff, in their Far East Appreciation, officially recognised that both the fundamental assumptions of the C.I.D. 1937 Appreciation had broken down because it was now impossible to send the Fleet to the Far East, and the Japanese advance southward, the development of communications and of aerodromes in Thailand, and the increased range of aircraft, had all contributed to the development of the overland threat to Malaya. The necessity for holding the whole of Malaya, with reliance primarily on Air Power, was now recognised. It was laid down that the rôle of the land forces was to be (*a*) The close defence of the naval and air bases, (*b*) Internal security, (*c*) To deal with any enemy land forces which might succeed in gaining a footing despite the action of the Air Force. Until the necessary air forces could be provided, their absence must be made up for as far as possible by the provision of additional land forces. It was estimated that a minimum of 336 1st Line aircraft would be required for the defence of Malaya and British Borneo, and for trade protection in the north east half of the Indian Ocean. It was laid down that the aim should be to complete this programme by the end of 1941. It was considered that, when this target was reached, the total land garrison required would be the equivalent of 6 brigades with ancillary troops. Meanwhile approximately three divisions would be necessary. It is to be noted that this appreciation was made before the entry of the Japanese into Indo-China. The Commanders in Singapore were instructed to make a tactical appreciation based on the Chiefs of Staff strategical appreciation.*

*25. In September, 1940, the Japanese occupied the northern portion of Indo-China, thereby greatly increasing the threat to Singapore. In fact, the whole conception of the defence problem had again been changed because a Japanese invading force, instead of having to be transported all the way from Japan, could now be concentrated and prepared within close striking distance of Malaya.*

26. The tactical appreciation asked for was prepared by the Commander-in-Chief, China, General Officer Commanding, Malaya, and Air Officer Commanding, Far East. It was reviewed and endorsed by the Singapore Defence Conference held in October, 1940, attended by representatives of Australia, New Zealand, India and Burma, and by one American observer. It was estimated that 566 1st Line aircraft would now be required and that, when this target was reached, the strength of the land forces should be 26 battalions with supporting arms, ancillary services, etc. The Army estimate was accepted by the Chiefs of Staff who, however, declined to increase the previously approved air scale. The general situation and war plans were further discussed at staff conversations with officers from the Dutch East Indies on 25-29th November, 1940, at a conference with Dutch and Australian representatives and United States observers in February, 1941 ("A.D.A. Conference"), and at a full conference with American and Dutch (as well as Dominion) representatives in April, 1941 ("A.D.B. Conference").

27. Further reinforcements now began to arrive in Malaya. In August, 1940, two British battalions arrived from Shanghai on the evacuation of the latter place and in October and November, 1940, the 6 and 8 Indian Infantry Brigades, both of the 11 Indian Division (Major-General Murray Lyon) reached Malaya. In February, 1941, the first contingent of the Australian Imperial Force arrived. It consisted of the Headquarters and Services of the 8 Australian Division (Major-General Gordon Bennett) with the 22 Australian Infantry Brigade Group. In March, 1941, the 15 Indian Infantry Brigade and the 1st Echelon of the 9 Indian Division (Major-General Barstow) arrived from India and one Field Regiment from the U.K., followed in April by the 22 Indian Infantry Brigade also of the 9 Indian Division. In May the 1st Echelon of Headquarters 3 Indian Corps (Lt.-Gen. Sir Lewis Heath) arrived and was located at Kuala Lumpur. It took over the 9 and 11 Indian Divisions, the Penang Fortress and the F.M.S. Volunteers. Some readjustment of formations in the two Indian Divisions had previously been made.

28. *The Disposition of Troops, May, 1941.*—The disposition of the troops at the end of May, 1941, shortly after I took over the Command, was as under:

(a) *Northern Area*:—3 Indian Corps, distributed as under:

*East Coast Sub-Area*: 9 Indian Division (of two Brigade Groups only) less one Infantry battalion. In the Kelantan area was 8 Indian Infantry Brigade with attached troops (Brigadier Key) and in the Kuantan Area 22 Indian Infantry Brigade (less one battalion) with attached troops (Brigadier Painter).

*Northern Sub-Area*: 11 Indian Division (of two Brigade Groups only). Headquarters and 15 Brigade Group (Brigadier Garrett) were at Sungai Patani in South Kedah, the 6 Brigade Group (Brigadier Lay) less one Infantry battalion was at Tanjung Pau Camp in North Kedah, and there was one Infantry battalion each in Perlis, Penang and at Kroh on the Thailand frontier in North Perak.

*Penang*: The Penang Garrison (Brigadier Lyon) consisted of one Infantry Volunteer battalion, two 6-in. batteries with searchlights, some Royal Engineer and administrative units. The remaining equipment for the Fixed Defences had not arrived and there were no Anti-Aircraft defences.

*Lines of Communication*: The L. of C. Area consisted of that part of the west coast area which lay south of the River Perak. The Commander was Brigadier Moir, who was also Commandant of the Federated Malay States Volunteer Force.

*Corps Reserve*: In Corps Reserve was one Infantry battalion situated at Mantin Camp south of Kuala Lumpur.

*Federated Malay States Volunteer Force*.—This force, which consisted of four Infantry battalions and some supporting units, was not yet mobilized.

The Commander 3 Indian Corps was responsible for the whole of Malaya north of Johore and Malacca and for the Island of Penang.

(b) *Singapore Island and Eastern Johore*.—The Singapore Fortress Troops (Major-General Keith Simmons) consisted of:

*The Fixed Defences* (Brigadier Curtis) which were divided into two Fire Commands, i.e. The Changi Fire Command which covered the approaches to the Naval Base, and the Faber Fire Command which covered the approaches to Keppel Harbour and to the western channel of the Johore Straits. In each Fire Command was one 15 in. and one 9.2 in. battery and a number of 6 in. batteries; also searchlights and smaller equipments.

*The Anti-Aircraft Defences* (Brigadier Wildey).—These Defences, which included both guns and searchlights, had been built up over a number of years under War Office direction. Most of the guns were of the static type but a few tractors were available. The defences had been sited on Singapore Island and in Southern Johore to protect the Naval Base and other important installations in the Singapore Fortress area. There were three Anti-Aircraft Regiments, one Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, and one Searchlight Regiment.

*Field Troops*.—There were three Infantry Brigades, one Field Regiment and one Field Company, etc. The 1 Malaya Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Williams) of two battalions only and the 2 Malaya Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Fraser) were responsible for the defence of the beaches on the south coast of Singapore Island and at Pengerang in Southern Johore. The 12 Indian Brigade Group was responsible for the defence of the east coast of Johore.

*Fortress Troops*.—There were also a number of Fortress units, i.e. Fortress Companies, Royal Engineers, etc.

*Straits Settlement Volunteer Force* (*less the Penang Bn.*).—This Force, strength about a weak Brigade Group, was not yet mobilized. It was allotted a role in the defence of Singapore Town.

*Command Headquarters and Base Units*.—In addition to the troops directly under his command, the Commander Singapore

Fortress was responsible for the administration of the Command Headquarters and Base units located in the Singapore Island area.

(c) *Malaya Command Reserve*.—The A.I.F. (8 Australian Division less two Infantry brigade groups) was in Command Reserve. It was located in the Malacca/Negri Sembilan area with Headquarters at Kuala Lumpur. It was to be prepared to operate anywhere in Malaya, and for this purpose officers of the A.I.F. were ordered to carry out reconnaissances of the areas where operations were most likely to take place.

(d) *Borneo*.—One Infantry Battalion (less one company at Miri), with some Local Forces and administrative units attached, was stationed at Kuching in the State of Sarawak. Its task was to protect the aerodrome under construction there for the use of our Air Force and to deny it to the enemy.

There was also a small infantry and engineer detachment at Miri, where two 6 in. guns had been installed. Its task was to destroy the oil fields and installations, if necessary to prevent them falling into the hands of the enemy.

(e) *Christmas Island*.—There was a small coast artillery detachment at Christmas Island, whose task was to protect the phosphate deposits there.

(f) *Indian State Forces Units*.—There were also in Malaya several State Forces units from the Indian States. They varied greatly in training, strength and efficiency. Being without transport and more suitable for a static role, they were employed principally on aerodrome defence, coming under the commanders of the areas in which they were situated.

The above dispositions were in accordance with the role of the land forces as laid down in the Chiefs of Staff Appreciation of August 1940 already referred to. The commanders of the various forces were given written instructions as to their role and the action to be taken in certain eventualities.

29. *The Advance into Thailand*.—Before leaving London I discussed on broad lines a proposal which was then under consideration to advance into South Thailand if a favourable opportunity presented itself. Immediately after taking over command I was instructed by the C.-in-C. Far East to give this matter my further detailed consideration. It was also discussed on several occasions at conferences. The operation was known as MATADOR. I was informed that it could not be carried out without reference to London since MATADOR could only be put into effect if and when it became clear beyond all reasonable doubt that an enemy expedition was approaching the shores of Thailand. As time would then be the essence of the problem it appeared almost certain that, by the time permission had been asked for and obtained, the favourable opportunity would have passed.

The military advantages of the occupation of South Thailand, or of part of it, were great. It would enable us to meet the enemy on the beaches instead of allowing him to land and establish himself unopposed, it would provide our Air Force with additional aerodromes and, by denying these aerodromes to the enemy, it

would make it far more difficult for his Air Force to interfere with our sea communications in the Malacca Straits. It was a question, however, whether it was a sound operation with the meagre resources available. No troops could be spared for the operation other than the 11 Indian Division, strengthened by some administrative units. The proposal to occupy the narrow neck of the Kra Isthmus was rejected as being too ambitious and the discussions centred round the occupation and denial to the enemy of the Port of Singora and the aerodromes at Singora and Patani.

The following factors, among others, had to be considered:

(a) The Thai Government had stated publicly that it would defend its territory against the invasion of any foreign troops. Therefore opposition, even if slight, was to be expected.

(b) All the main bridges on the road between the Thailand frontier and Haad'yai Junction were in process of reconstruction. Therefore time and material might be required for their repair.

(c) Large quantities of M.T. would be required to mechanize the road parties of the force and to keep it supplied.

(d) The psychological effect of offensive action would be considerable, but this had to be weighed against the possibilities of an encounter battle and the loss of prepared ground.

(e) An enemy landing would certainly be supported by tanks, of which we had none. It was noted also that during the period of the North-East Monsoon, i.e. October-March, the country on the east coast is wet, and therefore, less suited to tank action, while on the west coast it is comparatively dry.

After careful examination of the problem, it was decided:

(a) That, provided a favourable opportunity presented itself, the operation MATADOR would be put into effect during the period October-March.

(b) That it would take the form of (i) an advance by road and rail to capture Singora and hold a defensive position north of Haad'yai Junction, and (ii) an advance from Kroh to a defensive position, known as The Ledge position, on the Kroh-Patani road some 35-40 miles on the Thailand side of the frontier. The reason for this limited objective on the Kroh front was lack of resources, both operational and administrative.

(c) That at least 24 hours start was required before the anticipated time of a Japanese landing.

Detailed plans were worked out and preparations made for this operation. Maps were printed, money in Thai currency was made available and pamphlets for distribution to the Thais were drafted though, to preserve secrecy, the printing of them was deferred till the last minute.

By a special arrangement made by the C.-in-C. Far East, authority was obtained for a limited number of officers in plain clothes to carry out reconnaissances in South Thailand. In all 30 officers, including some of the most senior officers, were able to visit Thailand in this way. They frequently met Japanese officers who were presumably on a similar mission.

On the 5th December, 1941, I was informed by the C.-in-C. Far East that, in accordance with the terms of a telegram just received from London, MATADOR could thenceforward be put into effect without reference to London (a) if the C.-in-C. Far East had information that a Japanese expedition was advancing with the apparent intention of landing on the Kra Isthmus, or (b) if the Japanese violated any other part of Thailand.

30. *The Northern Frontier.*—One of the first problems to which I turned my attention was the defence of the Northern frontier. Excluding the Kelantan frontier, which will be referred to later, the Malaya-Thailand frontier was crossed by only two roads and one railway, but there were in addition a number of bush tracks. The main road from Alor Star in Kedah to Haad'yai in South Thailand and thence to Singora crossed the frontier a few miles north of Changlun. A secondary road, running eastward through Province Wellesley and South Kedah, crossed the frontier at Kroh and then continued via Yala to Patani in South Thailand, an unbridged river being crossed by a ferry. The west coast railway, passing through Alor Star, crossed the frontier in the small State of Perlis and then forked at Haad'yai Junction, the main line continuing to Bangkok with a branch to Singora.

31. The C.-in-C. Far East having issued an order that the main road approaches from Thailand were to be put into a state of defence, the problem was studied by senior officers of 3 Indian Corps. The primary role of the troops in this area was to cover the aerodrome at Alor Star and those further south in Kedah and Province Wellesley. The position selected therefore had to be sufficiently north of the Alor Star aerodrome for this purpose. The frontier area itself was found to be unsuitable both for tactical reasons and because it was known to be very malarial. Ultimately a position was selected in front of the small village of Jitra, which lies at the junction of the main road with the branch road to Perlis, some 18 miles south of the frontier. This position had, however, obvious disadvantages, chief of which was the weakness of the left flank in dry weather, for between it and the sea was a stretch of some 12 miles of open or semi-open country, intersected by small canals and ditches. The main defences were, therefore, concentrated astride the two roads, reliance being placed on a skeleton pill-box defence combined with a maximum use of natural obstacles for the protection of the left flank. Plans were made to flood an area astride the railway, which seemed to be a probable line of enemy advance. On the main front anti-tank ditches were dug where there were no natural obstacles and defended localities were constructed, though later preparations and training for MATADOR interfered to some extent with the development of these defences.

32. On the Kroh-Patani road, intelligence reports pointed to the fact that the most suitable place for a defensive position was a locality known as "The Ledge", some 35-40 miles on the Thailand side of the frontier. Here the road had been cut out of a steep hillside and it seemed probable that it would be comparatively easy to block it by demolitions, though it was of course impossible to make any preparations in peace-time. Another defensive position

was prepared west of the frontier upon which to fall back in case of need.

Although no large bodies could cross the frontier by bush tracks in North Perak, it was nevertheless possible for small parties to do so. Such small parties, by guerilla activities against our communications, could at least develop a nuisance value. In order to watch these tracks a special platoon of local men was formed and incorporated in the Perak Volunteer Battalion.

33. *The East Coast.*—Throughout the whole length of the east coast of Malaya there are numerous beaches very suitable for landing operations. For the greater part of the year the sea is comparatively calm off this coast. The exception is the period of the north-east monsoon. It had, however, been determined, as a result of a staff ride held in 1937, that even during this monsoon landings were possible though it was thought they might be interfered with for two or three days at a time when the storms were at their height. In consequence, it was thought that the enemy would be unlikely to choose the period December-February if he could avoid it.

It has already been explained (see Sections I and VI) that there are large undeveloped areas in the eastern part of Malaya and that communications are scarce; also that the original policy had been to avoid, as far as possible, further development of these communications with a view to reducing military commitments in this part of Malaya. By 1941, however, the Army had been obliged to undertake the defence of three areas on the east coast i.e. the Kelantan area, the Kuantan area and the East Johore area. The primary role of the Army in the first two of these, both of which were situated at the end of very long and vulnerable communications, was the defence of the aerodromes which had been constructed there. In both cases the forces which could be made available were inadequate for their task.

34. The State of Kelantan is divided into two parts by the Kelantan River which flows roughly South to North and reaches the sea near Kota Bharu. The river is wide and unbridged for road traffic which makes communication from one bank to the other difficult and slow. The railway crosses the river west of Machang and then running west of it crosses the frontier into Thailand a few miles from the coast. There are no road communications across the frontier though, as in Perak, the frontier is crossed by tracks and, in the more mountainous sections, by rivers navigable by small craft.

There were three modern aerodromes in Kelantan—one at Kota Bharu completed and in use, one at Gong Kedah some 30 miles down the coast, serviceable and nearly completed, and one at Machang on the Krai-Kota Bharu road under construction. All these were east of the Kelantan River.

The Commander of the Kelantan Force of one brigade group, which had only begun to move into position at the end of 1940, was instructed that his primary task was to secure the aerodromes for the use of our Air Force and to deny them to the enemy. He was also instructed that in order to carry out his task, he was to endeavour to prevent an enemy landing and that, for this purpose, pill-boxes were to be built and beach defences, both anti-personnel and anti-tank, were to be constructed

as far as resources would admit. He decided to keep his force east of the Kelantan River with the exception of small mobile detachments whose task was to watch the frontier and, in face of an enemy's advance in force, to fall back across the Kelantan River. Arrangements were made to destroy the railway bridges near the frontier. The bulk of the force was therefore concentrated about the aerodromes at Kota Bharu and Gong Kedah, with beach defence troops on the most likely landing beaches. Reserves were held at Chondong and Peringat. Headquarters were in the Kota Bharu area in touch with the Sultan and British Adviser. Railhead was at Krai where the main reserves of supplies, stores, etc. were held. I approved these dispositions when I visited the area in company with the A.O.C. in July, 1941.

35. At Kuantan the small cantonment lies a mile or so from the sea in the bend of the Kuantan River. North of the river are some 12 miles of beach suitable for landing. South of the river mouth there are also good landing beaches but a tributary of the Kuantan River blocks the deployment from these beaches northwards. The road from Jerantut (100 miles distant) crosses the Kuantan River by a ferry west of the cantonment. The aerodrome was situated near this road some 7 miles west of the ferry.

The Commander of the Kuantan Force of one weak brigade group which had only moved into position in April, 1941, was instructed that his primary task was to secure the aerodrome for the use of our Air Force and to deny it to the enemy. The beaches were far too long to hold in strength, but if the enemy was allowed to land unopposed he could concentrate a large force for an attack on the aerodrome. Moreover, the slow ferry crossing of the Kuantan River was a source of great weakness. The plan, which I approved, was to deploy one battalion on the beaches, where material defences were constructed, and to hold one battalion for the defence of the river lines and of the aerodrome. I also authorised the construction of a swinging pontoon bridge across the river which, however, owing to difficulty in getting suitable material was not finished in time. Communication with Kuantan was by military wireless and by a civil land line. Both these channels of communication were subject to frequent interruption.

36. By far the greater part of the East Johore area is undeveloped forest. There are, however, two small towns of strategical importance, Mersing and Endau, situated about 20 miles apart. Mersing is 90 miles from Singapore and connected to it by a motor road. There are good landing beaches both north and south of the town but the water off-shore is shallow so that ocean-going steamers have to lie a long way out. Mersing is also connected to Kluang in the centre of Johore and thence to Batu Pahat on the west coast by a lateral road which branches from the Mersing-Singapore road at Jemaluang. Endau, a smaller town than Mersing, is connected to it by a motor road. It lies at the mouth of the Endau River on which at Bukit Langkap, some 20 miles from Endau, was situated an important Japanese owned iron ore mine.

From this mine large quantities of iron ore were shipped to Japan annually, being brought down river in a fleet of Japanese-owned barges

and loaded into Japanese steamers which lay off the mouth of the Endau River. From the mine there was also water communication with the Jemaluang-Kluang road. The whole of this area was therefore well known to the Japanese.

On the coast south of Mersing there are a number of water-ways in which a small force could be landed within striking distance of the Singapore road.

The Jemaluang road junction was clearly vital to the defence of this area. It was essential, therefore, that the main operations should take place in front of this junction. There were three contingencies to be provided for (a) an attempt by the enemy to land in the Endau area with the object of either moving on Mersing or via the Bukit Langkap iron ore mine to the Kluang road and the Kahang aerodrome situated close to it; (b) a landing in force in the Mersing area; (c) landings of small forces further south with a view to cutting communications with Singapore.

In May 1941, when I took over command, the responsibility for the defence of this area rested on the Commander, Singapore Fortress, who had allotted for this purpose the 12 Indian Brigade Group, one battalion group of which only was actually accommodated at Mersing. The general plan was to hold in force the Mersing area and the beaches to the south with a detachment at Endau and a reserve in a prepared position north of the Jemaluang road junction; other detachments watched the communications to Singapore. The beach defences in this area were more advanced than those further north. I approved this plan during a visit to the East Johore area in June 1941.

Some small minefields were laid off the East Johore coast by the Royal Navy but, owing to the limited supply of mines, it was not possible to lay them off other parts of the east coast.

In view of the possibility of enemy landings on the east coast detailed arrangements had been made with the civil authorities for the removal or destruction of all boats and other surface craft on this coast on receipt of specified code words.

37. *Air Defence.*—Prior to the outbreak of World War II, Air Defence in Malaya had been, for all practical purposes, limited to the anti-aircraft defence of selected areas on Singapore Island, though plans had also been made for the defence of Penang. With the extension of the defence problem, however, to embrace the whole of Malaya and the more imminent danger of active operations in the Far East, the plans for active air defence underwent rapid expansion, and passive air defence was organized.

38. As regards the Anti-Aircraft Artillery, the defences of Singapore had been developed in accordance with the War Office plan of 1936 as amended and extended by the plan approved by the Chiefs of Staff Committee in 1940. They were laid out for the defence of the Naval Base and of other vulnerable installations, for which an order of priority was laid down. In May 1941 there were three Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiments, one Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and one Searchlight Regiment in the Singapore area. In the autumn of that year the 1 Indian Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment arrived. A very large proportion of the

men of this Regiment were still in the recruit stage and none of them had had any training on guns. When hostilities opened there were 60 Heavy Anti-Aircraft guns in the Singapore area out of the 104 which had been authorised. These consisted of two 4.5 in., thirty-eight 3.7 in. and twenty 3 in., the majority of which were static. Every effort had, however, been made to make as many as possible mobile and to train in mobile operations. Outside Singapore Island, authority had been received for the preparation of positions for the defence of Penang and of the aerodromes at Alor Star, Sungei Patani, Kota Bharu and Kuantan, but only those at Sungei Patani had been completed when hostilities opened. Temporary positions were, however, occupied by such 3 in. guns as could be made available for defence of the Alor Star and Kota Bharu aerodromes. One battery of the Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment from Singapore, on a mobile basis, was placed under orders of the Commander, 3 Indian Corps, for expected operations in North Malaya and was located at Alor Star. There were no guns available for the defence of cities on the mainland such as Kuala Lumpur and Ipoh.

At the time of my arrival in Malaya the anti-aircraft artillery was under the orders of the Commander, Singapore Fortress. Having in view, however, the increase in the scale of anti-aircraft defence and its extension to other parts of Malaya, I decided to bring the anti-aircraft artillery directly under my own command, except for purposes of administration, and to reorganize it under the Commander, Anti-Aircraft Artillery, into two brigades, one for Singapore and one for North Malaya. This reorganization had not been completed when war broke out. Command of the Anti-Aircraft Artillery in North Malaya was delegated to the Commander, 3 Indian Corps.

39. In 1940 the Active Air Defence was strengthened by the arrival of fighter aircraft. A proportion of these was always retained at the Singapore bases for defence of the important objectives in that area, the remainder being allotted to the northern area, which appeared to be the most vulnerable to attack.

40. With the arrival in Malaya in the summer of 1941 of Group Captain Rice, who had had much experience, in connection with the Air Defence of Great Britain, the task of building up a co-ordinated Air Defence scheme for Malaya was energetically pushed forward. The fighters allotted to the defence of the Singapore area were placed under the command of Group Captain Rice. This officer was also authorised, as regards the Singapore area, to co-ordinate the action of the fighters and the anti-aircraft artillery and, during hostile attacks, to issue orders direct to these two formations. A control station was established near the Kallang aerodrome.

41. As part of this Air Defence scheme an efficient Warning System was essential. An organization of civilian watchers had already been started. Efforts were now made to extend this organization and provide it with better equipment. There were two main difficulties. Firstly, there was the difficulty of finding suitable people in the less developed parts of Malaya to complete the chain of watchers. Secondly, and more important still, was the paucity of communications. The civil telephone system in Malaya consisted only of a few

trunk lines, which followed the main arteries of communication, and local lines in the populated areas. This was quite inadequate for a really efficient Warning System, as it was impossible to allot separate lines for this purpose. A plan was worked out, in conjunction with the civil authorities, for the duplication of this system and for extensions where required. A start was made with the limited amount of cable available but only small progress had been made when war broke out. There were a few radar sets available but efforts to supplement the system with wireless communication met with only partial success owing to the unreliability of wireless in the difficult climatic conditions of Malaya. Nevertheless, in spite of these difficulties, an organization was built up which proved of great value during the subsequent operations, though it should be pointed out that it covered South Malaya and the Singapore area only, and that there was no adequate Warning System for North Malaya.

The organization of Passive Air Defence will be explained later when dealing with Civil Defence.

42. *Defence of Aerodromes.*—As a result of experience in Europe, and especially in Crete, the C.-in-C. Far East laid down that the defence of aerodromes was to take precedence, as regards A.A. weapons, over everything else except the defence of the Naval Base. A scale of Heavy and Light A.A. Guns for each aerodrome was laid down but, owing to lack of resources, it was never approached. Such guns as were available, however, were allotted for this purpose. In addition, small infantry garrisons, drawn from Malayan Volunteer units or Indian State Force units, were provided. There were also a few heavy armoured lorries specially constructed for this purpose. In no case, however, was the strength of the garrison really adequate for the defence of the aerodromes, the perimeters of which varied between 3 and 5 miles.

43. *Borneo.*—The large Island of Borneo, partly British and partly Dutch, was clearly of great strategical importance, lying as it did between the main routes linking Japan with Malaya and Sumatra on the one hand and Java and the Southern Areas on the other, and containing large supplies of oil and other raw materials. Unfortunately neither the British nor the Dutch were able to find adequate garrisons for this island.

The British portion of Borneo consisted of:—

*British North Borneo* a territory controlled by the British North Borneo Company, whose headquarters were in London. The Governor and officials of British North Borneo were in the employ of that Company.

*Labuan Island.*—A British Colony administered by a Resident.

*Brunei.*—A British Protected State with its own Sultan.

*Sarawak.*—A Malay State which had for many years been governed by members of the Brooke family. In September 1941, however, the ruling Rajah made over much of his responsibility to a Council. He then left Sarawak for a holiday and was in Australia when hostilities broke out. His efforts to return to Sarawak were unsuccessful.

There had for some time been a project to open up air facilities in British Borneo. Aerodrome sites had been selected and surveyed.

Ultimately, however, as there was no immediate prospect of British aeroplanes being available to use the aerodromes, the project was postponed except as regards an air landing ground at Kuching in Sarawak and a landing strip at Miri.

44. In British North Borneo there were several excellent natural harbours which were undefended. There was a small but efficient local Volunteer Force but, owing to lack of resources, it was not possible to provide any regular troops for the defence of this territory. The Governor of British North Borneo was therefore informed by the C.-in-C. Far East that his territory could not be defended and that the role of his local forces should be the maintenance of internal security.

45. In West Brunei and East Sarawak were situated the important Seria and Miri Oil Fields and the Lutong Refinery. It was the policy of the British Admiralty, in the event of war breaking out in the Far East, to do such damage to the wells and plant that they would be of no use to the enemy. This work was the responsibility of the Army, and for this purpose a demolition party with an infantry escort of about a company (partly Indian and partly British) was stationed there. There was also a 6 in. battery. A partial denial scheme was put into effect before hostilities broke out.

46. The town of Kuching, the capital of Sarawak, is situated some 8 miles from the coast and is approached only by waterways. The intervening country is mostly bush-covered or marshy. The town itself lies on both sides of the Bintawa River. The air landing ground is situated some 7 miles south of the town to which it is connected by a metalled road. The only land communication between Sarawak and Dutch West Borneo was a bush track unfit for wheeled transport.

The O.C. Troops Sarawak and Brunei (Lt.-Col. Lane) was instructed that his primary object was to secure the air landing ground for the use of our Air Force and to deny it to the enemy; also that if, owing to overwhelming forces, this object could no longer be attained, then he should act in the interests of the defence of West Borneo as a whole, his line of withdrawal being by the bush track into Dutch West Borneo. This defence problem was not an easy one. If the plan envisaged only the close defence of the landing ground, then the enemy would be free to move unopposed up the waterways where he would be most vulnerable. Moreover, the people of Kuching Town would be left entirely unprotected. On the other hand any attempt to defend Kuching itself would lead to great dispersion.

The O.C. Troops had at his disposal the 2/15 Punjab Regt. (less one weak company to Lutong), the Sarawak Rangers, some local volunteers trained chiefly for administrative duties and some regular administrative detachments. The Sarawak Rangers, which had previously been disbanded, had recently been re-formed but owing to lack of weapons were only partially armed. There was no artillery, except some field guns manned by the infantry, and no engineers.

Under the defence scheme prepared by the O.C. Troops, the Sarawak Rangers were employed as scouts north of Kuching and detach-

ments of regular troops were pushed forward to block the waterways. The remainder of the 2/15 Punjab Regt. was held in reserve at the landing ground, where defensive positions were under construction. I approved this plan during a visit to Kuching at the end of November 1941. I was informed at the same time that there were large Japanese plantations in the area immediately east of Kuching.

47. *Review of Strength Required.*—Shortly after taking over command I was instructed to review the Army strength required for the defence of Malaya. Before doing so I personally visited all the main defence areas and also arranged for a strategical examination of the defence problem by a joint staff committee. In the course of that examination I asked to be informed what damage the Air Force at its existing strength might be expected to inflict on a hostile sea-borne expedition before it reached the shores of Malaya. I based my estimate of the Army strength required on the figure given. In the event, unfortunately, the damage done fell far below this figure. I have no record to show, and I do not wish to infer, that this figure was given by the A.O.C.

I pointed out the serious deficiencies in the strength of the Air Force, the obsolescence of many of the aircraft, the weakness of our naval forces and the greatly increased threat from the Japanese occupation of Indo-China which had then been extended to the southern portions of that country.

On the 2nd August, 1941, I gave my estimate of the Army strength required in a telegram to the War Office. This estimate was not examined in detail by the C-in-C Far East but the despatch of the cable was approved by him as a definition of the target. Summarized, it asked for:—

- 48 Infantry Battalions.
- 4 Indian Reconnaissance Units
- 9 Field Artillery Regiments.
- 4 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments
- 2 Tank Regiments.
- 3 Anti-Tank Regiments.
- 2 Mountain Artillery Regiments.
- 12 Field Companies.

with the necessary administrative units. This was exclusive of the Volunteers, the infantry anti-aircraft and tank units required for aerodrome defence, and also of the Anti-Aircraft units required for the defence of localities including the Naval Base. In a Tactical Appreciation forwarded by telegram in September 1941 two Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiments for the Field Force were asked for while the Anti-Aircraft Guns required for the defence of Singapore were estimated at 212 Heavy and 124 Light.

The main difference in the above estimate over those which had been submitted previously was that it made provision for a 3rd Corps Reserve in North Malaya of one complete Division and certain Corps Troops units, for a complete division instead of two brigade groups in the Kelantan-Trengganu-Pahang area, for two regular infantry battalions for Penang and for a brigade group instead of one battalion in Borneo.

This estimate was accepted by the Chiefs of Staff, but it was recognised that the target could not, in the existing circumstances, be fulfilled

in the foreseeable future. A working target was subsequently approved by the War Office.

*48. Further Re-inforcements.*—On the 15th August 1941, the second contingent of the Australian Imperial Force arrived in Malaya. It consisted of the 27 Australian Infantry Brigade with attached troops. As the commander of this Brigade had been prevented on medical grounds from accompanying it, Lt.-Col. Maxwell was, on the recommendation of the Commander, A.I.F., appointed by the Australian authorities to command it. The Brigade Group had had the advantage of a period of training in Australia but had had no experience of bush warfare. It was accommodated temporarily on Singapore Island pending the completion of hutted accommodation in West Johore and Malacca.

In September the 28 Indian Infantry Brigade disembarked at Port Swettenham. It was composed of three Gurkha battalions which, like other Indian units, had lost a large proportion of their leaders and trained personnel under the expansion scheme. It joined the 3 Indian Corps and was accommodated in the Ipoh area, being earmarked for operations under 11 Indian Division.

In November-December 1941 two field regiments and one anti-tank regiment arrived from the U.K. and one field regiment and one reconnaissance regiment (3 Cavalry) from India. These were all placed under orders of 3 Indian Corps. The artillery regiments consisted of excellent material but were lacking in experience and had had no training in bush warfare. The Indian reconnaissance unit had only recently been mechanised and arrived without its armoured vehicles. It was so untrained that drivers had to be borrowed for some of the trucks which were issued to it.

*49. Re-adjustment of the Defence Plan.*—On arrival of the 2nd Contingent of the A.I.F. I decided to make certain alterations in the Plan of Defence. I ordered the A.I.F. to take over responsibility for Johore and Malacca and brought into Command Reserve for operational purposes the 12 Indian Brigade Group, leaving it under the Commander Singapore Fortress for training and administration. My reasons for this step were as under:—

(a) I considered the dual task imposed upon the Commander Singapore Fortress of defending both Singapore Fortress and East Johore to be unsound as he might well be attacked simultaneously in both areas. Similarly some of the Fortress troops had alternative roles in the two areas.

(b) I was anxious to give the 22 Australian Brigade Group, which had now had six months' training in Malaya, a rôle which involved responsibility.

(c) There was a greater probability under the new arrangement that the A.I.F. would be able to operate as a formation under its own commanders instead of being split up. The advantages of this need no explanation.

In this connection I had enquired on taking over command whether there were any special instructions with regard to the status and the handling of the A.I.F. I had been informed that there were none.

The responsibility for the defence of Johore and Malacca passed to the Commander A.I.F. at 1200 hrs. on the 29th August, 1941.

In September the Kelantan garrison was strengthened by the addition of the infantry battalion which had previously been held in 3 Corps Reserve, an Indian State Forces battalion from the South for aerodrome defence, and some supporting units.

*50. Dispositions on Outbreak of War with Japan.*—As a result of the above changes the disposition of troops in the Malaya Command (Lt.-Gen. A. E. Percival) on the outbreak of war with Japan was as under:

(a) *Northern Area*—3 Indian Corps (Lt.-Gen. Sir Lewis Heath). Responsible for the defence of that part of Malaya which lies north of Johore and Malacca, including the Island of Penang, and for the conduct of Operation MATADOR should it be decided to put it into effect.

#### *Troops—*

9 Indian Division of two Brigade Groups, East Coast Area.

11 Indian Division, Northern Sub Area. Penang Fortress.

Lines of Communication Area.

The Federated Malay States Volunteer Force and, for operational purposes, the Penang and Province Wellesley battalion of the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force. Corps Troops.

(b) *Johore and Malacca*—The A.I.F. (Maj.-Gen. Gordon Bennett). Responsible for the defence of the States of Johore and Malacca except the Pengerang area of Johore.

#### *Troops—*

The A.I.F. of two Brigade Groups.

The Johore Military Forces.

The Johore Volunteer Forces.

The Johore Volunteer Engineers (an European unit).

(c) *The Singapore Fortress*.—(Maj.-Gen. F. Keith Simmons). Responsible for the defence of Singapore and adjoining islands and of the Pengerang area in South Johore.

#### *Troops—*

The Fixed Defences of two Fire Commands.

Field troops of two Infantry Brigades etc. to man the beach defences.

Fortress units i.e. Fortress Companies Royal Engineers etc.

The Straits Settlements Volunteer Force (Less for operational purposes the Penang and Province Wellesley battalion).

The 12 Indian Infantry Brigade Group (for training and administration only).

Command Headquarters, Base and other units (for administration only).

(d) *The Anti-Aircraft Defences*.—(Brig. A. W. G. Wildey). Responsible, in co-operation with other arms, for the defence of selected targets in the Singapore area against hostile air attack.

#### *Troops—*

Four Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiments.

One Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (less one battery under 3 Indian Corps).

One Searchlight Regiment.

(e) *The Command Reserve*.—(Brig. A. C. Paris). To be prepared to operate anywhere in Malaya. Under Singapore Fortress for training and administration.

#### *Troops—*

12 Indian Infantry Brigade Group.

The Commander 3 Indian Corps was informed that, in the event of an advance into Thailand, this Brigade Group would immediately be moved North and placed under his orders. The Commanders 3 Indian Corps and A.I.F. were instructed that, in the event of this Infantry Brigade Group being committed to operations, they must be prepared to replace it with another infantry brigade group if called upon to do so.

(f) *Borneo*.—(i) *Kuching (Sarawak) Detachment*.—(Lt.-Col. C. W. Lane). Responsible for the defence of the Kuching air landing ground.

*Troops*—

One Indian Infantry Battalion (less one company).

The Sarawak Rangers.

The Sarawak Volunteers.

Administrative detachments.

(ii) *Miri Detachment*.—Responsible for the denial, in case of necessity, of the Miri and Seria Oilfields and of the Lutong Refinery, to prevent them falling in a serviceable condition into the hands of the enemy.

(iii) *British North Borneo, Labuan Island, Brunei*.—In these States no regular military forces were maintained, though in British North Borneo there was a small Volunteer Force. The Senior Civil Officials were responsible for internal security.

(g) *Christmas Island*.

*Troops*.—A Coast Artillery detachment manning a section of 6 in. guns. Responsible for the protection of the phosphate deposits.

(h) *Command Troops*—

Base and Other Administrative Units. Command Troops units and a number of Base and other units, for the maintenance of all troops in the Malaya Command, were located in the Singapore area and elsewhere in Malaya.

The Order of Battle of Malaya Command on the 8th Dec. 1941, is given in detail in Appendix B attached to this Despatch.

The Plan for the Defence of Malaya was contained in the Malaya Defence Scheme, which was supplemented as necessary by special instructions for the conduct of the defence in the various areas. In view of the wide area covered by the Malaya Command and the possibility of operations developing simultaneously in different parts of that area I considered it advisable to decentralise responsibility for the control of operations as far as possible. Every effort, therefore, was made to ensure that the Defence Scheme and pre-war Instructions should be as comprehensive as possible, so that subordinate formation commanders would be in a position to conduct operations with only such supplementary and amending orders and instructions from higher authority as the development of the situation might demand.

51. Special Operations.

(a) Early in 1941 an Independent Company, with a strength of about 300 partly British and partly Indian, was formed. It was accommodated first at Kuantan and then in Kedah, and was trained under Headquarters Malaya Command in amphibious operations and for special operations in enemy territory.

(b) In the summer of 1941 a Branch of the Ministry of Economic Warfare was started in Singapore. It suffered from an excess of secrecy and from a lack of knowledge on the part of the gentlemen responsible as to how to set about the work. Thus valuable time was lost. Later, however, some very useful work was done by this organization.

SECTION VII.—TRAINING.

52. Apart from the garrison of Singapore Fortress and the Command Reserve, of which most units had been in Malaya for some time, there were in 1941 very few trained units in Malaya. Practically all the Indian Army units had suffered severely from the rapid expansion of that Army which had only been commenced a year after the outbreak of the war. Officers and N.C.O.s had been withdrawn to meet the needs of this expansion until the lack of leaders, and even of potential leaders, reached a dangerously low level. Few units had more than two or three senior officers with experience of handling Indian troops and of the junior officers only a proportion had had Indian experience. The great majority of the troops were young and inexperienced.

The Australian units were composed of excellent material but suffered from a lack of leaders with a knowledge of modern warfare. The same applied in some degree to the British units in which there were few men with previous war experience.

No units had had any training in bush warfare before reaching Malaya. Several of the units had in fact been specially trained for desert warfare.

53. In June, 1941, the C.-in-C. Far East, in addition to ordering the construction of defences to cover the main road to Thailand, laid down a scale for the material defences on all defended beaches, to include anti-boat, anti-tank and anti-personnel defences. As an early outbreak of hostilities then appeared probable, he issued instructions that these defences were to be completed as early as possible. On the east coast a great deal of work remained to be done.

54. A balance, therefore, had to be struck between the employment of troops on defence work and their field training. I decided that the proper course was to build up a foundation of good individual and sub-unit training, which could be done concurrently with the construction of defences. If hostilities did not break out in the autumn I hoped that we might then expect a period of three months (December/February) during which we could concentrate on higher training.

I therefore issued instructions that individual, sub-unit and unit training was to be carried out during the period July/November, when possible in bush country, under the direction of formation and unit commanders and that formation exercises would be held during the period December/February. During the latter period I also arranged for two exercises without troops to be held to study problems connected with the defence of Malaya as a whole. In the event, the political tension which existed in August and September prevented much training being done by units in the forward areas. The 1st Contingent of the A.I.F. and the Command Reserve, however, carried out some very

profitable training in bush warfare conditions. Some units of the latter were still in the Port Dickson training area when war with Japan broke out.

Towards the end of September, the defences having made good progress, I directed that an increased proportion of time should be allotted to training.

55. An exercise with troops arranged by the Commander 3 Indian Corps to study the problems of a withdrawal from Kedah southwards was scheduled to take place early in December, but had to be cancelled when war appeared imminent.

56. During the tenure of office of my predecessor a handbook on bush warfare had been issued by Headquarters Malaya Command. A similar manual had been received from India, while all the War Office training manuals were available in limited numbers. Directives were issued to supplement these manuals as necessary.

57. As regards Courses, Schools of Instruction etc. a balance had to be struck between the requirements of co-ordinating instruction and the desirability of leaving officers and N.C.O.s. as far as possible with their units to lay the foundations of field training. Accordingly, I decided as a policy that Command Courses would be held for those subjects in which technical knowledge was required, while courses in other subjects would be held under formation or unit arrangements. In accordance with this policy Command Courses were held in Physical Training, Chemical Warfare, Intelligence and Camouflage. In addition, there was an Officers Cadet Training Unit at Singapore where men from all parts of the Far East were trained for commissions.

58. Profiting by the lessons of Crete, a great deal of attention was paid to the defence of aerodromes, special exercises being held in several areas to study this problem.

Exercises were also held to study the movement of troops by M.T. and the handling of mechanized columns. As in other theatres, a tendency on the part of the troops to become road-minded was apparent. The effects of this were perhaps more serious in Malaya, where the essence of success is familiarity with the jungle, than elsewhere.

During this period both the Fixed and Anti-Aircraft Defences of Singapore Fortress reached a high standard of training.

59. To summarize, the troops in North Malaya were, for reasons given, less well trained when war broke out than those in the South. Had we been allowed a few more months for training, there is reason to suppose that great progress would have been made. Throughout the Army there was a serious lack of experienced leaders, the effect of which was accentuated by the inexperience of the troops.

#### SECTION VIII.—THE INTELLIGENCE ORGANISATION.

60. In Malaya were a number of Intelligence Organizations all of which had an interest in varying degrees in the local Malayan scene and in the affairs of other countries in the Far East which had an influence on it.

In 1941 the Far East Combined Bureau (F.E.C.B.) was primarily responsible for the collection and collation of intelligence from the Far East outside Malaya. This bureau was

located at the Naval Base and was under the control of the Commander-in-Chief China. It was staffed by officers of the three Services, the senior of whom was a naval officer. It held daily meetings, which were attended by a staff officer of Headquarters Malaya Command, and published weekly summaries. It also interested itself in Malayan matters and demanded the closest co-operation of the Malayan Civil organization.

61. At Headquarters Malaya Command there was an Intelligence Branch of the General Staff, which dealt with operational intelligence immediately affecting Malaya and British Borneo. Its establishment was small and much of its time was taken up with matters affecting the Press, censorship, distinguished visitors, police liaison, the map production programme etc. So heavy were these day to day requirements that they absorbed much time that would have been better spent on broader issues more directly affecting operations. In 1941 I recommended a considerable increase in the establishment of the Intelligence Branch but this had not taken place when war broke out.

62. For Intelligence within Malaya the Services were naturally dependent to a great extent on the Civil Police Intelligence Branch. The Inspector General of Police was Chairman of the Defence Security Committee, of which representatives of the Services and of the Civil Police were members. This Committee examined and made recommendations upon all matters affecting security in Malaya in whatever form.

63. The constitutional organization of Malaya necessitated multiple separate Police Forces and Police Intelligence Services, but the Inspector General of Police Straits Settlements was also Civil Security Officer for the whole of Malaya. Shortly before the outbreak of war the Malayan Security Service was set up to co-ordinate the work of the various Police organizations in the Peninsula, to establish a central control and uniform legislation for aliens, to provide security control of the northern border and pan-Malayan direction from a central office in all police civil security affairs, which covered a very wide field. Malayan Security was in its infancy but showed promising results and did much to overcome the difficulties inherent in the excessively complicated lay-out of the Peninsula.

64. It must be recorded that Headquarters Malaya Command was not well supplied with information either as to the intentions of the Japanese or as to the efficiency of their Fighting Services. At a Senior Military Commanders' Conference held at my Headquarters as late as the end of October 1941 to survey the defence arrangements and to consider the Far East situation as it affected Malaya at that time, a representative of the F.E.C.B. painted a very indecisive picture of the Japanese intentions. Flights of Japanese aircraft over Malayan territory, orders to their nationals to leave Malaya and other indications, however, gave us sufficient warning of the coming attack. As regards the Japanese Fighting Services, it was known that their troops were intrepid fighters and that they were experts in Combined Operations, but their efficiency in night operations, their ability to overcome difficulties, and the efficiency of their Air Force had all been underestimated.

65. Information of Thailand's attitude was similarly lacking even up to within a few days

of war. It is difficult to say whether the Thai officers who came on official visits to Malaya were sent with the intention of misleading us or not, but there can be no doubt that there was at least an advanced degree of co-operation between some of the most responsible authorities in Thailand and the Japanese, and that the preparations made in South Thailand by the Japanese for their landing there and for their attack on Malaya were made with the connivance, if not with the actual assistance, of those Thai authorities.

#### SECTION IX.—ADMINISTRATION.

66. The scale of reserve stocks to be held in Malaya was based on the "Period before Relief" which, as has been stated, stood in 1941 at 180 days. Initially these reserve stocks had been held entirely on Singapore Island, where special bomb-proof magazines had been constructed for the ammunition. With the increase in the garrison, however, and the extension of the defence to cover the whole of Malaya new problems were presented. These problems were akin to those connected with the defence of the United Kingdom in 1940 i.e. the base at Singapore, except that it was more heavily defended, was equally as exposed to attack as were the more forward areas elsewhere in Malaya. It was therefore necessary to distribute some of the reserve stocks throughout the country instead of holding them all in one area. In this way transportation problems would during active operations be reduced and all areas would be to some extent self-contained. Operation MATADOR was another factor in the problem. To meet the requirements of this, should it be put into effect, it was necessary to hold certain reserves well forward. I therefore decided that the main reserve stocks should be held on Singapore Island, that reserves on a scale to be fixed in each case should be held in the forward areas and that the balance should be held in advanced depots in Central Malaya. In accordance with this policy it was decided:—

(a) That the full 180 days for the garrisons of Singapore and Penang should be kept in those islands.

(b) That 60 days for all the troops, except the Penang garrison, north of Singapore should be kept in Singapore.

(c) That on the west coast 60 days should be kept north of the Perak River, and on the east coast 90 days in Kelantan and 60 days in Kuantan.

(d) That the balance of the 180 days for the troops in 3 Indian Corps area should be kept in the Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh and Jerantut areas.

In the Singapore Island area a policy of dispersal was adopted. This was due partly to the congestion in the Town area where depot space was difficult to obtain and partly to the desire to avoid heavy loss from air attack.

The administrative situation at the outset of hostilities was approximately as under:—

67. *Weapons.*—Early in 1941 the scale of armament had been dangerously low. In particular all Indian formations and units arrived in Malaya with a very low scale of weapons. After March, however, a steady and increasing flow came in Malaya, but it was not until November that formations received the higher scale of weapons and were issued with

25-pounder guns for the artillery. Even then many units, i.e. Artillery, Signals, R.A.S.C., were below establishment in light automatics and rifles and there were never more than a few of these weapons in reserve. Requests for weapons from the Sarawak Rangers, the British North Borneo Volunteers and other units had to be refused either in whole or in part, while the lack of weapons also rendered the further expansion of local forces impossible.

68. *Ammunition.*—It had been difficult to keep pace with the increase in the "Period before Relief" and the great increase in the garrison. Nevertheless, when hostilities started, the situation in most categories was satisfactory though in some, such as those for Light Anti-Aircraft and 25-pounders, there were shortages.

69. *Petrol.*—With an almost unlimited supply in the Netherlands East Indies it had been possible to build up large reserve stocks. The Army stocks were held chiefly in large 60-gallon drums. The Air Force stocks were held dispersed as in the case of the Army, but the main Air Force petrol reserve was held in specially constructed underground tanks at Woodlands on Singapore Island a little south of the Causeway.

The Asiatic Petroleum Company held large reserve stocks for civil use both on Singapore Island and at certain places on the west coast.

70. *Food.*—The food problem was complicated with the Australian ration differing from the British ration and with the Indian and other Asiatic troops having their own specialized rations. Nevertheless, approximately 180 days reserve stocks of all types had been accumulated before hostilities broke out. Cold storage accommodation for frozen meat existed at Singapore and Penang and a few vans were available for distribution to troops on the mainland.

In order to build up reserves the meat ration of British troops (though not of the Australian troops) was reduced in the autumn of 1941 and replaced by other commodities, the full meat ration not being so necessary in the climate of Malaya as it is elsewhere.

The food supply for the civil population of Malaya was a complicated problem. It had been studied for some years by a sub-committee of the Defence Committee, Malaya, and, on the outbreak of World War II, a Food Controller was appointed. In peace-time only the rice-growing areas of Malaya are self-supporting. To all other areas, and especially to Singapore Island, rice has to be imported. Malaya had to import annually from Thailand and Burma two tons of rice for every ton grown. The annual consumption was about 900,000 tons. In Singapore and other large cities stocks for both European and Asiatics were held, while in each State rice stocks were accumulated under State arrangements. In addition, a number of cattle on the hoof were brought from Bali in the Netherlands East Indies. It is probable that, when hostilities broke out, a minimum of 180 days reserves were held in the more important commodities, though in some of the others the reserves were on a smaller scale.

The question of a rationing scheme had been under consideration by the Civil Government for some years but by the summer of 1941 no result had been achieved. Committees appointed to examine the problem reported that the difficulties in producing a rationing scheme

for the Asiatic population were so great that they could not put forward a satisfactory solution. As a result, when hostilities broke out, only a modified and limited scheme existed. In the light of subsequent experience it appears that it should have been possible to produce a workable scheme, though it is true that during the campaign there was no shortage of foodstuffs for the civil population.

**71. Water.**—It is only necessary here to explain the water supply in the Singapore Island area. In other parts of Malaya there was little or no danger of a water shortage. Singapore Island was dependent upon two main sources of supply (a) reservoirs at Gunong Pulai in Johore (10 miles west of Johore Bahru) and (b) rainwater catchment areas and open-air reservoirs on Singapore Island i.e. the Seletar, Peirce and MacRitchie Reservoirs. From the former water was brought by above-ground pipe line to Singapore Town where it filled two high-level covered reservoirs at Pearls Hill and Fort Canning. Branches from the Johore pipe-line supplied the Naval Base and Army and Air Force barracks in that area.

The Peirce Reservoir fed by gravity into the MacRitchie Reservoir whence water was pumped into the distribution mains serving the Singapore and Changi areas against the Johore water coming via the Pearls Hill and Fort Canning Reservoirs. The supply from the Seletar, Peirce and MacRitchie Reservoirs was ample to give a restricted supply indefinitely even if the population was increased by refugees, provided the control of these reservoirs remained in our hands and the machinery for distribution continued to operate.

**72. Medical.**—The hospital accommodation which had been prepared in peace-time was of course quite inadequate for the increased garrison. The A.I.F. had their own Base Hospital which was housed in one wing of the new civil hospital at Malacca. The Base Hospital for other Europeans of all three Services was at the Alexandra Military Hospital on Singapore Island. The Indian Base Hospital was in huttied accommodation also on Singapore Island. On the mainland forward hospitals were established—often in schools taken over for the purpose. There were also convalescent camps and "change of air" camps for both Europeans and Indians, and steps were being taken for the construction of a large "change of air" station at Cameron Highlands.

Large reserves of medical supplies were held in the Tanglin (Singapore) area.

With a view to increasing the hospital accommodation in the Singapore area in the event of active operations arrangements had been made with the owners of certain large houses for a portion of them to be used, if required, as overflow convalescent hospitals.

The Civil Medical Services were well developed. There were excellent modern hospitals and a plentiful supply of medical stores. The standard of efficiency of the medical officers was high and there were some exceptionally clever specialists.

**73. Red Cross**—There were Red Cross organizations working for both British and Indian troops. The Australian Red Cross was responsible for all the British troops.

**74. N.A.A.F.I.**—The N.A.A.F.I. organisation, which had been established in pre-war days, was expanded to supply the needs of the British troops. By special arrangements with the Government of India it also in 1941 undertook responsibility for the Indian troops. This branch of its activities was, however, never fully developed, partly owing to the time required to bring in the additional supplies and partly also to the difficulty in finding suitable men to act as branch managers.

**75 Accommodation**—In Malaya, as in other Eastern countries, the problem of accommodation for troops differs widely from that in European countries. There are no farms, large empty houses, or village halls, while billeting on the civil population, mostly Asiatic, has obvious objections. In most places there are good schools and these were made available, when the emergency demanded, by the civil authorities. A limited amount of tentage was also available. A great deal of new construction, however, became necessary. This took the form of wooden hutments erected by civil contractors. Water supplies and eventually electric light had to be laid on. Delays were caused by the shortage of materials, some of which had to be brought from overseas. The R.E. Works Services received valuable help from the Public Works Department in the preparation of these camps.

Sites for the camps were selected in accordance with tactical requirements. Some of those in the North had been erected before my arrival in rubber plantations with a view to providing them with cover from air observation. From a health point of view, however, these camps were definitely unsatisfactory and caused me much uneasiness. The thick rubber tree-tops prevented the sun and light from penetrating to the camps, which in consequence were damp and depressing. This had an adverse physical and mental effect on the troops, some of whom were in consequence not as fighting fit at the end of 1941 as they otherwise would have been. I attempted to improve conditions by thinning the tree-tops and also by organising "change of air" camps on Penang Island and elsewhere to which troops could be sent in turn for short periods.

**76. Recreation.**—Everything was done to provide recreational facilities, both outdoors and indoors, for the troops. In some places, however, the nature of the country did not lend itself to outdoor recreation grounds. Clubs for the troops were organized and special buildings erected in Singapore and other of the larger towns. In this connection many of the civilians were both hospitable and generous in their help.

**77. Married Families.**—In peace-time married families accompanied the troops to Malaya. After the outbreak of World War II, however, no married families of the Army or the Air Force were allowed to enter Malaya, but those already there remained there. The same policy applied to officers' families. The families of officers coming to Malaya from China were sent to Australia, where living was very expensive as it was also in India. In consequence, a number of officers of both the British and Indian Service, especially those who had children in the United Kingdom, became financially embarrassed. On the other hand, women were

urgently required in Malaya as V.A.D.s, car drivers, for work in offices, and for other war work. For these reasons I recommended to the War Office at the request of the C.-in-C. Far East that officers' families should be allowed to enter Malaya at my discretion. This request was refused though they were allowed to visit Malaya for limited periods.

78. *Furlough*.—In peace-time the normal period of service in Malaya was limited to three years. By 1941 many officers and men had already exceeded that period, some by a considerable margin. In order to avoid, as far as possible, deterioration in efficiency I authorised, with the approval of the C.-in-C. Far East, leave ex-Malaya for all ranks for limited periods and provided that no more than a fixed proportion of each unit was absent at any given time. Unfortunately, owing to expense and difficulties of travel, only a few were able to avail themselves of this privilege.

79. *Administrative Inspection*.—In September, 1941, I made an administrative tour lasting eight days of the principal depots, hospitals and other installations in Malaya. Questions of policy were settled and contacts established with the civil authorities. I was satisfied that, as far as lay within our power, everything possible was being done to ensure the maintenance of the essential administrative services should hostilities break out.

#### SECTION X.—CIVIL DEFENCE.

##### *The Civil Population.*

80. *European*.—The European Civilians in Malaya fell into two main categories, the Officials and the Unofficials. Most of them were men of energy and ability but there were some who, after many prosperous years in Malaya, especially during and after World War I, had lapsed into an easier routine. To this the climate partly contributed. This class was gradually disappearing, their place at the beginning of World War II being taken by a splendid type of young man who came out to join the Civil Service or to take up other appointments in civil life.

The picture, so often portrayed, of the "whisky-swilling planter" was a gross misrepresentation of the conditions under which Europeans in Malaya lived at the time of World War II. That the consumption of alcoholic liquor was fairly high is not to be denied, any more than it can be denied in other tropical countries, but there was little drunkenness and the vast majority of Europeans lived very normal lives. The standard of living, however, as a result of the natural wealth of the country and of the climatic conditions, was exceptionally high—possibly too high for the maintenance of a virile European population.

I felt that in some quarters long years of freedom from strife had bred a feeling of security. This frame of mind was voiced in one of the local newspapers which wrote, when the decision to defend Penang was first announced: "There are not a few who view with concern the disturbance of the restful and placid atmosphere of Penang which will result from the military invasion." Even in 1941 there were those who found it difficult to believe that an attack on Malaya was within the bounds of practical politics. It should be stated, however, that most of the Unofficial Europeans were

engaged, directly or indirectly, in the rubber and tin industries which, by order of the Home Government, were working at maximum pressure. Bearing this fact in mind, the European community of Malaya, taken as a whole, shouldered its responsibilities as war approached in the same loyal spirit as was evident elsewhere in the Commonwealth.

81. *Asiatic*.—The bulk of the Asiatic population consisted of Malays and Chinese in approximately equal proportions. In general, the Chinese were to be found in the towns and larger villages while the Malays inhabited the country districts and the sea-boards. The reason for this was that the Chinese, being more industrious by nature and more commercially minded, had gained control of a great deal of the business of the country while the Malays, a more easy-going and less ambitious race, were content to live on the natural products of the soil.

82. The Chinese themselves were of two categories—those who were and those who were not British subjects. For practical purposes the political sympathies of the Chinese population could be divided into four groups:—

(a) The pro-Kuomintang. This was probably the most powerful group.

(b) The pro-Wang Ching Wei, i.e., those who were in sympathy with Japanese aims. A small and not dangerous group.

(c) The pro-Communists, predominantly Chinese of the working classes. The most active and vocal group.

(d) The pro-British and Independents, the former being genuinely loyal adherents of the British Empire, and the latter those who wished to be left alone in the pursuit of fortune and their own self-interest. This group formed the large majority but unfortunately was only too prone to dragooning by (a) and (c) above.

The temporary reconciliation between the Kuomintang and the China Communist Party following the invasion of Russia by Germany resulted in the formation in Malaya of a "United Front" which, on the outbreak of war with Japan, absorbed all Chinese with the exception of Group (b).

As will be readily understood from the above summary, the Chinese population taken as a whole lacked homogeneity and centralized leadership.

83. The Malays were divided into four classes, i.e. the Ruling class of Malay Nobles, the "Intelligentsia", the artisan and clerical class, and the peasant.

The Ruling Classes naturally felt that there should be an ever-widening control by the Sultans. Among the "Intelligentsia" were signs of a movement towards Nationalism. The other two classes were not in the broad sense politically minded.

The remainder of the Asiatic populations, totalling less than 20 per cent. of the whole, consisted of Indians, Eurasians, Japanese, etc.

84. The Indians, the great majority of whom were Hindu by religion with an active proportion of Sikhs, were divided politically into:—

(a) Indian Nationalists who, through the Central Indian Association of Malaya, were bidding for control of the Indian population of the country on a strongly Nationalist basis.

(b) The general mass of Indians, normally a peaceful but ignorant section of the population which was mainly interested in the quiet pursuit of its livelihood but was becoming an easy prey to the agitator.

(c) Indians who were whole-heartedly British in their loyalty, found largely in the better type of Indian trader and in the clerical classes and professions.

(d) The Sikh Community, strongly organized within itself and very susceptible to the anti-British propaganda emanating from overseas.

The Eurasians were to be found mainly in the Colony and particularly in Singapore. The community as a whole was loyal and presented no political problem. It was not politically active.

85 There were a number of Japanese in Malaya and, as all foreigners were treated alike, no special restrictions had up to 1941 been imposed on their activities. They were located mainly—

(a) In Singapore City, where there were large business houses, stores, hairdressing and photographic establishments, etc.

(b) In Johore, where they owned rubber and other estates and iron ore mines.

(c) In Trengganu and Kelantan where they owned large iron ore mines.

(d) In Penang where they carried on similar activities to those in Singapore.

Although access to the defence areas was forbidden to the Public and restrictions were imposed on photography and similar activities, it was quite impossible to maintain secrecy as regards the location and the general nature of the defences being constructed. Moreover, with such a cosmopolitan population, a Foreign Power could have little difficulty in obtaining most of the information it might require, topographical or otherwise, about Malaya.

86. To sum up, the majority of the Asiatic population were enjoying the benefits which British occupation had brought to Malaya. They had so long been immune from danger that, even when that danger threatened, they found difficulty in appreciating its reality and in bringing themselves to believe that the even tenor of their lives might in fact be disturbed.

87. As will be appreciated from this brief review of the civil population of Malaya, the sense of citizenship was not strong nor, when it came to the test, was the feeling that this was a war for home and country. Perhaps more might have been done by the Government in pre-war days to develop a sense of responsibility for service to the State in return for the benefits received from membership of the British Empire.

88. *Contribution to Imperial Defence.*—The Colony of the Straits Settlements was one of those which made an annual contribution to Imperial Defence. In addition to this, the Straits Settlements, the Federated Malay States and the Unfederated States of Johore, Kedah and Kelantan each maintained Local Volunteer Forces. The Federated Malay States also maintained the Malay Regiment and the State of Johore maintained the Johore Military Forces. There were also Naval and Air Volunteer Forces. Among the gifts to Imperial Defence

were the battleship "Malaya" given by the Federated Malay States, the 15 in. Johore Battery given by the Sultan of Johore and some armed coastal patrol craft given by the Straits Settlements.

89. *Malaya's War Role.*—Prior to the outbreak of war with Japan Malaya had been given a charter for its participation in World War II. It was to produce the greatest possible quantities of rubber and tin for the use of the Allies. This was a factor which had considerable influence on its preparations for war.

The Governor and High Commissioner had wide powers to enact legislation by orders in Council.

90. *Manpower.*—The subject of the proper utilization of the available man-power had been carefully examined in peace-time by a sub-committee of the Defence Committee Malaya. It was clear that in time of war as in peace the Government of the country must be carried on and that many of the business concerns must continue to operate. Special war-time officials would also be required. There was no leisured or retired class in Malaya which could be called upon for war-time expansion.

Soon after the outbreak of World War II the Governor and High Commissioner, under the powers conferred upon him, ordered that all European males resident in Malaya should between certain ages be liable for service in one of the local volunteer corps. At Singapore a Controller of Man-Power was appointed in place of the Man-Power Sub-Committee and in each Colony and State Man-Power Boards, on which both civil and military interests were represented, were set up to consider and give decisions on claims for exemption. Many exemptions had to be granted, even after allowing for the fact that in many cases Government and business could be carried on temporarily with reduced staffs.

No liability to military service was imposed upon the Asiatic population. Many of the Asiatics were of a type unsuitable for training as soldiers and the difficulties of nationality of registration and of selection would have been great. Moreover, as already stated, there were no rifles or other arms available with which to equip Asiatic units. There was, however, great difficulty in filling the Chinese sub-units in the existing Volunteer organization. This was in no way due to lack of available material or to lack of effort on the part of the military authorities. It was due chiefly to the lack of unity and of forceful leadership which existed among the Chinese population.

Early in 1941 half the Volunteers were for the first time called out for a period of two months continuous training. It was unfortunate that in April-May labour troubles, involving the calling out of troops, developed on some of the estates in the Selangor and Negri Sembilan area and at the Batu Arang coal mines. This was imputed in some quarters to the absence of European officials at the training camps. At the instance of Government the calling out of the remainder of the Volunteers was postponed to a later date. It never in fact took place.

In Singapore and other large cities Local Defence Corps were formed. They were trained in the use of small arms, but their role was

primarily to assist the Civil Police. They were not incorporated in the military organization but came directly under the Civil Government.

91. *Labour*.—The question of the conscription of labour in time of war had been considered and, in accordance with the advice of those best acquainted with labour conditions in Malaya, rejected as unworkable. The question of the control of labour in time of war had, however, been the subject of frequent discussions and tentative schemes had been worked out.

Although the grave labour problems which developed after the outbreak of hostilities had admittedly not been fully foreseen, some of the trouble could in my opinion have been avoided had the problems of war-time control of civil labour been tackled more energetically in time of peace.

The Singapore Harbour Board and the Municipality, independent bodies operating in co-operation with the Government and carrying out its policy, had their own labour forces.

92. *Passive Air Defence*.—The steps taken by the Civil Government as regards reserve stocks of essential commodities, medical services etc. have already been described in Section IX. The general organization of Passive Air Defence was based on the Home organization. Warning sirens were installed at all the main centres and the P.A.D. organizations included First Aid and Salvage detachments, Medical Auxiliary Services, Fire Services etc. As a rule the detachments were led by Europeans, the members being composed of both Europeans and Asiatics.

A few blast walls to important buildings were built. Only very few air raid shelters were constructed for the civil population. As regards Singapore itself this was partly due to the difficulty of constructing underground shelters, and partly due to the advice of the civil medical authorities, who were of the opinion that to obstruct the circulation of air by building surface shelters in the streets might well lead to epidemics. A number of slit trenches had been dug but these soon became waterlogged and bred mosquitoes.

In Singapore the general policy was to rely rather on dispersal to camps constructed outside the town area. Apart from members of the Fighting Services gas masks were provided only for those persons, such as members of salvage squads, whose duties might compel them to work in gassed areas. This decision was made by the War Committee after consultation with gas experts, on the grounds that the danger from gas bombing was not great in the climatic conditions of Malaya.

Generally speaking, it may be said that the arrangements for Passive Air Defence were in 1941 on too small a scale and inadequate to deal with anything but sporadic air raids. Realising this, arrangements were made in October and November of that year for a series of lectures to be given at the main centres of Malaya by Brigadier I. Simson, the Chief Engineer Malaya Command, who had recently had experience of Passive Air Defence both in London and in Scotland. These lectures were attended by both military and civil officials, but there was little time before war broke out for the instruction given in them to be put into effect.

93. *Evacuations*.—Careful plans were worked out jointly by the military and civil authorities for the evacuation, in case of need, of the civil population from the South Coast of Singapore Island and from other exposed areas. Some areas in East Johore were actually cleared of civilians before war broke out.

94. *Hospitality*.—The civil population, following the example set by the Governor and High Commissioner, were generous in their hospitality to the troops. Clubs were built, equipped and operated by civilians for their benefit. Many civilians invited troops to their houses and entertained them in other ways. A debt of gratitude specially is due to the women of Malaya, many of whom worked untiringly in that enervating climate in the interests of the troops.

95. *General*.—Nevertheless, an atmosphere of unreality hung over Malaya. In the restaurants, clubs and places of entertainment peace-time conditions prevailed. There was no restriction on the consumption of foodstuffs. A measure to restrict the hours during which intoxicating liquor could be sold was not passed into law after long delays until November, 1941. Long immunity from war had made it difficult to face realities.

#### SECTION XI.—RELATIONS WITH THE SERVICES AND THE CIVIL GOVERNMENT.

96. Throughout the summer and autumn of 1941 the co-operation between the Services was good, commanders and staffs working together on friendly and intimate terms. This was true both in the higher and the lower formations.

Relations with the Civil Government also showed a marked improvement. Generally speaking, officials throughout the country co-operated willingly with the military commanders.

I feel bound to record, however, that in my experience of Malaya there was a lack of the team spirit between the Service Departments on the one side and the Civil Government on the other in tackling problems of common interest. The vital importance of attaining the common object, i.e., the security of Malaya, was at times overshadowed by local interests, aggravated by the insistence of the Home Government on the maximum production of tin and rubber. The task of balancing the requirements of a country of vital strategical importance to the Empire with those of a wealthy and prosperous commercial community was a difficult one requiring great tact and patience. Clashes of interests naturally occurred followed very often by long delays due in part to the complicated form of government. Other delays, as has so often happened before in our history, resulted from discussions as to the relative financial responsibility of the Home and Malayan Governments on matters of defence. There was also a difficulty in getting full and accurate information as to civil defence measures.

These difficulties and delays could to some extent have been overcome if there had been more regular meetings of the Defence Committee Malaya, and later of the War Committee. Both the Services and the Civil Government

were represented on these committees and problems affecting the defence, both military and civil, could have been discussed frankly and more expeditiously than by ordinary routine methods. Similarly, reports on the work of the various sub-committees and controllers could have been made and the information could thus have been disseminated to all concerned.

#### SECTION XII.—INFORMATION, PRESS AND CENSORSHIP.

97. *Information.*—At Singapore were established the Ministry of Information Far East and the Malayan Information Bureau. It was through these channels, among other duties, that official propaganda was disseminated.

98. *Press and Censorship.*—The Local Press in Malaya was divided into two categories, i.e. the English Press and the vernacular Press in which each Asiatic community had its own paper or papers. In addition there were the war correspondents whose numbers increased rapidly as the situation worsened. For liaison between the Press and the Services a Public Relations Officer was appointed. The holder of this appointment was a retired naval officer who came directly under the Commander-in-Chief China until the beginning of December, 1941, and then under the Commander-in-Chief Far East. Under him were officers representative of the three Services, who acted as conducting officers, advisers to the censors, etc.

In the same building as the Public Relations Officer was the Chief Censor with his staff of subordinates, i.e. press censors, cable censors, mail censors, etc.

With permission of the C.-in-C. Far East I agreed to receive all Press correspondents for interviews at stated intervals. Similar interviews were given by other commanders. We considered that it would be better to give the Press some official data to work on rather than that they should publish statements and views, often harmful, based on false information or misunderstandings. Towards the end of 1941 I had regrettably to discontinue these interviews on instructions of the C.-in-C. Far East who had, I understand, received instructions from Home to this effect.

Visits to troops in all parts of Malaya were arranged, when desired, for the war correspondents.

In the summer of 1941 there was a tendency in certain sections of the Press to give the Overseas troops very much more publicity than was given to the British Troops. This was damaging to good "esprit de Corps" and I had occasion to include the matter in the agenda for one of my Press conferences. I made it clear that my policy was to treat all troops alike and asked that the Press should do the same. This they agreed to do.

#### SECTION XIII.—THE POLITICAL SITUATION.

99. During 1941 the tension with Japan increased and there were various signs that she was preparing for hostilities in the Western Pacific. Towards the end of July she occupied the Southern part of Indo-China, where she increased her concentrations. She also increased her political activities in Thailand. The attitude of the Thais was uncertain. On two occasions Thai military officers paid official visits to Singapore, where they protested their friendship for Britain. One of them was actually there when war broke out. On the other

hand, there is no doubt that the Japanese were permitted to make preparations in advance for their occupation of South Thailand, for our officers, carrying out reconnaissances in that area, frequently met Japanese there and one of them, though too late, found large petrol dumps on the Patani aerodrome which had been made ready for the occupation. In the autumn many Japanese nationals received orders from their Government to leave Malaya, and Japanese reconnaissance aircraft flew over Malaya and Sarawak. As a result of these activities varying degrees of readiness were from time to time ordered by the C.-in-C. Far East. On the 1st Dec., 1941, the 2nd Degree of Readiness was ordered and a State of Emergency was declared. On the same date the Volunteer Forces were mobilized.

#### SECTION XIV — THE NAVAL SITUATION.

100 On the outbreak of World War II the greater part of the China Fleet had of necessity to be withdrawn for operations elsewhere. The Flag of the Commander-in-Chief, China Station, was transferred from Hong Kong to Singapore at the end of June, 1940. He brought with him, however, only a few light cruisers and destroyers as additions to the very inadequate fleet of local naval craft which existed there. We no longer had control over sea communications in the Far East.

On the evacuation of Shanghai in August, 1940, three river gunboats from the Yangtze were transferred to Singapore, while a few days before the outbreak of war with Japan the "Prince of Wales" and "Repulse" with some attendant destroyers arrived. There were, however, still no aircraft carriers, heavy cruisers or submarines, so that there was nothing in the nature of a balanced fleet.

With the arrival of the "Prince of Wales" and the "Repulse" on 2nd December, Admiral Sir Tom Phillips as Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, took over command of all Fleet operations, leaving local Naval defence in the hands of Vice-Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton, then Commander in Chief, China. The Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, immediately left Singapore by flying-boat for Manila to confer with the American Naval Commander-in-Chief, Asiatic Fleet, with whom contact had been previously established by Commander-in-Chief, China, and did not return to Singapore till 7th December. On the outbreak of hostilities with Japan, the appointment of Commander-in-Chief, China Station, lapsed.

Naval Headquarters remained at the Naval Base.

By December, 1941, the seaward approaches to the Naval Base and to Keppel Harbour were strongly defended by mine-fields, booms, submarine nets, detector loops, etc.

The following ships were at Singapore on the 8th December, 1941:—

Battleship ..	1
Battle Cruiser ..	1
" D " Class	
Cruisers ...	3
Destroyers (including	
" S " Class)	7
Gunboats ...	3

Auxiliary Anti-	
Submarine	
Vessels ..	13
Minesweeping	
Vessels ..	4
Auxiliary Minesweepers ..	12 (and 5 at Penang).
Auxiliary Patrol Vessels ..	5
Motor Launches	11
Boom defence, tugs and depot ships ..	6

#### SECTION XV —THE AIR SITUATION.

101. The Air Officer Commanding Far East, Air Vice-Marshal Fulford, on taking over command at Singapore on the 26th April, 1941, was faced with tremendous difficulties. The aircraft at his disposal were still very deficient in numbers and few of them were of modern types.

102. The bulk of the fighters were the American built Brewster Buffalos, comparatively slow machines with poor manoeuvrability. The device by which the .5 in. machine guns with which they were equipped fired through the propeller was faulty and caused a lot of trouble. A large number of the machines were also temporarily unserviceable when war started. There was also a squadron of Blenheim night-fighters. None of these machines could be classified as modern fighters. For these fighters only a limited number of trained pilots were sent from the United Kingdom. The remainder had to be found from pilots, mostly New Zealanders, who arrived in Malaya with a minimum of flying training and no fighter training, or by transferring pilots from other types of aircraft.

103. The bombers consisted of two squadrons of Hudson General Reconnaissance machines and two squadrons of Blenheims. Some of these squadrons were below strength. There were no heavy bombers in Malaya.

104. There were two squadrons of Torpedo-bombers of the Vildebeeste type. These machines were obsolete. They had a very limited range, and a speed of less than 100 miles per hour.

105. There was one Flying-boat squadron of Catalina machines, which had also become deficient in numbers owing to casualties and lack of reserves.

106. There were no special Army Co-operation aircraft in Malaya. I arranged, however, with the A.O.C. Far East for some of the fighters to be made available for training in Army co-operation work. It was only possible, in the short time available and owing to lack of resources, for the most elementary training to be carried out.

There were no transport or dive-bomber aircraft in Malaya.

107. There was a great shortage of spare parts, reserve aircraft, and reserve pilots. For this reason and in order to conserve resources flying was from May, 1941, onwards greatly restricted. In order to assist the Air Force, Army Officers, when travelling about by air, usually used light machines belonging to the Civil Transport Line or to the Volunteer Air Force.

The Air Force in Malaya was drained of trained personnel to supply shortages in the Middle East. Trained personnel were also

withdrawn from the Australian squadrons to act as instructors in Australia.

The restrictions on flying and the shortage of trained personnel militated greatly against efficiency.

108. When war broke out with Japan, the total of operationally serviceable I.E. aircraft in Malaya was as under:—

Hudson General Reconnaissance land-based	... 15
Blenheim I Bombers	... 17 including 8
Blenheim IV Bombers	... 17 from Burma
Vildebeeste Torpedo-Bombers	27
Buffalo Fighters	... 43
Blenheim I Night Fighters	10
Swordfish (for co-operation with Fixed Defences)	4
Shark (for target-towing, recce. and bombing)	5
Catalinas ...	3 (of which 1 in Indian Ocean).

Total ... 141

This contrasted with the 566 1st Line aircraft which had been asked for.

In addition to the above, there were a few Light Aircraft (Moths etc.) manned by the Volunteer Air Force.

109. This was the Air Force with which we started the war. There was in fact no really effective Air Striking Force in Malaya and the fighters were incapable of giving effective support to such bombers as there were or of taking their proper place in the defence.

The A.O.C. was fully alive to the weakness of the force at his disposal. He frequently discussed this subject with me and I know that he repeatedly represented the situation to higher authority.

110. In order to facilitate co-operation between the Army and the Air Force in North Malaya should hostilities break out, an air organization known as Norgroup was prepared and a commander appointed. The functions of the commander were:—

(a) to command such air forces as Air Headquarters might allot to him from time to time; .

(b) to act as air adviser to G.O.C. 3 Indian Corps and to command such air forces as might be placed under the Corps Commander.

#### SECTION XVI.—SUMMARY OF THE SITUATION ON THE OUTBREAK OF WAR WITH JAPAN.

111. When war broke out with Japan on the 8th December, 1941, there were some glaring weaknesses in the arrangements for the defence of Malaya.

112. The Navy no longer controlled the sea approaches to Malaya and there was a great shortage of craft suitable for coastal defence.

113. The Air Force, in place of a force of 566 1st Line Aircraft asked for by the A.O.C. Far East or of 336 approved by the Chiefs of Staff, had a force of only 141 operationally serviceable aircraft, very few of which were of the most modern types and some of which were even obsolete. There were no modern torpedo-bombers and no dive-bombers, the two types required for offensive action against an

approaching sea-borne expedition, and no transport aircraft, the type essentially required for the maintenance of forward troops in jungle warfare. In addition, there were for reasons already stated comparatively few trained pilots and there was a great shortage of spare parts.

114. The Army dispositions are most easily explained by comparing Malaya again to England and Wales (see Section I). It may further be assumed that an enemy with a superior fleet is in occupation of Norway and that Scotland is a neutral State, whose territory may not be entered unless the enemy is advancing with the obvious intention of landing in the South of Scotland or has violated any part of that country.

In Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire, then, there is one Division watching the main road and railway approaches from Scotland. On the east coast there is a strong brigade group in Northumberland and a weak brigade group at Hull. The Headquarters of this northern area are at Crewe. In the South of England there is one Division consisting of two brigade groups only. One of these is on the east coast about the mouth of the Thames, while the other is about the Oxford area. The Isle of Wight, where the Army Headquarters is situated, is strongly defended on the seaward side and has reasonably strong anti-aircraft defences.

The Command Reserve, which consists of one brigade group only, is situated partly on the Isle of Wight and partly in the area of the Cotswolds where it has recently been carrying out training.

The object of the defence is to protect the Naval Base of Portsmouth which, for purposes of the comparison, it must be assumed is situated on the north coast of the Isle of Wight.

115. The dispersion of the land forces and the lack of reserves needs no stressing. The dispositions on the mainland had been designed primarily to afford protection to the aerodromes, most of which had been sited without proper regard to their security. The situation was aggravated by the fact that there was no adequate Air Force to operate from them. It is true that, even without this commitment, it would have been necessary, in order to protect the Naval Base, to hold at least most of Malaya but, had it not been for the aerodromes, better and more concentrated dispositions could have been adopted.

116. As soon as the threat to Malaya developed in the summer of 1940 everything possible was done, both at Home and in Malaya, to strengthen the land defences. The fact that more could not be done was no doubt due to our Imperial commitments elsewhere. The time proved too short to put a country almost the size of England and Wales, in which there was no surplus labour, into a satisfactory state of defence. The financial control also had a restrictive effect.

117. As regards the Army itself, the troops generally were inexperienced and far too large a proportion of them were only partially trained. There was a shortage of experienced leaders, especially in the Indian and Australian units.

Instead of the 48 infantry battalions and supporting arms (excluding the Volunteer

Forces and troops required for aerodrome defence) which had been asked for, we had only 32 infantry battalions and supporting arms. There were no tanks which, as the operations developed, proved a very serious handicap.

118. Nevertheless, there was throughout the Fighting Services, in spite of these weaknesses, a firm resolve to do our best, with the limited means at our disposal, to ensure the security of the great Naval Base. The Japanese did not gain either strategical or tactical surprise. Our forces were deployed and ready for the attack.

119. As regards Civil Defence, much had been done but, viewed as a whole, the preparations were on too small a scale. There were many who responded nobly as soon as the call came but it cannot be said that the people of Malaya were fully prepared for the part they were to play in a total war.

## PART II. THE OPERATIONS ON THE MAINLAND OF MALAYA.

### SECTION XVII.—THE OPENING OF HOSTILITIES

6-8TH DECEMBER, 1941

120. At about 1130 hrs. on the 6th December, 1941, the morning air reconnaissance, which was watching the approaches to the Gulf of Thailand, reported having sighted Japanese convoys consisting of warships and transports approximately 150 miles S.E. of Pt. Camo (South Indo-China) steaming westward. Information that there were two separate convoys was received at 1400 hrs. The position of these convoys was about 80 miles E.S.E. of Pul Obi. At that time I was at Kuala Lumpur, whither I had gone by civil air line that morning to confer with the Commander 3 Indian Corps. I received the information by telephone at about 1500 hours. At 1515 hrs. I ordered the Commander 3 Indian Corps to assume the First Degree of Readiness, and, anticipating that Operation MATADOR might be ordered, to instruct the Commander 11 Indian Division to be ready to move at short notice.

121. On returning to my Headquarters at Singapore at 1830 hrs. that evening I was informed that the C.-in-C. Far East appreciated that the Japanese convoys had probably turned North West with a view to demonstrating against and bringing pressure to bear on Thailand; that in consequence he had decided not as yet to order Operation MATADOR, also that one convoy consisted of twenty-two 10,000 ton ships escorted by one battleship, five cruisers and seven destroyers, and the other of twenty-one ships escorted by two cruisers and ten destroyers. Two Hudson reconnaissance aircraft had been sent out at 1600 hrs. to shadow the convoys until relieved by a Catalina flying boat which would continue the shadowing throughout the night. These Hudsons failed to make contact owing to bad weather, which prohibited relief Hudsons being sent.

122. The Combined Army and Air Force Operational Headquarters had already been opened at Sime Road. The Administrative Branch of Headquarters Malaya Command and the Headquarters of the Services remained at Fort Canning, partly because their accommodation at Sime Road was not complete and partly because it was desirable for them to remain in close contact with Government Departments.

During the evening I called on the Governor and the C.-in-C. Far East, to whom I reported that the First Degree of Readiness had been assumed by all troops under my command.

123. The first Catalina sent out failed to make contact during the night 6-7th December. A second was despatched early on the 7th December and instructed that, if no contact was established, a search was to be made from 10 miles off the west coast of Indo-China as G.H.Q. anticipated that the convoys might be concentrating in the Koh Kong area where there was a suitable anchorage. No reports were received from this Catalina and, from information subsequently received, it would appear that this boat was shot down by the Japanese. Three Hudson aircraft sent out on the same morning similarly failed to make contact, owing to bad weather conditions which forced two of them to abandon the search.

Further Hudson reconnaissances were sent but only single merchant vessels were sighted in the Gulf of Siam at 1345 hours and 1545 hours respectively. These Hudsons were then sent on a diverging search off the Siamese Coast, and at 1750 hours one merchant vessel and one cruiser were sighted steaming 340°. The cruiser opened fire on the reconnaissance aircraft. At 1848 hours under conditions of very bad visibility, four Japanese vessels, perhaps destroyers, were seen off Singora steaming south.

It will thus be seen that for a period of nearly 30 hours after the first sighting the air reconnaissance sent out had failed to make contact with the main invasion forces, owing to bad weather.

If the report of the Catalina flying boat having been shot down by Japanese aircraft on the morning of 7th December, 1941, is correct, then this was the first act of war in the Malaya area between Japan and the British Empire. If not, then the first act was the firing on the Hudson reconnaissance aircraft by a Japanese ship on the evening of the 7th December.

124. An appreciation of the situation showed that the enemy convoy, if it was bound for Singora, could reach there about midnight 7-8th December, whereas if MATADOR was put into operation, it was unlikely that our leading troops, even if they met with no opposition or obstacles on the way, would arrive there before about 0200 hrs. 8th December. An encounter battle with our small force and lack of reserves would have been very risky, especially as the enemy was expected to include tanks in his force. There was also the complication of part of our force having, owing to the lack of M.T., to move forward by rail and subsequently be linked up with its transport in the forward area. For these reasons I informed the C.-in-C. Far East at a Conference held at Sime Road that I considered Operation MATADOR in the existing circumstances to be unsound. Subsequently at a Conference held at the Naval Base at about 2230 hrs. that night, at which both the C.-in-C. Far East and the C.-in-C. Eastern Fleet (who had just returned from Manila) were present, it was decided not to order MATADOR that night. At 2320 hrs., the Commander 3 Indian Corps was informed of this decision and was instructed to be ready to put MATADOR into effect at dawn on the 8th December if ordered to do so.

125. On the Kelantan front the probable landing beaches had been heavily wired with three belts of double apron or triple dannert wire and concrete pill-boxes had been built. In addition, large numbers of anti-personnel and anti-tank mines had been laid; but the two forward Battalions had to watch a front of over 30 miles and the average company front was over 8,000 yds.

At about 2345 hrs. on the 7th December the Beach Defence troops on Badang and Sabak beaches, the point of junction of which at the Kuala Pa'amat was about one and a half miles N.E of the Kota Bharu aerodrome, reported ships anchoring off the coast. Shortly afterwards our beach defence artillery opened fire and the enemy ships started shelling the beaches. At about 0025 hrs. on the 8th December the leading Japanese troops landed at the junction of the Badang and Sabak beaches and by 0100 hrs. after heavy fighting had succeeded in capturing the adjacent pill-boxes manned by troops of the 3/17 Dogras. The garrisons of the latter inflicted very heavy casualties on the enemy before being themselves wiped out almost to a man. Hudson aircraft between midnight and dawn pressed home numerous attacks in the face of heavy A.A. fire from warships and transports. One of the transports which is believed to have contained tanks and artillery was set on fire, either by air attack or gunfire, or perhaps both, and prevented from discharging its cargo. As soon as the first landing took place the 2/12 Frontier Force Regt. (less one coy. West of the Kelantan River) and 73 Field Battery were ordered up from Chon-Dong with orders to prevent any penetration towards the aerodrome with a view to a subsequent counter-attack.

In the meantime I had informed C.-in-C. Far East and the Governor that hostilities had broken out.

126. At about 0430 hrs. 8th December a Japanese air formation raided Singapore area. It had presumably come from French Indo-China, a distance of about 700 miles. The air raid alarm was sounded but Singapore was not completely blacked out when the aircraft arrived. Bombs were dropped on the Seletar and Tengah aerodromes and in the City area, but damage was slight. This was the first indication the citizens of Singapore had that war had broken out in the Far East.

127. The A.O.C. Far East, in consultation with myself, decided that the task of the Air Striking Force was to co-operate with the Army in repelling the attack on Kelantan. Accordingly the Squadrons based on the Kedah, Kuantan and Tengah aerodromes were ordered to attack the enemy ships lying off Kota Bharu at dawn. Upon arrival at Kota Bharu these aircraft were unable to find the Japanese transports, which had by then withdrawn behind the Perintian Islands some 15 miles off the Kelantan Coast. One squadron went on to Patani, where other Japanese transports were seen and attacked, but owing to fighter opposition it is doubtful if results were obtained. From now on the absence of modern escorting fighters was keenly felt. On return to the aerodromes in Kedah some of our aircraft were attacked by Japanese bombers and fighters while re-fuelling and considerable losses were sustained. The aerodromes at Alor Star, Sungai Patani, Butterworth, Penang, Kota Bharu, Gong Kedah and

Machang were all attacked on this day. The performance of the Japanese aircraft of all types and the accuracy of their high level bombing had come as an unpleasant surprise. Our own air force had already been seriously weakened.

128. At 0820 hrs. 8th December G.H.Q. Far East reported that Operation MATADOR had been approved by the Chiefs of Staff if the Japanese attacked Kota Bharu but G.H.Q. added "Do not act". Air reconnaissance sent to Singora and Patani at dawn reported that enemy forces had landed at those places, that there were a number of ships lying off the coast and that the Singora aerodrome was in use. It was clearly too late now to put Operation MATADOR into effect, so I authorised the Commander 3 Indian Corps to start harassing activities and to lay demolition charges on the roads and railways.

At 1000 hrs. the Straits Settlements Legislative Council, in accordance with previous arrangements, met at Singapore. I took the opportunity to report the situation to it.

At about 1100 hrs. 8th December, sanction to enter Thailand then having been obtained from the C.-in-C. Far East, orders were issued to the Commander 3 Indian Corps to occupy the defensive positions on both the Singora and Kroh-Patani roads, and to send a mobile covering force across the frontier towards Singora to make contact with the enemy and to harass and delay him.

129. This change from an anticipated offensive, for which the 11 Indian Division had been energetically preparing for some weeks, to the defensive had undoubtedly had a considerable psychological effect on the troops. It was aggravated by the fact that on the 7th December certain preparatory moves had been carried out within the division in preparation for MATADOR, including the moves of two battalions of the 15 Indian Infantry Brigade to Anak Bukit Station to entrain. The Division was thus caught to some extent on the wrong foot for the defensive operations which were to follow. It had, however, always been realised that the chances of being able to put Operation MATADOR into effect were not great in view of the political restrictions and Commanders had been instructed to prepare for either alternative. Possibly the defensive preparations had been to some extent sacrificed in favour of the offensive.

130. It was originally intended that the column operating on the Kroh-Patani road, known as Krohcol and commanded by Lt.-Colonel Moorhead, should consist of the 3/16 Punjab Regt., the 5/14 Punjab Regt. from Penang, one coy. sappers and miners, one field ambulance and a light battery of the F.M.S.V.F. The F.M.S.V.F. battery had, however, been unable to mobilise in time, and was replaced later by the 10 Mountain Battery from the North Kedah front. The 5/14 Punjab Regt. was moved up to Kroh on the 8th December leaving one company in Penang but had not arrived when operations started. Responsibility for operations on the Kroh front was on 8th December delegated by Commander 3 Indian Corps to Commander 11 Indian Division.

At 1330 hrs. on the 8th December the Commander Krohcol received orders to occupy the Ledge position some 35-40 miles beyond the

frontier. It was hoped that the Thais would at worst be passively neutral. These hopes were speedily disillusioned. As the vanguard crossed the frontier at 1500 hrs. they were immediately engaged by a light automatic post manned by Thais. Throughout the afternoon the advance was disputed by snipers assisted by road blocks, the enemy fighting skilfully. By nightfall our troops had cleared only 3 miles of the road and then they halted for the night. The enemy were all Thais, some of whom were armed with Japanese rifles.

131. On the North Kedah front, a mechanised column consisting of two companies and the carriers of the 1/8 Punjab Regt. with some anti-tank guns and engineers attached, crossed the frontier at 1730 hrs. 8th December and moved towards Singora to harass and delay the enemy. Concurrently an armoured train, with a detachment of 2/16 Punjab Regt. and some engineers, advanced into Thailand from Padang Besar in Perlis. The Singora column reached Ban Sadao, 10 miles North of the frontier at dusk, where it halted and took up a position north of the village. Here, at about 2130 hrs. it made contact with a Japanese mechanised column, headed by tanks and moving in close formation with full headlights. The two leading tanks were knocked out by the anti-tank guns, but the Japanese infantry quickly debussed and started an enveloping movement. Our column was then withdrawn through the outpost position at Kampong Imam, destroying two bridges and partially destroying a third on the way back. Meanwhile the armoured train party had reached Klong Gnea, in Thailand and successfully destroyed a large bridge before withdrawing to Padang Besar

132. To return to the Kelantan front, as soon as it had become clear from the dawn reconnaissance that there were no ships off the coast further south, the Commander Kelantan force moved up his reserve battalion, the 1/13 Frontier Force Rifles, with some anti-tank guns attached, from Peringat with a view to counter-attacking the enemy who had landed. Some local counter attacks had already been put in and progress made. At 1030 hrs. the 2/12 Frontier Force Regiment (less two coys.) was ordered to counter attack from the south and the 1/13 Frontier Force Rifles from the north. Owing chiefly to the difficulties of the thick waterlogged country and the impassable creeks which lay behind the beaches, these attacks failed to close the gap and by 1700 hrs. the advance of our troops was stopped.

At about 1630 hrs. the R.A.F. Station Commander decided that Kota Bharu aerodrome was no longer fit to operate aircraft and obtained permission from the A.O.C. Far East to evacuate the aerodrome. All serviceable aircraft were flown away and the ground staff was evacuated by road to rail-head. No offensive or reconnaissance aircraft were then available in that area. By 1900 hrs. more ships were reported off the Sabang beach and the Japanese had started to infiltrate between the beach posts in the Kota Bharu area. The Commander Kelantan force therefore decided to shorten his line and ordered a withdrawal during the night to a line east of Kota Bharu. It was pouring with rain and pitch dark and communications had been reduced for the most part to Liaison officers. It was therefore not

surprising that some of the orders went astray. As a result part of the 1/13 Frontier Force Rifles were left behind.

Mention should be made of the splendid work throughout a very trying day of the anti-aircraft detachment of the Hong Kong and Singapore Royal Artillery defending Kota Bharu aerodrome.

An important railway bridge on the Thailand side of the frontier was attacked by Hudsons of No. 1 Squadron (R.A.F.) prior to their withdrawal. Reports on this attack indicate that although the permanent track was damaged the bridge was not.

133. Thus within 24 hrs. of the start of the campaign the Japanese had gained their first major objective, but at considerable cost. It is believed that the forces landed in Kelantan consisted of rather less than one Japanese division. This force lost its accompanying tank formation and many of its guns before it got ashore and subsequent reports indicated that the Japanese suffered some of their heaviest losses during the first day's fighting in Kelantan.

134. A midday air reconnaissance reported 2 cruisers and 15 destroyers moving towards Besut, 6 transports lying off Patani and 25 transports off Singora.

At about 1130 hrs. 8th December I placed one Battalion of the Command reserve, the 4/19 Hyderabads which was then in the Negri Sembilan area on the conclusion of brigade training, under the command of 3 Indian Corps for duty in Kelantan. It was moved up at once by rail.

In the 3 Indian Corps area the 28 Indian Infantry Brigade was ordered on the 8th December to move forward from Ipoh and Taiping to the area of the Alor Star aerodrome and to come under orders of the commander 11 Indian Division.

#### SECTION XVIII.—THE FAR EAST WAR COUNCIL.

135. On the 10th December 1941, in accordance with instructions received from the Home Government, the Far East War Council was formed at Singapore. Its composition was as under:

##### *Chairman.*

The Rt. Hon. A. Duff Cooper, Cabinet representative in the Far East.

##### *Members.*

The Governor and High Commissioner Malaya.

The Commander-in-Chief Far East.

The Commander-in-Chief Eastern Fleet.

The General Officer Commanding Malaya.

The Air Officer Commanding Far East.

Mr. Bowden representing Australia and later

Sir George Sansom, as being responsible for propaganda and Press control.

##### *Secretary.*

Major Robertson, the Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders (staff officer to the Cabinet representative in the Far East).

In addition to the above, Major-General Gordon Bennett, commanding the A.I.F., was told that he was at liberty to attend meetings if and when he wished to do so, and that he would be informed if and when matters particularly affecting Australia were on the agenda.

The Council met at Sime Road at 0900 hrs daily. The meetings usually lasted nearly two hours. The Secretary circulated minutes after each meeting.

If any of the members were unable to attend they were usually represented by deputies.

In January, after the departure from Singapore of Mr. Duff Cooper and Sir George Sansom, the Governor and High Commissioner became Chairman, Mr. Scott took Sir George Sansom's place and Mr. Dawson became Secretary. Later Brigadier Simson, as Director General of Civil Defence, joined the Council.

#### SECTION XIX.—OPERATIONS 9-11TH DECEMBER, 1941.

136. *The Kedah Front.*—The plan for the defence of the Jitra position was to hold it with two brigades forward, the 15 Indian Infantry Brigade on the right and the 6 Indian Infantry Brigade on the left. Of the two forward battalions of the 15 Brigade the 2/9 Jats extended from the hills on the right flank of the position to a point exclusive of the main road. On their left were the 1 Leicesters whose front included both the main and Perlis roads. West of the latter they linked up with the 2 East Surreys, the right battalion of the 6 Brigade whose position included the wooded Pisang salient forward of the Alor Changlih Canal. On their left the 2/16 Punjab Regt. was responsible for the whole front from the railway to the sea. It had permanent positions on the railway and coast only and patrolled the several miles of padi and marsh which intervened. The remaining battalion of the 15 Brigade had the role of delaying the enemy between the frontier and Asun and of occupying an outpost position at Asun, subsequently coming into brigade reserve. The outpost position of the 6 Brigade at Kampong Imam was to be held by the reserve battalion, the 1/8 Punjab Regt. less two companies. The 28 Indian Infantry Brigade less one battalion was to come into Divisional Reserve on arrival in the Alor Star aerodrome area. Its detached battalion had the role of L. of C. and anti-paratroop protection between Alor Star and Sungai Patani. The Divisional Artillery consisted of 155 Field Regiment of two batteries each of eight 4.5-in. Howitzers, the 22 Mountain Regiment, less one battery in Kelantan, armed with a mixed assortment of weapons, the 80 Anti-Tank Regiment, less one battery in Kelantan, with thirty-six 2-pounders, the 16 Light A.A. Battery with sixteen Bofors and, on its way up, the 137 Field Regiment with twenty-four 25-pounders. The 3 Indian Cavalry was on paper the Divisional Reconnaissance Regiment. It had recently arrived in Malaya without its armoured vehicles, having only recently handed over its horses. It consisted of three squadrons of dismounted men, many of them recruits who had had little training. It had very few trained drivers and was equipped in Malaya with a few unarmoured trucks. It was totally unfit for its role of divisional reconnaissance unit.

The defences in the Jitra position, although well advanced, were not complete. In addition, most of the posts had become waterlogged after a week's heavy rain, which still continued for the next few days. It was in these conditions that the troops set to work to complete the defences. The rain also had a serious effect on the demolitions, all of which were

charged on the 8th December but several of which subsequently failed to operate.

137. On the Singora road the advance of the enemy column was delayed by the engagement at Ban Sadao and by demolished bridges and it was not until 0430 hours 10th December that contact was again made about the frontier a few miles north of Changlun. Our forward troops withdrew and the 1/14 Punjab Regt., with some artillery and engineers attached, took up a position behind a stream a little south of Changlun Cross Roads. The Commander 15 Brigade was told by the divisional commander that he must hold the enemy north of Asun at least until the morning of 11th December. He asked for an additional battalion and was given the 2/1 Gurkha Rifles from the 28 Brigade. This battalion took over the Asun outpost position.

138. During the 10th December the covering troops of 6 Brigade withdrew to Kodiang without incident, carrying out important demolitions on the railway before they went. This withdrawal entailed the evacuation of the State of Perlis, as a result of which Britain was accused by one of the Perlis Ministers of State of violating her treaty by abandoning the State.

139. At about 0800 hours 11th December the 1/14 Punjab Regt. was attacked in the Changlun position but succeeded in driving the enemy back. By mudday, however, the enemy attacking from the right flank had penetrated into the middle of our position and the Commander of the Covering Force decided to withdraw behind the Asun outpost position, calculating that he would be able to reach there before the enemy tanks could negotiate the damaged bridges. At 1430 hours, however, he was ordered by the divisional commander to occupy a position 1½ miles north of Asun with a view to imposing further delay on the enemy. At about 1630 hours, when the force was moving back, covered by a rearguard, occurred the first of many incidents which showed the influence of the tank on the modern battlefield, especially against inexperienced troops. Suddenly with little warning twelve Japanese medium tanks followed by infantry in lorries and other light tanks attacked the rear of the column. Few of the troops had ever seen a tank before. The tanks advanced through the column inflicting casualties and causing much confusion and approached the bridge in front of the Asun outpost position. The demolition exploder failed but the leading tank was knocked out by anti-tank rifle fire and blocked the road. The blitz was temporarily stopped, but at considerable cost in men and material. Some 200 men of the 1/14 Punjab Regt. with the Brigadier, all of whom had been cut off, rejoined the following day, but the battalion was temporarily rendered ineffective.

140. By 1830 hours the tanks, followed by infantry, had come on again and broken into the outpost position held by the 2/1 Gurkha Rifles. Shortly afterwards the Battalion Commander decided to withdraw all his three companies. But communications had been broken and of the forward companies only 20 survivors ever rejoined. The losses of the battalion in this action were over 500.

141. On the Perlis road, as may often happen with inexperienced troops, a demolition was prematurely exploded behind the covering and outpost troops. For various reasons it was not

repaired in time although there was no contact on this front and all the transport, guns and carriers of the covering and outpost troops and seven anti-tank guns in the main Jitra position were lost.

142. Withdrawals are admitted to be among the most difficult operations of war even for seasoned troops and the above incidents, which have been described in some detail, serve to illustrate the great difficulty of conducting them successfully with inexperienced troops. They had a profound influence on the Battle of Jitra. At the same time I am of the opinion that some of the trouble might have been avoided had the commanders reacted more swiftly to the problems created by the appearance of tanks on the battlefield.

143. *The Kroh Front*—The advance was continued early on the 9th December. Our column was still opposed by the detachment of the Thailand Armed Constabulary which was now some 300 strong and which adopted guerilla tactics. As the leading troops approached Betong, however, in the afternoon all opposition ceased. Here the column stopped for the night.

144. At first light on the 10th December Krohcol embussed in the 2/3 Australian Reserve M.T. Coy. and moved forward towards the Ledge position. When about 4 miles short of its objective the advanced guard came under fire from Japanese troops. It continued to advance rapidly for 1½ miles and then was held up. An encounter battle developed in which there was heavy fighting with considerable casualties on both sides, but again the issue was decided by Japanese tanks which made a surprise appearance on this front. The 3/16 Punjab Regt. fought splendidly in this engagement as it did also the following day. The 10 Mountain Battery and 5/14 Punjab Regt. (less one Company) had now arrived at Kroh and the Commander Krohcol ordered them up to a position about 10 miles north of Betong. He also reported the situation to the Commander 11 Indian Division saying that he might have to withdraw. The latter in his reply imposed on him the rôle of stopping, and not merely delaying, the enemy.

145. During the afternoon of the 11th December the enemy made repeated attacks on the forward troops of Krohcol but were repulsed with heavy losses. The battalion casualties, however, after three days' and nights' fighting were past the 200 mark. The commander Krohcol estimated that he was opposed by four enemy battalions and reported accordingly to Headquarters 11 Indian Division. It was the night after the affair at Asun recorded above and in reply the Commander 11 Indian Division sent a personal message to the effect that the object of Krohcol must now be to ensure the safety of the whole division by preventing the enemy from debouching on to the L. of C. about Sungei Patani. The Commander Krohcol was given full permission to withdraw as necessary to the Kroh position, where his stand must be final.

A detachment of anti-tank guns was sent to this front.

146. *The Kelantan Front*—Civil plans during the first day of war had gone smoothly under the capable direction of Mr. Kidd, the British Adviser. During the 8th December all European women and children were withdrawn

to Kuala Krai and thence out of the State, and plans for the denial of sea and river craft to the enemy were put into effect. The few remaining Japanese civilians were rounded up for internment. Many of the Japanese civilians had left before the outbreak of war. The Sultan of Kelantan and his household left for his residence near Kuala Krai. The few Asiatic civilians who wished to leave did so under control and there was no refugee problem.

147. During the night 8th-9th December heavy fighting went on at the Kota Bharu aerodrome. At dawn the Japanese put in a heavy attack astride the aerodrome road and the Commander, Kelantan Force, decided to withdraw to a position with a good field of fire South of Kota Bharu. Eventually the line was stabilized at the new position and a large number of troops who had been cut off in the withdrawal rejoined their units. In the afternoon the 4/19 Hyderabad Regt. arrived from the Command Reserve and was ordered to take up a position some 12 miles south of Kota Bharu covering the camp at Chondong. In the meantime, the troops in the north half of the night sector of the beach defences had been ordered back from the beaches to cover the road Kota Bharu—Pasir Puteh. The troops on the main road were withdrawn through the Hyderabads and night positions were established north of Chondong.

148. On the 10th December units were reorganized. The strength of each of the battalions which had been heavily engaged was now up to 600 or more. As so often happened later in the campaign our casualties did not prove to be so heavy as at first reported. Several attacks made by the enemy were beaten off.

149. Having in view the threat to his communications should the enemy make fresh landings further south on the coast of Kelantan, the Commander, Kelantan Force, decided on the morning of the 11th December to give up the Gong Kedah and Machang aerodromes, which were no longer required by our Air Force, and to concentrate his force south of Machang to cover his communications. This movement was carried out during the day and a good position occupied. Unfortunately the runways at both the Gong Kedah and Machang aerodromes had to be left intact, for at neither had the demolition arrangements been completed. Orders were given for the demolition of the Guillemaud Bridge over the Kelantan River, the longest railway bridge in Malaya.

Information was received that the Japanese had on the 10th December landed another force at Besut in South Kelantan.

150. *The Kuantan Front*—On the 9th December Japanese aircraft attacked the Kuantan aerodrome. They were engaged by small arms fire, there being no anti-aircraft guns available for the defence of this aerodrome. In the afternoon the aerodrome was abandoned as being unserviceable. Subsequently the greater part of the aerodrome was cratered by Army engineers, one runway only being left for emergency use.

Early on the night 9th-10th December reports were received from the northern part of the beach defences that enemy ships were approaching the beaches. Defensive fire was opened and spread southwards and at about 0400 hrs torpedobombers attacked three ships

off this coast. No landing took place but subsequently some boats with Japanese equipment were found on the beach south of Kuantan. This incident had a great influence on the movements of the "Prince of Wales" and "Repulse" which will be recorded later.

151. *Naval Operations*.—In accordance with pre-war plans, submarines of the Royal Netherlands Navy operated off the east coast of Malaya and in the approaches to the Gulf of Thailand during this period. They reported sinking 4 Japanese transports off Patani on the 12th December, and a merchant ship and a laden oil tanker off Kota Bharu on the 12th and 13th December.

Towards dark on the 8th December, Admiral Sir Tom Phillips put to sea with the battleship "Prince of Wales" and the battlecruiser "Repulse" to attack the Japanese ships in the Gulf of Thailand. They were escorted by 4 destroyers. The decision to take the fleet to sea was made by the Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, after discussing the situation with the Commander-in-Chief, Far East.

On the evening of the 9th December the British Fleet was sighted by a Japanese submarine and also by Japanese reconnaissance aircraft. The Japanese air striking forces, which were being held in readiness, probably in South Indo-China, for this purpose, set-off for a night attack on the Fleet but ran into thick weather and were forced to return to their base.

The Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, realising from his having sighted Japanese aircraft that his movements had been seen, and that the element of surprise had been lost, decided to abandon the project and return to Singapore. During the night 9th-10th December, however, he was informed by his shore Headquarters at Singapore that a landing had been reported at Kuantan. Reconnaissance aircraft were flown off and the Fleet closed the shore in order to clear up the situation before returning to Singapore. Shortly after daylight the Fleet was again located by Japanese reconnaissance aircraft and their striking force was again despatched. At about 1115 it attacked the "Prince of Wales" and "Repulse" when about 60 miles off Kuantan, and by 1320 both these ships had been sunk. Fighter aircraft from Singapore were despatched as soon as the attack on the ships was reported, but only arrived in time to see them go down. 2,185 survivors were picked up by the destroyers and brought to Singapore. The Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, was lost and was succeeded by Vice-Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton.

With the sinking of these two ships the Japanese again obtained undisputed control of the sea communications east of Malaya and the whole of the east coast became exposed to attack.

I wish to pay tribute to the gallant manner in which the C.-in-C. Eastern Fleet endeavoured to assist the land and air forces by attacking the enemy's sea communications.

152. *Air Operations*.—Early on the 9th December our Air Force attacked targets in the Singora area. Owing to lack of fighter support 5 out of 11 of our aircraft were lost. During the morning Alor Star aerodrome was again heavily bombed and was evacuated later in the day, the buildings being set on fire. The sound of the explosions and the sight of the burning

buildings had a considerable psychological effect on the troops of the II Indian Division who had been told that their task was to secure this aerodrome for the use of our Air Force. Further attacks were carried out on Sungei Patani and Butterworth aerodromes and, again owing to the lack of light anti-aircraft and fighter defence, casualties were inflicted on the aircraft grounded there. On the 10th Dec. our aerodromes on the Kedah front were again heavily attacked. Sungei Patani aerodrome was evacuated during the day. On this day also the first of a series of heavy Japanese air attacks on Penang Island took place. It was carried out by 70 enemy bombers and Georgetown was the target. There were no anti-aircraft defences, except small arms fire, and few shelters. The inhabitants thronged the streets to watch the attack. The casualties from this raid ran into thousands. A large part of the population left Georgetown and moved to the hills in the centre of the Island, but the A.R.P. and the Medical and the Nursing Services stood firm. The small garrison, in addition to manning the defences, was called upon to assist the Civil Administration by taking the place of labourers and of the personnel of essential municipal services. It also had to assist in burying the dead. On the following day Georgetown was again raided by 25 aircraft and the experiences of the previous day were repeated on a smaller scale.

On the east coast front the enemy during this period concentrated his air attacks on our aerodromes, all of which in the States of Kelantan and Pahang became unserviceable.

Valuable photographic reconnaissances were carried out during this period, as they were throughout the campaign, by two pilots flying Buffalo aircraft.

**153. Borneo.**—In accordance with pre-war plans the denials of the Miri and Seria Oilfields and Installations in Sarawak and Brunei were completed, as far as could be done, as soon as hostilities broke out. The refinery at Lutong was also demolished on the 9th Dec.

**154. Command Reserve.**—On the 10th Dec., in view of the threat to Kuantan, the weak strength of the garrison there and the danger to the communications of the Kelantan Force, I moved one battalion of the Command Reserve (2 Bn. The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders) from the Port Dickson area to the Jerantut area on the east coast railway and placed it under orders of the Commander 3 Indian Corps for duty in that area only.

**155. Summary.**—Since the outbreak of hostilities the general situation had changed greatly to our disadvantage. The Japanese had established complete air superiority over North Malaya and had gained full control of the sea communications east of Malaya. As a result of this the whole of the east coast of Malaya and Singapore Island itself lay open to attack and, to meet attack, reliance would have to be placed almost entirely on the land forces. As regards the land situation the Japanese had established strong forces both in South Thailand and in Kelantan, and nothing could now prevent them from bringing in reinforcements as far as their resources would admit. To make matters worse they had, as far as could be ascertained, landed these forces with the loss of only 7 ships, of which 6 had been sunk by Dutch

submarines, in place of the considerable losses which it had been hoped that our Air Force would inflict and which had formed the basis of my estimate of the Army strength required (See Part I, Section VJ). Our own forces were weak everywhere and we could not expect any reinforcements until at least the following month, though it was certain that every endeavour would be made to send us such reinforcements as could be made available as early as possible. Further, it had been established that the Japanese force included tanks while we had none.

It was apparent that the safe arrival of reinforcements was of paramount importance and, if we were to attain our object of securing the Naval Base, it was essential that they should arrive in time to take part in operations on the mainland. To enable them to do this, it was necessary that we should impose the maximum delay on the enemy but that at the same time we should avoid having our forces destroyed in detail. If the latter should happen in any area, it might open the way for a rapid advance by the enemy which with our lack of reserves we might find it impossible to stop.

**156. Special Order of the Day.**—On the 10th December I issued the following Special Order of the Day:—

"In this hour of trial the General Officer Commanding calls upon all ranks Malaya Command for a determined and sustained effort to safeguard Malaya and the adjoining British territories. The eyes of the Empire are upon us. Our whole position in the Far East is at stake. The struggle may be long and grim but let all resolve to stand fast come what may and to prove ourselves worthy of the great trust which has been placed in us."

#### SECTION XX.—THE AIR SITUATION 11TH DECEMBER, 1941.

**157. Photographs** taken of the aerodromes in South Thailand showed that the Japanese were already operating large numbers of aircraft from them. On Singora aerodrome alone there were upwards of 100 aircraft with comparatively little anti-aircraft gun protection—a wonderful target had we had an adequate and balanced Air Striking Force. The enemy were of course also operating their longer range types of aircraft from their bases in Indo-China and possibly also from aircraft carriers. It is probable that they were operating some 300 modern aircraft at this time. Their bombers were of the Navy 96, the Army 97 and the Junkers 88 types, all twin-engined machines. Their dive-bomber was the Junkers 87B. Their torpedo-bombers were Navy 97's and their fighters were Navy "O." (or Zero) machines. A wide use of auxiliary petrol tanks for the fighters gave them increased range.

In face of this attack the losses suffered by our small Air Force in North Malaya had been comparatively heavy. They had been heavier than they otherwise would have been owing to the inability, due to lack of resources, to provide adequate fighters in North Malaya for the defence of aerodromes and the protection of the bombers, and also owing to the lack of ground defence against low-flying aircraft.

158. On the 9th and 10th December, Dutch air reinforcements arrived in Malaya from the Netherlands East Indies. They consisted of three squadrons of Glenn Martin Bombers totalling 22 aircraft and one squadron of nine Buffalo fighters. Unfortunately the Dutch bomber pilots were not fully trained in night flying or in advanced navigation over the sea, so that it was necessary for them to return, a squadron at a time, to the Netherlands East Indies for further training in these subjects. Nevertheless, the Netherlands East Indies had shown a most co-operative spirit in sending these aircraft, as well as, submarines, so promptly to our assistance.

159. On the morning of the 11th December, 1941, rather more than 100 aircraft were available for operations disposed as under:—

*Selectar.*

Vickers Vildebeeste Torpedo-Bombers	..	..	18
Catalina Flying Boats	..	..	1
Sharks	..	..	5
Swordfish	..	..	4

*Sembawang.*

Hudson General Reconnaissance	4
Buffalo Fighters	17
Glenn Martin Bombers (N.E.I.)	13

*Tengah.*

Blenheim IV Bombers	..	8
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*Kallang.*

Buffalo Fighters	..	..	26
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*Taiping.*

The surviving aircraft from the Northern aerodromes reinforced by a few from the South.

160. On the 11th December it was decided that the air policy should be as follows:—

(a) Bombing, except in special circumstances, to be confined to night. This was made necessary by the enemy's fighter superiority.

(b) The primary tasks of the fighters would be the defence of the Singapore Base and the protection of convoys bringing land and air reinforcements to Malaya. The reason for this was that we could not hope to regain superiority without powerful reinforcements. The safe arrival of such reinforcements was therefore the first essential in our air strategy.

As a result of this policy it was clear that the Army would suffer from lack of air support and of close co-operation in the fighting on the mainland, though some seaward reconnaissance would still be possible. I accepted this situation.

#### SECTION XXI.—THE WITHDRAWAL FROM KELANTAN.

161. On the 12th December 1941 the Commander, 3 Indian Corps, visited Command Headquarters to discuss the policy as regards the Kelantan Force.

It will be recalled that the task of the Kelantan Force had been the protection of the three aerodromes in that State for the use of our Air Force and the denial of them to the enemy. In view of the situation some fresh instructions were clearly necessary. The alternatives were either to leave the force in Kelantan or to

withdraw it for employment elsewhere. The factors in favour of the former course were:—

(a) It might still be possible to prevent the enemy making full use of the three aerodromes.

(b) The presence of our force in Kelantan would contain a proportion of the enemy's force in that State.

(c) The moral effect of the withdrawal both on the civil population and on our own troops would not be good.

(d) We should probably lose some material and equipment in the withdrawal.

In favour of a withdrawal were the following factors:—

(a) The aerodromes were no longer required by our Air Force and there seemed to be no probability of them being required within a reasonable period of time.

(b) It seemed probable that the main threat would develop on the west coast, where we had inadequate resources with which to meet it.

(c) The communications of the Kelantan Force, which now consisted of only a single line railway with a number of bridges, were precarious, especially having in view the enemy's great air superiority.

(d) In view of (c) above and of the superiority on land which the enemy was likely to develop, it seemed probable that we should lose the force if it remained in Kelantan.

After full consideration I decided, with a view to conserving our resources and concentrating them for the main battle which would probably develop on the west coast, to withdraw the Kelantan Force as soon as rolling stock could be made available. This decision was submitted to the C.-in-C., Far East, the same afternoon and approved by him. Orders were issued immediately and the evacuation of surplus stores started at once.

162. On the 12th December the enemy became very active and attacked in strength, but the 2/10 Baluch Regt. counter-attacked, coming to close grips with the enemy and inflicting casualties.

On the 13th December the 2/10 Baluch Regt. again inflicted casualties on the enemy who were trying to advance round their flank.

163. During the next few days the withdrawal continued systematically, the enemy being made to fight for each position, with comparatively little loss to the defenders. By the 16th December all surplus stores and equipment had been evacuated and the withdrawal of the troops by rail began. The 4/19 Hyderabads were the first to leave so that they could rejoin their own brigade on the west coast. On the 19th December the railhead at Kuala Krai was evacuated. The rearmost troops withdrew from Kuala Krai on foot as the large railway bridges a little south of that place had by then been destroyed. Practically all the stores and all the vehicles, except about 80 for which no railway flats were available, were successfully evacuated. A rearguard under Lt.-Col. McKellar, known as Macforce, was left behind to watch the railway and prevent the repair of the bridges. It included troops of the Pahang Volunteers and the Malay Regiment, and carried out its duties most efficiently.

On completion of the withdrawal on the 22nd December the 8 Indian Infantry Brigade concentrated in the Kuala Lipis/Jerantut area except for the 2/12 Frontier Force Regt. which rejoined its brigade at Kuantan.

164. The casualties suffered in the Kelantan fighting had been fairly heavy but not excessive. The conduct of the operations generally and especially of the withdrawal reflected great credit on the Commander of the Force (Brigadier B. W. Key) and his staff.

#### SECTION XXII.—WEST COAST OPERATIONS 12-17TH DECEMBER, 1941.

165. *The Battle of Jitra.*—In the absence of the commander of the 15 Indian Infantry Brigade who had, as stated in Section XIX, been cut off as a result of the action in the outpost position, the commander of the 28 Indian Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Carpendale) temporarily took over command of the 15 Brigade as well as his own and held it until the return of Brigadier Garrett, the following day.

166. Shortly after midnight 11/12th December the Japanese attacked the left forward company of the 2/9 Jats east of the Singora road. Two hours later the frontage had been extended to involve the right forward companies of the 2/9 Jats and the 1 Leicesters. By 0400 hrs. the right rear company of the Jats had also been attacked but had repulsed the enemy. At dawn the Japanese infantry made a determined frontal attack on the Jats and Leicesters and suffered heavy losses but by midday had penetrated deep into the area held by the Jats. The Leicesters formed a defensive flank to their right. In the meantime the Commander 15 Brigade had called upon the Commander 6 Brigade for assistance and had been given 1½ battalions which he used to protect his right flank.

167. At about 0830 hrs. the Commander 11 Indian Division asked Headquarters 3 Indian Corps for permission to withdraw his division to Gurun, some 30 miles to the south, and possibly later to the Krian River. The Commander 3 Indian Corps was at that time on his way to Singapore to confer on the Kelantan policy (see Section XXI), so the message was telephoned direct to me. Such a long withdrawal had not been considered in our pre-war discussions of war plans and it would immediately have prejudiced our chances of denying the west coast aerodromes to the enemy. Moreover I felt that such a withdrawal would have a most demoralising effect on both the troops and on the civil population. This view was endorsed by the War Council which was sitting at the time. I therefore replied to the effect that pending further orders the battle was to be fought out on the Jitra position. At that time the Jats were, in point of fact, the only battalion which had incurred serious losses although two battalions had, as already recorded, been rendered ineffective on the previous day.

168. During the morning two counter-attacks were made by the 1/8 Punjab Regt. on the enemy who had penetrated east of the road and, although unsuccessful in re-capturing the lost ground, were effective in stopping the enemy's advance for the time being.

In the early afternoon the enemy infantry resumed their advance on the right and attacked

the 2/2 Gurkha Rifles holding the line of the Bata River. The left of this battalion was at the iron bridge on the main road and between it and the right of the Leicesters further north was a gap of 1½ miles. The Leicesters were now ordered to withdraw from their prepared position and to take up a new position with their right on the iron bridge, their centre on Jitra village and their left at Rimba. This gave them a front of over two miles with a pronounced salient in the middle.

Later in the afternoon the road south of Jitra came under close range enemy fire. The traffic on it at the time was heavy and some confusion developed. The Divisional Commander, fearing the enemy would move round our right flank, ordered two companies of the East Surreys to move back by rail to guard the vital bridges at Kepala Batas.

169. At about 1930 hrs. the Commander 11 Indian Division again asked for permission to withdraw. The request was telephoned to me at Headquarters Malaya Command where I was still in conference with the Commander 3 Indian Corps. After consultation I authorised the latter to despatch the following message to the Commander 11 Indian Division:

"After consultation it is decided that your task is to fight for the security of North Kedah. Estimated that you are only opposed by one Japanese division at most. Consider best solution may be to hold up advance enemy tanks on good obstacle and dispose your forces to obtain considerable depth on both roads and to obtain scope for your superior artillery. Reserves for employment in divisional area are being expedited."

170. The divisional orders for the withdrawal were sent out at 2100 hrs. The plan in outline was that the 28 Brigade, reconstituted under Brigadier Carpendale and with one battalion of the 15 Brigade under its command, should hold a position between Langgar and the south bank of the River Kedah at Alof Star. This meant a withdrawal of some 10 miles. The remainder of 15 Brigade was to be in reserve. The 6 Brigade was to occupy a position 7 miles further back at Simpang Empat. A small composite force was to hold the line of the River Padang Terap until the 15 Brigade had passed through.

This withdrawal would have been difficult under the most favourable conditions. With units mixed as a result of the day's fighting, communications broken and the night dark, it was inevitable that orders would be delayed and in some cases would not reach the addressees. This was what in fact occurred. Some units and sub-units withdrew without incident. Others, finding themselves unable to use the only road, had to make their way as best they could across country. Some parties reached the coast and, taking boats, rejoined further south. Some again were still in position the following morning.

171. On the day after the battle the strength of the 15 Brigade was only about 600 and it was temporarily unfit for further fighting. The 6 Brigade, though still a fighting formation, had also had serious losses. In the 28 Brigade the 2/1 Gurkha Rifles, except for one intact company, had been almost wiped out. The other two battalions had suffered about

100 casualties between them. Several guns had been lost. The majority had either been caught on the wrong side of demolitions, or become inextricably bogged in their gun positions or been cut off by enemy penetration, it being impossible in most places to move them across country. A large number of vehicles were lost for similar reasons. The loss of carriers, small arms weapons, signalling equipment etc. had also been very heavy. These were serious losses as in many cases there were not sufficient reserves in Malaya to replace them.

The 11 Indian Division needed to be relieved, rested and reorganised before being again called upon to fight, but there were no troops available to relieve it.

172. It is unlikely that the Japanese employed more than one division during the battle of Jitra. Their success was won primarily by bold and skilful infantry tactics and by the use of tanks. They employed no artillery heavier than the infantry gun and in this action they made little use of aircraft in support of ground forces. They exploited the moral value of noise behind the defences. They also appear to have had an organized "fifth column" plan which had at least a partial success by spreading false rumours.

173. It is probably true to say that the battle of Jitra was half lost before it began. The change from an anticipated offensive to a strategical defensive had, as has been stated, an adverse moral effect on the troops. The temporary loss of two battalions on the previous day had left serious gaps in the reserves on the right flank. In consequence, when the enemy broke into the defences, the reserves were not strong enough to prevent the enemy getting control of the one vital artery of communications. Veteran troops would have found these conditions trying enough. They were in some cases too trying for the young and inexperienced troops of which the 11 Indian Division was composed. Finally, the eventual withdrawal, carried out in very difficult circumstances, was too complicated and too long for troops who were already exhausted and considerably disorganised.

174. *The Command Reserve.*—On the 12th December I placed the Command Reserve (12 Indian Brigade Group), with the exception of headquarters and one battery of the 122 Field Regiment, at the disposal of the Commander 3 Indian Corps for employment on the west coast. With the exception of the 4/19 Hyderabad Regiment, which had to be withdrawn from Kelantan, the Brigade Group began to move forward immediately by road and rail.

175. *The Kroh Front.*—Early on the morning of the 12th December (the day of the Jitra battle) the enemy again attacked the 3/16 Punjab Regiment but was driven back. An outflanking movement, however, forced the Punjabs to withdraw with heavy casualties to one of their forward companies. Eventually the 3/16 Punjab Regiment withdrew through the 5/14 Punjab Regiment to Kroh. Their strength, including 50 reinforcements, was now about 400. They destroyed three bridges on the road to Klian Intan and Grik and moved into a prepared position 2 or 3 miles west of Kroh. The orders given to the Commanding

Officer of the 5/14 Punjab Regt. were that he was to delay the enemy but not become inextricably involved.

Two Japanese companies attacking at dawn on the 13th December were practically annihilated by the fire of our light automatics. Enemy enveloping movements round both flanks, however, forced a withdrawal and the 5/14 Punjab Regt. with attached troops fell back to Betong, where the battalion embussed, and by dusk the whole force was in occupation of the position west of Kroh.

At midnight 12/13th December the Commander 3 Indian Corps took over direct command of Krohcol from the Commander 11 Indian Division.

At midday on the 14th December the Commander 12 Indian Infantry Brigade took over command of Krohcol and moved it to the Baling area some 9 miles west of Kroh. Krohcol, as an independent force, was then dissolved.

The withdrawal of Krohcol to the position west of Kroh left uncovered the jungle road through Klian Intan to Grik and thence the metalled road to Kuala Kangsar and Ipoh. Reports on this road had indicated that as far as Grik it was passable only for light M.T. in dry weather. We were soon to learn that these reports were optimistic. To meet the threat a company of the 2 Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders with a detachment of the F.M.S.V.F. Armoured Cars was ordered to Grik.

176. *Headquarters 3 Indian Corps.*—On the night 13/14th December the Commander 3 Indian Corps moved up to Bukit Mertajam in Province Wellesley where he established an advanced headquarters.

177. *The Battle of Gurun.*—At dawn on the 13th December there were only three companies in position on the south bank of the Kedah River with one company at Langgar. The large road bridge south of Alor Star was destroyed, but an attempt to destroy the railway bridge was less successful. The enemy made only one attempt to cross during the day and, after getting a footing on the south bank, was driven back. During the night 13/14th December and the morning of the 14th all troops of 11 Indian Division were withdrawn to the Gurun position. Here, where the plain merges into the rolling thickly wooded rubber country of South Kedah, was perhaps the best natural defensive position in Malaya. It had previously been reconnoitred and was again reconnoitred as soon as the Japanese advance began. A large labour force had been ordered to assemble but failed to appear and no work had been done on the position when the division arrived.

178. The Gurun position was occupied with the 28 Indian Infantry Brigade on the right and the 6 Indian Infantry Brigade on the left with the weak 15 Indian Infantry Brigade in reserve. On the afternoon of the 14th December the enemy attacked down the main road with tanks followed by infantry in lorries and supported by aircraft. Some penetration took place but the enemy were stopped by local counter-attacks. During the night, however, the enemy effected a deep penetration down the road and at 0700 hrs. attacked the Headquarters of the 6 Brigade. All the officers except the Brigadier himself were killed. There

was a large gap now between the main road and Kedah peak. East of the road, however, our forward troops were still in position, but they were now moved to block the main road down which the enemy was advancing. By the afternoon the division was again in confusion and the 28 Brigade was the only one which could for the time being be relied upon. The Divisional Commander decided to withdraw his force behind the River Muda during the following night covered by the only fresh troops which were available i.e. the Independent Company which had just arrived from Penang and one squadron of 3 Indian Cavalry. Units of the 28 Brigade and the 2 East Surrey Regt. did some splendid work in covering the withdrawal. As had happened before, the premature demolition of bridges was the cause of losses of many vehicles and carriers.

179. By the morning of 16th December the Division was south of the River Muda and had passed into Province Wellesley. The 12 Indian Brigade Group (less one battalion) had moved into position on its right with one battalion (the 5/2 Punjab Regt.) at Batu Pekaka, an important bridge over the River Muda, and the Argylls at Baling.

180. The Division was in no fit state for further operations. Most of the men were tired and dispirited. They badly needed time to re-organise and refit. There had been a further heavy loss of vehicles and weapons. Some of these it was now impossible to replace. The tanks had again played their part in the battle of Gurun, but the enemy should not have been allowed to penetrate as he did down the main road. Later, lack of communications made it difficult for formation commanders to control the battle. The Divisional Commander courageously tried to control the battle from a carrier, but the thickly wooded country was against him. All the infantry brigade Commanders had become casualties.

181. On the 15th December the R.A.F. evacuated Butterworth aerodrome. The 16 Light A.A. Battery had done some good work in defence of this aerodrome, claiming 4 enemy aircraft certain and 6 other probables brought down.

182. *Penang*.—Although the Island of Penang had been since 1936 (see Part I Section VI) officially a fortress, it was in fact in December, 1941, far from being one. The garrison on the 12th December, 1941, consisted of:—

Fortress Headquarters and Signals.

11 Coast Regt. Hong Kong and Singapore Royal Artillery (two 6-in. batteries).

36 Fortress Company Royal Engineers (manning searchlights).

One Company 5/14 Punjab Regt.

1 Independent Company.

Detachment of 3 Indian Cavalry.

The 3 (Penang and Province Wellesley) Battalion S.S.V.F.

A Mixed Reinforcement Camp.

Administrative Detachments.

There were no anti-aircraft defences as the guns and searchlights had not yet arrived from the U.K. The civil airport was too small for normal R.A.F. requirements. The only fighter defence was provided by five Buffalo Fighters which were able to operate for one day only from the Butterworth aerodrome.

In addition to the Island the Commander Penang Fortress (Brig. Lyon) was responsible also for a part of the Prai-Butterworth area on the mainland and for the Lines of Communication area (North).

183. The original object of fortifying the Island of Penang was to secure the anchorage which lies between the Island and the mainland from sea and air attack, as the Royal Navy contemplated using it both for warships and as a convoy collecting port.

184. The pre-war instructions to the Commander 3 Indian Corps were to the effect that 11 Indian Division, if driven back, would fall back on the axis of the main road and railway communication arteries, leaving on Penang Island, which would be held, up to two additional infantry battalions with supporting troops.

185. The effects of the first air attacks on Penang on the 10th and 11th December have already been described in Section XIX. On the 13th December 50 Naval Ratings, survivors from the "Prince of Wales" and "Repulse" arrived to operate the ferries, the crews of which had disappeared.

On the 12th December at a meeting between the Fortress Commander and the Resident Counsellor it was decided to evacuate on the following night all European Service families and the Resident Counsellor was asked to arrange for the evacuation of all civilian European women and children. This decision was taken as a normal measure to evacuate "bouches inutiles". The evacuation of the sick and wounded from the military hospital was also ordered.

186. On the 13th December the policy as regards the defence of Penang had to be reviewed in the light of the situation on the mainland which has been described earlier in this Section. There was a very real danger that the 11 Indian Division, which at this time was in an exhausted and very disorganized condition, would be overrun and cease to exist as a fighting formation. There was also the danger that the threat from Kroh, which was now much greater than we had anticipated, would cut the communications of the 11 Indian Division in the Kuala Kangsar area. If either of these things had happened, the enemy would have had a clear run down the west coast, for there were no other troops with which to oppose him north of Johore, and by doing so he would have cut the communications of 9 Indian Division on the east coast. That was the situation we had to face and we had the choice of trying to fight the enemy both on the mainland and on Penang Island or of concentrating the whole of our resources for the battle on the mainland. The anchorage was no longer of any use.

187. The matter was of such importance that I brought it before the Far East War Council on the morning of 14th December. The pros. and cons. were discussed and carefully considered. It was decided that our ability to hold Penang must depend upon the result of the battle upon the mainland, and that we should concentrate on averting the calamity which threatened; further, that if we failed to stop the enemy upon the mainland the policy would be to evacuate what remained of the garrison from Penang rather than leave the population exposed to unrestricted air attack against which we could provide them with no defence.

In accordance with the above decision, I caused the following telegram to be despatched to the Commander, 3 Indian Corps at 1125 hrs. 14th December:—

"Importance of covering Penang is increased by fact that bulk of remaining cables to U.K. and India pass through that Island. Considered that ability to hold Penang depends upon result of Kedah battle. You are at liberty therefore to use any part of the garrison of Penang that can be made available to take part in Kedah operations, particularly Independent Company. Should it become impossible to cover Penang from mainland, policy will be to evacuate Penang removing by sea the garrison and such essential stores as possible and destroying remainder. Preliminary arrangements should be made as necessary but to avoid causing alarm it is of utmost importance that such arrangements should be kept secret. Resident Counsellor Penang is being given similar instructions. Acknowledge."

188. On the 14th December the Municipal Commissioners of Georgetown presented a memorandum to the Fortress Commander stating that the Civil Administration had broken down and pointing out the danger of outbreaks of cholera and typhoid owing to the fouling of the water catchment area and the breakdown of the sanitary and conservancy services.

189. At 1100 hrs. 15th December, following a warning the previous evening, the Fortress Commander received an order from the Commander 3 Indian Corps that the evacuation, which was to take place by sea, would be completed on the night 16th-17th December. Shipping had to be found locally. Most of the troops were moved to the mainland but the remainder and all Europeans, except a few who remained behind at their own request, were evacuated. Asiatics serving in the Volunteers were given the option of being evacuated or of staying. The majority decided to stay to protect their families. Lack of transport would have made it quite out of the question to evacuate large numbers of Asiatics. Moreover it was undesirable at that stage to increase the population of Singapore.

190. A great deal of denial work was done at Penang. The Fixed Defences were effectively destroyed and the smaller weapons were withdrawn. At least most of the ammunition in the magazines was destroyed, as also was much of the oil and petrol. Denial schemes were similarly carried out at many of the civil establishments. But it was hardly to be expected in the circumstances that the destruction would be complete and there were two unfortunate omissions which had a very considerable effect on subsequent events. One was the failure to destroy the Penang Broadcasting Station from which during the rest of the campaign a stream of anti-British propaganda was sent out and the other was the failure to remove or scuttle all the small vessels and barges in the harbour. The latter was probably due, at least in part, to the masters and crews having disappeared. The Japanese later made great use of them in developing their threats to our communications from the west coast. When this omission was discovered a destroyer was sent by night to mine the southern exit from the harbour, but this could not have been entirely effective.

191. *Province Wellesley Operations.*—On the 16th December heavy fighting developed at the Batu Pekaka Bridge on the right of the River Muda position where the 5/2 Punjab Regt. was attacked by enemy troops led by an European. Late in the afternoon the enemy succeeded in getting a footing south of the river but were ejected by counter-attack. The Argylls were withdrawn from Baling to Titi Karangan.

During the day the units of 11 Indian Division were being reformed in Province Wellesley covered by a weak rear-guard which consisted of one platoon and the armoured train on the railway bridge, the Independent Company and a company of Leicesters at the two main road bridges and a squadron of 3 Indian Cavalry at the ferry to the west of them. The 137 Field Regt. was in support.

The Commander 3 Indian Corps, in consultation with the Commander 11 Indian Division, decided to withdraw the division behind the River Krian, the main bridges over which were at that time being held by personnel from the Penang Reinforcements Camp. The 28 Brigade moved by road and rail to Simpang Lima and the next morning took over the defence of the River Krian from the railway bridge at Nibong Tebal to the sea. Fifteen miles to their right at Selama was the 3/16 Punjab Regt. from Kroh.

During the 17th December the troops on the Muda River and in the Bukit Mertajam area were withdrawn to the Taiping area where they came into reserve to the Krian defences. The 12 Brigade Group fought a rear-guard action from the Batu Pekaka Bridge to the Terap-Selama area. By the 18th December all troops were south of the River Krian.

192. *The Grik Road.*—On the Grik Road contact was made a little north of Grik during the night 16th-17th December. Our small force, which consisted only of one company of the Argylls and a detachment of F.M.S.V.F. Armoured Cars was hard pressed on the 17th and fell back to the area South of Sumpitan. It was reinforced by two platoons of the Perak Battalion F.M.S.V.F. It now became clear that the enemy had directed the main body of his Patani Force down this road, difficult as it was for wheeled transport, and was endeavouring to cut off the 11 Indian Division by reaching the main road at Kuala Kangsar. Indeed, reports from Japanese sources have subsequently indicated that this was a strong attack and that their grand strategy was to cut off and annihilate the whole of the troops in Kedah and Province Wellesley.

193. On the evening of the 17th December the Commander 3 Indian Corps decided that the 12 Brigade Group which he had intended to withdraw into reserve at Taiping, should go straight through to Kuala Kangsar and that the 1 Independent Company should leave Taiping at first light on the 18th December for Lenggong on the Grik Road.

194. *Future Operations*—On the evening 17th December I authorised the Commander 3 Indian Corps to withdraw to the line of the River Perak if he thought such a withdrawal absolutely necessary. I also instructed him to arrange for reconnaissances to be carried out of the Slim River Line in South Perak and placed at his disposal officer teams from the Officers Cadet Training Unit to assist in carrying out rearward reconnaissances.

I now foresaw that, if the Japanese advanced into Perak, their communications would become very vulnerable to raids from the sea coast. I therefore arranged for a small force of about 50 picked Australians to be organized for sea-borne raids on the enemy's communications, using Port Swettenham as a base.

**SECTION XXIII.—THE STRATEGICAL SITUATION,  
17TH-23RD DECEMBER, 1941.**

**195. Naval.**—Following the loss of the "Prince of Wales" and "Repulse" the seagoing naval forces based on Singapore consisted only of a few light cruisers and half a dozen destroyers and sloops. Most of these were employed on escort work, leaving only three destroyers and a number of auxiliary vessels and small craft for local defence.

On the 17th December the Perak Flotilla, which consisted of H.M.S. "Scout" and some light craft, was formed to deny to all enemy craft the approaches to the West Coast between the River Krian and the River Bernam (south of Telok Anson).

The submarines of the Royal Dutch Navy, which during the first few days had operated successfully in the waters east of Malaya, had had losses and only a very few now remained.

The Japanese Navy had so far confined its activities to protection of its convoys. Although it held undisputed control of the waters east of Malaya it had as yet made no attempt to interfere with our communications south or west of Malaya either by naval or air action.

**196. Air.**—The main concern of the Japanese Air Force was obviously to confirm and extend the superiority which it had already established. Apart therefore from the heavy attacks on Penang and a few attacks on targets in the battle area, its activities continued to be directed against our aerodromes.

The strength of our Air Force, including the Dutch reinforcements, was now a little over 100—probably about one quarter of the Japanese strength.

In accordance with the agreed policy, the bulk of the fighters were retained on the Singapore aerodromes for defence of the Singapore Base and for convoy protection work. The balance were under command of Norgroup for operations in the 3 Corps area.

The Dutch bombers were, for reasons already given, being used principally for reconnaissance work. The torpedo-bombers, with their limited radius of action, were retained for attack on any naval force which might approach Singapore or the east coast of Johore. As regards the possibility of reinforcements, the Japanese had cut the established air route between Singapore and India. It now became necessary to use the Dutch aerodrome at Sabang, an island off the northern tip of Sumatra, as a link in the air route, but this could only be used by the longer range type of aircraft. Fighters could only be brought by sea.

In order to provide accommodation for the large number of aircraft which it was hoped would shortly concentrate in the Singapore area, the construction of new aerodrome strips was put in hand, both in South Johore and on Singapore Island.

I felt that the recovery of air superiority was so vital that I agreed to give priority to the Air Force so far as labour was concerned for the construction of these new air strips and for the maintenance of the existing aerodromes.

There was no way of regaining air superiority unless and until a sufficient number of modern fighters, superior to the Japanese fighters, could be brought to Malaya and until their pilots could have time to develop full fighting efficiency in conditions that would be strange to them. The first of these fighter aircraft could not be expected to reach Malaya in much under four weeks.

**197. Army.**—Our troops who had been in contact with the enemy had suffered severe losses both in men and material. Our strength on the west coast, apart from the Volunteer units, was now barely one division, including the 12 Indian Brigade Group and 1st Line Reinforcements. Against this the Japanese probably had in the front line one division moving on the axis of the main road and one division on the Grik road. Behind these we estimated that they had in reserve and already landed further forces at least equal to those in the front line.

On the east coast the enemy had landed one division in the Kelantan area.

In Indo-China he undoubtedly held reserves, which he could either use to reinforce those formations which had already landed or for fresh enterprises.

The striking power of his field force was greatly increased by the inclusion of a component of modern tanks of which we had none.

**198.** On our side we knew that every endeavour would be made to send reinforcements to Malaya, but we also knew that no reinforcements could arrive before some time in the first half of January. The comparison of forces as above showed clearly that we must make every endeavour to ensure the safe arrival of these reinforcements, for it was only with their assistance that we could hope to turn the scales on land. One of the chief dangers to which convoys bringing reinforcements would be exposed was from attack by Japanese aircraft as they were approaching Singapore. If the Japanese could establish their fighters on the aerodromes in Central Malaya they would be able to give their bombers much more effective support and thus render their attacks more dangerous. It was clear therefore that we should make every endeavour to deny these aerodromes to them for as long as possible.

**199.** On the west coast the terrain in the State of Perak was, generally speaking, more suitable for delaying action than was that in the States of Selangor and Negri Sembilan further south. In the latter States were many more roads to facilitate the enemy's movements, while the vast rubber estates rendered movement off the roads easy for infantry and at the same time provided good cover for the attacker. The States of Perak and Selangor also were the centre of the tin-mining industry which was at that time of such vital importance to the Allied war effort. There were also vast rubber estates in this area.

The weakness of the Perak area from the defence point of view lay in the fact that the long road and rail communications lay roughly parallel to the River Perak. Consequently if enemy detachments could get a footing on the left bank of that river they would be able to harass and temporarily to interrupt our communications.

200. It was necessary also to take into consideration the condition of the troops of 11 Indian Division. Though their morale was not broken, it could not be regarded as being as high as one would have wished. They were undoubtedly very exhausted by almost continuous fighting and movement both by day and night. Moreover, the superiority which the Japanese possessed in the air coupled with the complete absence of tanks on our side could not but have the most adverse effect upon the trust reposed by the Indian troops in the might of the British Empire. It is not too much to say that the Indian troops were dismayed to find the British so outclassed in these two essentials of modern war.

201. As regards the enemy's course of action, it was now clear that he intended to continue his advance down the west coast with a view to attacking Singapore from the North. Combined with this, his forces in Kelantan might move southward by the coastal route or he might deliver sea-borne attacks against the Kuantan and/or East Johore areas with a view to cutting our communications with our forces in the North, or he might deliver a sea-borne attack against Singapore direct. There remained also the possibility of an air-borne attack directed against our aerodromes.

202. I was informed by the C.-in-C. Far East that the policy was to keep the enemy as far north in Malaya as possible in order to prevent him acquiring territory and particularly aerodromes which would threaten the arrival of reinforcements.

203. I considered the possibility of moving up all or part of the A.I.F. in relief of troops of 11 Indian Division but rejected the idea for the following reasons:—

(a) The relief could not be carried out without temporarily leaving the Johore defences very weak;

(b) It was undesirable to break up the A.I.F. organization;

(c) On the other hand, if the whole of the A.I.F. was sent, the relief would necessarily take a long time and ultimately the vital Johore area would be held by tired troops with no previous experience of that part of Malaya.

204. I decided to go to Ipoh to discuss the situation with the Commander 3 Indian Corps and left Singapore late on the 17th December.

After a reconnaissance of the area and a visit to some of the forward troops on the 18th December the following decisions were made:—

(a) While adhering to the general policy of withdrawal behind the River Perak, the enemy would be held west of the river as long as possible without permitting our forces to become inextricably committed.

(b) The Commander 3 Indian Corps would select and have prepared a series of positions between Ipoh and Tanjong Malim.

(c) The immediate role of 9 Indian Division would be (i) to continue to deny the Kuantan aerodrome to the enemy; (ii) to secure the 11 Indian Division and its communications against attack from the east coast.

(d) As soon as the withdrawal across the River Perak had taken place, the best area for the operations of the sea-borne raiding force (to be known as " Rose Force ") would

be that part of the state of Perak which lies west of the river and south of the railway.

(e) Arrangements were to be made for land raiding parties and for " left behind " parties to harass the enemy's communications.

(f) A liaison officer was appointed to co-ordinate the action of the military and civil authorities in the west coast theatre of operations.

(g) The 6 and 15 Indian Infantry Brigades were to be amalgamated and to be known as the 6/15 Indian Infantry Brigade. Certain units were to be amalgamated, notably the East Surreys and Leicesters which became known as the British Battalion. The 12 Indian Brigade Group was to be incorporated into the 11 Indian Division.

(h) The Commander 3 Indian Corps was to consider the question of the command of 11 Indian Division. It was felt that an officer with the widest possible experience of bush warfare was required. A few days later Brigadier Paris, the Commander 12 Indian Infantry Brigade, who had been in Malaya for 2½ years, was appointed to succeed Major-General Murray Lyon.

As all the infantry brigade commanders of the division had become casualties, Lt.-Col. Moorhead was appointed to command the 6/15 Brigade, Lt.-Col. Stewart the 12 Brigade and Lt.-Col. Selby the 28 Brigade.

(j) All troops were to be given a minimum period of 48 hours rest as soon as this could be arranged. Defence in depth astride the main road after crossing the River Perak seemed to be the only way to make this possible.

(k) It was now clear that we were faced by an enemy who had made a special study of bush warfare on a grand scale and whose troops had been specially trained in those tactics. He relied in the main on outflanking movements and on infiltration by small parties into and behind our lines.

For support of his forward troops he relied on the mortar and the infantry gun rather than on longer range weapons. His snipers operated from trees. He exploited the use of fireworks. For mobility he made a wide use of civilian bicycles seized in the country. His tanks he had up to date operated mainly on the roads. His infantry had displayed an ability to cross obstacles—rivers, swamps, jungles, etc.—more rapidly than had previously been thought possible. Finally, speed was obviously of vital importance to him and he was prepared to press his attacks without elaborate preparations.

To meet these tactics, it was agreed that brigade groups should be echeloned in depth astride the main arteries of communication and that in selecting defensive positions special regard should be had to tank obstacles and cover from air, in both of which arms the enemy were well equipped while we were entirely deficient.

205. On return to Singapore I circulated an Instruction on the tactics to be employed, the main points of which were as follows:—

(i) Enemy outflanking and infiltration tactics must not lead to withdrawals which should take place only on order of higher authority.

(ii) Immediate counter-attacks should be exploited. These should, whenever possible, be planned beforehand and, owing to the necessity for speed, should usually be carried out by small bodies of a company on the initiative of local commanders.

(iii) It was suggested that the defences should consist of a holding group dug in astride the main communications, with striking forces forward on the flanks which should attack as soon as the enemy made contact with the holding groups.

(iv) The spreading of rumours must be suppressed.

(v) The enemy could not be defeated by sitting in prepared positions and letting him walk round us. We must play him at his own game and attack on every occasion. The efficiency, cunning and alertness of the individual were of primary importance.

Arrangements were made for the evacuation of as much as possible of the reserve stores from the Ipoh area. There was not, however, sufficient M.T. available to move the petrol, which was stored in 60-gallon drums. Arrangements were made for these to be destroyed by puncturing the drums.

I returned to Singapore on the morning of the 20th December.

206. The importance of the lateral road Jerantut-Kuala Lipis-Raub-Kuala Kubu, which was the main communication between East and West Malaya, now became apparent. If our forces on the west coast were driven back beyond Kuala Kubu, the enemy would be able to cut the only road communication of our forces on the east coast.

I discussed this situation with the C.-in-C. Far East and the A.O.C. It was agreed as a general policy that we should withdraw the Kuantan garrison at a time to be decided later in accordance with the development of the situation.

I also thought it desirable to take preliminary steps for the defence of North Johore and of Singapore Island itself against attack from the North.

On the 23rd December I caused to be issued Malaya Command Order No. 28, an extract from which is attached to this Despatch as Appendix "C".

207. The Commander A.I.F. delegated responsibility for the defence of North Johore to the 27 Australian Brigade Group in A.I.F. Malaya Operation Instruction No. 11 dated 24th December 1941 from which the following is an extract:—

"The 27 Brigade Group is made responsible for holding delaying positions towards the Johore-Malacca boundary. Requisition for local labour is to be submitted to the C.R.E."

"The Bde. Gp. is to be disposed as under:—

(i) Gemas-Segamat, one Bn. Gp. plus one Coy.

(ii) Muar, one Bn. (less two Coys.) with attached troops.

(iii) Reserve (in Kluang-Ayer-Hitam area) one Bn. Gp."

moved forward to recapture Sumpitan, led by the Independent Company. An encounter battle took place in the village, where our troops fought gallantly and were only withdrawn in face of a strong counter-attack. That night they fell back to Lenggong. On the 20th the Argylls were heavily engaged all day and had to drive off by counter-attack an enemy force which had moved down the river on rafts and reached Kota Tampan in their rear. On the 21st the Argylls held the Kota Tampan area against renewed enemy attacks, while the 5/2 Punjab Regt. occupied positions west of Chenderoh Lake. Some enemy rafts were sunk on the lake. At about 1800 hrs. the Argylls disengaged and withdrew through the 5/2 Punjab Regt. and the enemy following up were stopped at the Causeway.

The river approach through the Chenderoh Lake now gave the Japanese the opportunity of by-passing Kuala Kangsar and of threatening the main road and railway bridges over the River Perak and the communications east of them. To meet this threat the 4/19 Hyderabad Regt., which had now arrived from Kelantan, was concentrated east of the River Perak.

The enemy were now only some 12 miles from Lawin, where the Grik road joins the trunk road, and the situation demanded the speedy withdrawal of the 28 Brigade Group before it could be cut off in its positions north of Taiping.

209. *The Krian River Front.*—On the 19th and 20th December there was some activity on the right of the Krian River position and, to avoid being outflanked on the right, the 28 Brigade Group fell back to Ulu Sapetang and Bagan Serai. The bridges over the River Krian were demolished.

210. *The Tactical Situation*—On the evening of 21st December all troops west of the River Perak, including those on the Grik road, were placed directly under the Commander II Indian Division. He decided that, in view of the situation on the Grik road, an immediate withdrawal behind the River Perak was necessary. He realised the importance of covering the Blanja Pontoon Bridge over the River Perak which gave direct access to the Ipoh area and the communications south of it.

The withdrawal of the 28 Brigade Group commenced at 2000 hrs. 21st December, the units being disposed as far as possible to meet all possible threats.

On the 22nd December there was further fighting on the Grik Road and that night the 12 Brigade Group withdrew across the Perak River covered by troops of the 28 Brigade Group. By the morning of the 23rd December all troops, except for a bridgehead at Blanja, were east of the river. The Blanja bridgehead was withdrawn on the night 23rd-24th December.

A gap was successfully blown in the Iskander Bridge, the fine main road bridge over the River Perak. A portion of the pontoon bridge at Blanja was swung to the eastern shore and the pontoons sunk.

On withdrawal the 12 Brigade Group bivouacked in the Salak North area and the 28 Brigade Group concentrated in the Siputeh area with a detachment watching the River Perak at Blanja.

#### SECTION XXIV.—WEST COAST OPERATIONS, 18TH-30TH DECEMBER, 1941.

208. *The Grik Road.*—On the 19th December our troops, who had now been reinforced,

**211. Summary.**—After sixteen days of continuous and exhausting operations our troops on the west coast were back behind the River Perak. What would have happened had Operation MATADOR been put into effect in good time is a matter for speculation. It is almost certain that it would have eased the air situation by denying to the enemy some of its fighter bases. On the other hand, had we been unable to hold the strong enemy thrust on the Kroh front our communications to North Malaya and subsequently to East Malaya would have been severed and our whole structure of defence undermined. For the frustration of the enemy's plan to destroy our forces in this way we are indebted particularly to the fine fighting of the troops on the Kroh and Grik roads and to the quick reaction of all commanders to the very real threat which the enemy's thrust on this front constituted.

**212. Operations in the Ipoh area.**—On the 22nd December the Commander 3 Indian Corps decided to hold the areas south of Ipoh as under:—

One Brigade Group between Kg. Sahum and Tapah.

One Brigade Group covering road and railway north of Kampar.

One Brigade Group covering road and railway north of Bidor with a battalion at Ct. Jong and the Independent Company at Telok Anson.

On the 23rd December the Commander 3 Indian Corps issued instructions to the Commander 11 Indian Division, the gist of which were as under:—

(a) The Commander 11 Indian Division would assume control of all combatant troops north of the Rivers Slim and Bernam.

(b) The enemy was to be delayed for as long as possible west of the River Kinta.

(c) The positions at Kg. Sahum—Kampar—Tapah and Bidor must be held until the strategic situation demanded that the Division be withdrawn. A rear position was being prepared in the neighbourhood of the River Slim.

(d) Local offensive operations were advocated.

(e) In case communications should be cut, each battalion was to hold 10 days' supplies and ammunition.

(f) Fighting patrols were to be employed to watch the flanks which could never be secure.

(g) Civil labour was being engaged and handled by the Europeans of the Perak Volunteer Force.

The 6/15 Indian Infantry Brigade had now been rested and reorganised. Three days in the Ipoh area had worked wonders. All units had been partly, but far from completely, re-equipped. The outlook was very much brighter. The Kampar position was rapidly put into a state of defence.

**213** On the 26th and 27th December the 12 Brigade Group fought a delaying action north of Chemor (10 miles north of Ipoh) inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy, whose units moved forward in close formation. The 5/2 Punjab Regiment, upon which the brunt of the fighting fell, distinguished itself though it suffered fairly heavy losses.

During these two days the 28 Brigade Group continued to watch the line of the River Perak in the Blanja area.

By the 26th all troops remaining in Ipoh had moved south. Among the last to leave their posts were the Chinese and Eurasian girl operators of the telephone exchange who were handling military traffic and who continued to do so in the face of bombing and the approach of the enemy until ordered to leave. They deserve the highest praise.

The withdrawal of the 12 and 28 Brigade Groups began at 1900 hrs. on the 27th December and continued throughout the night. The 12 Brigade Group, to which had been allotted the task of delaying the enemy's approach to the Kampar position north of Dipang, occupied a position south of Gopeng, while the 28 Brigade Group took up positions astride the defile road which protected the right flank of the Kampar position, with one battalion in the Tapah area.

The newly formed Kedah Armoured Car Company, manned by European Volunteers, acquitted itself well during and following the withdrawal. It now became apparent, however, that the enemy were using an armour-piercing bullet against which the armour of the Marmon-Harrington armoured cars was not proof. Many casualties were suffered by the crews of these cars during the subsequent operations.

**214.** On the 29th December the 12 Brigade Group was early in contact with the enemy who attacked at 1000 hrs. The attack was repulsed but, realising that the enemy was now in strength, the divisional commander ordered the brigade to withdraw that evening through the Kampar position and come into reserve at Bidor. The enemy followed up the withdrawal closely and again tanks produced a demoralizing effect on the tired troops. The situation was saved by some excellent work on the part of the 137 Field Regt. and the 80 A/Tk. Regt. The large bridge over the River Kampar at Dipang was destroyed after several abortive attempts.

The 12 Brigade Group had had a gruelling time. Since the battle of Gurun it had borne the brunt of the fighting, and in its doggedly-fought rearguard actions between Batu Pekaka and Selama, on the Grik road and in the Ipoh area it had gained time for the re-organization of the remainder of the 11 Indian Division and the occupation of the Kampar position and had inflicted delay and heavy casualties on the enemy. It had, however, suffered severely itself.

**215.** In order to protect the long and vulnerable communications the 1 Independent Company had been sent to the Telok Anson area on the lower reaches of the River Perak. From here distant boat and cycle patrols were sent out. It was supported by one infantry battalion at Ct. Jong.

**216. Operations of Rose Force.**—Towards the end of December a successful raid was carried out by Rose Force, strength about 40 men, against the enemy's communications west of the River Perak. The party was landed from the sea on the Perak coast but was unfortunately weakened by the breakdown of one of the troop-carrying launches. A M.T. column was ambushed and some lorries and two staff cars containing high-ranking officers destroyed.

The party was then withdrawn to Port Swettenham. With a little more persistence even greater results might perhaps have been obtained.

217. It was hoped to repeat and develop this enterprise which undoubtedly offered great possibilities. That it was not found possible to do so was due to the lack of sea transport which resulted in the main from losses suffered as a result of the aerial supremacy which the enemy had established on this coast. The last hope disappeared when on the 1st January five "Eureka" fast coastal vessels which the Army had purchased from America and handed over to the Navy to operate were attacked by aircraft on their way north to Port Swettenham and either sunk or driven ashore. On the 30th December also H.M.S. "Kudat", the base depot ship for this force, was bombed and sunk in the harbour of Port Swettenham.

218. *Air Operations.*—The 23rd December was the first day of intensive air action against our troops in the forward areas. Up till then the enemy's air effort had been concentrated chiefly against our aerodromes. On that day heavy attacks were made against troops in bivouac areas and on the move and against Ipoh railway station. These attacks continued for the rest of the month. Our own troops were almost entirely without air support as all the remaining fighters except for a few which operated from Kuala Lumpur had by now been withdrawn to the Singapore area.

Air attacks against the Singapore area were not renewed until the 29th December when the first of a succession of night attacks took place.

Our own Air Striking Force, which seldom consisted of more than half a dozen machines, carried out night attacks against enemy occupied aerodromes. The Sungei Patani Aerodrome in particular, where over 100 Japanese aircraft had been located, was attacked on several occasions. In addition, aerial reconnaissances were carried out daily off both the east and west coasts as far as the availability of aircraft permitted.

The C.-in-C. Far East laid down as a policy that convoy protection work must in the future take precedence over all other calls on the Air Force.

219. *Strategy.*—In a telephone conversation which I had with the Commander 3 Indian Corps at 1100 hrs. 29th December it was agreed that it would be better to fight the enemy in the positions then occupied rather than carry out any rearward movements in the immediate future, although this in no way altered the general instructions.

On the same day I informed the Commanders 3 Indian Corps and A.I.F. that I had arranged with the Director of Public Works to form Works Groups in selected areas under State engineers who would report to them for orders. The object of this was to prepare a series of obstacles, especially anti-tank obstacles, in great depth on the probable line of the enemy's advance. The idea was that the officers of the Public Works Department should be given outline instructions and be left to carry out the work themselves with civil labour.

On the 28th December the Commander Singapore Fortress was ordered to prepare schemes for the destruction of the Causeway which connected Singapore Island with the mainland.

## SECTION XXV.—THE BORNEO AND CHRISTMAS ISLAND OPERATIONS.

220. *Sarawak and Brunei.*—On the 13th December the Miri detachment, having completed its task, left for Kuching in H.M.S. "Lipis".

At 0330 hrs. on the 16th December Japanese troops landed at Seria. Some of them proceeded by road to Belait. Early on the 22nd they reached Danau.

On the 19th and 20th December Japanese aircraft attacked the aerodrome at Kuching and also dropped bombs on and machine-gunned the town. Many of the inhabitants evacuated. On the 23rd December the O.C. Troops reported that there had been a complete break in civil labour.

221. On the evening of the 23rd December two Japanese cruisers and seven transports arrived off the mouth of the River Santubong near Kuching and landings were made during the night. Before arrival the convoy had been attacked by submarines of the Royal Dutch Navy and three transports and one tanker were reported to have been sunk or disabled. The Japanese troops advanced in landing craft up the waterways leading to Kuching and were engaged by our forward troops at Pending and elsewhere. Later in the day, the situation having become confused, the forward troops were withdrawn to the vicinity of the aerodrome. In the meantime, in accordance with the instructions received from Singapore, the denial scheme on the aerodrome had been put into operation.

222. At 1305 hrs. 24th December I received a wireless message from O.C. Troops Sarawak and Brunei to the effect that, as the aerodrome was no longer required by our Air Force, he presumed that he was at liberty to withdraw his force into Dutch West Borneo. I replied to the effect that he should fight the enemy for as long as possible, and that subsequently he should act in the best interest of West Borneo as a whole, withdrawing if necessary into Dutch territory.

223. On the evening of the 24th December the enemy ships off Kuching were attacked by a small force of Blenheim Bombers.

After some sharp fighting in the vicinity of the aerodrome on the 25th December contact was broken off in the evening and withdrawal to Dutch West Borneo via the 50 mile jungle path was effected. All wheeled transport had to be abandoned. The force arrived at Sanggau in Dutch Borneo on the 29th December and came under orders of the local Dutch commander. Arrangements were made by Headquarters Malaya Command to drop supplies and ammunition on the aerodrome at Sinkawang for this force.

224. The Japanese arrived at the Sarawak—Dutch West Borneo frontier on the 7th January, 1942, but were held there by the 2/15 Punjab Regt. until the 18th January. Much bitter fighting took place here in the endeavour to prevent the enemy reaching the large Dutch aerodrome at Sanggau. Eventually the aerodrome, installations and bomb stores were successfully demolished. A rearguard action was then carried out to Nyabang, where contact with the enemy was lost.

225. Subsequently it was decided to move to the South Coast of Borneo in two columns,

one, making for Sampit in the centre of the south coast and the other for Pankalang Boen 120 miles to the West. It was hoped to find sea transport which would take the columns to Java. The columns left early in February and arrived at their destinations simultaneously. On arrival at Sampit the eastern column found a Japanese force there which it engaged. It then joined the western column by marching on a compass bearing through dense jungle for six days. The distance covered by the eastern column from Kuching to Sampit was over 800 miles, the major portion on foot through jungle. On the 3rd April the whole force, which was in an exhausted state after its long march, became prisoners of war. A high standard of discipline had been maintained by the troops who had covered hundreds of miles carrying their light automatics and ammunition with no transport through some of the worst country in the world.

226. *Labuan*.—On the 3rd January, 1942, a small Japanese force took possession of the Island of Labuan, which was not defended.

227. *British North Borneo*.—The State of British North Borneo was organized into two Administrative Divisions, the east and west coast Residencies. The seat of Government was at Sandakan.

On the 3rd January a small detachment from the Japanese force which had landed at Labuan proceeded in a captured motor vessel to Mem-pakul on the coast of British North Borneo and from there to Weston, a small port at the mouth of the River Padar. At Weston the detachment commandeered a train and proceeded to Beaufort 20 miles distant. The detachment at Beaufort was reinforced on the evening 3rd January. On the 6th January Japanese forces entered Jesselton by rail from Beaufort (56 miles). All the west coast area was now under Japanese control and the Governor (Mr. C. R. Smith) severed all connection between the east and west coast Residencies.

On the 19th January a Japanese force, estimated at 600 strong, arrived at Sandakan, British North Borneo, having assembled at Banggi Island off the north coast of North Borneo two days earlier. It came in two coastal vessels captured in Brunei waters and twelve Japanese motor fishing vessels. The troops from the latter landed in two creeks to the north of the Sandakan area and reached Sandakan by land at about 0900 hrs. The two coastal vessels entered Sandakan harbour at about 0930 hrs. The Governor surrendered the whole State at 0900 hrs. 19th January and refused to carry on the administration under Japanese control. He and his staff were interned.

Tawau, situated on the east coast near the N.E.I. border, was occupied by the Japanese on the 24th January and Lahad Datu, between Tawau and Sandakan, on the 26th or 27th January. Kudat on the north coast was occupied about the 1st February and the whole State then came under Japanese control.

A great deal of denial damage was done under the Governor's orders in accordance with plans carefully prepared beforehand. In particular, coastal vessels and local craft, including a number of Japanese craft, were sunk. The Japanese occupying forces were much incensed

at the damage done, especially at Sandakan and Tawau.

228. *Christmas Island*.—On the 20th January our Coast Defence Artillery at Christmas Island engaged an enemy submarine which had torpedoed a Norwegian vessel.

#### SECTION XXVI.—THE HIGHER COMMAND.

229. On 5th January, Vice-Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton, Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, moved his headquarters from Singapore to Batavia:

This move was decided on primarily because of the now vital necessity of taking every possible step to ensure the safe and timely arrival of troop convoys at Singapore. This necessitated close co-operation with the American and Dutch Commanders, which could only be achieved at Batavia.

Moreover, by this date it had become apparent that Singapore would shortly be exposed to heavy air attack by bombers escorted by fighters and therefore would be of little value in the immediate future as a base for heavy surface ships. The Rear-Admiral Malaya (Rear-Admiral Spooner) became Senior Naval Officer at Singapore, and resumed responsibility for the whole of the local naval defence of Malaya.

230. On the 23rd December, 1941, Lt.-Gen. Sir Henry Pownall arrived to succeed Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke Popham as Commander-in-Chief Far East in accordance with a decision which had been made before the outbreak of hostilities. He immediately went North to the 3 Indian Corps area, visiting the 11 Indian Division on the 25th Dec. and the 9 Indian Division on the 26th Dec. On the 7th Jan., 1942, General Sir Archibald Wavell (now Field-Marshall Earl Wavell) arrived at Singapore to assume the appointment of Supreme Commander South West Pacific Command. After visiting Headquarters 3 Indian Corps and troops of the 11 Indian Division on the 8th Jan. General Wavell left Singapore for Java. The Far East Combined Bureau accompanied him except for a few officers who were left to strengthen the Intelligence Branches of the Service Staffs at Singapore. On the establishment of Headquarters South West Pacific Command, the appointment of Commander-in-Chief Far East lapsed.

231. Mr. Duff Cooper, the Cabinet representative in the Far East, also left Singapore early in January.

232. It was generally agreed that these rapid changes in the Higher Command, necessary though they may have been, had an unsettling effect and did not make for continuity.

#### SECTION XXVII.—THE SCORCHED EARTH POLICY.

233. Early in 1941 a denial scheme for the event of the invasion of Malaya had been prepared and necessary instructions issued. This scheme was directed principally to the destruction or removal of everything that might facilitate the movement of invading forces, i.e., the destruction of any form of repair workshop, the demolition of bridges and the removal or destruction of all forms of vehicle or boat. The plan did not envisage a complete Scorched Earth Policy.

About the middle of December, 1941, the Cabinet Representative in the Far East informed the War Council that he had received

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

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

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

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

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

#### SECTION XXVIII.—WOMEN AND CHILDREN.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Far East War Council, after full consideration of the factors involved, issued instructions that evacuation should start forthwith and that all available accommodation in ships returning to suitable destinations should be used. A Joint Service and Civil Committee was set up to allot accommodation. In providing passage accommodation for those civilians who wished to leave Singapore the civil Government ordered that all nationalities should receive absolutely equal and impartial treatment. A Committee was set up with a Judge of the Supreme Court as Chairman to decide on priority of claims. The implementation of the policy will be dealt with later in this despatch.

240. This was one of the most difficult problems we had to solve. It is a problem upon which there will be many and varied opinions. It was complicated by the known characteristics of our adversary, and by considerations for the care of children. I do feel, however, that women who stick to their posts in these conditions so long as the commander allows them to do so are making a very valuable contribution to the general war effort and especially to the maintenance of morale.

#### SECTION XXIX.—CIVIL DEFENCE.

241. It had become apparent very soon after the outbreak of hostilities that the pre-war civil defence arrangements were in many respects inadequate for the situation which was developing. This did not apply so much to the Passive Air Defence Services which were for the most part operating efficiently in the area which had been bombed, though they required strengthening especially as regards the Fire Fighting Services whose work was invaluable. It applied chiefly to the material protection of important buildings and to the control of labour and transport.

242. *Martial Law*—Towards the end of December 1941 Martial Law was, at the instigation of the Cabinet Representative in the Far East, declared in the Colony of Singapore. The Commander Singapore Fortress was appointed Administrator. The Commander 3 Indian Corps and the Commander A.I.F. were authorised to declare Martial Law in the Federated Malay States and in Johore and Malacca respectively at their discretion. They did not find it necessary to do so.

243. *The Civil Defence Committee*.—In an endeavour to develop and bring up-to-date the Civil Defence arrangements for Singapore the Cabinet Representative in the Far East set up on the 16th December a Civil Defence Committee to review and deal with all measures affecting the defence of Singapore other than those of a purely military character. Its composition was as under:

##### *Chairman.*

The Cabinet Representative in the Far East. (The Rt. Hon. A. Duff Cooper).

##### *Members.*

The Commander Singapore Fortress (Maj.-Gen. Keith Simmons).

The Inspector General S.S. Police (Mr. A. H. Dickinson).

Mr. Denham.

The Defence Security Officer (Col. Johnson).

The Committee was dissolved early in January.

244. *The Directorate of Civil Defence*.—Towards the end of December the Cabinet Representative in the Far East proposed the formation of a Directorate of Civil Defence under a Director General. I was asked if I would be willing to make my Chief Engineer, Brigadier I. Simson, available for the appointment of Director-General. Although I was loath to lose the services of so important an officer at this juncture, I agreed to make Brigadier Simson available provided he retained concurrently the appointment of Chief Engineer. This provision was made in his own interests and for financial reasons. In sending my reply I expressed the opinion that the organization which would result from the proposed new Directorate was faulty because it cut across the existing organization and would lead to a clash of responsibility between the Director General of Civil Defence and the Secretary for Defence. Nevertheless, the Directorate was created on the 31st December, Brigadier Simson being appointed Director-General and Mr. F. D. Bisseker, the General Manager of the Penang Smelting Works and the Senior Unofficial Member of the Legislative Council, Deputy Director-General. Mr. Bisseker, was also appointed Director of Labour and Transport.

The Minister gave the D.G.C.D. plenary powers on all matters pertaining to Civil Defence in Singapore Island and Johore, subject only to reference to the War Council through the Minister where considered necessary. A letter to this effect, signed by the Minister, was addressed to certain Heads of Government Departments, Public Bodies and Civil Firms, with copies to the Governor and the Service Chiefs.

On the 1st January 1942, under amended terms of reference issued by the Governor, Johore was excluded, so that the Directorate of Civil Defence actually operated in Singapore Island only.

On or about the 23rd January, the D.G.C.D. became a member of the Far East War Council.

245. As the campaign progressed the activities of the Directorate of Civil Defence increased rapidly, but it was an impromptu organization and suffered from lack of staff and normal office facilities. Also the extent of its functions were never clearly defined or understood. The Director-General and his Staff worked untiringly, but I remain convinced that the organization was fundamentally unsound. There was already a Secretary for Defence and there was a Permanent Labour Committee. Plans had also been made for transport in wartime to be handled by the Registrar of Vehicles and his staff. It is true that at this time strong action was required for the rapid development of some of the Civil Defence arrangements but, by making the Director-General of Civil Defence responsible through the Minister to the Far East War Council, the Governor and his subordinates were presumably deprived of some at least of what should have been their responsibility. It would, in my opinion, have been better to build on the

existing organization, strengthening it as necessary by the introduction of men of character and experience.

### SECTION XXX.—LABOUR.

246. War experience soon showed that, while the organized military labour units worked on the whole satisfactorily, this was far from being the case with civil labour. Trouble first broke out in Kedah, where civil labour disappeared as soon as the operations started. At Penang, during the heavy air raids, the majority of the Asiatic municipal employees disappeared leaving the troops to carry on their functions, an experience which was to be repeated later in Singapore. On the railway, after the spasmodic enemy air attacks on the stations, many of the non-European officials and labourers absented themselves. These included such key men as engine-drivers, stokers, signalmen, plate-layers etc. As a result there was a real danger that railway traffic would come to a standstill. The danger was averted, firstly by the Volunteer Railway Unit and secondly by seconding for work on the railways military personnel with previous railway experience. The conduct of the senior railway officials throughout was, however, exemplary.

247. In the Singapore area the trouble first appeared on the aerodromes. It had from the first become obvious that a secure base from which our aircraft, and especially our fighter aircraft, could operate was essential for the successful development of the campaign. I therefore agreed to the maintenance of the existing Singapore aerodromes and the construction of new air strips taking priority over other military work. Large labour gangs were required to fill in the craters caused by enemy bombing and for work on the new air strips. After each raid, however, the greater part of these gangs disappeared and after a time it became difficult to get labourers to work on the aerodromes at all. To ease the situation I had to arrange for working parties to be found, whenever available, from the Army Reinforcement Camps for work on the aerodromes, even though this meant that little or no labour was available for work on the beach defences of Singapore Island. The trouble soon spread to the Naval Dockyard where, after one or two air attacks, many of the permanent civil staff absented themselves, with the result that the repair of local naval craft and other work was seriously delayed. Later the Dock workers, employed by the Singapore Harbour Board, similarly disappeared when the Docks became the main target for enemy air attacks. Here also military personnel had to be called in to unload the ships.

248. In the Army, War Office authority had been received shortly before war broke out to form up to six labour companies, but for some time the War Office refused to agree to increase the fixed rate of 45 cents per day for coolies. As the current rate in Singapore at that time was in the region of one dollar per day plus free rations and accommodation, it was not surprising that, in spite of strenuous recruiting efforts, these companies could not be formed. By the 7th January only one additional company had been formed.

249. Early in January efforts were made to solve the grave labour problem. Mr. Bissekter

was appointed Director of Labour under the Director-General of Civil Defence. He worked through the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and through influential representatives of the other communities. The Services applied to him for their requirements.

250. On the 8th January a Director of Army Labour was appointed. He took over control both of the existing labour companies and of the labour supplied by contractors. Many of the latter were of a very poor quality and it had become apparent that the only satisfactory solution was to recruit as many labourers as possible into the labour companies; also that it was essential that they should be handled by officers and N.C.O.s. who understood them and that accommodation should be provided as near as possible to their work. By arrangement the Governor cabled to the Colonial Office requesting that the Services should be given authority to accept decisions by the D.G.C.D. as regards conditions of service reached after consultation with interested departments. No authority was received, but the War Office was informed that in view of the urgency the labour scheme agreed upon locally was accepted.

251. We continued to be hampered by the lack of centralized leadership among the Chinese in Singapore, from whom the bulk of the labourers were drawn. The coolies understood little of the war and many of them were quite content to hide in their villages unpaid. There were few who would go among them and lead them. The situation was to some extent aggravated by the distribution of rice to each Asiatic household to be held as a reserve, a measure taken by the Government in order to disperse food reserves but which had the effect of making it unnecessary for the labourers to earn their subsistence.

252. There were those who urged that compulsion should be applied but those best acquainted with the Asiatics, and especially with the Chinese, were opposed to it. They considered that better results would be obtained by trying to find, and get the co-operation of, Asiatic leaders. I supported this view. It was only when this had failed to produce the required results that a measure was passed on the 20th January to introduce compulsion, but it came too late for its value to be disclosed.

253. The shortage of civil labour remained a great source of weakness throughout the campaign. It is right to add, however, that many of the senior officials, both European and Asiatic, performed their duties loyally and well. This was particularly the case in the Railway and in the Posts and Telegraphs Departments which were kept working in spite of very great difficulties.

### SECTION XXXI.—THE STRATEGICAL SITUATION, 30TH DECEMBER, 1941—2ND JANUARY, 1942.

254. Our object remained as before, i.e. the Defence of the Naval Base.

There had been no change recently in the Naval situation.

The Air situation has been described in Section XXIV. The safe arrival of 50 Hurricane Fighters, due to reach Singapore by sea about the 13th-15th January, appeared to be of paramount importance as this was still the only

chance of re-establishing any measure of air superiority.

255. As regards the relative strength of the Land Forces, we knew from air reconnaissance that Japanese ships had been steadily discharging at Singora and other ports, but the general situation as regards the strength of the forces on both sides remained as stated in Section XXIII.

We had, however, now been informed that we might expect substantial reinforcements during the month of January, the principal of which were as under:—

(a) *During the first few days of January.*

—One Indian Infantry Brigade with attached troops.

(b) *About 13th-15th January* —One Brigade Group of the 18 British Division with certain artillery units. These troops were coming in large American liners, the safe arrival and despatch of which were of the utmost importance.

(c) *Later in January.*—The 18 British Division (less one Brigade Group), one Indian Infantry Brigade, some Australian and Indian Reinforcements and certain other units.

256. The Hurricane Fighters were coming in the same convoy as (b) above. This was therefore a most valuable convoy, the chief danger to which lay in air attack from bases either in West Borneo, in Malaya or in South Thailand, or from aircraft carriers. The scale of air attack which the enemy could deliver would be much increased if he could, before the arrival of the convoy, establish his aircraft on the Kuantan and Kuala Lumpur aerodromes.

257. In the west coast area the situation appeared to be slightly improved. The new 6/15 Indian Infantry Brigade had had 10 days in which to reorganize and to occupy the Kampar position. The 28 Indian Infantry Brigade, though on continuous front line duty, had had no heavy fighting for the last 10 days and was now also in position. The 12 Brigade Group had, it is true, been continuously in action since its arrival in the North and was tired. A defensive position, to which to fall back, was being prepared north of Tanjung Malim. The chief danger lay in the threat to the left flank and rearward communications from enemy forces which might either cross the lower reaches of the River Perak or be landed, from coastal craft. It seemed, however, that the strength of such forces must be limited.

258. On the east coast the Kelantan Force was resting in the area Kuala Lipis—Jerantut—Raub covered on the North by Macforce which was still operating on the railway north of Kuala Lipis and on the South by detachments watching the approaches through Pahang. In the Kuantan area patrols had made contact towards the end of December with enemy troops moving South by the coast road in Trengganu and the Kuantan Force had, in accordance with instructions received from Higher Authority, been re-disposed with the bulk of the force, material and transport west of the River Kuantan and with light mobile forces only operating east of the river.

259. It was clear that the enemy intended to continue his advance down the west coast as rapidly as he could. He might also be expected to attempt landings of small forces on the west

coast from the sea. On the east coast a combined sea and land attack against Kuantan seemed possible, while the enemy might also deliver a seaborne attack against East Johore or against Singapore Island direct. In this connection a special landing-craft carrying ship had been seen lying off Singora by our reconnaissance aircraft. There remained also the possibility of an airborne attack directed against our aerodromes.

260. As regards our own course of action, the governing consideration was the safe arrival of land and air reinforcements and time to deploy them. An early withdrawal would enable the enemy to establish his aircraft on the aerodromes at Kuantan and Kuala Lumpur before the arrival of the mid-January convoys. In consequence, it would make the task of bringing in these convoys much more difficult.

To achieve our object of protecting the Naval Base it was necessary to fight the main battle on the mainland and it was hoped to be able to deploy all the reinforcements due to arrive in January for that purpose. Therefore the longer we could delay the enemy in Central Malaya the better.

Further, there was a great deal of machinery and large quantities of stores, both military and civil, in the Kuala Lumpur area. Time for the evacuation of these was required.

I hoped to be able to hold the Kuantan aerodrome for another 10 days or so, which would make it impossible for the enemy to repair and organize the aerodrome before the middle of January. Allowing time for the Kuantan garrison to withdraw and cross the Jerantut ferry, this would mean that the west coast force would have to hold the enemy north of the Kuala Kubu Road Junction until about the middle of January. That would mean that it would have a depth of about 70 miles in which to manoeuvre for 15 days.

With the above considerations in mind I went north on the 30th December to discuss with the Commander 3 Indian Corps and his Divisional Commanders the details of the strategy to be pursued.

261 Accompanied by the Commander 3 Indian Corps I visited the Headquarters 11 Indian Division at Tapah on the 31st December. The Divisional Commander reported that the position at Kampar was satisfactory. As regards future strategy, he expressed confidence in his ability to hold the enemy north of the Kuala Kubu Road Junction until at least the 14th January. He was therefore instructed that he was not without permission to withdraw his force beyond that road junction before the 14th January, and that he was to continue to impose the maximum delay on the enemy's advance. I impressed upon all commanders the importance of taking adequate measures to prevent penetration by enemy tanks down the main road—a danger which I considered a very real one in view of our complete lack of tanks with which to counter it.

262. On the 1st January we visited the Headquarters 9 Indian Division at Raub. The Divisional Commander reported that he had instructed the Commander Kuantan Force that he should hold the Kuantan aerodrome for as long as possible, provided he did not thereby jeopardise his force. He had indicated that the aerodrome should be held for 5 more days if

possible. Communication with Kuantan had broken down and an officer sent to ascertain the situation had not yet returned. After discussion it was decided that the Commander Kuantan Force should be instructed to hold the aerodrome until the 10th January.

263. Late on the 1st January the Commander 11 Indian Division reported that an enemy force had landed at Ulu Melintang near the mouth of the River Bernam (a little south of the mouth of the River Perak) and that he had moved the 12 Brigade Group to meet this threat. He further said that he thought he could continue to hold the Kampar position, where a strong attack had already been repulsed, for several days but that, if he did so, his ability to hold the enemy north of the Kuala Kubu Road Junction might, in view of the threat to his communications, be prejudiced. He asked for authority to withdraw his force from Kampar at his discretion. This was granted.

264. The Commander 3 Indian Corps was already having reconnaissances carried out of lines on which to co-ordinate the withdrawal as far back as North Johore. With a view to co-ordinating future defence plans I arranged to hold a conference at Segamat in North Johore on the 5th January at which both the Commanders 3 Indian Corps and A.I.F. should attend.

265. After visiting Port Swettenham and Port Dickson, I returned to Singapore late on the 2nd January.

266. During this tour the following matters, in addition to those reported above, were discussed:—

(a) Measures to harass the enemy's communications. "Left behind" parties, consisting for the most part of Chinese led by Europeans, were being rapidly trained at Singapore. It was planned to send these parties up to the 3 Indian Corps area as soon as ready. In addition, an offer had been received and accepted from the N.E.I. Military Authorities for a detachment of Marechaussees, specially trained in guerilla warfare in the jungle, to be sent to Malaya.

(b) The preparation of special news sheets for distribution among the Indian troops to counter Japanese propaganda.

(c) Methods of anti-tank defence. In this connection, a very large number of concrete cylindrical blocks were being manufactured both at Singapore and at Kuala Lumpur and some were now ready for distribution.

(d) Policy as regards the Federated Malay States Volunteer Force.—This Force consisted partly of European and partly of Asiatic personnel. It was organized on a State basis and maintained out of Federated Malay State funds. In practically all cases the families of the Asiatic personnel were resident in the State and would remain there after withdrawal. Faced with the prospect of moving into South Malaya and leaving their families behind, some of the Asiatic Volunteers began to show discontent and desertions had taken place. We were faced with the alternative of continuing to enforce service with the Colours at the expense, almost certainly, of weak and discontented units or of releasing those who wished to leave. We decided on the latter course. Thereafter, when a unit was to be withdrawn

from its State every Asiatic member was given the option of remaining with it or of handing in his arms and equipment and going to his home. In almost every case the latter course was chosen. The arms and equipment were re-issued to units requiring them as there were few or none at that time in reserve.

267. On return to Singapore I circulated a letter on Tactics. A copy of this letter is attached as Appendix "D" to this despatch.

#### SECTION XXXII.—THE KUANTAN OPERATIONS.

268. The Kuantan area was very isolated. As already stated, it was over 100 miles, through desolate jungle country, from Jerantut on the east coast railway, and it was 160 miles from the Headquarters of the 9 Indian Division at Raub. These are big distances when there are no aircraft available for inter-communication. Its military importance lay solely in the R.A.F. aerodrome, 9 miles inland from the town and on the other side of the Kuantan River.

Kuantan was garrisoned by the 22 Indian Brigade Group under command of Brigadier Painter.

269. Since the 9th December when the aerodrome had been evacuated, Japanese aircraft had been daily active over the Kuantan area, reconnoitring, bombing and machine-gunning, but little damage had been done. It appears that the enemy had intended to make landings on the coast of Trengganu but had been prevented from doing so by his losses, especially of landing craft, in the Kelantan operations.

Between the 20th and 24th December our long distance patrols were in contact with Japanese troops moving southward in M.T. on the coast of Trengganu. On the 27th the enemy were engaged by our artillery near the Trengganu/Pahang frontier.

270. It was now apparent that the threat against the Kuantan area was developing from the North, though it might still be accompanied by a sea-borne landing. It will be recollected that we had by that time had heavy losses of material on the west coast and that our reserves had been depleted. We could not afford to have further heavy losses. The situation at Kuantan was particularly hazardous owing to most of the material being east of the River Kuantan which was crossed only by a single ferry. In consequence of this and of the situation which was developing on the left flank instructions were issued to the Commander Kuantan Force that he should concentrate the bulk of his force, material and transport, west of the River Kuantan, holding the area east of the river with light mobile forces only.

271. This readjustment of the position was going on when, on the morning of the 30th December the Japanese advanced via the Jabor Valley in greater strength than they had previously shown. They were engaged by our artillery and small arms fire and confused fighting continued throughout the day. The ferry, which had been split into two working halves, was bombed during the day and one half only remained in action.

272. By the morning of the 31st December the enemy were attacking the ferry, but a bridgehead was maintained during the day.

During the night 31st December/1st January the rearguard was withdrawn across the river and the ferry destroyed. At that time, however, the River Kuantan was fordable in its upper reaches, a most unusual occurrence at that time of year. This seriously weakened the defence.

273. In the meantime the Commander Kuantan Force had been ordered to hold the aerodrome till the 5th January (see Section XXXI) and this had been later extended to the 10th January. On the 2nd January, however, events on the west coast and the serious threat to our communications there forced the Commander 3 Indian Corps to expedite the programme and early on the morning of the 31st January the Commander Kuantan Force received orders to withdraw his force to Jerantut forthwith. During the day the enemy closed in on the aerodrome and at about 1745 hours, as the withdrawal was taking place, a strong attack developed and very heavy fighting took place. It was during this action that Lt.-Col. Cummings, commanding the 2/12 Frontier Force Regt., won the Victoria Cross. During the withdrawal the rearguard was twice ambushed on the main road by a Japanese force, which had passed by bush tracks west of the aerodrome, and suffered heavy casualties.

274. The withdrawal was continued on the following days, the rearguard crossing the ferry at Jerantut on the night 6th/7th January. The Kuantan Force then moved to the area Raub-Tras-Tranum. One Infantry battalion (5/11 Sikhs) was still nearly at full strength. The strength of the other two battalions combined was rather less than one battalion. The losses in the supporting arms and administrative units had been comparatively small.

275. The Kuantan Force, like many other forces in Malaya, had had a difficult task to perform, because it had been greatly influenced by events elsewhere. It can be claimed, however, that by denying the aerodrome to the enemy for a month it had greatly decreased the scale of air attack which the enemy was able to develop against the Singapore area. That this was so was proved by the rapid increase in the scale of that attack during the month of January. It has also been ascertained from Japanese sources that heavy casualties were inflicted on them during these operations—especially by our artillery when the enemy concentrated his troops in the Kuantan township. There is little doubt that these casualties were considerably in excess of those suffered by our own troops.

#### SECTION XXXIII.—WEST COAST OPERATIONS, 31ST DECEMBER, 1941—8TH JANUARY, 1942.

276. *The Battle of Kampar.*—The Kampar position was the strongest of any occupied in Malaya. The main position was semi-circular covering the township of Kampar on a frontage of about four miles. The eastern flank rested against a limestone mountain 4,000 feet high with its steep sides and summit covered with thick jungle. Close under its western slopes ran the main road. To the North, West and South lay an extensive, open, tin-mining area, broken only to the south-west by a large rubber plantation. Fields of fire for small arms, except in the rubber plantation, extended up to 1,200 yards and more. There was excellent

artillery observation from forward O.P.s on the mountain slopes. The newly organized 6/15 Indian Brigade Group was made responsible for the main position.

On the eastern flank the mountain was circled by a loop road which, leaving the trunk road at Kuala Dipang, passed through Sahum and Chenderiang and rejoined the trunk road a little north of Tapah. On this road, covering Sahum, a position subsidiary to, but independent of, the Kampar position was occupied by the 28 Indian Brigade Group. The 12 Indian Brigade Group was in reserve in the Bidor area.

277. On the 31st December the Japanese increased the pressure which had commenced the previous day on the 28 Brigade Group but made no headway. The Gurkhas, who were fighting in country suited to their well-known qualities, proved themselves superior to the Japanese and, ably supported by the 155 Field Regiment, inflicted heavy losses on the enemy.

278. At 0700 hrs. on the 1st January the enemy started a determined attack on the Kampar position and heavy fighting continued throughout the day, particularly on the right flank where the British battalion was located. The garrisons of the defended localities held on grimly and localities lost were immediately recaptured by counter-attack. At the end of the day all positions were intact.

279. On the following day the enemy renewed his attacks east of the main road where fierce fighting took place. The British battalion under the inspiring leadership of their Commanding Officer (Lt.-Col. Morrison) fought desperately. Late in the afternoon the enemy were driven out of a vital position, which they had captured, by the Sikh Company of the 1/8 Punjab Regt. magnificently led by the Company Commander (Capt. Graham) and the situation was again restored.

280. The influence of events elsewhere, however, again predominated though it is doubtful whether in any case the position could have been held much longer and at 2100 hrs., under orders from the divisional commander, the 6/15 Brigade Group started to withdraw. The withdrawal was closely followed up but, covered by the 28 Brigade Group, the 6/15th eventually disengaged and moved to the Tapah Bidor area.

281. The Battle of Kampar, where our troops fought extremely well, showed that trained British troops are at least the equal of the best Japanese troops. The infantry were splendidly supported by the artillery, the 88 Field Regt. on the Kampar front doing some particularly good work.

It is worth recording that during their stay at Kampar the British battalion lost over 100 officers and men evacuated with malaria—the result no doubt of operations further north.

282. *West Coast Operations.*—As recorded in Section XXIV the 1 Independent Company had been sent to the Telok Anson area to watch the seaward approaches. Here it was joined by a squadron of the 3 Indian Cavalry. Supporting units were moved to the Changkat Jong area on the Telok-Anson/Bidor road, where work on defensive positions was begun.

283. On the 28th December long distance reconnaissance patrols reported Japanese troops at Lumut and at Sitiawan. At the latter place repairs were being carried out to the air landing strip. On the 31st December, air reconnaissance reported small steamers with barges in tow moving down the Perak coast. At 0900 hrs., 1st January, a motor launch patrol located a tug with four barges in tow stationary at the mouth of the River Perak. It was clear that the tug was stuck on a sandbank. Naval and Air action were requested, but the Japanese air cover proved too strong and nothing could be effected.

284. On the afternoon of the 1st January six small steamers accompanied by other craft were reported anchored at the mouth of the River Bernam, which flows into the sea a few miles south of the River Perak. The River Bernam is navigable for launches to Rantau Panjang, whence tracks lead to the main road, so that the threat to our communications was obvious. At 1930 hrs. some enemy troops landed at Ulan Melintang on the River Bernam. To meet this threat the 12 Brigade Group was moved from its rest area at Bidor to the Changkat Jong area.

285. At dawn on the 2nd January an enemy force, strength about one battalion, landed at Telok Anson. It had come down the river Perak in boats. The instructions given to the 1 Independent Company and the Squadron 3 Cavalry were to the effect that they were to delay any landing and cover the occupation of the Changkat Jong position. Accordingly, after some fighting in the outskirts of the town, these troops withdrew and passed through the 12 Brigade Group. The enemy followed up closely and by 1400 hrs. were in contact with the forward troops of this brigade which fell back fighting. By the evening the Commander 12 Brigade Group estimated that he was being attacked by at least a regiment and reported that he could not guarantee to keep the main road open for more than 24 hours. It was as a result of this report that the withdrawal from Kampar was ordered.

286. On the 3rd January the enemy again attacked strongly in the Changkat Jong area supported by their Air Force but were repulsed. In the evening the 12 Brigade Group withdrew to the Trolak sector of the Slim position. The 6/15 Brigade Group followed them to a covering position at Sungkai. The 28 Brigade Group moved to the Slim River Village area.

287. South of Perak the Commander of the L. of C. Area (Brigadier Moir) was responsible for the defence of the west coast. He came directly under the orders of the Commander 3 Indian Corps. Immediately the threat to the west coast developed the forces at his disposal were strengthened by the temporary transfer of an infantry battalion from the 9 Indian Division and of another infantry battalion, the 3 Cavalry and some artillery from the 11 Indian Division which was later itself reinforced by another battalion drawn from the 9 Indian Division.

288. Late on the 2nd January two small steamers and about a dozen motor landing craft or barges approached the coast at Kuala Selangor a small village a little south of the

Perak frontier. One of the steamers was sunk by artillery fire and the remainder withdrew. On the afternoon of the 3rd January a number of small craft were sighted off Kuala Selangor but out of artillery range. About midday on the 4th, however, patrols of 3 Indian Cavalry made contact with an enemy force moving south down the road from 8th Mile Village north of Kuala Selangor. This enemy force, driving back the cavalry patrols, advanced eastwards along the River Selangor, exercising a direct threat to the main road communications at Rawang. A sharp engagement took place at the bridge east of Batang Berjuntai. To meet this threat the 6/15 Brigade Group, recently withdrawn from the Kampar position, was moved to Rawang and thence to the Batang Berjuntai area which it reached on the 6th January. It took up a defensive position south of the River Selangor. Orders were given for the Denial Scheme to be put into force at the Batu Arang coal mines—the only coal mines in Malaya—which are situated in this district:

One destroyer (H.M.S. "Scout") and naval patrol craft operated against enemy craft off the west coast.

289. *Reinforcements.*—On the 3rd January the 45 Indian Infantry Brigade with attached troops arrived at Singapore. This was a comparatively newly formed brigade which was only semi-trained. It had been intended for operations in the Middle East and had had no experience of jungle warfare. It was commanded by Brigadier Duncan. It was accompanied by an Indian Pioneer battalion—a non-combatant labour unit. On disembarkation the Brigade and the Pioneer battalion concentrated in the Segamat-Malacca area.

290. *Plans for the Defence of Johore.*—On the 4th January the Commander A.I.F. informed me that, if 3 Indian Corps fell back to Johore, he would like to be allowed to exercise operational control over all troops in Johore. If this was impossible, then he would prefer that the A.I.F. should be responsible for the West area and the 3 Indian Corps for the East area.

I replied that I could not agree to this for the following reasons:—

(a) The fusion of the 3 Indian Corps and A.I.F. must lead to Command and Administrative difficulties.

(b) The proposal to transfer the A.I.F. as a whole from East to West Johore was not practical owing to the complicated moves that would become necessary in the middle of active operations and the weakening of the east coast defences.

I informed him that the only practical solution at that time seemed to be for the A.I.F. to be responsible for the East area and the 3 Indian Corps for the West area, but that I would be guided by events.

291. At 1100 hrs. 5th January I held a conference at Segamat in North Johore as previously arranged (see Section XXXI) to discuss plans for the withdrawal and the defence of Johore. It was attended by the Commanders 3 Indian Corps and A.I.F. with members of their staffs and by staff officers of Headquarters Malaya Command.

292. As a result of this conference, orders were issued for the withdrawal to and defence of Johore, the main points of which were as under:—

(a) *Intention.*—The intention was to continue to ensure the security of the Singapore Naval Base.

(b) *Policy.*—The broad policy was to continue opposition on the mainland to cover the arrival of reinforcements.

(c) There was to be no withdrawal without my permission south of the line Endau (later amended to read Mersing)—Batu Anam (N.W. of Segamat)—Muar.

(d) North of the line given above the 3 Indian Corps would continue to fight the enemy in areas selected by the Corps Commander. No withdrawal from one area to another would take place until necessitated by enemy action. The enemy should be attacked in flank and rear. It was of the utmost importance for strategical reasons to deny to the enemy the use of the Kuala Lumpur and Port Swettenham aerodromes for as long as possible, but at least until the 14th January.

(e) In view of possible enemy attempts to land on the west coast of Singapore Island, the Commander Singapore Fortress should pay particular attention to the defence of that area.

(f) After withdrawal the 3 Indian Corps would be responsible for the defence of the West area of Johore and the A.I.F. for that of the East area.

(g) The Main Line of resistance to be on the general line Mersing—Batu Anam—Muar.

(h) The 45 Indian Infantry Brigade with attached troops to come under orders 3 Indian Corps at once and the Pioneer Battalion from midday 7th January.

(j) 3 Indian Corps to take over immediately from A.I.F. Malaya operational control of the area north of the line G. Besar—Labis—Semarah all inclusive to 3 Indian Corps.

(k) The State of Johore and Settlement of Malacca to be formed at once into an administrative area to be known as Johore/Malacca area.

293. *The Slim River Battle.*—At dawn on 4th Jan. the 12 Brigade Group was moving into the Trolak sector and the 28 Brigade Group into harbours near Slim River Village ready to man its positions in that area when ordered. No battalion could now muster more than the equivalent in men of three poorly armed companies. No battalion had more than two anti-tank rifles. Some had none.

The Trolak sector of the Slim River position extended for three miles forward from Trolak village and was divided into three battalion sub-sectors. The terrain in the two forward sub-sectors consisted of thick jungle through which the road and railway ran in narrow parallel corridors about 400 yards apart. This jungle was impassable for A.F.Vs. It was also a poor country for artillery support. To block the road against tanks a supply of large concrete cylinders had been sent up. Owing to the constant presence of enemy aircraft which flew up and down the road bombing and machine-gunning all day, work on the defences had to be done under cover of darkness. On

the afternoon of the 5th Jan. an enemy attack down the railway was repulsed with heavy loss.

294. At 0345 hours 7th Jan. the enemy attacked the forward troops frontally in bright moonlight. They succeeded in clearing the tank blocks and 15 tanks followed by infantry advanced down the road. On reaching the second sub-sector the leading tank struck a mine and some 30 tanks piled up behind it in close formation. The attack was held up for some two hours in this sub-sector during which seven tanks were destroyed. Then they cleared the obstacles and continued their advance closely followed by infantry. The news of this tank break-through had, partly owing to lack of telephone cable, not reached the troops in rear who were in turn taken completely by surprise. Two battalions were overtaken by the tanks while marching along the road to occupy their position and were badly cut up. Artillery units were similarly surprised. It was not until the tanks had reached a point two miles south of Slim and 15 miles from their starting point that they were stopped by a 4.5-in. howitzer of the 155 Field Regt. There was practically nothing between them and Kuala Lumpur.

The effect of this break-through was disastrous. The enemy tanks were now in control of the bridge at Slim and all our wheeled transport was on the further side of it. The enemy infantry had followed up quickly and there was considerable fighting during the day in the forward areas. In the afternoon the brigade commanders issued orders for a withdrawal down the railway line to Tanjong Malim 17 miles away.

295. Our losses from this battle were very heavy. The three battalions of the 12 Brigade mustered only the equivalent of about a company each. One battalion of the 28 Brigade had been obliterated while the remaining two had a total strength of less than one battalion. In the artillery, the engineers and the administrative units, the losses were on the same scale. A large number of guns and wheeled vehicles had been lost. The 11 Indian Division had temporarily ceased to exist as an effective fighting formation.

296. On the 8th January the Supreme Commander South-West Pacific, who had visited 3 Corps area on taking over command, initiated a plan to withdraw what remained of 3 Indian Corps into Johore without delay.

297. It would be easy, but unprofitable, to attribute the defeat at the Slim River Battle to the inadequacy of the anti-tank defences, the failure to blow the bridges or to a variety of other causes. The real cause lay in the utter weariness of the troops, both officers and men. They had been fighting and moving by day and by night for a month, and few of them had had any proper rest or relief. In the exhausting and enervating climatic and topographical conditions of Malaya this is far too long. The enemy's troops also no doubt suffered from the local conditions which were no more natural to them than to the majority of ours. But the enemy, with the initiative conferred by the offensive and by the freedom of the sea and air and with the ability to concentrate the whole of their forces against portions of ours in detail,

could always relieve their tired troops or ease the pace whenever they found it necessary. Without reserves we were able to do neither. Had we had at this time the reserve division, which had been asked for, in 3 Indian Corps area, the story might have been very different.

298. *Air Operations.*—During this period the enemy gave continuous air support to his troops in the forward areas and also to his craft moving down the West Coast. He also made a series of attacks on the Kluang aerodrome in Central Johore and of night attacks against objectives in the Singapore area. Our own air strength during this period fell to a very low level. Our forward troops were entirely without air support. A large proportion of the available aircraft were employed on the defence of Singapore, on convoy protection duties and on seaward reconnaissances.

#### SECTION XXXIV.—THE WITHDRAWAL TO NORTH JOHORE, 9TH-14TH JANUARY, 1942.

299. *Orders for the Withdrawal and Defence of Johore*—On the 9th January, in accordance with instructions received from the Supreme Commander, South West Pacific, I issued outline orders for the withdrawal to Johore, and the defence of that State. The main points of these orders were as under:—

(a) Commander A.I.F. to concentrate one Brigade Group, A.I.F., in the Segamat area as soon as possible.

(b) 45 Indian Brigade Group to come under command of A.I.F. Malaya immediately.

(c) 3 Indian Corps to withdraw from present positions into Johore covered by maximum possible demolitions. Withdrawal to be carried out by rail and by M.T. as ordered by Corps Commander.

(d) Withdrawal to be covered by rear-guards on the demolitions.

(e) On entering Johore 9 Indian Division to come under command of A.I.F.

(f) 3 Indian Corps, less 9 Indian Division, to take over operational responsibility for South Johore up to and inclusive of the line Endau—G. Berembang—Kluang—Batu Pahat on a date to be fixed later.

A copy of Malaya Command Operation Instruction No. 33 is attached as Appendix "E" to this Despatch.

300. To the best of my belief these orders were in accordance with the instructions received from the Supreme Commander, South-West Pacific. He has since stated that he directed that the Australian Brigade Group in the Mersing area should be moved as soon as possible to join the remainder of the A.I.F. I have no record or recollection of such instructions, though it was my intention, if opportunity offered at a later date, to relieve this brigade group by a newly arrived formation.

The Supreme Commander, South-West Pacific has also stated that he directed that the 9 Indian Division should be employed in the southern portion (i.e. Muar Sector) of the position to be occupied. I have equally no record or recollection of this instruction.

301. At 1100 hours, 10th January, I held a conference at Segamat. It was attended by the Commanders 3 Indian Corps and A.I.F. with

their staff officers and staff officers of Headquarters, Malaya Command. At this conference the orders already issued on the 9th January were supplemented as under:—

(a) The troops in Johore would be re-organised into two forces, the one under Maj.-Gen. Gordon Bennett to be known as Westforce, and the other under Lt.-Gen. Sir Lewis Heath to be known as 3 Indian Corps. This did not include troops under command Singapore Fortress or directly under Headquarters, Malaya Command.

(b) The composition of Westforce to be as under:—

9 Indian Division.

A.I.F. less 22 Australian Brigade Group.

45 Indian Brigade Group.

2 Battalion The Loyal Regt. less one company (from Singapore Fortress).

Artillery, Engineer and Administrative units not included in formations.

The Indian Pioneer Battalion.

The task of Westforce was to hold the North-West portion of Johore, the main line of resistance to be on the general line Batu Anam—Muar. There was to be no withdrawal behind the line Segamat—Muar without my permission.

(c) The composition of 3 Indian Corps to be as under:—

11 Indian Division.

22 Australian Brigade Group with attached troops, which included 2/17 Dogra Battalion from Singapore Fortress, to be known as Eastforce (Brigadier Taylor).

3 Corps Troops, which included Artillery, Engineer and Administrative units.

The task of 3 Indian Corps was the defence of Johore south of and inclusive of the line Endau—G. Berembang—Kluang—Batu Pahat except the Pengerang area, for which Singapore Fortress was responsible.

(d) The 11 Indian Division, less 12 Indian Infantry Brigade, to be accommodated in areas where it could be rested and re-organised. The 12 Indian Infantry Brigade to be withdrawn direct to Singapore.

302. After the conference we reconnoitred in detail the positions to be occupied. I approved a plan for a major ambush on the road west of Gemas.

303. On the morning of 12th January, after a visit to troops of 9 and 11 Indian Divisions, I held a co-ordinating conference at which the Commanders A.I.F. and 9 Indian Division were present. At this conference the tactics to be adopted were discussed and I approved the following plan:—

(a) *Segamat area*.—The crossings over the Rivers Muar and Segamat, which were vital to the defence, to be held strongly against all forms of ground and air attacks.

West of River Muar localities to be held as focal points with striking forces available on the flanks to attack the enemy when he tried to move round them.

An ambush force to be located west of Gemas.

(b) *Coastal area*.—On the west coast flank the 45 Indian Brigade Group to cover the main coast road at Muar south of the river with detachments and patrols watching the river and exits south from it over the front Kg. Lenga to Muar.

(c) *Anti-Tank Defence.*—Forward field guns to be used for anti-tank and anti-personnel roles. The necessity for a physical obstacle, to be covered by fire, wherever it was intended to stop tanks was stressed.

304. *Commanders.*—At the request of the Commander 3 Indian Corps I appointed Brigadier Key to command the 11 Indian Division in place of Major-General Paris. The reason for this was that we considered that an Indian Army Officer was now required to pull together and re-establish confidence in what remained of the 11 Indian Division. Brigadier Lay, who had now returned to duty, was appointed to command the 8 Indian Infantry Brigade and Col. Challen took over command of the 6/15 Indian Infantry Brigade in lieu of Brigadier Moorhead.

305. *The Withdrawal of 3 Indian Corps.*—At 0600 hrs., 9th January, the 1/14 Punjab Regiment on the right of the Batang Berjuntai position was suddenly attacked and suffered considerable losses. In the afternoon the 6/15 Brigade Group fell back to the Batu Arang area. On the West Coast road our troops after some skirmishing fell back to a position about three miles north of Klang. On the main road the 28 Brigade Group occupied a position at Serendah without being pressed.

306. For the withdrawal of 3 Indian Corps there were in the West Coast area two main roads available, i.e., the main trunk road Kuala Lumpur—Seremban—Tampin—Gemas—Segamat, and the coastal road Klang—Morib—Port Dickson—Malacca. The 9 Indian Division had the tortuous and little-used road Bentong—Durian Tipus, thence either via Kuala Pilah or Bahau to join the main trunk road two miles south of Tampin.

In the States of Selangor and Negri Sembilan and the Settlement of Malacca through which the withdrawal was to take place the roads are much more numerous than they are in the States of Perak and Pahang. The beaches also are sandy and more suitable for landings. These facilities conferred on the enemy greater freedom of action and made our task more difficult.

307. The plan was for the 11 Indian Division and L. of C. Troops to occupy two delaying positions during the withdrawal, the one covering Seremban and Port Dickson and the other covering Tampin and Malacca. The existence of the lateral road Kuala Pilah—Seremban and the convergence of the two divisional routes at Tampin made it necessary that the 9 Division should be clear of Kuala Pilah and Tampin respectively before the first and second delaying positions were vacated by the 11 Division.

308. Soon after dawn on the 10th January the enemy attacked the 28 Brigade Group at Serendah and, adopting his usual tactics, quickly enveloped both flanks. Some fierce fighting went on during the day, our troops gradually falling back to Sungai Choh Village, which they found already in possession of an enemy force which had come from the West. They managed to force their way through, however, though suffering severe losses, and late in the afternoon embussed for Tampin leaving behind a party to cover the engineers working on road demolitions.

The 6/15 Brigade Group, which had been withdrawn the previous night from the Batu

Arang area, followed the 28 Brigade Group through Kuala Lumpur. The last bridge in the Federal Capital was blown at 0430 hrs. 11th January and the Brigade, leaving a small force to cover further demolitions, moved to the Labu area west of Seremban.

309. The 12 Indian Infantry Brigade, now only some 600-700 strong, was already in position guarding the Mantin (Setul) Pass, a narrow hilly defile a few miles north of Seremban. A battalion of the newly arrived 45 Indian Infantry Brigade had also been sent forward with requisitioned transport (it's own having not yet arrived) to the Sepang area.

310. On the coastal road Port Swettenham was evacuated on the afternoon on the 10th January and the big bridge at Klang was rather ineffectively blown at 2030 hrs. that night. After some local engagements with the enemy, all troops were withdrawn during the night 10th/11th January to positions covering Port Dickson.

311. During the 11th and 12th January there was no contact on the front, though the Japanese aircraft were active on both days reconnoitring and bombing. On the night 12th/13th January the 6/15 Brigade withdrew to the Alor Gajah area and the remnants of the 12 Brigade entrained at Gemas for Singapore. On the coast road the L. of C. troops fell back to a position covering Malacca. The 9 Indian Division moved in conformity.

312. On the evening of the 13th January, the final stage of the long withdrawal started. As there is only a ferry crossing over the broad river at Muar, all wheeled transport had to pass through Segamat which thus became a bad bottleneck. By the 14th January, however, all troops of 3 Indian Corps were clear and the command of the forward area passed to the Comdr. Westforce. The Commander 3 Indian Corps assumed responsibility for South Johore at 2000 hrs. 14th January.

313. During the withdrawal demolitions were carried out on all roads. In particular gaps were blown in all bridges over what might constitute an anti-tank obstacle.

314. On completion of the withdrawal the formations of 3 Indian Corps were disposed as under:—

Headquarters 3 Indian Corps, Johore Bahru.

Headquarters 11 Indian Division, Rengam.  
6/15 Indian Infantry Brigade and 11 Divisional Artillery, Kluang.

28 Indian Infantry Brigade, Pontian Kechil.

3 Indian Cavalry, Independent Company and one Company Malay Regiment, Batu Pahat.

315. On the 13th January the Supreme Commander South West Pacific visited Malaya. At Segamat he discussed the defence dispositions with the Commander Westforce.

#### SECTION XXXV.—THE ADMINISTRATIVE SITUATION, 15TH JANUARY, 1942.

316. As a result of our rapid withdrawal from North and Central Malaya there had naturally been losses in material and reserve stocks. This was particularly the case as regards petrol, which required more transport for its removal than was available. On the

whole, however, it had been possible by careful organization to evacuate a good proportion of our reserves. The general policy which I had approved was to create new dumps in South Johore for issue to troops in the Johore area. A large dump a few miles south of Segamat, which had been established in the pre-war period to serve both the East and the West Coast areas, was built up. There was also a dump of Royal Engineer material, established for the same purpose, at Batu Anam. The advantages of this policy were threefold (i) It avoided further congestion on Singapore Island; (ii) it avoided traffic congestion on the Causeway between Singapore Island and the mainland; (iii) it would reduce the length of the forward carry. Accordingly dumps were formed at Johore Bahru and near the waterways in South-West Johore.

317. *Food*.—The general food situation remained on the whole satisfactory in spite of the large increase in the population of Singapore caused by the influx of refugees from the mainland, and in spite of the decrease of military reserves occasioned by the arrival of reinforcing units which usually only brought a limited quantity of foodstuffs with them.

318. *Water*.—The water situation also up to this time had given no serious cause for anxiety in spite of a most unusually dry season. After the start of hostilities new wells had been dug round Singapore Town but about the middle of January the digging of them had been stopped at the instigation of the Civil Health Authorities. Measures for strict water economy had also been introduced. The necessity for such economy was constantly kept before the public by publicity in the Press, by posters and by police action.

319. *Ammunition*.—There had been heavy expenditure of field and light anti-aircraft ammunition in the series of battles on the mainland. Our stocks in these categories had never been very satisfactory and now began to give rise to some anxiety. Apart from this the situation was satisfactory.

320. *Petrol and Oil*.—As regards petrol and lubricating oils we still had the large dumps on Singapore Island and some smaller ones in Johore. The civil supplies, however, were getting low owing to the loss of their large depots on the mainland.

321. *Transport*.—A considerable amount of civil transport had been requisitioned, especially in the Northern area, to supplement military resources. Vehicles now also became available owing to the enforced closing of business enterprises. In consequence the transport problem at this stage presented no great difficulty.

322. *Medical*.—The need for increased hospital accommodation in the Johore and Singapore areas now began to make itself felt. All the hospitals in North and Central Malaya and the large Australian Base Hospital at Malacca had had to be cleared. The Alexandra Military Hospital was full and some overflow branch hospitals for the less serious cases had been established in private houses under the pre-war scheme. New buildings had to be taken over. Included among these was a wing of the large new civil hospital at Johore Bahru.

323. Sick and wounded, not likely to be fit for duty within two months, were earmarked for evacuation. These, except acute cases, and those requiring special or constant nursing, were evacuated to the United Kingdom and India by ordinary passenger ship. Both the War Office and Australia had been approached with a view to provision of hospital ship accommodation, but owing to the needs of other theatres of war, no final arrangements could be made and no ship could be promised. With the help of the Naval authorities, however, the "Wu Sueh," a Yangtze river boat of 3,400 tons and 5 feet draught, had some time previously been bought and re-designed as a hospital ship. She was not considered capable of making an ocean voyage (though later she did so) but it was the best that could be done and it would at any rate provide transport to the Dutch East Indies.

324. *Accommodation*.—Accommodation on Singapore Island was becoming very congested. It was clearly impracticable to prohibit the entry of European civilians from the mainland. It was equally impossible to prohibit the entry of influential Asiatics whose lives would be at stake if they fell into Japanese hands. In consequence, though measures were taken to prevent the mass influx of refugees from Johore, the population of Singapore Island increased very greatly during January.

325. *Railway*.—As a result of the rapid withdrawal, great congestion had occurred on the railway. In particular there were insufficient sidings in the southern section of the railway to accommodate the rolling stock. An effort was made to solve this difficulty by building new sidings in South Johore and on Singapore Island where rolling stock not actually in use could be parked. Unfortunately they were not ready for use in time. Consequently, when the withdrawal through Central Johore took place, thirteen fully laden trains had to be abandoned on the Malacca branch. Efforts to destroy them by air attack were only partially successful. Included in the loads of these trains was a large consignment of maps of Singapore Island which had been printed to a special order by the Malayan Survey at Kuala Lumpur. The lack of these maps was to prove a great handicap at a later date. It is not known what, if any, use the Japanese made of them.

326. *Docks*.—The Japanese Air Force had not yet started bombing the Docks at Singapore and work there was proceeding normally up to the middle of January.

327. *Labour*.—(See Section XXX).—There had been little improvement in the situation as regards civil labour. The workers still disappeared as soon as any bombs fell near them and usually remained absent for some days. This applied particularly to the aerodromes upon which the Japanese Air Force was now making daily attacks.

328. *Man-Power*.—A number of European civilians, both official and unofficial, had now become available for duty. Their names were registered with the Controller of Man-Power to whom applications were made both by the Services and by the Civil Departments. Those who had technical knowledge, of whom there were many, were employed as far as possible where their knowledge could be utilized. Some

of the older men were employed in Government Departments or in the Passive Air Defence Organization which needed strengthening. A number of the younger men were commissioned in the Services. Some specially selected officers were posted direct to Indian Army Units in spite of their lack of knowledge of the language as it was considered essential to strengthen the European element in those units. Others were attached to combatant units as interpreters and advisers on local conditions.

329. *Supplies in Forward Areas.*—The tactics adopted by the enemy of striking at our communications, coupled with the complete lack of transport aircraft, forced us to modify the general principle of keeping supplies in forward areas mobile. I therefore directed that 7 days' reserve of food, ammunition and other essential stores were to be maintained at all times by forces whose communications might be in danger of attack.

#### SECTION XXXVI.—REINFORCEMENTS.

330. As has already been stated (Section XXXIII), the 45 Indian Infantry Brigade with attached troops and an Indian Pioneer Battalion had arrived at Singapore on the 3rd January. On the 13th January an important convoy reached Singapore safely bringing the following formations and units:—

53 British Infantry Brigade Group of the 18 British Division.

One Heavy British Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

One Light British Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

One British Anti-Tank Regiment.

50 Hurricane Fighters with their crews.

The transports included several large American liners which were discharged with the utmost despatch and left again without delay.

331. The reception and protection of this and subsequent convoys were combined operations of considerable magnitude. The Navy was responsible for routeing and docking them and for the provision of naval escort vessels, the Air Force for providing aerial protection from the Banka Straits northwards, and the Army for the provision of ground anti-aircraft protection from the time they reached Singapore till the time they left and for the rapid disembarkation of personnel and discharge of cargoes. Each convoy presented separate problems which had to be carefully studied before plans could be formulated. In all three Services the preservation of the utmost secrecy was insisted upon. It was due to this that commanders in the forward areas were sometimes unable to appreciate the broader aspects of strategical plans. It stands to the credit of all three Services that only one ship in convoy was sunk before reaching Singapore.

332. The 53 Infantry Brigade Group had left the United Kingdom in October bound for the Middle East and had been diverted off the east coast of Africa. The voyage had lasted exactly eleven weeks. On arrival the troops were healthy but soft. In addition, a great deal of new equipment had been issued shortly before embarkation with which there had been no time to train. The Brigade had had no experience of bush warfare conditions. It arrived without its guns and transport, but it was found possible to replace these temporarily from local reserves. It was accommodated in the first instance on

Singapore Island, where I had hoped to be able to give it a short time to become acclimatized, but the swift march of events made this impossible. On the 14th January orders were issued for:—

(a) One battalion of the Brigade to move to Jemaluang as soon as ready to relieve a battalion of the 22 Australian Infantry Brigade which would then be at the disposal of Westforce,

(b) The remainder of the Brigade to be prepared to move as soon as ready to either (i) Mersing in relief of the 22 Australian Infantry Brigade, or (ii) Labis, to come under orders of Westforce. Reconnaissances of the Mersing area were to be carried out at once.

333. On the 14th and 15th January the detachment of Dutch Marechaussees (See Section XXXI) reached Singapore by air from the Netherlands East Indies. This detachment, the strength of which was about 80 all told, consisted of native troops from the N.E.I. with European officers. They were specially trained in jungle guerilla warfare. Their despatch to Malaya provided another proof of the ready co-operation of our Dutch Allies in this Far Eastern war.

After arrival the Marechaussees concentrated in the Labis area of North Johore and, after the Japanese advance, operated against their communications in that district. During the latter half of January they had considerable success killing a number of Japanese and doing material damage. Later, however, they experienced difficulties from lack of food and from the unreliability of some elements of the local population. Rather more than half the detachment eventually made its way to Sumatra.

334. The Hurricane Fighters arrived crated, but were unpacked and assembled with the utmost despatch by the R.A.F. They were in the air within a few days of their arrival. These machines were not the most modern type of Hurricane. Most of the twenty-four pilots had previously seen active service, but had been drawn from several different units.

335. As regards the future, another Indian Infantry Brigade, an Australian Machine Gun Battalion and some Indian and Australian reinforcements were expected within the next ten days and the remainder of the 18 British Division towards the end of the month.

#### SECTION XXXVII.—THE STRATEGICAL SITUATION, 15TH JANUARY, 1942.

336. Our object remained as before, i.e., the Defence of the Naval Base.

337. *Army.*—We knew that on the west coast the enemy had two divisions in front line. From the manner in which they were able to maintain the momentum of the attack we thought that they had the equivalent of two divisions in reserve with which they were able to effect regular reliefs of their front line troops.

There was little evidence of what troops the enemy might have on the East Coast, but we knew it was a minimum of one division.

In addition the enemy was known to have in Indo-China a formation trained in air-borne landings and he was believed to have there at least two divisions in reserve which might be employed in Malaya or elsewhere.

We estimated therefore that the enemy had at his disposal a minimum of seven divisions with

a formation of air-borne troops. His land forces included an armoured component.

Our forces were approximately as under:—

*Eastforce*.—One Brigade Group at full strength.

*Westforce*.—The equivalent of one strong division.

*11 Indian Division*.—The equivalent of about  $\frac{1}{2}$  brigade groups.

*Singapore Fortress*.—Two weak Infantry Brigades and the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force.

Fixed Defences at full strength.

Anti-Aircraft Defences.—At full strength.

Command Reserve.—One Brigade Group.

This gave a total of approximately three divisions with Fixed and Anti-Aircraft Defences. In addition we might expect to receive by the end of the month the equivalent of one additional division and a number of reinforcements.

338. *Air*.—Before the arrival of the Hurricanes (See Section XXXVI) our Air resources had sunk to a very low level. It had not been possible to replace the daily losses and, owing to the length and dangers of the route, not more than half of the reinforcing aircraft which had been despatched to Malaya by land route had reached their destination. In consequence, there were seldom a dozen aircraft, and often considerably less, available for attacks on selected targets. The A.O.C. did his utmost with his limited resources to meet the Army requirements but it was practically impossible to give any effective support to troops in the forward areas.

The Japanese Air Force on the other hand had been able to give continuous support to their troops in the forward areas and to their sea-borne landings on the West Coast. They had also carried out a series of attacks against the Kluang aerodrome in Central Johore. During the first ten days of the month there had been nightly attacks against targets, generally aerodromes, in the Singapore area. From the 10th January onwards these attacks were usually delivered by day as the Japanese were then able to escort their bombers with fighters based presumably on Kuantan. On the 12th January three attacks were made on the Singapore aerodromes by a total of 122 aircraft while on the same day our photographic reconnaissance recorded 200 enemy aircraft on aerodromes in Malaya excluding those in Kelantan.

339. *Naval*.—The enemy continued to exercise complete control of the waters east of Malaya. Off the West Coast his coastal vessels were able to move freely under air protection. We felt, however, that these coastal operations would become more difficult for him as he moved further south and as the length of the coastline to be watched by our forces decreased.

340. *Topographical*.—Broadly speaking, the Western area of Johore is much more developed than are the Central and Eastern areas.

In the eastern area the Mersing and Jemaluang districts are for the most part under rubber plantations, but south of the Jemaluang-Kahang road there is a wide belt of untouched jungle passable only for infantry without wheeled transport. On the east coast there are numerous creeks and waterways which give access to the interior.

In the central area east of the railway the country is broken and hilly and has been less developed. Communications are poor.

The west coast area has, except for a few swamps and patches of jungle, been extensively developed. It is mostly covered by rubber plantations, though there are also cocoanut, pineapple and other plantations. Through it ran the railway, the main trunk road and also a coastal road. The large rivers at Muar and Batu Pahat are crossed by ferry only. Along the coastal belt the country is low-lying and swampy. In the Batu Pahat district there had before the war been extensive Japanese-owned estates.

341. *Communications*.—The greatly increased length of the Japanese communications must without a doubt have complicated their supply and maintenance problems. They had behind them a large number of broken bridges both on the roads and the railway. We also hoped that the guerilla bands which had been organized to attack their communications would soon be having effect. To offset these difficulties, however, the Japanese had control of the sea and of the air and were known to be making use of these elements.

Our own communications were now getting shorter but they were constantly subject to enemy air attack.

342. *Aerodromes*.—The large modern aerodrome at Kluang and the unfinished aerodrome at Kahang would be of great value to the enemy if they fell into his hands. Experience had shown that demolitions could not deny an aerodrome to the enemy for more than a few days.

The aerodrome near Batu Pahat was a smaller one and suitable only for light and medium aircraft.

343. *Morale*.—The fighting qualities of some of our troops had naturally been affected by the long and continuous withdrawals and by the enemy's superiority in certain types of modern armament. This was particularly the case with some of the Indian infantry who had up to date borne the brunt of the front line fighting. On the other hand, the A.I.F. were fresh and comparatively well trained and we had two recently arrived Brigade groups which had not yet been in action.

344. *Political*.—The State of Johore was an Unfederated Malay State bound to us by treaty. It maintained at its own expense a small military force and had in the past made a generous contribution to Imperial Defence. These factors made it politically desirable that we should do our utmost to hold as much of that State as possible.

345. *The Japanese Course of Action*.—It was clear that the Japanese intended to press on as fast as possible down the West Coast. It seemed probable also that a landing would soon be attempted on the east coast of Johore, probably in the Mersing area, from where the enemy could either develop another thrust towards Singapore or open the lateral road to Kluang. A direct sea-borne attack on Singapore was still, as before, a possibility, though it seemed probable that this, if contemplated, would be deferred until it could be combined with an attack from the landward side. Finally, there was the possibility of an airborne landing either in Johore or direct on to Singapore Island.

346. *Our Own Course of Action.*—In order to attain our object it was necessary that we should continue to fight the enemy on the mainland. In view of the disparity in strength between the Japanese and ourselves the safe arrival of our expected reinforcements remained of primary importance. We estimated that the most important formation, the 18 British Division, could not be disembarked and deployed on the mainland before the end of the first week in February at the earliest, i.e., more than three weeks ahead.

Our problem was greatly influenced by the fact that the road Jemaluang—Kluang—Batu Pahat is the only direct lateral communication in Johore and also by the fact that the newly constructed aerodromes of Kahang and Kluang were situated on this road. It was obviously necessary to fight as long as we could north of this vitally important road.

It was therefore decided to deny to the enemy the line Mersing—Segamat—Muar. An outline of the plan to put this decision into effect has already been given in Section XXXIV.

#### SECTION XXXVIII.—THE JOHORE OPERATIONS, 14TH-26TH JANUARY, 1942.

347. *The Gemas Ambush.*—North of Segamat the Commander Westforce had disposed the 27 Australian Brigade Group and the 8 Indian Brigade Group astride the main road and railway with one battalion (the 2/30 Australian Bn.) forward in an ambush position west of Gemas. The 22 Indian Brigade Group was similarly disposed in depth astride the Malacca-Segamat road with the forward battalion about the Jementah cross roads. The 2 Loyals, withdrawn from the Singapore garrison, was in reserve and responsible for the local defence of Segamat. Major-General Barstow, the Commander 9 Indian Division, was senior officer on the Segamat front and, under his influence, an excellent spirit of co-operation quickly grew up between British, Australian and Indian troops.

The ambush laid by the 2/30 Bn. (Lieut.-Colonel Gallagher) was very carefully prepared. The forward company covered 700 yards of road immediately east of the River Gemencheh and was 3 miles in front of the main battalion position. The troops were concealed in thick jungle bordering the road. At 1600 hrs on the 14th January the leading enemy troops appeared. By 1620 hrs. about 250 cyclists had passed through towards the main position, 500 cyclists were in the ambush and another 500 were seen approaching. At this moment the bridge was blown and fire opened. Some 400/500 of the enemy were killed before the company withdrew. More would have been killed had not the enemy cut the artillery telephone line.

By 1000 hrs. the following morning the enemy were in contact with the main battalion position. Attack and counter-attack went on throughout the day in the course of which more of the enemy troops were killed and 8 or 9 tanks destroyed. Our own losses were under 70. During the night the battalion fell back on to the main position.

The R.A.F. co-operated gallantly in this action. A scratch force—all that was available—of Glen Martins, Wirraways, Wildbeeste and Buffalos attacked enemy columns approaching Gemas and headquarters at Tampin and did some damage.

The ambush of Gemas provides an excellent example of the success that will often attend such tactics in jungle country. But fresh and reasonably well trained troops are required and these in the Malayan campaign were seldom available.

348. *The Battle of Muar.*—The town of Muar (Bandar Maharani on some maps) is situated on the south bank of the Muar River a short distance from its mouth. The River Muar is here about 600 yards wide and is unbridged below the main North/South trunk road. In its long course between the main road and the sea the river is extremely tortuous, especially in its lower reaches in which it winds through low-lying and swampy country. Along the south bank of the river for some 20 miles inland from Muar there stretches a belt of estates with fairly numerous roads and tracks.

The defence of this sector was entrusted to the newly arrived 45 Indian Infantry Brigade, to which was attached a battery of Australian field artillery. The Brigade was disposed with two battalions forward on the line of the river, one between the sea and Jorak and the other between Jorak and Lenga, and one battalion in reserve in the Bakri area with patrols watching the coast at Parit Jawa. The plan envisaged a mobile defence using fighting patrols to attack the enemy. Unfortunately each of the forward battalions was ordered to push forward two companies north of the river to harass and delay the enemy. In view of the weakness of the force available this was undoubtedly a tactical error which resulted in a great dispersion of force.

349. The enemy's air offensive against Muar started on the 11th January. The bombing of the town, as in other places, started a general exodus and among those who left were the ferrymen. Nearly all the Asiatic employees of the waterworks and power station also deserted.

350. By the morning of the 15th the enemy had reached the north bank of the river, though no information of their approach had been received from the forward troops. In the afternoon a number of boats were seen off the mouth of the River Muar and a small party landed on the coast between Muar and Batu Pahat. Early the following morning another small force landed at the lighthouse west of Batu Pahat where it was engaged by our troops.

351. In order to meet this threat to Westforce communications the boundary between Westforce and 3 Indian Corps was amended to read as follows:—

"all inclusive 3 Indian Corps Road Kluang—Ayer Hitam—Yong Peng—Batu Pahat"

thus making the task of protecting Westforce communications the responsibility of the Commander 3 Indian Corps.

At 1655 hrs. on the 16th January after visiting commanders in the forward area, I placed the 53 British Infantry Brigade under orders of the Commander 3 Indian Corps and ordered it to move during the following night to the Ayer Hitam area. The Commander 3 Indian Corps placed this brigade under the 11 Indian Division. One battalion (6 R. Norfolk) was immediately sent to hold the defile East of Bukit Payong, a dominating feature some 11 miles west of Yong Peng, with a detachment at Parit Sulong Bridge some 5 miles further on.

One battalion (2 Cambridgeshire) was sent to Batu Pahat and one (5 R. Norfolk) was held in reserve at Ayer Hitam.

352. At about 0200 hrs. 16th January the leading Japanese troops crossed the River Muar at a point a few miles up-stream from the town and by 0900 hrs. had reached the road and established a block 2 miles east of Muar. During the morning some sharp fighting took place in this area. At 1300 hrs. a further collection of barges or landing craft appeared off Muar, some of which were sunk by our artillery fire. Continuous fighting went on throughout the afternoon in the outskirts of the town. By the evening of the 16th all troops of the 45 Brigade south of the river, except for the right forward battalion, were concentrated in the Bakri area and the Brigade Commander was planning a counter-attack to recapture Muar.

Early on the 17th January the Commander Westforce withdrew the 2/29 Bn. A I.F. from the Segamat front and despatched it to Bakri to meet the threat which was now developing. It arrived in the afternoon.

353. The enemy's attack from Muar, though it had not yet been possible to assess the full strength of it, obviously constituted a very real threat to Westforce's communications in the Yong Peng area, for if the enemy could reach the road there the whole of the Segamat force would be cut off. I discussed the situation with the Commander Westforce and the Commander 11 Indian Division at Rear Headquarters Westforce at 1200 hrs. 17th January. We were loth to order an immediate withdrawal from Segamat which we thought would be damaging to morale and decided to strengthen the Yong Peng-Muar front by every means at our disposal. I arranged to make available immediately the 2/19 Australian Battalion from Jemaluang, relieving it temporarily by the reserve battalion of the 53 Brigade.

354. Early on the morning 18th January the 45 Indian Infantry Brigade, with the 2/29 Australian Battalion attached, was strongly attacked by the enemy in its perimeter position west of Bakri. Nine enemy tanks were destroyed by the Australian anti-tank guns and tank hunting platoons. The enemy cut the road between this force and Brigade Headquarters situated a short distance to the east but with the arrival of the 2/19 Australian Battalion the situation was restored. In the evening the Japanese again attacked heavily but were repulsed.

On the afternoon of the 18th the enemy landed a strong force on the coast a few miles north of Batu Pahat.

355. Our Intelligence Service on this day reported that the Japanese were advancing with two divisions in front line, a Division of the Imperial Guards being in the Muar area and the 5 Division on the main road. The latter was a crack division which was known to have been specially trained in landing operations. The full extent of the threat from Muar now became clear. I felt that our chances of holding up this thrust for any length of time were not great and that a withdrawal from Segamat would sooner or later be forced upon us. I therefore approved a proposal by the Commander Westforce on the evening 18th January for an immediate withdrawal behind the River Segamat as

a preparatory step to a further withdrawal should such become necessary.

356. At the same time, by agreement with the Commander Westforce, I placed the whole of the Muar front temporarily under the Commander 3 Indian Corps. My reasons for this were:—

(a) I thought it difficult for the Commander Westforce with his small staff to give the close attention to the Muar front which the dangerous situation there demanded as well as controlling the operations on the Segamat front some 70 miles distant.

(b) It would obviously be necessary to build up a supporting front west of Yong Peng in order to keep open communications both with the Muar and Segamat forces. This could only be done by troops at that time under command of 3 Indian Corps.

357. On the morning of the 19th January very heavy fighting again developed in the Bakri area. The enemy again struck at our communications destroying some transport which was parked in rear of the defensive position and blocked the road. About midday the right forward battalion of the 45 Brigade (4/9 Jats) which had remained detached was ambushed when rejoining the main force and suffered heavily. Brigade Headquarters was practically wiped out by a bomb.

The Commander 53 British Brigade was now made responsible for the Bukit Payong—Yong Peng area, under 11 Indian Division, having been relieved of his responsibility for Batu Pahat. The 3/16 Punjab Regt of 11 Indian Division was placed under his orders.

358. At 1420 hrs. 19th January I held a conference at Yong Peng at which the Commanders 3 Indian Corps, Westforce, 11 Indian Division and 53 British Infantry Brigade were present. The following orders were issued:—

(a) The 53 Brigade Group to hold a position from the bridge at Parit Sulong to the high ground S.E. of the junction of the Yong Peng—Muar and Yong Peng—Batu Pahat roads.

(b) The 45 Brigade Group to be ordered to withdraw at once through the 53 Brigade Group to a position west of Yong Peng.

(c) The Segamat Force to continue its withdrawal.

(d) The 22 Indian Infantry Brigade, on its arrival at Yong Peng on the night 20th-21st January from the Segamat front, to be at the disposal of 11 Indian Division.

359. Events, however, anticipated the implementation of this plan, for on the afternoon of the 19th January an enemy force attacked and captured the defile east of Bukit Payong and later occupied the bridge at Parit Sulong. An attempt the following morning to recapture the defile by counter-attack was only partially successful, and eventually our troops took up a defensive position at the west end of a causeway which crossed a marshy area a little further east.

360. In accordance with the orders to withdraw, sent by W/T from Westforce which was the only means of communication then open, the Muar Force started to concentrate on the evening of 19th January but was attacked from all sides and suffered heavily. Early on the 20th the withdrawal started, the force being

organised into seven company groups. The road, which passed through miles of swampy country, had been blocked in many places. Each block had to be cleared in turn and some of the fiercest and most terrific fighting of the whole campaign took place on this day, our troops, harassed on all sides, repeatedly charging with the bayonet, and the Japanese Guards fighting with their traditional fanaticism. It was not till 0600 hrs., 21st January, that the head of the column reached the bridge at Parit Sulong to find it held by the enemy.

361. Early in the withdrawal the Commander 45 Indian Brigade (Brigadier Duncan) was killed while leading a bayonet charge. He had set a magnificent example of courage and fortitude and can in no way be held responsible for the disaster which overtook his untrained brigade. The command of the force devolved upon Lt.-Col. Anderson A.I.F., who for his fine leadership was awarded the Victoria Cross.

362. At 0833 hrs. 21st January I ordered the Commander Westforce to assume command of all troops on the Yong Peng—Muar road at a time to be arranged direct with the Commander 11 Indian Division. The reasons for this change in command were as under:—

(a) The movements of the Segamat and Muar Forces now required very careful co-ordination.

(b) The shortening of communications now made it possible for the Commander Westforce to control both forces.

(c) The only possibility of communication with the Muar Force was by W/T from Headquarters Westforce.

363. At 1230 hrs. 21st January I held another conference at Yong Peng. The decisions reached at this conference, which concerned chiefly the organization for future operations, will be recorded later. The Commander Westforce reported, however, that he was organizing a counter-attack with 2 Loyals, withdrawn from the Segamat front, to recapture the Bukit Payong feature with the object subsequently of re-opening communications to the Muar Force. To this project I gave my approval. That it was not subsequently carried out was due partly to delay in the provision of transport for the move forward of the 2 Loyals and partly to the difficulty of providing artillery support. Having studied the problem carefully I am now of the opinion that the chances of a single battalion being able to advance 7 miles through that type of country and relieve the Muar Force in the time available were remote. The remaining infantry in the Yong Peng force were by that time too exhausted to be able to take a useful part in the operation.

364. Throughout the 21st January desperate efforts were made by the Muar Force to force the river crossing at Parit Sulong. But the bridge was strongly held and the attacks were repulsed. In the rear a new threat appeared in the shape of heavy tanks, several of which were destroyed by anti-tank guns and tank-hunting parties. By nightfall, however, the position held had become very contracted. The following morning food and medical supplies were dropped by three aircraft from Singapore, but at 0900 hrs. the Commander Muar Force reluctantly gave the order for all guns, vehicles and heavy weapons to be destroyed, for the

wounded to be left behind in charge of volunteers and for all who could walk to make their way through the jungle to Yong Peng.

Eventually some 550 Australian troops and some 400 Indian troops rejoined. I regret to have to record that the wounded who were left behind were, almost without exception, subsequently massacred by the Japanese.

365. The 45 Indian Infantry Brigade ceased to exist. Those killed included the Brigade Commander, every battalion commander and second-in-command and two of the three adjutants. Only one or two of the surviving British officers had more than a few months' service. This brigade had never been fit for employment in a theatre of war. It was not that there was anything wrong with the raw material but simply that it was raw. It was the price of our unpreparedness for war and over-rapid expansion.

366. Throughout the Battle of Muar the Navy and Air Force did their utmost to help us, the former by sending gunboats nightly to bombard the Muar area and the latter by mobilizing all possible resources, however antiquated, to attack the enemy.

367. The Battle of Muar, which lasted six days, was one of the most sanguinary of the Malayan campaign. Our small untried force, in spite of its handicaps, had held at bay a division of the Japanese Imperial Guards and by doing so had saved the Segamat Force which would otherwise inevitably have been lost.

368. *The Withdrawal from Segamat.*—On the afternoon of the 18th January the enemy attacked with tanks near the main road north of Batu Anam but were repulsed. During the night, in accordance with the decision previously recorded, the 9 Indian Division fell back behind the line of the River Muar and the 27 Australian Brigade Group behind the River Segamat.

During the night 19th/20th January the 9 Indian Division was withdrawn south of the River Segamat to the Tenang area. All the big bridges over the Rivers Muar and Segamat were destroyed.

During the night 20th/21st January the 27 Australian Brigade Group was withdrawn by M.T. from the line of the River Segamat and fell back direct to Yong Peng, where it took up positions covering the vital road junction. The 9 Indian Division moved one brigade group to the Labis area and one to Kampong Bahru. On the afternoon of the 21st January the forward troops of the 22 Indian Brigade successfully ambushed the leading Japanese troops moving down the main road. Our troops, having got used to this novel form of warfare, were now displaying more cunning.

During the night 21st/22nd January the 22 Indian Brigade Group less one battalion (R. Garhwal Rifles) moved by M.T. to the Kluang area, the R. Garhwal Rifles marching down the railway to the Paloh area. The 8 Brigade Group was in position astride the main road some 12 miles south of Labis where the enemy made contact early on the 22nd January. Fighting continued on this front throughout the day. During the following night the 8 Brigade Group fell back behind the River Gerchang some 4 miles north of Yong Peng, a strong position where further fighting took place on the 23rd. This day was also remarkable for intense enemy air activity.

their reconnaissance and ground-strafing aircraft often flying as low as 100 feet. At midnight 23rd/24th January the rearguards from both the Segamat and Muar fronts passed through Yong Peng.

369. The extrication of the Segamat Force from its perilous position was a matter for considerable satisfaction. The whole of the Segamat—Muar operations required the most careful handling by all commanders and quick compliance with orders by all formations and units. They imposed a great strain on commanders and staffs, in illustration of which I may mention that during the twenty-five days ending 23rd January I motored over 2,500 miles and held numerous conferences in the forward areas besides attending War Council meetings and working late into the night at my Headquarters at Singapore.

370. *Plans for the Defence of Central Johore.*—At the Conference held south of Yong Peng at 12.30 hrs. 21st January (see above) it was decided that, after withdrawal from Yong Peng, our forces would be re-organized as under:

*Eastforce.*—All troops in the Mersing and Kahang area under command of an officer to be detailed by the Commander 3 Indian Corps.

*Role.*—To hold Jemaluang with detachments forward in the Mersing area.

*Westforce.*—9 Indian Division and A.I.F. less 22 Australian Brigade Group under command of Major-General Gordon Bennett.

*Role.*—To hold the area exclusive Yong Peng—inclusive Kluang—Ayer Hitam.

11 Indian Division.—53 British Brigade Group when released from Westforce).

6/15 Brigade Group of two battalions etc.

28 Indian Brigade Group,  
under command of Major-General Key.

*Role.*—To hold the Batu Pahat area and operate on the West Coast road.

371. At a conference held at Rengam on the morning of the 23rd January I decided that Westforce would come under command of 3 Indian Corps as soon as the last troops had been withdrawn south of the Yong Peng road junction. The Commander 3 Indian Corps would then command all troops in Johore except those anti-aircraft defences and administrative units under Headquarters Malaya command and the Pengerang Defences under Comdr. Singapore Fortress.

I directed that the general line Jemaluang—Kluang—Ayer Hitam—Batu Pahat would be held and that there would be no withdrawal from this line without my permission.

372. In this connection I cabled to the Supreme Commander South-West Pacific on the 24th January as under:

"I want to be able to hold line of road Kluang—Batu Pahat for another 24 hours at least as positions further south are NOT good . . . . Hope you will press for continuous attacks by Fortress bombers on Kuala Lumpur and Kuantan aerodromes. I feel that if we can drive back his fighters we can then deal with his bombers."

On the 25th January I received the following telegram from the Supreme Commander South-West Pacific:

"Recent reports of heavy fighting on the Muar front show what determined resistance your troops are making against odds. You

have not much ground behind you and this resistance is necessary and well timed. I have no doubt that troops have inflicted severe casualties on the enemy. Well done."

373. The denial of the line of aerodromes in Central Johore to the enemy until the 18 British Division had safely arrived was now of primary importance. It was clear that the crisis of the campaign had arrived.

A copy of Malaya Command Operation Instruction No. 35 issued on the 23rd January, 1942 is attached as Appendix F to this dispatch.

374. *The Batu Pahat Operations.*—Batu Pahat was a small coastal port of the same type as Muar. The town lies on the south bank of an estuary some seven miles from the coast. The estuary was crossed by a road ferry. Batu Pahat is also linked by good roads with Yong Peng to the North, Ayer Hitam (20 miles away) to the East, and Pontian Kechil (46 miles away) to the South. The Air landing-ground was at Koris, 7 miles south of Batu Pahat. South of that the road runs within 2 or 3 miles of the sea. The country bordering the road and between it and the sea consists mostly of mangrove and cocoanut plantations. To an enemy possessing command of the sea this route was accessible at any point and indicated the necessity for holding both Batu Pahat and Pontian Kechil for the protection of the main L. of C. 20 miles inland.

Batu Pahat is dominated by the jungle-covered Bukit Banang which lies to the south of the town. Into this area the Japanese troops who had landed at the lighthouse on the 16th January (see above) had disappeared.

375. By the evening of the 19th January the 6/15 Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Challen) had taken over responsibility for the Batu Pahat area with the following troops under command:

The British Battalion

2 Cambridgeshire

One Company 2 Malay Battalion

One battery 155 Field Regt. (4 guns)

11 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery.

Administrative Units.

Batu Pahat was now also used as a base for the Royal Naval West Coast Flotilla.

The task allotted to the Commander Batu Pahat Force was to hold the town and to keep open the road to Ayer Hitam. To assist in the latter task the 5 R. Norfolk Regt., whose withdrawal from Jemaluang I had authorised, was to co-operate, working from the Ayer Hitam end.

376. During the 22nd and 23rd January skirmishes took place with enemy detachments on the Batu Pahat—Ayer Hitam road, as a result of which the road was finally closed on the evening of the 23rd January. 5 R. Norfolks were then despatched to Batu Pahat by M.T. moving south via Pontian Kechil. They arrived on the morning of the 24th January and came under orders of the Commander Batu Pahat Force.

In the Bukit Banang area also the enemy had become active and fighting developed in the gun position area. The enemy troops here were supplied with food and ammunition from the air.

377. On the evening 23rd January the Commander Batu Pahat Force, being unable to

communicate with higher authority owing to a breakdown in W/T, commenced to withdraw to Senggarang but later, communications having been restored, he was instructed to make a further effort to hold Batu Pahat with the aid of 5 R. Norfolks due to arrive the following morning. Throughout the 24th fighting continued in the town, but efforts to clear Hill 127 S.E. of Batu Pahat the following morning were only partially successful. On the morning of the 25th the enemy attacking the town were reinforced by fresh troops who arrived in lorries. The Commander Batu Pahat Force reported the situation, expressing a doubt as to his ability to hold the town much longer.

378. On the same day a determined attempt was made by the Commander 11 Indian Division to support the Batu Pahat Force with the 53 Brigade Group, now released from Yong Peng. The Group, which now included two weak infantry battalions only, was ordered to occupy Benut, Rengit and Senggarang and pass through a supply column to Batu Pahat. As the Group moved forward enemy troops, who had obviously moved down east of the road, occupied the road at various points. Some of the leading troops got through to join the Batu Pahat Force but by the evening the road between Senggarang and Rengit was held by the enemy while further south the road was under fire at several different places.

379. Before the war the Japanese held large commercial interests in the Batu Pahat area and had a complete and detailed knowledge of the country. They put this knowledge to good use during the operations. There were also demonstrations of pro-Japanese sympathies in Batu Pahat itself.

380. At 1515 hours 25th January I held a conference at Rear Headquarters Westforce near Kulai. The Commanders 3 Indian Corps, Westforce and 11 Indian Division were present. The only matter discussed at this conference was the immediate policy for the conduct of operations. All were agreed that an immediate withdrawal from Batu Pahat was necessary and that, as a result of this, the other columns should be withdrawn from the line Jemaluang — Kluang — Ayer Hitam. I instructed the Commander 3 Indian Corps, who was responsible for the whole of these operations, to issue orders accordingly and to co-ordinate the action of the various columns. A copy of the Minutes of this conference are attached as Appendix "G" to this Despatch.

381. The Batu Pahat Force withdrew during the night 25th/26th January and reached Senggarang at dawn on the 26th where it found the road blocked. Repeated attempts made throughout the day to force the block and open the road were unsuccessful. Here again as elsewhere the exhaustion of the troops after several days and nights continuous operations in conditions to which they were not acclimatized told its tale.

In the meantime, the Commander 11 Indian Division had organized a mechanized column, including armoured cars and carriers, at Benut and ordered it forward to the relief of the Batu Pahat Force. Many road blocks and ambushes were encountered and the column was broken up into small parties each fighting on its own. Only one carrier, that of the column commander, eventually got through.

In the evening the Commander Batu Pahat Force decided that there was no longer any possibility of the brigade fighting its way out as a formation and adhering to the time-table which he had been given. He therefore gave orders for units to make their way to Benut on foot by a route on the coastal flank of the road. A chaplain and personnel of the Royal Army Medical Corps voluntarily remained behind with the wounded who on this occasion were not molested by the Japanese.

382. Looked at in retrospect, it seems that, owing largely to the uncertainty of the communications, the authority to withdraw from Batu Pahat was delayed for 24 hours too long. When the authority was given, the Force was given a task which, in the existing circumstances, was beyond its powers.

383. *The Kluang—Ayer Hitam Operations* — Early on the morning of the 24th January the leading Japanese troops were approaching the aerodrome and town of Kluang, which were then being held by the 22 Indian Brigade Group with the 8 Brigade Group in reserve at Rengam. The Commander 9 Indian Division ordered the 8 Brigade Group to move up and relieve the 22 Brigade Group so as to free the latter for a counter-attack. In accordance with this plan the 5/11 Sikhs moved by a circuitous route on the left flank, bivouacked for the night, and the following day fought a highly successful action in the course of which they routed the enemy at the point of the bayonet and killed and wounded several hundreds of them.

During the night 25th/26th January, in accordance with the general plan of withdrawal, the 22 Brigade Group fell back to a position covering Rengam while the 8 Brigade Group remained in the Kluang area.

On the front north of Ayer Hitam the enemy made contact again on the 25th and fighting went on throughout the day. Our leading troops (2 Loyals) held their ground and inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy who again proved their ability to cross what had seemed impassable ground and again offered exceptional targets to our troops by disregarding normal field precautions.

During the following night our troops on this front fell back through the 2 Gordons who were in position at milestone 49. I had relieved this battalion from garrison duties at Penggerang and placed it under orders of the Commander Westforce in replacement of 2 Loyals who were now withdrawn to Singapore.

384. *The East Coast Operations*.—Mersing, 100 miles from Singapore on the N.E. Coast of Johore, had long been regarded as the back-door to Singapore Fortress, particularly since the completion of the road Kota Tinggi—Jemaluang. The beaches in the Mersing area are suitable for landings, though not ideal, since sandbanks and shoals extend for about 3 miles from the coast. The swampy and tortuous courses of the Endau River and its tributaries are navigable by shallow draught vessels as far as the Jemaluang—Kluang road in the vicinity of Kahang, where was situated the modern landing-ground prepared by the R.A.F. Plans for the defence of Mersing, therefore, had to take into account the possibility of being outflanked by enemy penetration up this river system from Endau.

The Mersing area was strongly defended. It was covered by a large number of anti-tank and anti-personnel mines, though the effective life of these in the humid climate of Malaya is limited.

385. On the 14th January, when contact was first made on this front, Eastforce (Brigadier Taylor) was composed of:—

- 22 Australian Brigade Group.
- 2/17 Dogras (released from the Singapore Garrison).

Detachments of the Johore Military Forces. Administrative Units.

It was disposed with two battalions holding the Mersing area with detachments forward at Endau, one battalion at Jemaluang, and one (2/17 Dogras) watching the long and vulnerable communications back to Kota Tinggi. On the night 17th/18th January, as has been recorded, the Jemaluang battalion was transferred to the Muar area, but later a weak Indian battalion was placed under command for defence of the Kahang aerodrome, and also an anti-aircraft and an anti-tank troop.

386. On the 14th January contact was made with an enemy force moving down the coast from Kuantan at Pontian north of the River Endau. After some patrol encounters our troops fell back behind the River Endau. The loss of the battalion from Jemaluang on the 17th/18th January caused some re-adjustment of the defences as a result of which the Endau detachment was withdrawn and the road between Endau and Mersing heavily cratered.

387. On the 21st January an enemy force approaching Mersing from the North was ambushed by our fighting patrols and suffered heavy casualties. On that day, in accordance with decisions taken at the Yong Peng Conference (see above) the Commander Eastforce was given the role of holding Jemaluang with detachments forward in the Mersing area. On the 22nd a Japanese attempt to cross the river at Mersing was repulsed with heavy loss. During the night 22nd/23rd January one battalion (2/18 Battalion A.I.F.) with supporting arms was withdrawn to the Nithsdale Estate between Mersing and Jemaluang, the forward troops remaining in the Mersing area.

On the 23rd a naval convoy was sighted between Singgora and Mersing moving south.

388. At 0745 hours on the 26th January our air reconnaissances reported two transports and some smaller craft escorted by two cruisers and twelve destroyers closing the shore at Endau. This convoy was twice attacked during the day by Hudson, Albacores and Vickers Vildebeeste aircraft escorted by Hurricanes and Buffalos. Each time a large force of Japanese Navy Zero fighters operating from Kuantan was met and there was much air fighting. A minimum of 13 enemy fighters were destroyed while we lost 11 Vickers Vildebeeste, 2 Hurricanes and 1 Buffalo. Both enemy transports were hit, but the landing was not prevented. Our Air Striking Force in Malaya, even such as it was, had now vanished. On the night 26th/27th January H.M. Australian destroyer "Vampire" and H.M.S. "Thanet" were sent to sweep up the coast and attack the Japanese transports. Off Endau they fell in with and engaged three destroyers and a cruiser. The "Thanet" was sunk and a Japanese destroyer severely damaged.

389. The fresh enemy troops advanced rapidly from Endau and at midnight 26th/27th January their leading battalion marched into an ambush which had been prepared for them in the Nithsdale Estate. There was confused and bitter hand-to-hand fighting during the night, in the course of which over 300 of the enemy were killed while our losses in killed, wounded and missing were less than 100. Our ambush troops then fell back through the Jemaluang position.

#### SECTION XXXIX.—THE WITHDRAWAL TO SINGAPORE ISLAND 27TH-31ST JANUARY, 1942.

390. *The Plan.*—On the 27th January I received a telegram from the Supreme Commander South West Pacific giving me discretion to withdraw to Singapore Island if I considered it advisable. On that day the full significance of the dispersal of the Batu Pahat Force and the opening to the enemy of the West Coast road became apparent. Our remaining troops on that road were not strong enough to stop the enemy's advance for long and there were no reserves available. The 18 British Division had not yet arrived. I felt that any further delay might result in the loss of the whole of our forces on the mainland. I therefore decided to authorise a withdrawal to Singapore Island, even though this meant failure to achieve our object of protecting the Naval Base. I accordingly approved a plan which was already being worked out by the Commander 3 Indian Corps for this withdrawal.

391. In anticipation of such a withdrawal certain preliminary steps had already been taken, among which were the following:—

(a) An outline withdrawal plan had been issued on the 24th January.

(b) Orders had been given to begin thinning out the Anti-Aircraft guns and searchlights from South Johore.

(c) The Rear-Admiral Malaya had been requested to arrange for all craft on the north shores of the Straits of Johore to be either sunk or removed to the south shores of Singapore Island.

(d) Arrangements had been made to insert explosives under the Causeway and to destroy the lock at the north end of the Causeway.

(e) The organization of the defences of Singapore Island had been planned.

392. The Plan, which was approved at a conference held at Headquarters 3 Indian Corps at Johore Bahru on the 28th January, was in outline as under:—

(a) A co-ordinated withdrawal to take place simultaneously on all four routes.

(b) The final withdrawal to the Island to be on the night 30th-31st January.

(c) The final withdrawal through the Johore Bahru area to be carried out rapidly in M.T.

(d) All withdrawals to be carried out by night in accordance with a pre-arranged programme.

(e) Anti-aircraft defence to be arranged for the protection of all bottle-necks. In particular, the maximum anti-aircraft defence to be concentrated for the protection of troops moving over the Causeway.

(f) An Outer and Inner Bridgehead to be organized for the ground defence of the Causeway. Three battalions with supporting arms under Brigadier Taylor were allotted for the defence of the Outer Bridgehead and one battalion (2 Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders) under Lt.-Col. Stewart for the defence of the Inner Bridgehead.

393. *Eastforce*.—The withdrawal of Eastforce was carried out according to plan without enemy interference. The final withdrawal took place in M.T. from Kota Tinggi.

394. 11 Indian Division.—Of the Batu Pahat Force, one contingent moved east of the road and reached Benut on the night 27th-28th January. The remainder, comprising about 2,000 officers and men, reached the sea at the mouth of the River Ponggor. From here they were evacuated during four successive nights by the Royal Navy and taken to Singapore. The operation was a most difficult one and reflected the greatest credit on all ranks of the Royal Navy engaged in it.

Benut was occupied by the enemy on the morning of the 28th January but our successful demolitions on this road slowed up his advance. In the evening there was contact north of Pontian Besar. On the 29th there were patrol encounters in the Gunong Pulai Reservoir area where a strong position had been prepared. By midnight 30th-31st January the head of the main 11 Indian Division column was following Eastforce across the Causeway, leaving only Westforce to be withdrawn through the bridgehead.

395. *Westforce*.—On the main road and railway front the enemy followed up our withdrawal energetically and much fighting took place. The withdrawal of the two columns required most careful co-ordination. There was little rest for the troops who were constantly fighting by day and moving back by night. The enemy aircraft were particularly active on this front reconnoitring, bombing and machine-gunning. Our own troops received very little assistance from the air.

Astride the main road a number of local engagements were fought by the 27 Australian Brigade Group with 2 Gordons under command and many casualties were inflicted on the enemy by local counter-attacks.

On the railway front disaster overtook the 9 Indian Division on the 28th January. A wide gap developed in the Layang Layang area between the 22 Indian Infantry Brigade, which was forward, and the 8 Indian Infantry Brigade which was supporting it. Into this gap enemy troops penetrated having moved round the eastern flank by estate roads. The Divisional Commander (Major-General Barstow), while moving up the railway to visit the forward brigade, was ambushed by the enemy and there is little doubt that he was killed. He was a gallant and gifted officer and his loss was a severe blow. The 22 Brigade, in an endeavour to rejoin the division, moved through the jungle west of the railway. Some parties of the enemy were met and dispersed, the 5/11 Sikhs again distinguishing themselves, but the dense jungle proved too much for the troops who were hampered by having to carry a number of wounded. In spite of a continuous march of three days and nights they were unable to catch up and efforts to locate them by

ground and air patrols failed. The final withdrawal was postponed as long as possible in an effort to recover this brigade but without success, and arrangements were made to ferry them across the Straits from a point east of Johore Bahru. Eventually only about 100 were saved in this way. The remainder were captured in the neighbourhood of Johore Bahru on the 1st February.

The final withdrawal on the night 30th-31st January was carried out without incident and with little interference from the enemy's Air Force. At 0815 hrs. 31st January all troops had been withdrawn and a gap of 70 feet was blown in the Causeway.

396. The operation of withdrawing the whole force through the bottle-neck of Johore Bahru and over the Causeway with the enemy holding complete control in the air had been an anxious one. In spite of the severe losses which we had suffered on the main-land, the successful accomplishment of this operation was a matter for much satisfaction.

#### SECTION XL.—AIR OPERATIONS, 14TH-31ST JANUARY, 1942

397. During this period the Japanese Air Striking Force concentrated their attacks chiefly on the aerodromes on Singapore Island. Some attacks also were made on the Naval Base and the Docks area and some bombs fell in the Town area. On several days the civilian casualties ran into several hundreds. The attacks were usually carried out in daylight by formations of 27 Bomber aircraft escorted by fighters. The maximum number of aircraft which attacked the Singapore area in any one day was 127. Our Anti-Aircraft Defence system had naturally been weakened by the loss of the outer part of the area covered by the warning system. Nevertheless, with the aid of the radar sets, it was still found possible in most cases to obtain some warning of attack though rarely enough for our fighters to carry out effective interception. There was much air fighting, especially on the 22nd January when the losses on each side were estimated to be about a dozen.

398. There was unfortunately no improvement as regards the labour conditions on the aerodromes. The civilian workers continued to disappear whenever an air attack took place and usually remained absent for some days. In consequence, one or more of the aerodromes on Singapore Island were almost invariably out of use.

399. In the forward areas, the enemy aircraft co-operated effectively with their ground forces by reconnaissances, by attacks on our troops and transport, and by dropping supplies on isolated parties. On our side, as before, we were able to give our forward troops very little air support, but we were now able to provide increased protection against low-flying attacks with our ground anti-aircraft defences.

400. During this period the Singapore Air Defence Organization was severely tested. On the whole the organization for the control of the Active Air Defence, which had been worked out in the latter part of 1941, worked very satisfactorily. The fire control of the Anti-Aircraft Heavy Artillery also worked smoothly, but the height of not less than 20,000 feet at which the enemy air formations invariably flew

tended to decrease the effectiveness of our anti-aircraft fire. Nevertheless, casualties were inflicted on the air formations, though these were difficult to assess, and some of the formations were broken up.

As regards Passive Air Defence, some modifications in the system were introduced to avoid the waste of valuable time which took place during periods of Air Raid Warnings.

401. On our side, great hopes had been placed in the Hurricane Fighters which reached Singapore on the 13th January. (See Section XXXVI). It was hoped that the superior quality of these machines might enable us to regain at least some measure of air superiority over the Japanese. Such, however, did not prove to be the case. In the first place the machines, which were not of the most modern type, did not prove to be superior to the Japanese Navy Zero Fighters. Secondly, the pilots lacked knowledge of the Malayan climatic and geographical conditions. As with the Army reinforcements, there was no time to accustom them to the local conditions. As a result, several of these Hurricanes were lost daily, some being brought down in battle, some accidentally lost, while a few were destroyed or damaged on the ground.

402. Our Bomber and Reconnaissance machines also continued to be a wasting asset. All available aircraft, including the torpedo-bombers, were used for daily East and West Coast reconnaissances, for reconnaissance of the roads behind the enemy lines and for attacks on enemy aerodromes and troop concentrations. These attacks, however, were so weak that comparatively little damage could be done. By the 26th January our Air Striking Force in Malaya had, as recorded in Section XXXVIII, to all intents and purposes ceased to exist. A few attacks were made late in January on enemy aerodromes by Blenheims from Sumatra and Flying Fortresses from Java, but they were not heavy enough to affect the scale of the Japanese air effort.

403. I wish here to pay tribute to the gallant air crews who throughout the later stages of the Malayan campaign went unflinchingly to almost certain death in obsolete aircraft which should have been replaced many years before, and also to those members of the Malayan Volunteer Air Force who, with no protection of any sort, continued to carry out reconnaissances in Moths and other light aircraft with complete disregard for their own safety.

404. On the 26th January I telegraphed to the Supreme Commander South-West Pacific as under:

"With our depleted strength it is difficult to withstand the enemy's ground pressure combined with continuous and practically unopposed air activity. We are fighting all the way but may be driven back into the island within a week. We shall then be subjected to a very heavy scale of air attack unless we can maintain sufficient fighters on the island and drive enemy from Southern Malaya aerodromes. I know that you are doing everything possible to reduce enemy air strength which is at present the dominating factor."

405. On the 30th January, 1942, it was decided to withdraw the whole of our Air Force, except one fighter squadron, to bases in the

Netherlands East Indies. This decision was made by the Supreme Commander South-West Pacific after consultation with the Air Officer Commanding Far East. At my urgent request, one fighter squadron was left at Singapore. Some heavy and light anti-aircraft artillery was also despatched from Singapore to Sumatra.

Certain preliminary steps had already been taken in anticipation of these moves. Unfortunately several ships carrying Air Force equipment were sunk before reaching their destination.

#### SECTION XLI.—FURTHER REINFORCEMENTS.

406. *Royal Navy*.—It was now known that it was not intended to send any additional naval forces to Malayan waters. It was also known that a small British fleet was assembling at Ceylon for operations in the eastern waters of the Indian Ocean, that a strong American fleet was assembling in the South Pacific with a view to keeping open communications with Australia, and that some British (including Australian) and American ships were concentrating with the Dutch Fleet for the defence of Java, which was already being threatened by a Japanese thrust south of Borneo. Detachments of Royal Marine survivors from H.M.Ss. "Prince of Wales" and "Repulse" had joined up with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.

407. *Army*.—The following reinforcements reached Singapore during the latter half of January.

*On or about the 22nd January*.—The 44 Indian Infantry Brigade with attached troops and 7,000 Indian reinforcements. The 44 Brigade was a sister brigade to the 45 Brigade which had fought at Muar. It was equally raw and only semi-trained. It was commanded by Brigadier Ballantine. With a view to giving it an opportunity for further training, I decided to retain it on Singapore Island and allotted it accommodation in the south-western area.

The 7,000 Indian reinforcements were extremely raw and untrained and included very few non-commissioned officers or even potential leaders which were so badly needed in our Indian units. After consultation with the Commander 3 Indian Corps I decided that it would be unwise to draft more than a proportion of these to the Indian units. The remainder were retained at the reinforcement camps for further training.

*24th January*.—An Australian Machine-Gun Battalion and about 2,000 Australian Reinforcements. As the terrain on the mainland was not suitable for machine-guns, the Machine-Gun Battalion was allotted accommodation in the Naval Base area and ordered to prepare machine-gun positions on the north coast of the island.

Many of the 2,000 Australian reinforcements had only had a few weeks' training. They had not been in the Army long enough to learn true discipline.

*29th January*.—The 18 British Division (Major-General M. Beckwith-Smith) less 53 Infantry Brigade Group and Machine-Gun, Reconnaissance, Anti-Tank and other units. These, with exception of the 53 Brigade Group already arrived, were due in a later convoy. This division had left the United Kingdom the previous October for the Middle East. It had

been diverted off the East Coast of Africa to India where it had spent a fortnight. It was a war division which had not previously been overseas. On arrival it was fit but soft. It was accommodated on Singapore Island. I decided to hold it initially in Command Reserve. It was ordered to carry out reconnaissances of (a) the northern area of Singapore Island in detail (b) communications in the western area.

In the same convoy arrived a Light Tank Squadron from India, the only tanks ever to reach Malaya. The tanks, which were obsolescent, had been collected from training establishments etc. in India. On arrival several of them had to be taken into workshops for over-haul before they could take the field.

Apart from the above no other early reinforcements were expected. It was, however, forecast that an Armoured Brigade might arrive in the Far East early in March. In reply to an enquiry from the Supreme Commander, South-West Pacific, I stated that "A Cruiser Regt. might well be required to deal with tanks landed on beaches, besides having a great moral effect" and suggested that the destination of one cruiser regiment should be left for decision at a later date when we should know the situation more clearly.

408 *Av.*—Towards the end of January 48 Hurricane Fighters were flown off an Aircraft Carrier west of Java. Of these one squadron was based on the Singapore aerodromes. The remainder went to the Netherlands East Indies. These were modern aircraft with only a small proportion of trained and experienced pilots.

#### SECTION XLII.—IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SCORCHED EARTH POLICY.

409. The measures decided on under the Scorched Earth Policy have already been explained in Section XXVII. These measures were carried out as far as circumstances would permit but the rapidity of the withdrawal made it impossible to ensure that all destruction was executed as planned. It would be idle for me to attempt to assess the success of the Scorched Earth Policy other than in general terms, as undoubtedly a great deal more information is now in possession of those who have returned to Malaya than is known to me. It was known, however, that the thoroughness with which denial was carried out varied in different areas, though it is probably true to say that, taken as a whole, the work was carried out as efficiently as might be expected in the prevailing conditions.

410. As regards rice stocks, it was impossible to burn them and there was not sufficient transport to remove them. In many districts they were thrown open to the people who were invited to take what they required.

411. The attempts to remove or destroy coastal craft were only very partially successful. Some owners whose livelihood depended on them preferred to hide them or to sink them temporarily in the creeks and rivers.

412. As a means of transport the Japanese troops made great use of bicycles which in peace time are widely used throughout Malaya. The removal or destruction of these presented an insurmountable problem except where ample time was available as on the east coast of Johore.

413. Both road and railway bridges were systematically destroyed as the withdrawal continued. It is estimated that some 300 bridges in all were destroyed in varying degree. The rapidity with which the Japanese made temporary repairs was remarkable, even allowing for the fact that in most cases ample material was available near the bridge site.

414. About the 20th January I received a telegram from the War Office asking for a personal assurance that, if the worst came to the worst, nothing of military value would be left intact for the enemy on Singapore Island. This was a big problem in view of the military and civil equipment and reserve stocks of all sorts which existed on the island. After careful consideration, it was clear to me that no guarantee could be given. Some of the equipment, such as coast defence guns, could in any case only be destroyed at the last minute. One of the main ammunition depots was within a short distance of the military hospital and nobody could be certain what the effect of the demolition of such a depot would be. Civil equipment and stocks would be required as long as Singapore was being held. I therefore replied to the effect that I would make all possible arrangements to ensure that, in case of necessity, the destruction of everything of military value should be carried out, but that I could not guarantee that this would in fact be done.

415. A Committee, comprising representatives of the three Services, was then set up to examine this subject in detail and to draw up plans as far as the Services were concerned. These plans clearly allocated the responsibility for executing each demolition. This work, which proved to be of some magnitude, placed a further burden on the already over-worked staff of Headquarters Malaya Command.

416. The Director General of Civil Defence was made responsible for the organization of civil demolitions on Singapore Island. The planning of these demolitions proved to be a difficult and delicate work. The plans were made with the utmost secrecy. Nevertheless, as was almost inevitable, information leaked out. This gave rise to the wildest rumours, including stories of immediate evacuation, which were damaging to morale.

#### SECTION XLIII.—IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EVACUATION POLICY.

417. The policy as regards the evacuation of women and children and the measures taken to carry out this policy have already been explained in Section XXVIII. The arrangements worked smoothly and by the end of January only comparatively few European women and children remained on Singapore Island. The majority of those who did remain were engaged on important war work. Practically all ships returning from Singapore to destinations within the British Empire had carried their complement of women and children. In some cases, as had been foreseen, the departure of European women, especially those engaged in the Civil Defence Services, had given rise to adverse comment on the part of the Eurasians and Asiatics.

In the end some 300 European women were interned in Singapore.

418. The difficulty as regards Asiatics was to find a country willing to accept them. There were no sailings to the China coast and ships

to India were not very large or frequent at that time. Eventually Australia agreed to accept 1,500 Chinese and a number were sent to Ceylon.

419. Our task being to protect the Naval Base, there was obviously no question of evacuating the Army even if shipping had been available, which in fact was not the case. I refused to allow any discussion of the question of evacuation.

I approved, however, of secret arrangements being made with the Dutch Authorities for the preparation of a route across Sumatra for the use of individuals or small parties who might for one reason or another be given permission to leave Singapore. I refused, however, to allow information of the arrangements made to be circulated among the troops as I feared that any talk of evacuation would cause a loss of confidence both among the troops and among the civil population.

### PART III. THE BATTLE OF SINGAPORE.

#### SECTION XLIV.—TOPOGRAPHICAL AND CLIMATIC CONDITIONS

420. The Island of Singapore is oblong in shape with a maximum length from east to west of 27 miles and a maximum width from north to south of 13 miles. It is separated from the mainland of Malaya by the Straits of Johore across which is a causeway 1,100 yards long. The Straits west of the causeway, which are the narrower, vary in width from 600 to 2,000 yards. They are navigable at high water for small medium draught vessels, though the channel is narrow and tortuous. East of the causeway the Straits vary in width from 1,100 to about 5,000 yards and are navigable for the biggest vessels afloat as far as the Naval Base. In the middle of these Straits at their widest point lies the Island of Pulau Ubin, with a length of 4½ miles and a width of 1½ miles. This island is marshy in the centre and is developed in a few areas only. To the east of Pulau Ubin is the mouth of the River Johore. This river, which is navigable for light craft as far as Kota Tinggi, gives access to the main Johore Bahru-Mersing road. Covering the mouth of the River Johore is the Island of Tekong. A few miles east of Tekong lies Pengerang Hill at the southern tip of the Johore mainland.

421. Immediately south of Singapore Island and separated from it by the waters of Keppel Harbour lie the Islands of Blakang Mati and Pulau Brani. The former, 2½ miles in length and 1¼ miles in breadth, was a military reserve.

422. Three miles south-west of Blakang Mati lies Pulau Bukum, 1¾ miles long by ½ mile wide, where was situated the Asiatic Petroleum Company's main reserves of naval fuel, petrol and lubricating oils. Further to the west and separated from the south-west coast of Singapore Island by only a narrow channel lie the Sembilan Islands, a group of low-lying islands of varying size inhabited only by Malay fishermen.

423. South of Singapore Island, and not very far from it, is the Rho Archipelago Group of Islands of the Netherlands East Indies, while to the west lies Sumatra. The Island of Singapore is approached by four main channels—the Malacca Straits to the west, the Durian and Rho Straits to the south, and the main channel

between South-East Johore and Dutch territory to the east.

424. The town of Singapore is situated in the south of the Island and extends for some 6 miles along the water front with a depth of about 1½ miles. Immediately north of it is an extensive residential area covering several square miles of country. The town is divided into two portions by the River Singapore, a muddy tidal waterway crossed by fine modern bridges. On either side of this waterway are the public buildings and the main shopping and business centres. Further west lies the extensive Docks area. The population of Singapore Town in peace-time was in the neighbourhood of 550,000 but by the end of January, 1942, it was probably nearer a million.

425. From Singapore Town main roads radiate in all directions. The principal is that known as the Bukit Timah Road which, crossing to the mainland by the causeway, becomes the main artery to the north. Other important roads are the Thomson Road, a narrow winding road running out to the Naval Base, the Serangoon Road, a good broad highway running north-eastwards and eventually leading to the Seletar Air Base, and the road which runs due east to the military cantonment at Changi. In addition to these, good roads follow the coast line for several miles in each direction from Singapore Town.

426. Although the Island is thickly populated there are few places of any size outside Singapore Town itself. The most noteworthy are the townships or large villages of Paya Lebar on the Serangoon Road, Nee Soon on the Thomson Road, and Bukit Timah on the Main (Bukit Timah) Road. These lie at important junctions where lateral roads join or cross the roads mentioned above.

427. The only hill features of importance on Singapore Island are (a) The Bukit Timah group of hills which lie just north of the village of that name and from which an extensive view can be obtained over the greater part of the Island, (b) Bukit Mandai, some 3 miles north of Bukit Timah, from which a good view can be obtained over the Straits and Johore Bahru, and (c) The Pasir Panjang Ridge, 4 miles in length, running from Pasir Panjang Village to the western outskirts of Singapore Town. From this ridge an extensive view can be obtained over the western approaches to Singapore and also over the country to the north. In the west of the Island there are other minor hill features.

428. Apart from the built-up areas, Singapore Island like the rest of Malaya is thickly covered by rubber and other plantations, while on the northern and western coasts there are extensive mangrove swamps. These swamps had of recent years, owing to extensive irrigation works, lost much of their value as a military obstacle.

429. In the centre of the Island lie the important MacRitchie, Peirce and Seletar reservoirs and the Municipal Catchment area, a large jungle area traversed only by a few tracks. To the north the Naval Base reservation covers a large tract of country.

430. Visibility is everywhere restricted. Even from the hill features referred to above little detail can be seen of ground objects.

431. The climate of Singapore, though not unhealthy for most people once they become acclimatized, is damp and enervating. Seasonal changes are slight, though during the period of the north-east monsoon (October-March) the weather is slightly cooler than during the rest of the year. The excessive moisture, however, prevents high temperatures. Rainfall is normally high and spread fairly evenly throughout the year, mostly in the form of thunder-storms. It seldom rains at night. During the period of the Malayan campaign, however, the weather in Singapore was exceptionally dry.

#### SECTION XLV.—THE SINGAPORE FORTRESS.

432. Before explaining the plans for the defence of Singapore Fortress an outline of the organization for defence as it existed before the withdrawal from the mainland must be given.

The Singapore Fortress area, as previously explained, comprised the Island of Singapore, the adjoining islands and the Pengerang area in South Johore. It was not a fortress in the old sense of the term. It was rather a large defended and inhabited area, with a maximum length of about 35 miles and a maximum width of about 15 miles, which included the large town of Singapore.

The organization for defence can be divided broadly into three categories: (a) The Fixed Defences, which included both guns and searchlights; (b) The Beach Defences, and (c) The Anti-Aircraft Defences. The first two categories were under the command of the Commander, Singapore Fortress (Major-General Keith Simmons). The third, for reasons which have already been explained in Section VI, were directly under me through the Commander, Anti-Aircraft Defences (Brigadier Wildey), though their action during operations was co-ordinated with that of the fighter aircraft by Group Captain Rice, R.A.F. The Headquarters of Singapore Fortress were at Fort Canning.

433. *The Fixed Defences.*—As stated in Section VI, the Fixed Defences were divided into two Fire Commands, i.e. the Changi Fire Command which covered the approaches to the Naval Base, and the Faber Fire Command which covered the approaches to Keppel Harbour and to the western channel of the Johore Straits. In each Fire Command was one 15 in. and one 9.2 in. battery and a number of 6 in. batteries; also searchlights and smaller equipments.

There was an elaborate system of buried cable communications linking headquarters with batteries and lights. Observation of fire was either from Observation Posts which had been constructed at points of vantage along the coast or from aircraft. An Anti-Aircraft Co-operation Flight was maintained by the Royal Air Force for this purpose.

After the Japanese landed in Malaya arrangements were made by which fire from the fixed armament could be brought to bear quickly on a limited number of localities selected as likely landing places for an enemy force attacking the sea-front of the Fortress of Singapore. This involved little difficulty.

As the Japanese advanced southwards, it became evident that the anti-ship guns must be prepared to engage targets on the land front of Singapore. Such a requirement was not easy to meet. The chief difficulties were:—

(a) Only a limited number of guns were available, the remainder being ruled out

either from lack of range or on account of limited bearing.

(b) The guns most likely to be available were the 15 in. guns (Forts Johore and Buona Vista) and the 9.2 in. guns on Blakang Mati (Fort Connaught), but the 9.2 in. guns only had about 30 rounds each of H.E. ammunition while the 15 in. guns had none at all.

(c) Observation of fire was likely to be difficult as the topography was highly unfavourable to ground observation, while air observation would not be available in view of the local superiority of the Japanese Air Force.

Nevertheless, an improvised but workable counter-bombardment organization was built up and fields of fire were cleared. A demand was made for more ammunition suitable for engaging land targets, but it did not arrive in time.

During January the Fixed Defences suffered some casualties from air bombing.

434. *The Beach Defences.*—The Beach Defences were designed to protect the Islands of Singapore and Blakang Mati, Pulau Brani and the Pengerang area in South Johore from a sea-borne attack. On Singapore Island they extended along the South Coast from Pasir Panjang to Changi, a distance of 20 miles. Concrete pill-boxes for machine guns and light automatics had been constructed at intervals of about 600 yards along the beaches. There were also a few 18-pounder field guns. The defences were well equipped with beach lights.

The material defences comprised anti-boat, anti-tank and anti-personnel defences. They included timber-scaffolding, timber tank obstacles, mines and barbed wire.

Two switch lines had been partially prepared to protect the centre of the Island from enemy landings in the east and west of the Island respectively. The eastern line, known as the Serangoon Line, was sited between the Civil Airport at Kallang and Paya Lebar. The western line filled the gap between the Rivers Kranji and Jurong. In addition, the western front of the Changi area had been wired.

435. Prior to the outbreak of hostilities with Japan no defences had been constructed on the northern or western shores of Singapore Island. This has been imputed in some quarters to a lack of foresight on the part of successive General Officers Commanding. It has, however, perhaps not been fully realised that the object of the defence was, not to hold Singapore Island, but to protect the Naval Base. To do this it was necessary at least to prevent the enemy bringing that base under observed fire and also, as far as possible, to keep the enemy out of close bombing range. Such resources, financial and material, as had been available had therefore been applied to the preparation of defences at a distance from Singapore, beginning with the Mersing area and subsequently extending further north. On the eastern front defences had been constructed as far back as Kota Tinggi. Major-General Dobbie, the then G.O.C., had intended these defences to be part of an extensive system covering the Naval Base. The estimate of cost was, however, so ruthlessly cut down by the War Office that the defences were never completed. The financial restrictions under which defence work in

Malaya was carried out have already been explained in Section V. Finally, all defence works were incorporated in the Defence Scheme Malaya which was subject to approval by the Committee of Imperial Defence and subsequently by the Chiefs of Staff Committee.

436. Not long after the commencement of the Malayan campaign it became apparent that we might be driven back to Johore or even to Singapore Island. On the 23rd December I therefore issued orders as under to the Commander, Singapore Fortress. (See Appendix 'C'.):—

"The Commander, Singapore Fortress will arrange for reconnaissance of the north shore of Singapore Island to select positions for the defence of possible landing places."

Early in January orders were given that the preparation of the defences of the northern part of Singapore Island was to be undertaken at once as an urgent measure.

Labour difficulties, however, then intervened. All the troops on Singapore Island had their allotted tasks in manning the defences, and the military labour companies, of which for reasons already explained there were only three, were fully employed on administrative work. Civil labour, from the beginning of January onwards, failed to an increasing extent as the bombing became heavier. I had, as previously stated, agreed to give priority to the Air Force for this labour for work on the aerodromes and new air strips. The Air Force seldom got enough and there was none available for our defence works. In fact, I had to make available men from the Reinforcement camps for work on the aerodromes.

As regards material, priority was given to the forward areas and a great deal of engineer material was lost at Batu Anam, at Kota Tinggi and elsewhere. There was a general shortage at this time of steel rods for making reinforced concrete.

Nevertheless, a great deal of work was done. The defences were planned in skeleton as it was not known what the strength of the garrison would be. Sites for the forward defended localities and for reserves were selected. Artillery observation posts and gun positions were reconnoitred and selected. Locations of formation headquarters were fixed and communications arranged. Machine gun positions were constructed. The 44 Indian Infantry Brigade worked in its area. Oil obstacles and depth charges were placed in creeks which appeared to be likely landing places. All available spare searchlights and Lyon lights were collected and made available. Anti-tank obstacles were constructed and made available.

437. On the 23rd January I issued a secret letter to formation commanders giving an outline of the plans for the defence of the Island, from which the following is an extract:—

#### *Policy for Defence.—*

The northern and western shores of the Island are too intersected with creeks and mangroves for any recognized form of beach defence.

The general plan in each area will therefore include small defended localities to cover known approaches, such as rivers, creeks and roads to the coast or tracks along which vehicles can travel.

These localities will be supported by mobile reserves in suitable assembly areas, from which they can operate against enemy parties seeking to infiltrate near these communications or in the intervening country.

The essential requirements of these assembly positions will be concealment from air and ground observation. Slit trenches, shallow and narrow, will be dug.

The covering positions should, where possible, conform to these requirements but must be sited to cover the approaches with fire.

#### *Preparation of Defence —*

The present Fortress Commander, Major-General F. Keith Simmons, will be responsible for developing the above outline plan. For this purpose, a special staff will be appointed under him. The senior officer of this staff will be Brigadier A. C. Paris. Commanders 3 Indian Corps and A.I.F. will each detail a selected senior officer to report to Brigadier A. C. Paris at Fortress Headquarters as soon as possible to work on his staff.

A sketch map was attached which showed formation and unit boundaries, sites selected for foremost defended localities and reserves, etc.

438. *The Anti-Aircraft Defences.*—These defences had been sited in accordance with a War Office Plan which was designed eventually to cover the Naval Base, Keppel Harbour and Seletar and Tengah aerodromes, but the lay-out was not scheduled to be completed earlier than the middle of 1942. It was, moreover, based on a lower density than had been found necessary in the defence of London during the German air raids. Sembawang and Kallang aerodromes were given some measure of protection by the defences of the Naval Base and Keppel Harbour respectively. Similarly, Singapore Town and the Base Supply and Ordnance Depots at Alexandra were partly protected.

Towards the end of January all the guns and searchlights from Johore had been withdrawn on to Singapore Island. One Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment (less one battery) and one Light Anti-Aircraft Battery were despatched to Sumatra for the defence of aerodromes. There remained for the defence of the Singapore Fortress area four Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiments plus one battery, two Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments less one battery, and one Searchlight Regiment.

The Anti-Aircraft Defence Headquarters were at Fort Canning and were linked by telephone to the Fighters Operations Room at Kallang.

With the withdrawal from the mainland the Anti-Aircraft Defences were deprived of the help of the Warning System which had been carefully built up. Their efficiency was thereby reduced though the G.L. sets proved of great benefit:

439. Singapore was not a Fortress. It comprised a large area of land and water with strong anti-ship defences, reasonably strong anti-aircraft defences, but weak infantry defences and no tanks. The coasts facing the Straits of Johore were, when war broke out, completely undefended for reasons which have been explained above. From time to time exaggerated statements had appeared in the Press as to the strength of the Singapore defences. It is probable that, as a result partly of these statements, the public believed the

defences to be stronger than they really were. It is certain that the troops retiring from the mainland, many of whom had never seen Singapore before, were disappointed not to find the immensely strong fortress which they had pictured.

#### SECTION XLVI.—THE ADMINISTRATIVE SITUATION 31ST JANUARY, 1942.

**440. Reserve Stocks—General.**—As explained in Section IX, the policy adopted by the Army as regards reserve stocks on Singapore Island had been one of dispersion. This was done partly to minimise the loss from air attack and partly owing to lack of accommodation in the Singapore Town area, a situation which became more and more aggravated as refugees poured in from the north. Some of the biggest dumps and depots outside the Town area were adjacent to the Bukit Timah and Thomson roads, where they were easy of access. This fact had a big influence on the operations which subsequently took place on Singapore Island. The civil stocks, on the other hand, were mostly in the Town area, where some large godowns had been taken over for the purpose. A large stock of rice was, however, stored between the River Kranji and the Causeway.

**441. Food.**—It is difficult to state with any accuracy what food reserves were available on Singapore Island at the end of January but there was probably not less than three months' supply for both troops and civilians, European and Asiatic.

The Main Military Supply Depot for Malaya had been established on the main road just east of Bukit Timah Village. At the Bukit Timah Racecourse a little further east was a large dump of foodstuffs which had been backloaded from the mainland. Other dumps had been established at Bukit Panjang Village, on the Jurong Road, at Changi, at Alexandra and in the Singapore Town area. A limited supply of fresh meat was held in cold storage at Alexandra and at Bukit Timah. There was a large supply of attah for the Indian troops at Bidadari on the Serangoon road.

The majority of the Civil Government's reserves of rice and other foodstuffs for the Asiatic population was held in the Singapore Town area. For the Europeans fresh meat was held in cold storage in Orchard Road, the main thoroughfare leading from the Town to the residential area. Finally, the Bali cattle, which had been purchased from the Netherlands East Indies and which had been grazed in Johore, had been driven back on to Singapore Island. With a view to dispersing the civil reserves, the population had been allowed to purchase and remove to their own houses limited quantities of rice. A modified form of rationing for certain European foodstuffs was in force.

**442. Water.**—After the Japanese captured the main source of Singapore's water supply at Gunong Pulai in South Johore on the 27th January the Island was dependent on water from the reservoirs. The water level in these reservoirs was rather lower than usual owing to the abnormally dry season. Nevertheless, there was with care an adequate supply even for the greatly increased population of Singapore Island. The measures taken to economise water have already been explained in Section XXXV. The two pumping stations, the one at Woodleigh  $\frac{1}{2}$  miles S.W. of Paya Lebar Village on

the Serangoon road and the other in Mackenzie road east of Government House, were both working at full pressure. Up to the end of January breaks in the mains due to air bombardment had been successfully dealt with. The civil staff of the Municipal Water Engineer had been augmented by European Volunteers, most of whom were refugees from the mainland.

The garrisons of Blakang Mati, Tekong and Pengerang were dependent on local supplies.

**443. Ammunition.**—The ammunition situation was on the whole satisfactory except as regards the 25-pounder field guns (for which we had about 1,500 rounds per gun), the Bofors Light Anti-Aircraft and some categories of mortar ammunition.

The two magazines which had been originally constructed were at Changi and at Alexandra (west of Singapore Town). These were bomb-proof and contained all types of ammunition. There was also a small magazine at Pulau Brani, and one at Fort Canning which contained S.A.A. only. Under the dispersion policy a large shell-proof magazine had been constructed on the east bank of the River Kranji and dumps had been formed in the Nee Soon area, on the Bukit Timah Rifle Range, near the MacRitchie Reservoir, in the Paya Lebar area and elsewhere.

In addition to these reserve stocks, the normal scales of equipment ammunition were of course maintained at the battery positions in the case of the Fixed Defences and with field echelons.

**444. Petrol and Oil.**—As previously stated, it had been found impracticable to back-load much of the unconsumed petrol from the mainland owing to lack of transport and the bulkiness of the petrol drums. Nevertheless, there were considerable Army reserves on Singapore Island.

The Main Reserve Depot was near the Bukit Timah Road a little east of the Racecourse. The Reserve Depot was just east of Bukit Timah Village. There were other dumps at Bukit Panjang Village, near the Thomson road, and in the Alexandra area.

The Main Reserve for the Royal Air Force was held in underground tanks at Woodlands just south of the causeway. There were also large reserves at Seletar and at the other aerodromes. There were other small dumps of aviation petrol dispersed about the Island.

The Civil Government held no petrol reserves. Considerable stocks were however held by the Asiatic Petroleum Company at Kranji and at Pasir Panjang. The main reserve stocks of that company were on Pulau Bukum.

**445. Fuel Oil.**—The Naval Fuel Oil Reserves were stored in three groups of large tanks, situated at the Naval Base, at Kranji just west of the Bukit Timah road and at Normanton just west of the Alexandra area. In addition there were very large reserves on Pulau Bukum.

**446. Transport.**—There was now a superfluity of transport, both military and civil, on Singapore Island and serious traffic blocks began to develop. To ease the situation all military transport no longer required was parked on the open spaces, while restrictions were placed on the use of civil transport. These measures had an immediate effect in reducing the number of vehicles on the roads.

447. *Medical.*—Accommodation for all hospitals withdrawn from the mainland had with difficulty been found in the Singapore Town area, where there was naturally much congestion. The Alexandra Military Hospital remained the main hospital for British troops, as did the Tyersall Park Hospital in the Tanglin area for Indian troops. The Australian Base Hospital evacuated from Malacca was accommodated in a school on the northern outskirts of Singapore Town. Temporary hospitals were formed at Changi, in St. Patrick's School, in the lower part of the Cathay building and, later on, on the lower floors of the Secretariat and of the Municipal Offices, at the Singapore Club and at the Cricket Club.

There were good reserves of medical stores at Tanglin.

As regards the Civil Medical Services, the Main Civil Hospital and a number of other hospitals in the Singapore area were still in full use.

448. *Ordnance.*—The Main Army Ordnance Depot was at Alexandra, with large Sub-Depots at Nee Soon and in the Singapore Town area. That of the Royal Air Force was at Seletar.

449. *Naval Stores.*—At the Naval Base were held large quantities of stores of all descriptions for the use of the Royal Navy.

450. *Docks.*—As a result of the Japanese air raids on the Singapore Docks, labour difficulties, similar to those which had been experienced elsewhere, developed towards the end of January. The Asiatic labourers, who were in the regular employ of the Singapore Harbour Board and most of whom occupied quarters adjoining the Docks, disappeared as the air raids became more intense, with the result that ships bringing military stores had to be unloaded by military personnel.

#### SECTION XLVII.—APPRECIATION OF THE SITUATION, 31ST JANUARY, 1942.

451. *Object*—As the Naval Base was now under observed artillery and small arms fire and within close range of enemy aircraft to which we could offer only limited opposition, we had clearly failed to achieve our object of protecting that base. From now onward our object was to hold Singapore.

452. *Naval.*—On the sea the Japanese retained complete control of the waters east of Malaya. With Borneo in their hands it was probable also that their naval forces would rapidly extend their control westwards and south-westwards towards South Sumatra.

On the west coast of Malaya no Japanese warships had yet penetrated to the Straits of Malacca but their coastal craft could move with impunity under cover of their aircraft. In addition to captured coastal craft it was now clear that the Japanese had succeeded in transferring to the west coast some of their own landing craft.

453. *Air.*—In the air the Japanese enjoyed almost complete supremacy, the only Air Forces we had available in Malaya at this stage being the one squadron of Hurricane Fighters and a small number of Buffaloes.

All the aerodromes, except that at Kallang, were under observed artillery fire and some of them were under small arms fire.

454. *Army.*—It was estimated that the Japanese could probably deploy three divisions

against Singapore Island, i.e., the Guards and 5 Division, or their replacements, from the west coast and one division from the east coast. These, if up to strength, would give a total of about 60,000 men. Behind these it was reasonable to expect that they had local reserves in Malaya and they also probably still had a General Reserve in Indo-China or elsewhere of one or two divisions. It was estimated, therefore, that they probably had available for operations against Singapore a total strength of seven or eight divisions. They were known in addition to have tank units and a formation of air-borne troops.

As regards our own strength, I have no official figures available now, but I believe it to have been in the neighbourhood of 85,000, i.e., the equivalent of four weak divisions with a large number of Base and other administrative troops. Included in this figure were units of non-combatant Corps, i.e., the Royal Army Medical Corps and the Pioneer and Labour Units, and men for whom no arms could be provided. Probably about 70,000 of the total were armed and equipped. A large number of these were very inadequately trained. Some of the reinforcements indeed were so untrained that it had been deemed unwise to draft them to units and they remained in the Reinforcement Camps.

We hoped to get reinforcements totalling about 2,500 early in February.

455. As regards equipment, the enemy had complete superiority in tanks as we still only had a few obsolescent light tanks available. We were, however, reasonably well equipped with anti-tank guns and still had a good number of Bren gun carriers and armoured cars. Our coast artillery was strong and our field artillery was equal if not superior to that of the enemy though our ammunition reserve was limited. The Japanese had a good infantry gun and their troops were well trained in the use of the mortar which was a better weapon than our own. We had two fully equipped machine-gun battalions, but few units even approached establishment in light automatics, mortars or Thompson sub-machine guns owing to heavy losses in the fighting on the mainland. There were comparatively few anti-tank rifles.

456. *Topography.*—The comparative narrowness of the western channel of the Johore Straits and the fact that the main west coast land communications led to that front made it appear probable that the main Japanese attack would develop from the west. There was also the possibility of an approach via the Malacca Straits to the south-west sector of Singapore Island. Another possible avenue of approach which could not be neglected was from Kota Tinggi via the River Johore leading to Tekong Island and the Changi area.

Should the enemy succeed in getting a footing on Singapore Island, the offensive and infiltration tactics<sup>1</sup> which he would certainly adopt would be favoured by the lack of ground observation.

457. *Communications.*—The Japanese land communications were now very long and vulnerable and exposed to the harassing tactics of the various parties which had been left behind on the mainland for that purpose. Many bridges had been destroyed. On the other hand by making use of the sea and by landing troops and material at Mersing or at one of

the small west coast ports the enemy could to some extent overcome the difficulties of these long communications.

South of Singapore our own communications were now very precarious as a result of the Japanese advance towards South Sumatra and Java.

The coast-line of Singapore Island, Blakang Mati and Pulau Brani measured 72 miles. In addition to this there was the Island of Tekong and the Pengerang Defended area. This was a long frontage to defend with the forces at our disposal.

**458. Morale.**—As is usual after all long withdrawals, our troops who had fought on the mainland were suffering from exhaustion and from lack of sleep. Their confidence had been shaken by the enemy's naval and air supremacy and by his great superiority in armoured fighting vehicles.

The fact that the Naval Base had ceased to be of use to us and the evacuation of the Air Force except for one fighter squadron, necessary as it may have been, were factors which had a most adverse effect on the morale both of the troops and of the civil population. It was understandable that some among the troops should begin to think of their own homes overseas which were now being directly threatened.

**459. Japanese Plan.**—I anticipated that the enemy would be certain to launch an attack against Singapore Island as early as possible in order to free troops and aircraft for operations elsewhere and to open sea communications to the Indian Ocean. He would certainly attack from the mainland but he might also simultaneously with this launch a sea-borne and/or an air-borne attack. I expected the attack to develop from the west, combined perhaps with a sea-borne attack via the Straits of Malacca. I thought it probable that another force would come down the Johore River to attack either Tekong Island or Changi.

If a direct sea-borne attack was undertaken this would probably be directed against the south coast east of Singapore Town, while the objectives of an air-borne attack would probably be the aerodromes.

I estimated that it would take the enemy at least a week to prepare his attack and that we must therefore be ready to meet this attack any time after the first week in February.

**460. Plan of Defence.**—The following two alternatives were, broadly speaking, open to us:—

(a) To endeavour to prevent the enemy landing or, if he succeeded in landing, to stop him near the beaches and destroy him or drive him out by counter-attack, or

(b) To hold the coast-line thinly and retain large reserves with a view to fighting a battle on Singapore Island.

The disadvantage of (a) was that it was not possible with the forces at our disposal, owing to the extent of the coast-line, to build up a really strong coastal defence. On the other hand, as regards (b) there was a lack of depth in which to fight a defensive battle on Singapore Island in front of the vital town area. The Naval and Air Bases, depots, dumps and other installations were dispersed all over the Island and some of them would

certainly be lost if the enemy was allowed to get a footing on the Island. Further, the close nature of the country and the short visibility would favour the enemy who would be sure to adopt aggressive tactics. Finally, the moral effect of a successful enemy landing would be bad both on the troops and on the civil population.

For these reasons alternative (a) was adopted.

**461.** There was then the problem of the Pengerang area and the outlying islands. If the Fixed Defences organization was to be retained in its entirety, and it seemed essential that it should be, it was necessary to hold both the Pengerang area and most of the islands. Pengerang was already garrisoned by an Indian State Forces unit in addition to the personnel of the Fixed Defences located there. The Island of Tekong had become, as has been explained, very vulnerable to attack from the River Johore. If retained, it must be provided with an infantry garrison. Pulau Ubin was not required for the Fixed Defences but it formed a screen behind which the enemy might assemble an attacking force. It was therefore of importance for observation purposes, but its size made it impossible to hold it in strength without greatly weakening the Changi defences behind it. I decided to establish observation posts on it only. The Island of Blakang Mati and Pulau Brani were required for the Fixed Defences. It was necessary to hold Pulau Bukum as long as the large oil reserves on that island remained intact.

The Sembilan Islands presented a difficult problem. They were not required for observation purposes as there was better observation to seaward from the higher ground on Singapore Island behind them. To hold them in strength would involve a dispersion of force which we could not afford. I decided therefore to rely on denying them to the enemy by fire.

**462. Outline Plan.**—The Plan of Defence in outline was therefore as follows:—

(a) Every endeavour to be made to prevent the enemy landing or, if he succeeded in landing, to stop him near the beaches and destroy him or drive him out by counter-attack,

(b) The defence of Singapore Island, other than the Anti-Aircraft Defences, to be organized into three areas (i) Northern Area (ii) Southern Area corresponding approximately to the South Coast Defences already held by the Singapore Fortress and to include the Fixed Defences (except the Pasir Laba Battery) (iii) Western Area (including the Pasir Laba Battery).

The Anti-Aircraft Defences to remain directly under Headquarters Malaya Command.

(c) The G.O.C. Malaya to hold a small central reserve. Each Area Commander to hold a reserve and to be prepared to send one battalion immediately to assist other Areas as required.

(d) The action of the artillery to be co-ordinated by a Brigadier Royal Artillery appointed for the purpose.

(e) Pengerang area to be held. No change to be made in the garrison.

The Island of Tekong to be held and provided with an infantry garrison of one battalion.

Observation posts with small escorts to be established on Pulau Ubin.

The Island of Blakang Mati and Pulau Brani to be held and to be provided with machine gun defence.

The Island of Pulau Bukum to be held and provided with a small garrison.

All inhabitants to be cleared off the Sembilan Islands, which would then be denied to the enemy by fire from Singapore Island.

(f) A belt  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile deep on the northern and western coasts of Singapore Island to be cleared of inhabitants.

(g) The Royal Navy to patrol the approaches to the Singapore Fortress from seaward and to co-operate with area commanders in the defence of their coast-line.

(h) The Royal Air Force to (i) co-operate in the defence of the Fortress and (ii) reconnoitre the land approaches from the mainland.

#### SECTION XLVIII.—THE DEFENCE PLAN.

463. As a result of the loss of the 22 Indian Infantry Brigade, (see Section XXXIX), the 9 Indian Division, which had never had more than two infantry brigades, now had only one weak infantry brigade. Its Commander also had been lost. In these circumstances it was decided that the 11 Indian Division should absorb what remained of the 9 Indian Division. In consequence it became necessary to include the 18 British Division in the 3 Indian Corps at once instead of at a later date as had been intended.

464. The intention was to hold the Singapore Fortress area.

465. The essence of the defence was that the enemy must be prevented from landing or, if he succeeded in landing, that he must be stopped near the beaches and destroyed or driven out by counter-attack.

For this purpose the defences were organized into three areas (Northern, Southern and Western) and the Anti-Aircraft Defences. The boundaries of areas and the garrisons allotted to them were as under:

*Northern Area.*—Exclusive Changi—inclusive Paya Lebar Village—exclusive Peirce Reservoir to 76 Grid Line—thence due north to exclusive the Causeway.

*Commander.*—Lt.-Gen. Sir Lewis Heath, Commander 3 Indian Corps.

*Troops.*—3 Indian Corps, now consisting of 11 Indian and 18 British Divisions with Corps troops.

*Southern Area.*—Inclusive Changi—exclusive Paya Lebar Village—inclusive Singapore Town and the coastal area west of it as far as inclusive the River Jurong: also Pengerang, the Islands of Tekong and Blakang Mati, Pulau Brani and Pulau Bukum.

*Commander.*—Major-Gen. F. Keith Simmons.

*Troops.*—Fixed Defences, 1 and 2 Malaya Infantry Brigades, Straits Settlements Volunteer Force, and Fortress Troops.

*Western Area.*—Inclusive Woodlands—inclusive Bukit Timah Village—inclusive Kg. S. Jurong—exclusive River Jurong.

*Commander.*—Maj.-Gen. Gordon Bennett, Commander A.I.F.

*Troops.*—The Australian Imperial Force and the 44 Indian Infantry Brigade, with attached troops.

*Reserve Area.*—The remainder of Singapore Island.

*In Command Reserve.*—12 Indian Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Paris).

At a later date the boundary between Northern and Southern Areas was adjusted to read "The Tampines River inclusive to Northern Area."

Commanders Northern and Western Areas were ordered to hold one infantry battalion at one hour's notice at night to move to the support of other areas as required.

Artillery was allotted and its action co-ordinated by the Acting Brigadier Royal Artillery, Headquarters Malaya Command. The inner line of the Defensive Fire Zone was approximately 200 yards in front of the Foremost Defended Localities. Owing to an anticipated shortage of 25-pounder ammunition, normal harassing fire was restricted but could be increased on application in special circumstances.

The lay-out of the Anti-Aircraft Defences was re-organised by the Commander Anti-Aircraft Defences, special protection now being given to the Docks area.

467. The Pengerang area was garrisoned by the personnel of the Fixed Defences and one Indian State Forces battalion.

The Island of Tekong was garrisoned by the personnel of the Fixed Defences and the 2/17 Dogras.

The Island of Blakang Mati and Pulau Brani were garrisoned by the personnel of the Fixed Defences and a machine gun unit formed from the European personnel of the Federated Malay States Volunteers.

Pulau Bukum was garrisoned by a detachment of the Independent Company.

On Pulau Ubin Northern and Southern Areas each established observation posts with small infantry escorts. The orders to these escorts were to resist minor enterprises but to withdraw in face of an enemy landing in strength. They were also to obtain information of enemy movements.

The Commander Western Area was responsible for denying the Sembilan Islands to the enemy by fire.

468. The personnel of all combatant administrative units were organized for the defence of their respective establishments under the direction of Brigadier Moir, late Commander F.M.S.V.F.

469. A force of Chinese Irregulars which had been operating on the mainland under command of Lt.-Col. J. D. Dalley was now expanded and became known as Dalforce. Owing to lack of weapons it could only be partially armed. Detachments of this force were placed under orders of Area Commanders with the object of (a) patrolling the swampy areas where landings might take place (b) acting as a nucleus of fighting patrols sent to operate on the mainland.

470. Orders were issued for officers' patrols to be sent across the Straits regularly into South Johore to reconnoitre the enemy's dispositions and ascertain his intentions.

471. Work was continued on the Serangoon and Jurong Switch lines (see Section XLV).

472. In view of an anticipated air-borne landing similar to those which had been so effective in Crete special steps were taken for the defence of aerodromes. In particular the Seletar and Sembawang aerodromes were strongly defended. Instructions were issued as to the form such air-borne landings might take and the best methods of countering them.

473. The Rear-Admiral Malaya arranged for naval craft to patrol the sea approaches to Singapore Island. Local naval craft were also made available for in-shore patrol work as required by Area Commanders. Naval Liaison officers were attached to the headquarters of each Area.

474. The tasks allotted to the Royal Air Force Fighter Squadron were, firstly, to co-operate with the ground defences in the protection of the Singapore Fortress area against attacks by hostile aircraft and, secondly, to reconnoitre the main arteries of communications in South Johore with a view to ascertaining the area of the enemy's concentrations. This squadron was now based on the Civil Airport at Kallang.

475. On the administrative side, certain changes were made. The duties of Martial Law Administrator passed from the Commander, Singapore Fortress, to the G.O.C., Malaya. All Army field units were ordered to hold seven days' reserve rations in addition to the emergency ration, as a reserve in case they should find themselves cut off from the normal supply. To economise petrol and avoid traffic congestion only those vehicles actually required were to be kept in use. All others were to be parked in the open spaces about Singapore Town.

All ships and small craft under control of the Royal Navy were now based on Singapore Harbour instead of on the Naval Base.

476. The Operational Headquarters Malaya Command remained at Sime Road with Administrative Headquarters at Fort Canning. The Headquarters Royal Navy and Royal Air Force were also at Sime Road.

477. The dispositions adopted by the Area Commanders and their subordinates were in outline as under:—

#### *Northern Area.—*

*Right.*—18 British Division (Major-General Beckwith Smith) less 53 Brigade Group.

This Division had the 54 Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Backhouse) on the right and 55 Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Massy Beresford) on the left.

*Left.*—11 Indian Division (Major-General Key).

This Division had the 6/15 Indian Infantry Brigade (Lt.-Col. Morrison) on the right, and the 28 Indian Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Selby) on the left. The 8 Indian Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Trott) was in divisional reserve. The 6/15 Brigade was after a few days relieved by the 53 British Infantry Brigade from Area reserve and went into reserve.

*Reserve.*—53 British Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Duke), later relieved by the 6/15 Brigade. To re-equip the 53 Brigade a large number of weapons had to be withdrawn from the remainder of 18 Division as there were now few in reserve.

#### *Southern Area.—*

*Right.*—1 Malaya Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Williams) with attached troops.

*Centre.*—*The Singapore Town Area.*—The Straits Settlements Volunteer Force (Col. Grimwood).

*Left.*—Exclusive Singapore Civil Airport to inclusive Changi and also including Pengerang Area and Tekong Island, 2 Malaya Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Fraser).

#### *Western Area.—*

*Right.*—27 Australian Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Maxwell) less one battalion.

*Centre.*—22 Australian Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Taylor).

*Left.*—44 Indian Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Ballantine).

*Reserve.*—One battalion 27 Australian Infantry Brigade, plus one machine gun company and detachments from administrative and reinforcement units.

478. *The Spirit of Attack.*—The following is an extract from an Instruction issued to all formation Commanders on the 3rd February:—

"All ranks must be imbued with the spirit of the attack. It is no good waiting for the Japanese to attack first. The endeavour of every soldier must be to locate the enemy and, having located him, to close with him."

#### SECTION XLIX.—THE PERIOD OF PREPARATION 31ST JANUARY-8TH FEBRUARY, 1942.

479. *Public Announcement.* I published an announcement which stated that the Battle for Malaya had concluded and that the Battle for Singapore was now beginning and called upon all ranks and all civilians to play their part in the defence of Singapore. A copy of this announcement is attached as Appendix "H" to this Despatch.

480. *The Far East War Council.*—The Council, under the chairmanship of the Governor, continued to meet at 0900 hrs. daily at the house of the Secretary, Mr. Dawson.

481. *Withdrawals to the Netherlands East Indies.*—In accordance with instructions received from the Supreme Commander South-West Pacific certain units and individuals were despatched to the Netherlands East Indies. The units included an Australian Motor Transport Company and certain Anti-Aircraft units. Among the individuals were senior officers required for Headquarters South-West Pacific and technicians no longer required at Singapore. I was also instructed by the Supreme Commander South-West Pacific, in view of the shortage of trained staff officers both in the N.E.I. and in India, to evacuate to the N.E.I. all staff officers who were no longer required and in particular to consider whether I could now dispense with any of the Indian Army formation headquarters in view of the reduction of the fighting strengths of those formations.

Some mechanical transport destined for Singapore was also retained in the N.E.I. or returned there without being discharged from the ships.

482. *Re-Organization of Formations and Units.*—As a result of two months of almost continuous day and night operations on the mainland, it was only to be expected that a great deal of re-organization had now become

necessary in almost all formations. This was especially the case in the 3 Indian Corps which had borne the brunt of the fighting. The absorption of the 9 by the 11 Indian Division has already been recorded. In addition, the weaker formations and units were now strengthened by the appointment of new Commanders, by the transfer of personnel, by the appointment of newly commissioned officers and by returning junior staff officers to duty. In spite of these measures, the fighting efficiency of many units, as a result of their initial dilution and of the heavy losses which they had suffered, was far from what could have been desired. This was an unpleasant but unavoidable fact which had to be faced.

Lt.-Col. Coates, G.S.O.1. 9 Indian Division, was appointed Commander of the 6/15 Indian Infantry Brigade in place of Brigadier Challen who was missing after the west coast operations. Col. Trott was appointed to command the 8 Indian Infantry Brigade.

As Headquarters Malaya Command was, in the peculiar circumstances prevailing, now dealing direct with divisions in matters concerning Artillery, Supply and Transport, Ordnance and Medical Services, I authorized a reduction of the administrative staff of Headquarters 3 Indian Corps to conform with the new conditions. Unfortunately there was no opportunity for evacuating the surplus personnel before the Japanese attack started.

The Australian units which had suffered such heavy casualties in the Muar area had now been re-organized and brought up to strength with new drafts many of which were, as has been stated, lacking in training and experience.

**483. Preparation of Defences.**—The preparation of the defences could now be continued by the troops who were to occupy them. Most of the work on the forward defences had to be done by night as they were directly under enemy observation by day. In most areas it was found desirable to withdraw the garrisons from the Foremost Defended Localities by day, leaving only observation posts, and to re-occupy them at night.

All civilians, except those employed on work for the Fighting Services, were evacuated from the northern and western coastal belts. In view of the congestion which already existed in other parts of the Island this was no easy problem.

**484. Arrival of Reinforcements.**—Early on the morning of the 5th February a convoy of four ships bringing the Reconnaissance, Machine Gun, Anti-tank and certain administrative units of the 18 Division and some Indian troops approached the Singapore area. At about 1100 hrs., when the leading ships were close to Singapore and the slowest ship, the "Empress of Asia", was south-west of the Sembilan Islands, the convoy was attacked by enemy dive-bombers. The "Empress of Asia" received several direct hits and soon began to sink. All the troops had to take to the water owing to fire on the ship. Some acts of great gallantry were performed, especially by members of the hospital staff. Rescues were quickly effected by the Royal Navy. The loss of life fortunately was small, but nearly all weapons and equipment on board were lost and the ship became a total wreck. Owing to heavy air attacks on the Docks area, some of the vehicles and heavy stores were not discharged

from the other ships which left again the following night.

It thus happened that some of these units landed without their equipment. They were re-equipped as far as possible with small arms and fought thereafter as infantry. They joined the 18 Division reserve.

**485. The Scorched Earth Policy.**—Very careful plans were made for the implementation of the Scorched Earth Policy. As far as the fighting Services were concerned, the policy briefly was that the authority responsible for the dump, depot or establishment concerned would be responsible for the preparation and execution of denial schemes. As regards the orders to put the schemes into effect, I reserved to myself the responsibility for giving the order if time permitted, but, to provide against the contingency of this not being possible, I laid down that there must always be on the spot day and night sufficient personnel with a reliable Commander who would in the last resort and failing any orders act on his own initiative to ensure that the policy of His Majesty's Government was carried out.

A copy of the Instructions issued in this connection is attached as Appendix "J" to this Despatch.

As regards the Naval Base area, it was arranged that the Rear-Admiral, Malaya, should confer direct with the Commander 11 Indian Division as regards any assistance he might require for the implementation of the Scorched Earth Policy.

The Director General of Civil Defence became responsible for the implementation of the policy as far as civil installations were concerned.

**486. Civil Defence.**—The withdrawal of the Air Force, except for one fighter squadron, and the evacuation of the Naval Base had a bad moral effect on certain sections of the civil population. Rumours were circulated that Singapore was not to be defended. In an endeavour to restore confidence, I published a statement in the Singapore newspapers making our intention clear. (See Appendix "H".) I also gave an interview to representatives of the Press on the 5th February and on the evening of the same day received a deputation of the leading members of the Unofficial European community. At both these interviews I explained the reasons for the withdrawal of the Air Force, stressed the strategical importance of Singapore and made it clear that our intention was to defend it to the best of our ability.

On the 2nd February a Chinese District Watch Force was formed whose duties, among others, were (a) to assist in arresting looters, hooligans, etc., (b) to assist in calming the populace, (c) to advise the populace to resume business after alerts, (d) to assist in food distribution. By this time the Communist element was taking a major part in the Chinese war effort.

Civil labour continued to be a great difficulty. The Docks at this time, were being worked chiefly by military labour assisted by some civilians. In other areas also labour was disappearing.

**487. Operations.**—The operations during this period consisted chiefly of air attacks and of artillery and patrol activities.

The attacks of the Japanese Air Force were directed mainly against the Singapore Docks

and the Kallang aerodrome, but attacks were also made on the Chang area on certain of the Fixed Defences and on the Singapore Town area. Attacks on the Johore 15 in. Battery did little damage. Our ground defences succeeded in preventing the enemy aircraft from flying low, while the fighters attacked them as opportunity offered.

The Japanese artillery adopted harassing tactics, batteries becoming active in the plantations north of Pulau Ubin and on the high ground east and west of Johore Bahru. One battery, with a specially long range of about 24,000 yards, shelled the Government House area from near Johore Bahru. A balloon section was brought forward to the high ground above Johore Bahru to assist in the observation of this artillery fire. Our artillery replied with counter-bombardment and harassing fire within the limits laid down. The observation posts on Pulau Ubin proved of great service but had to be withdrawn when enemy troops occupied the island early on the 8th February.

On all fronts our night patrols crossed the Straits and reconnoitred the enemy dispositions. Two of the A.I.F. patrols which returned on the night 7th-8th February, after being in enemy territory over 24 hours, reported that on the 7th February large enemy reinforcements had arrived in the rubber plantations opposite the western shores of Singapore Island between the Rivers Malayu and Perepat.

488. At 0930 hrs. on the 6th February our air reconnaissance sent out from Palembang in Sumatra reported one cruiser, four destroyers and four merchant ships at anchor in the Anambas Islands some 250 miles north-east of Singapore. We concluded that this was a sea-borne force assembling for an attack either on Singapore or on some objective in the N.E.I.

#### SECTION L.—COMMENCEMENT OF THE JAPANESE ATTACK ON SINGAPORE ISLAND. 8TH-9TH FEBRUARY, 1942.

489. At about 1330 hrs. on the 8th February, heavy artillery fire opened on the fronts of the 22 Australian and 44 Indian Brigade Groups following lighter shelling during the morning. Forward defences, headquarters and communications received special attention. After a lull at sunset the bombardment continued with increased intensity. It was apparent that the enemy had greatly strengthened his artillery during the previous week, the bombardment being reminiscent of that during the World War I. Casualties to personnel were, however, not heavy owing to the protection afforded by slit trenches, but cable communications were cut and damage was done to searchlight and other equipment.

490. The 22 Australian Infantry Brigade was disposed on a three battalion front, each battalion finding its own reserves. The Brigade front, which stretched from the River Kranji on the right to the River Berih on the left measured 16,000 yards. In rear of the position there is a comparatively narrow neck of about 3,000 yards where the headwaters of the Rivers Kranji and Berih nearly join. The problem was whether to allow the enemy to land unopposed and to endeavour to stop him on this neck or to hold forward positions near the coast with a view to attacking the enemy when he was most vulnerable, i.e., when he was crossing the Straits and landing on the shores

of the Island. In accordance with the general policy laid down by Headquarters Málaya Command the forward positions were occupied.

The 2/20 Battalion A.I.F. with a company of Dalforce attached was on the right on a front of 8,000 yards between the River Kranji and Sarimbun Island. The 2/18 Battalion A.I.F. was in the centre on a front of 4,000 yards between Sarimbun Island and Murai Point. The 2/19 Battalion which had absorbed a large number of reinforcements since its heavy losses at Muar, was on the left on a front of 4,000 yards between Murai Point and the River Berih. There was a machine gun company distributed along the front. The Brigade was covered by Australian Field Artillery, the total number of guns which could bear on this front being about 30.

I have no record of the orders issued by the Commander 22 Australian Infantry Brigade, but it appears they were to the effect that the forward troops if overrun were to fall back successively to company and battalion perimeter positions.

491. The first landings took place at about 2045 hrs. 8th February and very soon the whole of the front between the River Buloh on the right of the 2/20 Battalion and the right company of the 2/19 Battalion was being attacked. Some craft also attempted to enter the mouth of the River Berih but were driven off. The troops which formed the first flight of the attacking force were conveyed across the Straits in special armoured landing craft. Successive flights came in more vulnerable types of craft. These landing craft were available in very large numbers, as many as 40-50 appearing on the front of one of the forward companies in the first flight. Each landing craft carried 40 men. It is now known that two divisions, the 18th right and 5th left, took part in this attack. It has been ascertained from Japanese sources that 13,000 troops landed during the night and a further 10,000 soon after dawn, so that our defending troops were heavily outnumbered. The landing craft emerged from the rivers opposite the north-western and western shores of Singapore Island. It is now known that the Japanese carried them overland by road from Pontian Kechil on the west coast of Johore. There can be no doubt that preparations for this attack on Singapore Island had been made a long time before the war started.

492. The enemy landing craft in the first flight were in many cases sunk or beaten off by the Forward Defended Localities and the machine guns, but they were quickly followed by others and the enemy succeeded in landing at many points. Very heavy, and, in many areas, fierce hand-to-hand fighting developed. Some of the machine guns continued fighting until their ammunition was practically exhausted. Unfortunately, it appears that the S.O.S. calls for artillery support were not answered until some time after the attack started. This was due partly to the inadequacy of Verey Light signals in that close country, partly to the severing of cable communications by the enemy's bombardment and partly to a failure to make full use of W/T. When the artillery fire did come down, however, it was maintained, within the limits of the resources available, at a high level throughout the night and must have done considerable damage.

There was also a failure to make proper use of the beach searchlights for reasons which it has not been possible to ascertain. This disadvantage was, however, countered to some extent by the illumination provided by burning ammunition barges.

493. The strongest enemy attack was directed from the west up the banks of the River Murai with Ama Keng Village, the key point lying between the headwaters of the River Kranji and the River Berih, as its objective. In this area a wedge was driven between the 2/18 and 2/19 Battalions A.I.F.

494. At about midnight the commanders of the three battalions, in accordance with their instructions as outlined above, ordered the forward troops to withdraw into battalion perimeters. The 2/20 Battalion on the right concentrated in a position about the Namazie Estate, but the 2/18 Battalion was too closely engaged with the enemy and only a small proportion of them reached their perimeter at Ama Keng Village. A similar fate befell the 2/19 Battalion on the left. At about 0900 hrs. the commander of the 2/20 Battalion ordered a withdrawal to the Ama Keng Village area where he hoped to join up with the 2/18 Battalion, but found it occupied by the enemy.

495. The plan for the forward troops to fall back to battalion perimeter positions was contrary to the policy laid down by Headquarters Malaya Command and, in my opinion, involved an operation which was too difficult in the middle of a night battle which was being fought fiercely at close quarters. As a result of it there was much confusion and disorganization, groups of men becoming detached and lost in the close country. Some were collected and taken back to the Base Depot where they were refitted and reorganized. Others made their way to Singapore Town. The 22 Australian Infantry Brigade, however, did not cease to exist—on the contrary it continued to fight well later on as will be seen—and it would be very wrong to judge the performance of the A.I.F. by these stragglers. The action of these men must be judged in relation to the existing conditions. They were not long-service soldiers and discipline was not deep-rooted. They had volunteered for service and had been sent to Malaya to defend the Naval Base. The Naval Base was no longer of any use, but Australia, their homeland, was being threatened. Many of them belonged to units which, after heavy casualties on the mainland, had been reorganized but had had no time to regain their full fighting efficiency. They had fought well throughout a long night against heavy odds and were exhausted. This is the true picture and should be judged on its merits. Active and effective measures were quickly taken by Headquarters Malaya Command and by Headquarters A.I.F. to deal with the situation by means of reinforced stragglers' posts and officers' patrols in the Town area.

496. Shortly after midnight the Commander Western Area ordered the 2/29 Battalion A.I.F. from Area reserve to move up to the Tengah area and come under the orders of the Commander 22 Australian Infantry Brigade with a view to a counter-attack. It reached Tengah about 0600 hrs., and preparations for a counter-attack to recapture Ama Keng Village were put in hand. The enemy, however, who

had by now been strongly reinforced, anticipated this move by continuing his offensive tactics and by 0800 hrs. he was attacking the Tengah aerodrome.

497. At 0700 hrs. the Pasir Laba 6 in. Coast Defence Battery was attacked by dive-bombers and both guns put out of action, many of the crew being killed and wounded.

498. At 0830 hrs. 9th February, it having by then become apparent that no attack was likely to develop against the Northern area, I ordered the Command Reserve (12 Indian Infantry Brigade) to move at once to the Bukit Panjang—Keat Hong Village area where it would come under command Western Area. This so-called brigade now consisted only of the 2 Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, 350 strong, of which 150 were Royal Marines, and one Indian Battalion 400 strong. On arrival about mid-day it took up a defensive position astride the road just west of Keat Hong Village in the right sector of the Kranji—Jurong Line.

499. At 1100 hrs., with a view to forming a new Command Reserve, I ordered the Commander, 3 Indian Corps to put his reserve, the 6/15 Indian Infantry Brigade, at one hour's notice and not to use it without reference to me.

500. In the middle of the day there was a lull in the fighting which had been focused chiefly round the Tengah aerodrome. Early in the afternoon I discussed the situation with the Commander Western Area at his headquarters near Bukit Timah Village. A decision had to be taken with regard to the 44 Brigade Group which was still holding its positions on the southwest coast of Singapore Island and whose only line of communication along the Jurong road was now being threatened. The possibility of using this brigade to attack the right flank of the enemy's penetration was considered but dismissed as being impracticable owing to the dispersion of the brigade in its defensive positions. The following decisions were then taken:—

(a) The 27 Australian Brigade Group should continue to hold the Causeway and maintain its position east of the River Kranji.

(b) That we should now concentrate on holding the Kranji—Jurong Switch Line.

(c) That to assist in holding this line the 44 Brigade Group should be withdrawn at once from its coast defence positions and take up a defensive position on the left of the line astride the Jurong road.

(d) That the 6/15 Brigade from the Northern Area should be moved as soon as possible to a rendezvous on the Bukit Timah road with its head at the Racecourse where it would come under the orders of the Commander Western Area.

501. The enemy's thrust now exercised a very serious threat to our depots and dumps along the Bukit Timah road, especially to the large Kranji ammunition magazine and to the vital food and petrol dumps east of Bukit Timah Village and in the Racecourse area. I impressed upon the Commander Western Area the great importance of covering the area in which these depots and dumps were located.

502. It now became necessary to formulate a plan for the eventuality that the enemy's advance down the Bukit Timah road might force us to withdraw our troops from the other

parts of Singapore Island. There seemed to be two alternatives, either (a) to fall back to the east part of the Island and hold the Changi area or (b) to concentrate for the defence of Singapore Town. We were not strong enough to hold both areas. The most important considerations were the location of the water reservoirs, the location of our main dumps and depots and of our hospitals and the fact that the Civil Government and the bulk of the civil population were still in Singapore Town. I decided that, in the eventuality under consideration, we would concentrate on holding a perimeter round the Singapore Town area and the outlying islands, even though that meant the loss of the Changi defences. As regards the Fixed Defences, the experience at Pasir Laba that morning had suggested that these would not long remain in action if the enemy concentrated his dive-bombers on them.

The plan in outline was to hold a perimeter which would include the Kallang aerodrome, the MacRitchie and Peirce Reservoirs and the Bukit Timah depots area. It was given out verbally to the Commanders Northern and Southern Areas on the evening 9th February and issued as a Secret and Personal Instruction to Senior Commanders and Staff Officers at 0050 hrs. 10th February. It was issued in order that responsible senior officers might know my intentions in case the situation developed too rapidly for further orders to be issued. A copy of the Instruction is attached as Appendix K to this Despatch.

503. During the evening 9th February the enemy's artillery concentrated on the area held by 27 Australian Brigade. This brigade, on orders from the Commander Western area, had modified its dispositions to guard against the threat to its left rear. At about 1930 hrs. the enemy attacked on a front between the Causeway and the River Kranji. Again a large number of his landing craft were knocked out by artillery and machine gun fire but again he succeeded in getting a footing. Fighting went on in this area until midnight.

504. At midnight 9th/10th February after a day of very heavy fighting the position was approximately as under:—

*Causeway Sector.*—The enemy had effected a landing west of the Causeway and confused fighting was going on.

*Kranji—Jurong Sector.*—The 12 Brigade were still astride the road west of Keat Hong Village with troops of the 22 Australian Brigade in front of them near Bulim Village. The 44 Brigade Group was occupying a position astride the Jurong road near the headwaters of the River Jurong, having driven off some Japanese troops who had cut the road east of Jurong Village.

*River Jurong Sector.*—The 2 Malay Battalion of the 1 Malaya Infantry Brigade (Southern Area) was on the line of the River Jurong with forward troops west of the river.

*Other Fronts.*—Except for some artillery harassing fire there had been no activity on the other fronts.

*Reserve*—The 6/15 Brigade was assembling in the Racecourse area.

505. Throughout the day the Hurricane fighters had been in the air almost continuously, as had indeed been the case during the whole

of the previous week. They had inflicted casualties on the enemy aircraft and sustained some themselves. This one weak squadron fought gallantly against the Japanese Air Force. With the loss of Tengah, the aerodrome at Kallang was the only one now serviceable. The A.O.C. with my consent decided to withdraw what remained of the fighter squadron to a base in the Netherlands East Indies intending to use Kallang as an advanced landing ground only. In the event no British aircraft were seen again over Singapore.

506. Under cover of darkness on the night 9th/10th February a naval force of three fast armed patrol vessels (Fairmiles) entered the western channel of the Johore Straits with the object of disrupting the enemy's communications and sinking some of his landing craft. A few small craft were sunk but no other vessels were seen and the force had to withdraw without further success.

The Far East War Council met on the 9th February but no meetings were held on subsequent days.

#### SECTION LI.—EVENTS OF THE 10TH FEBRUARY, 1942.

507. Shortly after midnight 9th/10th February, his left battalion having been forced back from the beaches, the Commander 27 Australian Infantry Brigade issued orders for his brigade to withdraw to positions north and south of Bukit Mandai. This movement was successfully carried out before dawn. It had the effect, however, of leaving open the vital position overlooking the Causeway and exposing the left flank of 11 Indian Division. The enemy was not slow to occupy the hill south of the Causeway.

508. The 6/15 Brigade, the leading battalion of which arrived at its rendezvous on the Bukit Timah Road at about midnight 9th/10th February, was immediately ordered forward by the Commander Western Area to a position north of the Jurong road near the headwaters of the River Jurong and some 4 miles west of Bukit Timah Village. This position it reached and occupied, after a tedious march owing to the congested road, at about 0430 hours.

By dawn the 44 Brigade was in position on the left of the 6/15 Brigade and south of the Jurong road.

509. The 22 Brigade was still in the Bulim area where it had been since mid-day on the 9th and was ordered by the Commander Western Area to fall back at 0600 hours to fill in the gap in the Kranji-Jurong Line between the 12 and 6/15 Brigades. This movement commenced according to plan but, partly owing to the Brigade Commander losing touch with his units, and partly owing to a misunderstanding of an order received by him from the Commander Western Area, the brigade became scattered and only a part of it took up its allotted position. The remainder occupied a position south of Bukit Timah Village.

510. As previously stated the Kranji-Jurong Line had been selected and partially prepared in peace-time as a Switch Line to protect the centre of the Island against an attack from the west. A wide belt had been cleared of trees and undergrowth between the two rivers. It was a naturally strong position but the defences had not been completed.

511. By 0730 hours a strong attack had developed against the 12 Brigade holding the right of the position and later the attack spread southwards. Our troops were forced back to positions covering Bukit Panjang Village and Bukit Panjang to the south of it and further south to a position astride the Jurong road covering Bukit Timah Village. A wide gap developed between the left of the 12 Brigade and the right of the 6/15 Brigade.

512. On the left of the Northern Area the Commander 11 Indian Division, finding his left flank exposed, ordered the 8 Brigade from divisional reserve to move westwards and re-occupy the high ground south of the Causeway. This it succeeded in doing by about 1000 hours. A little later a battalion of the 8 Brigade attacked and re-captured Hill 95 overlooking the Causeway.

513. During the morning I ordered the Commander Northern Area to despatch a force of three infantry battalions as soon as possible from his Area to a rendezvous east of the Race-course to come under the orders of the Commander Western Area. This force was drawn from the 18 British Division. It was commanded by Lt.-Col. Thomas, Commander of the Machine-Gun Battalion, and became known as "Tom Force." As the 18 Division was still holding a front line sector and at this time had only two brigades under command, it was not possible, regrettable as it was, to send a composite formation.

514. After visiting Headquarters 3 Indian Corps and 11 Indian Division I returned again to Headquarters Western Area at 1430 hours and instructed the Area Commander to re-capture the Kranji-Jurong Switch Line which I looked upon as vital for the defence of the important Bukit Timah area where so many of our main depots were located.

515. The orders issued by the Commander Western Area for the counter-attack provided for an advance in three phases as under:

(a) To secure by 1800 hours 10th February the Bukit Panjang and Bukit Gombok features.

(b) To secure by 0900 hours 11th February a line from a point east of Keat Hong Village to Ulu Pandan.

(c) To re-establish by 1800 hours 11th February the Kranji-Jurong Switch Line.

The first advance involved only a slight re-adjustment of the line and was effected without difficulty. An enemy attack and penetration during the night, however, prevented the fulfilment of the remainder of the plan, which subsequently had to be cancelled.

516. At the same conference I decided, after consultation with the Commander Western Area, who had no ground communication with the 27 Australian Infantry Brigade, to place that brigade temporarily under command 11 Indian Division, through whose area its communications now ran.

517. On the front of the 1 Malaya Brigade, the forward troops of the 2 Malay Battalion were attacked and driven back east of the River Jurong.

518. Early in the afternoon the Commanding Officer of a battalion of the 44 Indian Infantry Brigade, which had been attacked,

asked for and obtained permission to make adjustments in his dispositions. Troops of the other battalions, seeing this movement, started moving themselves and, before the Brigade Commander could regain control, the whole brigade had reached the village of Pasir Panjang 4 miles away. Here the brigade was re-assembled and marched back in good order, tired but not demoralized, to a position one mile south of Bukit Timah Village. This incident is recorded to illustrate the unreliability of semi-trained and inexperienced troops in critical situations such as that which then existed. It was not a question of fear or cowardice. It resulted rather from bewilderment in conditions which were entirely strange to these raw and untried troops. Such incidents, however, make the conduct of a battle difficult if not impossible.

519. On receipt of information that the enemy were approaching Bukit Timah Village I gave orders for the Reserve Petrol Depot, situated just east of the village, to be destroyed at 1800 hours. These orders were duly carried out.

520. By dusk the 12 Brigade was in position astride the main road south of Bukit Panjang Village where at about 2015 hours it was attacked by enemy tanks closely supported by infantry. The tanks broke through and proceeded south towards Bukit Timah Village but were held up for a time by the 2/29 Battalion A.I.F. and other troops. About 40 tanks were used in this attack.

521. One more infantry battalion (5 Bedfords and Herts) was withdrawn from the Northern Area, and at 2200 hours 10th February was placed under orders of the Commander Southern Area with instructions to proceed to a rendezvous designated by him.

522. The Supreme Commander South-West Pacific arrived at Singapore early on 10th February and left late at night. During the day he visited all formation commanders. Before leaving he issued orders to the effect that Singapore must be held to the last. These orders I passed on to all ranks.

523. During this and subsequent days enemy aircraft were very active over the forward areas and over Singapore Town. They were now unopposed except for anti-aircraft and small arms fire.

#### SECTION LI. — EVENTS OF THE 11TH FEBRUARY, 1942.

524. At 0630 hrs. 11th February Tom Force moved forward astride the Bukit Timah Road with orders to re-capture Bukit Timah Village which was then in possession of the enemy. On reaching the line of the railway, however, the leading troops came under small arms fire and were held up. On the right contact was made in the thick country astride the pipe line east of the Bukit Timah Rifle Range where close-range fighting developed. The front stabilized on this general line for the rest of the morning.

525. During the night there was a great deal of mortar and patrol activity on the Jurong Road front and by 0830 hrs. the enemy was attacking this position in rear from the direction of Bukit Timah Village. The 6/15 Brigade and other troops on this front fell back south-eastwards towards Reformatory Road south of Bukit Timah Village. The

orders, however, did not reach one battalion of the 6/15 Brigade which was left behind.

By mid-day the front ran approximately from the hills east of the Bukit Timah Rifle Range on the right, along the line of the railway, then forward to the junction of Ulu Pandan and Reformatory roads and then south to a point on the coast north of Pasir Panjang Village.

526. By 0700 hrs. it had become clear that a dangerous gap existed between the MacRitchie Reservoir and the Racecourse which was not held by any of our troops. As a temporary measure I ordered a composite unit from the Reinforcement Camp to move up immediately and take up a position at the west end of the Golf Course. Later a troop of our light tanks pushed further west as far as Swiss Rifle Club Hill.

At the same time I ordered the Commander Northern Area to take over responsibility for this sector of the front as far left as a line exclusive Racecourse-Bukit Timah Road, and I ordered the 2 Gordons to move immediately from Changi to the Tanglin area and to come under orders of the Commander Western Area

527. At 0745 hrs. 11th February Advanced Headquarters Malaya Command closed at Sime Road, which was now closely threatened, and moved to Fort Canning.

528. At about 0800 hrs. the Main Reserve Petrol Depot east of the Racecourse was set on fire by enemy action and destroyed.

529. During the morning a letter from Lieut.-General Yamashita, Commander-in-Chief of the Japanese Army, was dropped from an aeroplane calling upon me to surrender the fortress. I made no reply to this and reported to Headquarters, South-West Pacific Command as under:—

"Have received letter from Commander of Japanese Army asking for surrender of fortress. Letter was dropped by air. Have no means of dropping message so do NOT propose to make reply which would of course in any case be negative."

530. To meet the threat developing from the west, the Commander Northern Area decided to withdraw units from the beaches held by the 18 British Division and organized a force under Brigadier Massy Beresford, known as "Massy Force." It consisted of three infantry battalions, a light tank squadron, a battery of artillery and a detachment of mechanized cavalry. It was given the dual task of (a) securing the pumping stations at the eastern ends of the Peirce and MacRitchie Reservoirs, and (b) filling the gap between the MacRitchie Reservoir and the right of Tom Force. Later in the day, the second task became the more important, but strong patrols were maintained between the two reservoirs to prevent infiltration. Units of the force were moved into position as they reached the rendezvous east of MacRitchie Reservoir.

531. During the morning a strong enemy attack developed against the 22 Australian Infantry Brigade, now reduced to a few hundred men only, which was in position north of the junction of the Reformatory and Ulu Pandan roads (about one mile south of Bukit Timah Village). Fierce fighting went on in this area throughout the day during which the

brigade held its ground most gallantly in face of infantry attacks supported by aerial bombing, artillery, mortar and small arms fire.

532. Further to the south the enemy penetrated as far as the Buona Vista 15 in. Battery which was destroyed, the crew subsequently fighting as infantry.

533. During the evening 11th February Tom Force, which was on a very extended front, was withdrawn to more concentrated positions astride the Bukit Timah Road with the right battalion in the Racecourse area and the left south of Racecourse Village. The gap between Tom Force and the right of the 22 Brigade was filled by an Australian battalion and later by 2 Gordons.

534. In the Causeway sector there was no change in the situation during the morning. Our artillery succeeded in keeping the gap in the Causeway open and at the same time inflicted numerous casualties on enemy parties trying to repair it.

A project to recapture Bukit Panjang Village with the 27 Australian Brigade Group, in order to ease the pressure on the Bukit Timah front, proved abortive. That Group was at this time too dispersed for any co-ordinated action.

During the day enemy troops penetrated between the 28 and 8 Brigades towards Nee Soon Village and at 1600 hrs. the Commander 11 Indian Division was instructed by the Commander Northern Area that his task now was to protect the left flank of the 18 British Division by holding a line from the River Seletar to Peirce Reservoir. He was to take immediate steps to put this plan into effect.

During the night 11th-12th February 11 Indian Division fell back to the line River Simpang-Simpang Village—inclusive Sembawang aerodrome—inclusive Seletar Reservoir.

535. The following inter-formation boundaries were fixed as from 2359 hrs. 11th February:

(a) Between Northern Area and Western Area.—The River Namly south of the Bukit Timah Road. Tom Force passed from command A.I.F. to command Massy Force.

(b) Between Western Area and Southern Area.—Inclusive to Western Area the Ulu Pandan Road.

536. During the period 9th-11th February the Johore 15 in. Battery and the Connaught 9.2 in. Battery had co-operated by shelling the Tengah, Johore Bahru and, later, the Bukit Timah Village areas. The fire, most of which was with A.P. shells, could of course not be observed but from reports subsequently received it is believed that heavy casualties were inflicted on the enemy by these guns.

537. The loss of the food and pétrol depots and dumps in the Bukit Timah area, in spite of all our efforts to hold them, was a very serious blow. We now only had about 14 days' military food supplies in the depots which remained under our control. As regards petrol, so little now remained that I issued an order that no further supplies, either Army, Air Force or Civil, must be destroyed without my permission.

538. The Indian Base Hospital at Tyersall was set on fire by enemy action and practically burnt out. There were a large number of casualties among the patients.

**SECTION LIII.—EVENTS OF THE  
12TH FEBRUARY, 1942.**

539. Thursday the 12th February was a day of heavy fighting on the whole front. The enemy, who had now been greatly reinforced, launched strong attacks at several different points.

At about 0900 hrs. the enemy attacked with tanks on the Bukit Timah road front and almost reached the Chinese High School area before they were stopped. As happened so often in Malaya, our commanders experienced great difficulty in controlling their units in the thick country. Strengths underwent rapid changes as sub-units became detached and later rejoined. The Commander Massy Force finally stabilized the front on the general line MacRitchie Reservoir—Adam Road—Farrer Road. To relieve the pressure on this front I ordered the Commander Western Area to organize an attack from the south against the enemy's flank in the Racecourse Village area. The Johore 15 in. Battery also engaged targets on this front.

540. After visiting the front on the Bukit Timah road area I formed the opinion that there was a very real danger that the enemy would break through on that front into Singapore Town. After consultation with the Commander Northern Area I decided that the time had come to organize a close perimeter defence round Singapore Town itself. This defence must, however, include the sources of the vital water supply. This plan involved the withdrawal of all troops from the beach defences on the north side of the Island and also from the Changi area with a consequent loss of the Changi Coast Defences. Accordingly, I instructed the Commander Northern Area to withdraw the 11 Indian and the remainder of the 18 British Division from the beach defences, to select and occupy a position covering the water supply and linking up on the right with Southern Area north east of the Kallang aerodrome, and to appoint the Commander 18 British Division to take over responsibility for the front now held by Massy Force. I also instructed the Commander Southern Area to make all preparations to withdraw from the Changi area and the beaches east of Kallang as soon as he received orders to do so. I informed the Governor of the dangerous situation which was developing on the Bukit Timah road front. He ordered the destruction of the broadcasting station and took certain steps to reduce the stocks of currency notes held by the Treasury.

541. At about 1000 hrs. the Japanese Imperial Guards made a determined attack, supported by tanks, in the Nee Soon Village area, but were held west of the village by units of the 8 and 28 Brigades. Early in the afternoon the 53 Brigade, on withdrawal from the beaches, took up a position astride Thomson road a little south of Nee Soon Village and later in the day the remainder of the 11 Indian Division passed through it.

542. Throughout the day the 22 Australian Brigade Group continued to hold its advanced position in the Pandan area in spite of all attempts by the enemy to dislodge it. There was a lot of fighting at close quarters. Towards the evening, however, the enemy effected a deep penetration south of the position held by this brigade. The brigade was withdrawn under cover of darkness to the Holland Village area.

It had fought a gallant action for 48 hours and done much to hold up the enemy's advance in this area.

543. Further south the enemy concentrated during the day on the front of the 44 Brigade and the 1 Malaya Brigade, fresh troops being brought up by M.T. Several enemy attacks were repulsed. After dark the front was adjusted to conform with the situation on the right and ran from the Tanglin Halt area to Pasir Panjang Village.

544. At 2030 hrs., in consequence of information which I had received, I ordered the demolition of all the Changi defences and the withdrawal during the night 12/13th February of all troops from the Changi area and from the south-east coast to the Singapore defences. These orders were duly executed.

545. The general line of the perimeter defences included Kallang aerodrome—Woodleigh Pumping Station (one mile south-west of Paya Lebar Village)—east end of MacRitchie Reservoir—Adam Road—Farrer Road—Tanglin Halt—The Gap and thence to the sea west of Buona Vista Village. The Commander Northern Area was, however, instructed to delay the withdrawal on the Thomson road front to give time for certain dumps in that area to be cleared.

546. During the day the Japanese aircraft and artillery were both active, an observation balloon being moved to the western end of Singapore Island. The Town area came in for much attention and there were a large number of casualties.

547. The administrative situation now began to cause great anxiety. As a result of the further withdrawals the military food reserves under our control were now sufficient for only about seven days' consumption. In addition to this there were the reserves, varying in quantity, held by units and the civil food reserves. We still had adequate ammunition reserves except as regards 25-pounder, Bofors and mortar ammunition. As regards petrol, except for the Asiatic Petroleum Company's reserves on Pulau Bukum, we only had one small dump and what was in vehicle tanks.

Pearl's Hill water reservoir was empty and the Fort Canning Reservoir began to lose water rapidly. In the Town area breaks in the mains from bombing and shelling began to gain steadily over repairs, with the result that from the 12th February pressure failed seriously and water at low pressure was only available at certain street and ground floor levels. Special water carrying parties were organized. On the 12th February Royal Engineer personnel and military transport were called in by the Director General of Civil Defence to assist the civil staff. For some time past certain Royal Engineer Officers, Warrant and Non-Commissioned Officers, had been understudying Public Utility Services so as to be able to assist should need arise.

**SECTION LIV.—EVENTS OF THE  
13TH FEBRUARY, 1942.**

548. The main Japanese offensive during the 13th February developed along the Pasir Panjang Ridge on the left of our position. Here the Japanese 18 Division, which had fought in the Mersing area and later taken part in the initial attack against Singapore Island, came

into action. After two hours of heavy shelling and mortaring it attacked the Malay Regiment which was holding this feature. The latter fought magnificently but suffered heavy casualties and by the afternoon the enemy had reached The Gap, a dominating position where the Buona Vista Road crosses the ridge. Further north the enemy also gained a local success. After dark our forward troops fell back under orders to positions covering the important Alexandra area in which was situated the Main Ordnance Depot, the Alexandra Ammunition Magazine, the Military Hospital and other installations.

549. In the Tyersall—Tanglin area the Commander A.I.F. (Western Area) had organized an all-round perimeter defence into which most of the units of the A.I.F., including all surplus personnel of administrative units, had been drawn. There was only minor activity on this front during the day.

550. On the Northern Area front the 53 Brigade Group fell back under pressure during the day along the Thomson road, and by the evening had taken up the position allotted to it north of Braddell road and east of Thomson road. Here it reverted to the command of the 18 British Division which now had its three brigades in line, 53rd on the right, 55th in the centre and 54th on the left. The Division was now on a five mile front and there had been much mixing of units as a result of the piecemeal way in which they had necessarily been withdrawn from the beach defences.

On the right of the 18 British Division was the II Indian Division holding a position astride the Serangoon road south of Paya Lebar and with its right in touch with the Southern Area eastern defences which included the Kallang aerodrome where some pre-war defences had been constructed.

551. Southern Area still held the beach defences in the Singapore Town area, and also Pulau Brani and Pulau Bukum, Blakang Mati, Tekong and the Pengerang Area. I gave orders for the infantry battalion on Tekong Island, which had not been engaged, to be withdrawn during the night 13th-14th February for employment on Singapore Island.

552. On the morning of the 13th February the Rear-Admiral Malaya decided to sail all the remaining ships and sea-going craft to Java during the night 13th-14th February and to leave Singapore himself. There was accommodation on these ships and small craft for about 3,000 persons in all, in addition to the crews. It was the last opportunity that could be foreseen for any organized parties to leave Singapore. At a meeting held by the Rear-Admiral the vacancies were divided between the Services and the Civil Government. One thousand eight hundred vacancies were allotted to the Army.

As a result of the above decision the move of the battalion from Tekong Island to Singapore referred to above had to be cancelled.

553. At 1400 hours I held a conference at Fort Canning. The following were present:—

The Commanders Northern and Southern Areas, A.I.F., II Indian Division and 18 British Division, and Anti-Aircraft Defences.

The Brigadier General Staff Headquarters Malaya Command.

The Brigadier i/c Administration Headquarters Malaya Command.

At this conference the future conduct of the operations was discussed. I indicated that I hoped to organize a counter-attack shortly to relieve the pressure on the defences. All formation commanders were agreed that, owing to the exhaustion of the troops, a counter-attack would have no chance of success at that time. After hearing the views put forward by subordinate commanders I gave orders for the defence of Singapore to be continued.

554. The conference then discussed the allotment of Army vacancies for evacuation the following night. I decided that:—

(a) All female members of the Military Nursing Service should be sent. This decision was taken as a result of a report from G.H.Q. South-West Pacific on the treatment of nurses by the Japanese after the capitulation of Hong Kong.

(b) Trained staff officers and technicians no longer required at Singapore could be sent at the discretion of formation commanders. The decision as regards trained staff officers was made in accordance with instructions received from G.H.Q. South West Pacific that any surplus were to be evacuated as they were badly needed both in Java and in India. Technicians were evacuated to avoid them falling into the hands of the Japanese who, there was reason to suppose, would have endeavoured to extort information from them.

As time was short vacancies were immediately sub-allotted to formations with instructions that they need not necessarily be filled.

555. As a result of the views put forward at the conference I formed the opinion that the situation was undoubtedly grave but was not hopeless. Our defence was now very fully stretched and it was not possible to relieve the troops in the forward areas who were becoming exhausted as a result of the continual day and night operations. The interests of the civil population, which was estimated at that time to number nearly one million, could not in my view be entirely disregarded. As so many and vast Imperial interests were involved I felt it my duty to report the situation fully and candidly as I saw it to the Supreme Commander South-West Pacific. I believe that in such circumstances it is equally wrong to give an over-optimistic view as it is to give one which is unduly pessimistic. As some misleading statements have been made as to the purport of the telegram which I sent to the Supreme Commander South-West Pacific on that day I quote below the final paragraph:—

"Your instructions of 10th February (see Section LI) are being carried out but in above circumstances would you consider giving me wider discretionary powers."

In his reply the Supreme Commander South-West Pacific made it clear that, while he fully appreciated our situation, continued action was essential and instructed me to continue to inflict the maximum damage on the enemy for as long as possible.

556. Throughout the 13th February both the Japanese aircraft and artillery were active. About midday there was a particularly heavy and accurate air attack on the Orchard road area, the main thoroughfare connecting Singapore Town with the Tanglin area. The Alexandra Ammunition Magazine came under shell and mortar fire and at midnight deliveries had to be temporarily suspended owing to fires. Our own artillery was also active throughout the day. Most of the field artillery was now sited on open spaces in the Singapore Town area. All remaining batteries in the Faber Fire Command of the Fixed Defences came into action and themselves came under enemy artillery fire. A number of enemy planes were shot down by our anti-aircraft defences.

557. On this day the Rear-Admiral Malaya, after consultation with me, gave orders for the destruction of the large oil stocks on Pulau Bukum. These comprised both naval fuel and lubricating oils and the Asiatic Petroleum Company's petrol reserves. I had previously opposed the destruction of these stocks on account of the adverse moral effect which I anticipated it would have on both the troops and the civil population. I now informed the Rear-Admiral Malaya that, though I would do my utmost to prevent the enemy seizing Pulau Bukum, I could no longer guarantee the security of the stocks there. The Rear-Admiral who was personally responsible for the destruction of the naval stocks, felt that he could not risk further delay. The demolition was carried out that afternoon. It was partially, though not entirely, successful.

558. The effect of the collapse of civil labour now began to make itself more and more felt. At the Docks all civil labour had disappeared and the Harbour Board Staff was no longer in control. In the Town area debris from the bombing and shelling remained untouched, the dead remained unburied and water ran to waste from the mains from lack of labour to clear the demolished buildings.

559. In the afternoon the Governor moved his headquarters from Government House to the Singapore Club in the centre of Singapore Town.

560. I regret to have to report that the flotilla of small ships and other light craft which, as stated above, left Singapore on the night 13th-14th February encountered a Japanese naval force in the approaches to the Banka Straits. It was attacked by light naval craft and by aircraft. Many ships and other craft were sunk or disabled and there was considerable loss of life. Others were wounded or were forced ashore and were subsequently captured.

Included in this flotilla was a patrol boat on which were the Rear-Admiral Malaya and his party and the Air Officer Commanding Far East. This boat was driven ashore on a deserted island by a Japanese destroyer and its engines dismantled. After some weeks on the Island the Rear-Admiral and the Air Officer Commanding Far East both died.

I wish here to pay a special tribute to the loyalty of Air Vice-Marshal Pulford, the Air Officer Commanding Far East. Though at liberty to leave Singapore at any time on or after the 5th February he preferred, from a

sense of duty and of personal friendship to myself, to remain there until the 13th February and would have remained longer had I wished him to do so. This gallant officer's self-sacrifice cost him his life.

#### SECTION LV.—EVENTS OF THE 14TH FEBRUARY, 1942.

561. During the day the Japanese renewed their attacks. Their main thrust was again made against the western front of the Southern Area. Here very heavy fighting at close quarters went on throughout the day in which the Loyal Regt. and the Malay Regt. especially distinguished themselves. By the end of the day our troops had been driven back by the weight of the attack to the line Alexandra—Gillman Barracks—Keppel Golf Course. Further north the enemy reached the Alexandra Hospital area but were prevented from making further progress by the 5 Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regt. and a composite Royal Engineer Unit. The 44 Brigade took up a position on the line of the Tanglin road in the Mount Echo area.

Japanese troops entered the Alexandra Military Hospital and attacked some of the staff and patients. Later many of the staff and patients were removed from the hospital by the Japanese and were massacred in cold blood.

562. On the A.I.F. front there was little activity, though some bodies of the enemy moving down the railway were engaged by artillery and small arms fire and dispersed.

563. On the front of the 18 British Division the 1 Cambridgeshire Regt. continued to hold its position west of Adam road where it had shown great determination in resisting enemy attacks during the last two days. To the right of this battalion the enemy developed a strong attack, supported by artillery and tanks, at about 1800 hrs. and succeeded in advancing nearly a mile until they were held up by defences on the line of the Mount Pleasant road. A deep dent in our line was thus created.

At the junction of Braddell and Thomson roads east of the MacRitchie Reservoir the enemy gained some ground but was driven back again by counter-attack. Further to the right, the left flank of the 53 Brigade was driven back south of Braddell road, but the right flank succeeded in maintaining its positions north of the road.

On the Serangoon road front the enemy attacked strongly from the direction of Paya Lebar Village but was stopped by units of the 11 Indian Division after advancing to within a few hundred yards of the vital Woodleigh Pumping Station.

564. On the eastern front of the Southern Area there were some local engagements between troops of the 1 Manchester Regt. and enemy detachments.

565. During the day there was fairly heavy shelling of selected areas by the enemy artillery which now had the advantage of observation from the Bukit Timah hills. Our own field artillery with due regard for ammunition economy, replied whenever suitable targets presented themselves.

566. Several enemy aircraft were again brought down by our anti-aircraft guns but casualties in the Town area were heavy.

567. Early in the morning of the 14th February a new and serious situation developed when the Municipal Water Engineer (Mr. Murnane) reported to the Director General of Civil Defence that he considered a complete failure of the water supply was imminent. In consequence of this report I held a conference at the Municipal Offices at about 1000 hrs., at which the following were present:—

The Director General of Civil Defence  
The Chairman of the Municipality (Mr. Rayman)  
The Municipal Water Engineer.

The Municipal Water Engineer reported that, owing to breaks in the water mains and pipes as a result of bombing and shelling, a heavy loss of water was going on; that, though both pumping stations were still working, well over half the water was being lost; that all civil labour had disappeared and that it was difficult to get repairs done. He estimated that the water supply would last for 48 hours at the outside and that it might only last for 24 hours. Various methods of dealing with the situation were considered, but the only practical one seemed to be to effect repairs quicker than the mains and pipes could be broken. I therefore ordered additional Royal Engineer assistance, but this could not be provided till the afternoon owing to the fact that all available Royal Engineer personnel were at that time fighting as combatant troops. I arranged another meeting for the evening.

568. At about 1030 hours I met the Governor at the Singapore Club. The Colonial Secretary (Mr. Fraser) was also present. The Governor stressed the dangers which would result if Singapore with its large population was suddenly deprived of its water supply. I informed the Governor that I intended to go on fighting as long as we could, as I did not consider that the water situation, though undoubtedly serious, had yet rendered the further defence of Singapore impossible. I arranged to visit the Governor again in the evening after a further review of the situation. It was agreed that the Governor would report the situation fully to the Colonial Office and that I would report it to the Supreme Commander South-West Pacific. This I did adding that I was watching the situation and fighting on but that I might find it necessary to take an immediate decision.

569. The Supreme Commander South-West Pacific in his reply said:—

"In all places where sufficiency of water exists for troops they must go on fighting." and in a later telegram he said:—

"Your gallant stand is serving purpose and must be continued to limit of endurance."

570. At about 1700 hours, after visiting formation headquarters of the 18 British and 11 Indian Divisions, I held another conference at the Municipal Offices. The same officials were present as at the morning conference. The Municipal Water Engineer reported that the position was very slightly better. I instructed the Director-General of Civil Defence to forward to my Headquarters by 0700 hours the following morning an accurate forecast of the water situation as it appeared at that time.

I subsequently reported the situation to the Governor at the Singapore Club.

571. It may not be out of place here to give some description of the conditions which existed in Singapore Town on the 14th February.

The Secretariat and other Government offices were operating on a skeleton basis only. The only newspaper being published was a Government controlled single sheet newspaper of which free issues were made. Practically all offices, business houses and shops were closed. The lower floor of many of the large buildings, including the Secretariat, the Municipal Offices, the Singapore Club and the Cathay building had been taken over as temporary military hospitals and were already full. The Asiatic population with few exceptions was apathetic. There were few people on the streets and public services were practically at a standstill. The Civil Hospitals were working to capacity. Those on the higher levels, including the General Hospital, were without water on the 14th February and special water-carrying parties had to be organized. This applied also to some of the military hospitals. The St. James Electric Power Plant, situated in the Keppel Harbour area, was still working but it was now directly threatened as the enemy were within one mile of it. The Peirce and MacRitchie water reservoirs were in enemy hands although water, whether by design or oversight, continued to flow to the pumping stations. The enemy were within a few hundred yards of the Woodleigh Pumping Station.

#### SECTION LVI.—EVENTS OF THE 15TH FEBRUARY, 1942.

572. During the night 14th-15th February enemy infantry infiltrated on all sectors of the 18 British Division front and also succeeded in getting a footing on the Mount Pleasant Ridge. The lack of an organized reserve made it difficult to deal with these pockets of penetration. Nevertheless, local counter-attacks were staged which regained some of the lost positions on the Mount Pleasant Ridge.

573. On the extreme left of our position the enemy renewed his attacks with vigour and some bitter fighting ensued on the front of the 1 Malaya Infantry Brigade. Heavy casualties were inflicted and suffered, the 2 Loyal Regt., which bore the brunt of the fighting, at this time totalling only about 130 fighting men. Eventually the line fell back to the east end of the Alexandra Depots area—Mount Washington—east end of the Keppel Gulf Links.

574. The morning report on the water situation from the Director General of Civil Defence (see Section LV) showed a serious deterioration. The D.G.C.D. summed up the situation by saying that he anticipated that the water supply would not last more than another 24 hours. On receipt of this report I instructed him to:—

(a) attend a Commanders' conference which was scheduled to take place at 0930 hrs. that morning.

(b) In the meantime, confirm the situation with the officials of the Municipality.

575. At 0930 hrs. the Senior Commanders' Conference met at Fort Canning. The following were present:—

The Commanders Northern and Southern Areas, A.I.F. and Anti-Aircraft Defences.

The Brigadier Royal Artillery.

The Brigadier General Staff, the Brigadier i/c Administration and the Deputy Adjutant General Headquarters Malaya Command.

The Director General of Civil Defence.

The Inspector General of Police Straits Settlements.

A Staff Officer Northern Area.

The formation Commanders reported verbally on the tactical situation in their respective areas.

I then gave a summary of the administrative situation in accordance with reports received that morning. The Director-General of Civil Defence, in reply to enquiry, repeated that the water position was critical, that the rate of breakage of mains and pipes exceeded repair, and that the meagre water supply still available could not now be guaranteed for more than about 24 hours; further, that if total failure took place it would at the best take several days to obtain piped water again.

The general situation as regards food was that the military food reserves under our control had now been reduced to a few days, though there were large reserves in the Bukit Timah area then under Japanese control. There were also civil supplies.

There were adequate reserves of small arms ammunition, but 25-pounder field gun ammunition was very short and the reserves of Light Anti-Aircraft (Bofors) ammunition were almost exhausted. The Alexandra magazine was practically in the front line and fires had prevented any ammunition being withdrawn from there the previous day.

As regards petrol, the only petrol which now remained, apart from one small dump, was what was in vehicle tanks.

576. A discussion on the general situation followed. The danger of the water situation, particularly as it affected the Indian troops and the vast civil population, was stressed. There was also the danger of a break-through into the crowded Town area if the Japanese delivered another determined attack. It was clearly no good remaining on the defensive as we were. As I viewed the situation, the alternatives were either (a) to counter-attack immediately to regain control of the reservoirs and of the military food depots and to drive back the enemy's artillery with a view to reducing the damage to the water supply system, or (b) to capitulate immediately. Formation Commanders were unanimously of the opinion that in the existing circumstances a counter-attack was impracticable.

I could see no immediate solution for the critical water situation and decided to capitulate. The other members of the conference concurred unanimously with this decision.

577. A discussion on the method of implementing the decision followed. It was decided that a joint military and civil deputation should proceed into the Japanese lines as soon as possible and that it should consist of the Deputy Adjutant General, the Colonial Secretary and an Interpreter. The deputation was instructed (a) to propose to the Japanese a cessation of hostilities as from 1600 hrs. 15th February, (b) to invite a Japanese deputation to visit Singapore to discuss terms. This procedure was in accordance with an arrangement previously made with the Governor in anticipation of an emergency arising.

578. Orders were issued for the destruction before 1600 hrs. of all secret and technical equipment, ciphers, codes, secret documents and guns. It was deemed inadvisable at this stage to destroy personal weapons in case the Japanese should not agree to a cessation of hostilities or should attack before an agreement had been reached.

579. At about 1145 hrs. I reported to the Governor at the Singapore Club.

580. The following is an extract from a telegram received from the Supreme Commander South-West Pacific on the morning of the 15th February:—

"So long as you are in a position to inflict losses and damage to enemy and your troops are physically capable of doing so you must fight on. Time gained and damage to enemy are of vital importance at this juncture. When you are fully satisfied that this is no longer possible I give you discretion to cease resistance. . . . Inform me of intentions. Whatever happens I thank you and all your troops for your gallant efforts of last few days."

In reply to the above I notified him of the decision to cease hostilities.

581. In the afternoon the deputation returned with instructions that I was to proceed personally with my staff to a given rendezvous. The meeting with the Japanese Commander (Lt. Gen. Yamashita) took place in the Ford Factory north of Bukit Timah Village. There is not, and never has been, any copy of the terms of surrender in my possession. As far as my recollection goes, only one copy was produced by the Japanese and this was retained by them. Certainly no copy was handed to me. The actual terms of surrender cannot therefore be recorded accurately. The main conditions were, as far as my memory goes, as under:—

(a) There must be an unconditional surrender of all Military Forces (Army, Navy and Air Force) in the Singapore area.

(b) Hostilities to cease at 2030 hrs. British time, i.e. 2200 hrs. Japanese time.

(c) All troops to remain in positions occupied at the time of cessation of hostilities pending further orders.

(d) All weapons, military equipment, ships, aeroplanes and secret documents to be handed over to the Japanese Army intact.

(e) In order to prevent looting and other disorders in Singapore Town during the temporary withdrawal of all armed forces, a force of 100 British armed men to be left temporarily in the Town area until relieved by the Japanese.

As regards paragraph (d) above I informed the Japanese Commander that there were no ships or aeroplanes in the Singapore area, and that the heavier types of weapons and some of the military equipment and all secret documents had already been destroyed under my orders. This he accepted.

582. Orders for the cessation of hostilities were issued to all formation Commanders soon after 1900 hrs. Hostilities finally ceased at 2030 hrs., 15th February, British time.

583. The general line of our foremost positions at the cessation of hostilities was from right to left as under:—

All inclusive the Kallang Aerodrome (Civil Airport)—The Tarlat Air Strip—The Junction of the Serangoon and Braddell roads—The Junction of Braddell and Thomson roads—The Broadcasting Station—Bukit Brown—Adam road—Raffles College area—Tyersall area—Tanglin area—Mount Echo—The Biscuit Factory—The Alexandra Ammunition Magazine—Mount Washington—The eastern end of the Keppel Golf Links.

We also held Blakang Mati, Pulau Brani, Tekong and the Pengerang area.

584. Japanese troops entered Singapore Town on the morning of the 16th February. There was a military demonstration in which 175 Medium and Light Tanks took part. The majority of the Japanese troops, however, were retained outside the Town area.

585. After the cessation of hostilities it was  $5\frac{1}{2}$  days, with engineers and water parties working at full pressure, before water again reached the lower areas of Singapore Town, which had been deprived of it, and the first floor of buildings in the lowest areas. It was 10 days before water again reached the General Hospital and many other buildings on the higher levels.

#### SECTION LVII.—IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SCORCHED EARTH POLICY ON SINGAPORE ISLAND.

586. The plans for the implementation of the Scorched Earth Policy on Singapore Island have already been explained in Section XLII and Appendix J. It was an operation of war, the planning and execution of which took up much time and required constant attention. To fight and destroy simultaneously is in my opinion one of the most difficult things which commanders and troops can be called upon to do. Hoping, as we did, that we should be able to stop the enemy and make use of our material resources we naturally delayed the demolition work for as long as possible. In this respect the problem differed widely from that in a pre-meditated withdrawal carried out on a time programme. As stated in Appendix J I reserved to myself the responsibility of ordering the various schemes to be put into effect whenever time permitted. In most cases, though not all, it was possible to do this and it was in fact done. As in the case of the mainland, it would be idle for me to attempt to assess the success of the Scorched Earth Policy on Singapore Island other than in general terms. In some cases the Policy could not for various reasons be implemented. It is natural also that, in the turmoil of operations, demolitions, most of which must necessarily be put into effect at the last minute, should not in all cases be as effective as would otherwise be the case. Nevertheless, a general picture of the implementation of the Scorched Earth Policy may be given.

587. Army.—*Fixed Defences*—It is believed that all the guns and other vital equipment of the Fixed Defences were damaged in such a way that it would be impossible for the Japanese to make further use of them.

*Anti-Aircraft Defences*.—With only a few exceptions the guns and the searchlights were effectively destroyed. Subsequent attempts by the Japanese to obtain assistance for the repair of guns were refused.

*Field Armament*.—The great majority, though not all, of the field and anti-tank guns were rendered unserviceable. In the case of the small arms, however, it was inadvisable to destroy these before the capitulation had been accepted by the enemy while later it was against the terms agreed upon. In consequence, it is probable that only a proportion of the small arms were rendered unserviceable.

*Secret and Technical Equipment, Secret Documents etc.*.—These were, as far as is known, successfully destroyed.

*Ammunition*.—There is no doubt that considerable stocks of ammunition fell into the hands of the enemy. The large Alexandra Magazine was left intact for reasons which have already been explained, i.e. that it could not with safety be destroyed owing to its proximity to the Military Hospital. The demolition of the Changi Magazine was partially successful, a second effort being made by the Royal Engineers the day after the evacuation of the area. Other stocks were left intact in dumps which were overrun in the course of the fighting, especially at Kranji, Nee Soon and on the Bukit Timah Rifle Range.

*Petrol*.—The only petrol which fell into the enemy's hands on Singapore Island was the contents of a few small dumps and what was left in vehicle tanks.

588. *Royal Navy*.—The machinery of the Graving Dock at the Naval Base was destroyed. The Floating Dock was sunk.

I am not in a position to report on the other installations for which the Royal Navy was responsible except as regards the Normanton Group of Oil Tanks. Owing to the proximity of these tanks to the Alexandra Military Hospital the Rear-Admiral Malaya, after consultation with me, issued orders that only the eight most westerly tanks of the group should be destroyed.

589. *Royal Air Force*.—Owing to the withdrawal of Royal Air Force personnel from Singapore Island the responsibility for destroying many of their scattered dumps devolved upon the Army. Though some small dumps were overrun in the course of the operations and fell into enemy hands, it is believed that the bulk of the aviation petrol was successfully destroyed or otherwise disposed of.

The Main Reserve Dump of aircraft bombs was also destroyed.

590. *Civil*.—The application of the Scorched Earth Policy to property owned by the civil government, by public bodies, and by firms and private individuals was carefully organized by the Director General of Civil Defence who was assisted by selected officers of the Public Works Department. The work on denial of machinery, plant and liquor continued throughout the 24 hours for the last week. The machinery and plant belonging to firms with British managers were, with a few exceptions, effectively destroyed in spite of the reluctance on the part of some firms to acquiesce in the proceedings. Those belonging to Asiatic firms were, however, not destroyed. All the reserve stocks of spirits and liqueurs were destroyed. All railway engines were rendered unserviceable by the removal of vital parts. The plant and machinery in the modern well-equipped workshops of the Singapore Harbour Board were destroyed.

591. As on the mainland, morale was affected very adversely by the implementation of the Scorched Earth Policy. Fighting and destruction do not go hand-in-hand together. In particular, the effect of burning oil should be recorded. The smoke rises in great black clouds and numberless particles are deposited far and wide over the countryside. These blacken everything with which they come in contact including human beings, who are also blackened from contact with the oil-soaked foliage. A soldier's self-respect and in some cases his morale are adversely affected.

592. To sum up, the Japanese undoubtedly obtained on Singapore Island some war material which was of value to them in their war effort. In view of the large quantities of weapons, military equipment and war stores of all natures concentrated there this was inevitable. Nevertheless, taking into account the difficulties which had to be faced and the strain, both mental and physical, under which all concerned were working, the implementation of the Scorched Earth Policy was, in my opinion, as effective as could reasonably have been expected.

593. In conclusion, it may not be out of place to stress once again the difference between the application of a Scorched Earth Policy in defence of a nation's homeland and its application in a distant land inhabited by Asiatic peoples where the property to be destroyed has been built up laboriously over the years by Government or by private enterprise and where in many cases those responsible for the implementation of the Policy have themselves in the past been the leaders of progress in their respective spheres. In this latter case some account must be taken of human nature.

#### PART IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.

##### SECTION LVIII.—THE DEFENCE PLAN.

594. The object of the defence, in accordance with instructions received, was the protection of the Singapore Naval Base.

595. The tense political atmosphere which prevailed in Europe following the advent of the Hitler regime and the rapidly increasing range and power of air forces were two factors which had profound influences on the problem of defence.

So long as it was certain that a strong and balanced British fleet could, when required, be despatched to the Far East and that it would be able on arrival there to control the sea communications leading to Malaya, the task of the local defence was to ensure the security of the Naval Base for a limited period only. Conversely a Japanese attacking force, if it was to be successful, would have had to capture the base within that limited period. The nearest Japanese base was then 1,800 miles from Singapore and the Japanese would not have had time to establish an advanced base from which they could develop deliberate operations. They would therefore have had to rely on some form of "coup-de-main" attack with forces of limited size.

The effect, however, of the uncertainty as to whether a strong British fleet would in fact be able to sail for the Far East was that the Japanese could, without incurring undue risk, undertake a more deliberate form of operation with very much stronger forces. In other words, they could establish bases in North

Malaya and in South Thailand from which they could develop operations by land, sea and air. The Naval Base at Singapore, which is only 400 miles from the Malaya-Thailand frontier, would thus become exposed to a heavy scale of air attack. To avoid this, and also to enable our own air forces to reach out and strike at the approaching enemy convoys as far from the shores of Malaya as possible, it became necessary to hold the whole of Malaya and not only Singapore and the adjoining islands with part of Johore.

596. This change in the problem of defence was fully appreciated by the General Officer Commanding Malaya in 1937 and was set forth in a document which, as General Staff Officer 1st Grade Malaya, I personally prepared in accordance with his instructions. This document was sent to the War Office. It asked, among other things, for substantial increases in the air forces and in the local naval craft and for more infantry. It seems, however, that the change in the situation was not as fully appreciated at Home as it was in Malaya, or it may have been that lack of resources of man-power, material and money, made it impossible to comply with the recommendations made. In any case, it was not until 1940 that official approval was given to the policy of holding the whole of Malaya.

597. The fall of France in 1940 and the subsequent occupation of French Indo-China by the Japanese again altered radically our problem of defence. Our potential enemy was now within easy striking range (400 miles) of North Malaya and within what was at that time comparatively long-distance air striking range (700 miles) of Singapore itself. Moreover, he now had an advanced base at which he could assemble a strong invasion force without interference. Thereafter such reinforcements as could be made available were sent to Malaya but, in view of our commitments elsewhere, these were not as large as were required.

598. In the autumn of 1940, when it had become apparent that we were not in a position to send a fleet to the Far East, the Home authorities laid down that the defence of Malaya must depend primarily on air power but that, until adequate air forces could be provided, the land forces must be strengthened. The policy of relying primarily on air power was in fact never implemented.

599. In consequence of the above policy the Army dispositions were designed primarily to afford protection to the bases from which the air forces when available would operate. In the event, the Army had to bear practically the whole weight of the Japanese attack with little air or naval support. This was the main cause of defeat.

##### SECTION LIX—COMPARISON OF FORCES.

600. *Navy.*—The Japanese were able to operate with a balanced Fleet based on Camranh Bay in French Indo-China. In the battleship "Prince of Wales" we had a more powerful unit than anything the Japanese possessed but we never had a balanced Fleet. The loss of the "Prince of Wales" and "Repulse" left the Japanese in undisputed possession of the eastern approaches to Malaya.

Malaya had a coast line of 1,000 miles with innumerable creeks. To conduct the attack or

defence of such a country actively it is essential to be able to undertake water-borne operations on an appreciable scale. In this form of warfare also the Japanese established a superiority, partly by the introduction of a large number of their special military landing craft, partly by the clever use of local craft, and partly by the degree of air protection which they were able to give to their coast-wise shipping. On our side we had three destroyers, three river gun-boats, a few Fairmile motor launches and some converted motor craft, but the latter were slow, unarmoured, lightly armed and very vulnerable to air attack. Our local craft had little air cover.

601. *Army.*—The initial Japanese landings in South Thailand and Malaya were made by the equivalent of two divisions and one tank regiment. A few days later a division of the Japanese Imperial Guards arrived in South Thailand by train from the north. There are indications that a fourth division may have arrived later in December, while a second tank regiment arrived either in December or January. In the middle of January two fresh divisions landed at Singora in South Thailand. It appears that it was originally intended to employ these divisions for an attack on the east coast of Johore, but as a result of a change of plan they were moved forward by motor transport to the Kluang area in Central Johore. They were in reserve for the attack on Singapore Island.

It appears, therefore, that the Japanese employed five and perhaps six divisions and two tank regiments for the attack on Malaya. As they kept the same divisions in front line for prolonged periods, during which they were known to have suffered heavy casualties, it is probable also that they filled up these divisions with reinforcements. In addition to the above, they had Army, Base and Lines of Communication units. The establishment of these would no doubt be smaller than in the British Army.

On the basis of 20,000 men per division and 150 tanks per regiment, I estimate that the Japanese employed a minimum of 150,000 men and 300 tanks in the Malayan campaign.

602. Against this we had on the outbreak of hostilities the equivalent of  $3\frac{1}{2}$  divisions with Fixed and Anti-Aircraft Defences but no tanks. Later we received as reinforcements about the equivalent of another two divisions and one squadron of obsolescent light tanks. The total number of officers and men who took part in the campaign on the British side was a little over 125,000, though the strength in Malaya at any one time was considerably less than this. This number included a high proportion of Command, Base and Lines of Communication troops, many of whom belonged to non-combatant units or were unarmed owing to shortage of personal weapons.

603. The initial attack on Singapore Island was carried out by three Japanese divisions. There were two and possibly three divisions in reserve. Two of the reserve divisions had recently arrived in Malaya and it may be assumed that they were at full strength. Some of the others may have been at less than full strength. On this basis I estimate that there were at the cessation of hostilities a minimum of 100,000 Japanese troops on Singapore Island or in South Malaya. How many of these had

actually crossed to the Island and how many were on the mainland is not known nor is it very material, but there is evidence to show that at least 23,000 crossed on the first day of the attack. There were also a minimum of 175 Japanese medium and light tanks on Singapore Island at the cessation of hostilities.

The total of the British forces in the Singapore Fortress area at the same time was in the neighbourhood of 85,000. This figure included a large number of non-combatant troops, i.e., Medical Services, Pioneer and Labour units, etc., of troops for whom no arms were available owing to a general shortage of personal weapons, and of sick and wounded. Probably about 70,000 of these men were armed and equipped but many of them belonged to Base and other administrative units and were very inadequately trained. There was one squadron of obsolescent light tanks.

The Japanese had an advantage in the fact that a high proportion of their forces in South Malaya and on Singapore Island were fully trained combatant troops, most of their Base and Lines of Communication troops being further north.

604. In official statements made in this country and recently published in the world Press, figures very different from the above have been given. In fairness to the officers and men who fought in Malaya I ask that those statements may now be corrected.

605. *Air.*—There is evidence to show that on the 11th December, 1941, i.e., three days after the outbreak of hostilities, the Japanese had 124 aircraft in Thailand and 280 in Indo-China. It may be assumed that in round numbers about 300 of these were being employed against Malaya. They included twin-engined bombers, dive-bombers, torpedo-bombers and fighters. The range of the fighters had been greatly increased by the use of auxiliary petrol tanks.

Opposed to this our Air Force had on the outbreak of war a total of 141 operationally serviceable I.E. aircraft, with a few light aircraft (Moths, etc.) manned by the Volunteer Air Force. Few of these aircraft were of modern types and a number were obsolescent. There were no long-range bombers or long-range fighters, no dive-bombers, no transport or military communication aircraft and no special army co-operation aircraft. The striking force was weak, the fighters were not of the most modern type, the reconnaissance forces were inadequate and the torpedo-bombers were slow and out-of-date.

During the operations we received reinforcements of 31 aircraft from the Netherlands East Indies, some bomber and reconnaissance aircraft from the U.K. and the Middle East, and the equivalent of three squadrons of Hurricane fighters.

These, however, were never more than sufficient to replace casualties and the strength of our Air Force dwindled progressively throughout the campaign.

What reinforcements the Japanese received is not known but shortly after the cessation of hostilities they were reported to have had 258 aircraft in South Thailand and Malaya and 270 in Indo-China. At the cessation of hostilities there were no British aircraft in Malaya.

## SECTION LX.—JAPANESE STRATEGY.

606. The Japanese attack on Malaya was very carefully planned and there is now no doubt that preparations had been going on for a very long time before hostilities actually started. The Japanese themselves admitted that the terrain of Malaya, our battle methods and our equipment were all carefully studied for years before the outbreak of war. The Commander-in-Chief of the 25th Japanese Army detailed for the Malayan campaign had spent six months in Germany before taking over command. He was given the best possible senior staff officers. The Japanese Divisions employed in Malaya are known to have been among the best in the Japanese Army. In particular the Guards Division and the 5 Division, both of which had been very highly trained for the type of warfare to be undertaken in Malaya, had been specially sent from Japan. To give them further experience they took part in April, 1941, in a landing operation on the coast of China followed by a quick thrust inland. They then went to Hainan where they did further training in landing operations and jungle warfare. The Island of Hainan was for a long time used as a springboard for the southward advance.

607. The Japanese strategy consisted in a continuous land and air offensive pressed with the utmost vigour with the object of advancing into South Malaya and capturing Singapore before our reinforcements could arrive. This offensive was supported by their Navy on the east coast of Malaya. Their Navy also co-operated with coast-wise operations on the west coast as soon as landing craft could be made available. These special craft were originally landed at Singora and transported across the peninsula by road to the west coast in the State of Kedah where they were launched on the 22nd December. These sea-borne operations had good and continued air cover. Had there been available at Singapore some flotillas of fast armoured and properly equipped coastal craft it is certain that the enemy would not have been able to exercise the constant threat to our communications with sea-borne forces which they did in fact succeed in doing.

In carrying out this strategy the Japanese undoubtedly took risks as regards the security of their Lines of Communication and the maintenance of their supplies. They relied to a great extent on the resources of the country.

608. The immediate object of the Japanese at the outset of the operations appears to have been (a) to cripple our Air Force and (b) to cut off and destroy the whole of our forces in Kedah by a rapid thrust from Patani via Kroh to cut the west coast communications west of the River Perak. In this way they hoped to reach the line of the River Perak in two days.

The campaign opened with intensive air operations in which the Japanese Air Force based on Indo-China made full use of the aerodromes which it had occupied in South Thailand. In the course of the first three days the Japanese succeeded in inflicting serious losses on our Air Force and driving it back off the northern aerodromes. The Japanese, however, did not succeed in cutting off and destroying our forces in Kedah, though we suffered very severe losses both in men and material. For a time the situation was very critical and it

was only by a great effort that the Japanese plan was frustrated. It actually took them sixteen days instead of two to reach the line of the River Perak.

The Japanese attack on the State of Kelantan appears to have had the double object of capturing the three aerodromes located there and of providing a base from which land operations against Kuantan could be developed.

609. After crossing the River Perak the Japanese continued their drive down the west coast arteries of communications and supported it by sea-borne operations on the west coast and by a land advance against Kuantan on the east coast. All these operations were closely supported by the Japanese Air Force which attacked our aerodromes in Central Malaya, our troops in the forward areas and columns on the move, as well as providing cover for their sea-borne operations and carrying out strategical and tactical reconnaissances.

During January the Japanese Air Force attacked objectives in the Singapore area, first by night and later, when they were able to support their bombers with fighters based on the Central Malaya aerodromes, by day. The aerodromes continued to be the main target but the Naval Base and, in the later stages, the Singapore Docks were also heavily attacked. There was bombing also, possibly not intentional, of areas in Singapore Town.

Towards the end of January a Japanese force landed at Endau on the east coast of Johore.

610. On reaching the Straits of Johore the Japanese, pursuing their previous strategy, attacked Singapore Island with the least possible delay with the results already recorded in Part III of this Despatch. That they were able to assemble their forces, bring forward a large number of special landing craft and launch the attack in little more than a week was without doubt a remarkable performance. The landing craft were transported by road from Pontian Kechil on the west coast of Johore to the rivers which flow into the western branch of the Straits of Johore.

611. The Japanese, in commenting on the Malayan campaign, have attributed their success to their pre-war preparations, to the fact that this campaign was the centre of interest throughout their whole Army, to the fact that their commanders, senior staff officers and troops were specially selected, and to the fact that their land operations were closely supported by their Navy and by their Army and Navy Air Forces.

Other important factors in their success were undoubtedly:—

(a) The great superiority, both as regards the quantity and quality of their machines, of the Japanese Air Force;

(b) The freedom of manoeuvre conferred on the Japanese Army, and conversely the crippling effect of the ever present threat to our own communications and bases, resulting from the Japanese strategical naval supremacy off the east coast of Malaya and, to a lesser degree, from their tactical supremacy off the west coast also;

(c) The inclusion in the Japanese Army of a strong modern Armoured Component, while we on our side had to rely on armoured cars and Bren gun carriers.

## SECTION LXI.—BRITISH STRATEGY.

612. The evolution of British pre-war strategy in Malaya has been summarized in Section LVIII and it has been shown that the Army dispositions were dictated primarily by requirements of protection of the Naval Base and of the bases from which large Air Forces, when available, would operate. Looked at from the Army point of view alone these dispositions were faulty because the comparatively small force available had to be widely dispersed. How widely dispersed it can best be understood by comparing Singapore to the Isle of Wight, an island strongly defended against sea-borne and air attacks, and applying the problem of defending Singapore and the mainland of Malaya with the equivalent of  $3\frac{1}{2}$  divisions but without an Armoured Component to that of defending England and Wales, a territory only very slightly larger in area, with a similar force against an attack from the east or from the north launched by an enemy with superior naval and air forces.

613. The project to move into South Thailand, risky though it was with the small forces available, was nevertheless attractive from the point of view of denying to the enemy the use of the two valuable aerodromes in that area. But it suffered from the danger always inherent in such projects, namely the difficulty of deciding when the time has come to enter neutral territory. It was due to this difficulty, combined with our inability to maintain contact with the Japanese convoys carrying their invasion forces during a vital period, that the project to move forward into South Thailand was not implemented. Had it been implemented, it would undoubtedly have eased the air situation but it might, if we had failed to hold the enemy on the Kroh-Patani road, have led to irreparable and early disaster.

614. When, after three days of hostilities, the enemy had succeeded in landing a strong force in South Thailand and North Malaya, intact, except for losses suffered in the attack on Kelantan, had by sinking the "Prince of Wales" and "Repulse" gained full control of the sea communications east of Malaya, and had also established air superiority over North Malaya, our initial dispositions became a source of great danger. It became clear that we had little hope of being able to achieve our object with the small force at that time available and that our best chance of achieving it was by ensuring, as far as lay in our power, the safe arrival of our land and air reinforcements. In order to do this it was necessary to impose the maximum delay on the enemy and to keep his air bases at the greatest possible distance from the vital Singapore area. The strategy adopted, therefore, aimed at a gradual fighting withdrawal with a view to an eventual concentration in South Malaya where it was hoped the main battle would be fought. Our aircraft were concentrated on the aerodromes in Central and South Malaya where they would be safer from enemy attack. Later the fighters were allotted as their primary tasks the defence of the Singapore area and, in co-operation with the other Services, the protection of the reinforcing convoys.

615. That our strategy was not successful was due primarily to a lack of strength in all three Services but particularly in the Navy and Air

Force. With the enemy in control of sea communications east of Malaya, we were prevented from sending more than very limited reinforcements to the northern and central areas of Malaya, and his sea-borne thrusts continually forced us to make detachments to meet them. This, combined with the lack of reserves, left our forces on the vital central front too weak, with the result that there was little relief for the front line troops who suffered from extreme exhaustion. This had a big influence on the course of the operations.

616. Penang was evacuated in accordance with a decision made by the Far East War Council. Although it had been decided in 1936 to fortify Penang it was in 1941 far from being a fortress. There was one 6 inch Coast Defence battery with searchlights, some beach defences and a very inadequate garrison. There was no anti-aircraft gun defence and practically no fighter defence. The situation on the mainland was critical. The Council was faced with the alternative of trying to restore the situation on the mainland and at the same time to hold Penang or of concentrating all available forces on the former. It chose the latter course which was, temporarily at any rate, successful.

617. Up to the 25th January, when we still had possession of the important chain of aerodromes and landing grounds and the lateral road in Central Johore, there was still a hope, though by then only a slender one, that our strategy might be successful. The loss of the Batu Pahat force, however, forced upon us the necessity of withdrawing into the Singapore Fortress area and of concentrating upon its defence. We had then failed in our object of protecting the Naval Base. Our task thereafter was to hold the Singapore Fortress area.

618. The policy for the defence of the Singapore Fortress area was to endeavour to prevent the enemy landing or, if he succeeded in landing, to stop him near the beaches and destroy or drive him out by counter-attack. As a result of the large area to be defended (Singapore Island alone, with Blakang Mati and Pulau Brani, has a perimeter of 72 miles), this necessitated weak forward defences and an inadequate reserve, but we were forced to adopt this policy by the nature of the country, by the lack of depth in the defence, and by the location of the Naval Base and of dumps, depots and other installations. The Japanese on the other hand were able to concentrate their forces for the attack on a selected portion of our defences. By doing so, they effected a landing and made a deep penetration in spite of severe losses. In the later stages exhaustion of the troops, accentuated by the moral effect of the loss of the Naval Base and the enemy's undisputed air supremacy following the withdrawal of our Air Force to the Netherlands East Indies, again influenced the operations. Ultimately the decisive factor was the imminent danger of a complete breakdown of the water supply as a result of the damage done to the distribution system by bombing and shelling.

## SECTION LXII.—TACTICS.

619. The campaign in Malaya probably provided the first instance of operations between forces armed and equipped on modern lines being conducted in a country almost wholly covered with jungle or plantations of various

types. There was therefore little previous experience on which to draw as a guide for the conduct of this peculiar type of warfare. It is well-known that such country favours the attacker. It makes the defence of a position a difficult and hazardous operation unless the flanks of that position rest securely on natural obstacles. In Malaya there were in fact no positions, sufficiently narrow to be held by the forces at our disposal, which fulfilled this condition. The positions which approached most nearly to it were those in North Perak and in North Johore, but even these were far too extended. In order to impose the required delay on the enemy, therefore, it was necessary to adopt a more mobile form of defence.

620. The Japanese, in accordance with their strategy of a vigorous offensive, invariably attacked with the least possible delay. They seldom made frontal attacks. Their usual tactics were to probe the front and search for the flanks. Having found the flanks they would then push mobile forces round to attack our communications which usually followed a single road. They also employed widely infiltration tactics by individuals and small parties of men as a means of creating alarm, the use of trees as fire positions, and the use of noise, i.e., fireworks and crackers resembling machine-guns in action, as a weapon of war. For the mobility of their forward troops they relied chiefly on bicycles commandeered in the country. Supporting fire, until they reached Singapore Island for the attack on which a large amount of field artillery was employed, was provided chiefly by the infantry gun and by mortars. Tanks, although able to traverse rubber plantations in which the trees are normally planted in straight rows, were used for the most part for "blitz" tactics on the roads. In order to keep up a relentless pressure the Japanese staged attacks both by day and by night. It is believed that, in order to maintain the momentum of the attack, they relieved their forward troops regularly at short intervals.

The Japanese displayed an ability to cross natural obstacles, i.e., rivers, swamps, thick jungle, etc., much more rapidly than had been thought possible. Their engineers also showed themselves adept at the quick repair of bridges of which some 300 were destroyed to a greater or less degree, though it should be stated that in most cases there was plenty of material available close to the bridge site. The ability of the Japanese to live on the country for long periods was a great asset to them.

The close co-operation between the Japanese infantry and the supporting arms and the co-operation between the ground troops and the air forces, chiefly by W/T, were of a high order.

621. After our initial reverse at Jitra we adopted a policy of defence in depth astride the main channels of communication combined with local offensives as opportunity offered. We also employed ambush tactics and took steps to harass the enemy's communications. In these offensive operations we had on several occasions, as has been recorded in Part II, a considerable measure of success. That they were not more successful was due to the inability of some of our unseasoned troops to employ successfully tactics which demand the highest degree of skill and training. This inability became more pronounced as exhaustion, accentuated by our lack of reserves, overcame the front line troops.

The most successful ambushes were those where it was possible to combine the action of artillery, engineers and infantry.

The employment by the enemy of tanks as the spearhead of his attack made it essential that any position occupied should be covered by a natural or artificial anti-tank obstacle. The existence of an anti-tank obstacle thus became a primary consideration in the selection of our temporary defensive positions and frequently a great deal of ground which might otherwise have been suitable for delaying action had to be given up to the enemy.

Efforts on the part of forward bodies and detachments whose communications had been cut to fight their way out and efforts to re-open communications to them from behind were seldom successful. This was due chiefly to the lack of strong and fresh reserves with which to make the attacks and also to the lack of tanks to support them.

622. The Japanese troops, especially their reconnaissance parties, were frequently disguised as local inhabitants. In this they had an advantage over our troops, the majority of whom could not well be mistaken for natives of the country.

There is no evidence to show that there was any extensive fifth column organization in Malaya, but there is no doubt whatever that the Japanese obtained considerable assistance at times from the local inhabitants. On many occasions arrows indicating the position of headquarters or other important air targets were found on the ground. Information as to the dispositions and movements of our troops was undoubtedly passed to the Japanese and guides were provided, possibly sometimes under compulsion. The Japanese also impressed what labour they required and did not hesitate to use ruthless methods to attain their ends.

623. The enervating climate of Malaya, which is unfavourable for long and sustained effort, had a considerable effect on the powers of endurance of our troops, many of whom had not been in the country long enough to become acclimatized before going into action. It is probable that the climate had less, though undoubtedly it had some, effect on the seasoned and more highly trained Japanese troops.

624. Specially selected officers were despatched from Malaya before the close of operations to spread the tactical lessons of the campaign to other theatres of war in the East. Since that time many other lessons have been learned in those theatres. It would be unprofitable, therefore, to discuss the tactical lessons of Malaya at any length in this Despatch, more particularly as the conditions were in many respects abnormal. Nothing, however, occurred to disprove the old axiom that thick country favours the attacker and that therefore the offensive should be seized at the earliest possible moment, but for this fresh and well-trained troops are necessary.

#### SECTION LXIII.—ORGANIZATION.

625. In view of the more recent experience gained in similar theatres of war it would be superfluous to report in any detail on the shortcomings of our organization, which was based on normal British and Indian war establishments, for operations in Malaya. It will be sufficient to comment only on those items which had the greatest influence on the operations.

626. *Armoured Forces.*—The lack of an armoured component was due, not to any weakness in our Army organization, but to inability, owing presumably to lack of resources and commitments elsewhere, to send an armoured component to Malaya when it was asked for. Whatever the cause, however, the absence of an armoured component had a profound influence on the course of the operations, for while the Japanese had at their disposal medium and light tanks in considerable numbers we had until the last few days only armoured cars and Bren gun carriers. The few light tanks which arrived from India towards the end of January were so obsolescent as to be of little value. Efforts were made to offset our deficiency in tanks by anti-tank weapons and other anti-tank devices. Useful as these proved, yet it remained clear that the tank itself is the only satisfactory counter to the tank.

It is true that armoured forces, which depend for their success primarily on speed, manoeuvrability and invulnerability are not so effective in jungle and wooded country, where their speed and manoeuvrability are limited, as they are in more open country. Nevertheless it is clear from the Malayan campaign that the influence of armoured forces even in that type of country is very great and that no force is complete without an armoured component.

627. *Bren Gun Carriers.*—Full value was not obtained from the Bren gun carrier whose cross-country performance was much restricted and which was too vulnerable to close range fire from troops in ambush. The numbers of these could be reduced.

628. *Artillery.*—Although our field artillery was at times most effective, it was seldom, owing to difficulties of observation and lack of suitable gun position sites, that full value could be obtained from its fire power. On the other hand artillery equipment tends to block roads which are invariably scarce in jungle types of country. Some reduction in the normal allotment of field artillery could therefore be accepted.

629. *Mortars*—The Japanese used the mortar with great effect as their chief supporting weapon. Their mortar equipment included telephones and cable for observation purposes. I strongly advocate these methods and recommend that the establishment of mortars for operations in Malayan type of country should be increased.

630. *Engineers.*—The engineers were very fully employed as they are always likely to be in similar conditions. No reduction in that arm is recommended.

631. *Signals.*—The fact that communications in the Malayan campaign were at times uncertain can be ascribed to the long distances over which they had to be maintained, to the limitations of the civil telephone system in a country which had been comparatively recently developed, to a shortage of reserve equipment and to the limitations imposed on wireless in the difficult conditions of Malaya. It is important that adequate reserves of equipment should be maintained in countries which are situated at a distance from the main sources of supply.

632. *Transport.*—As soon as operations started it became apparent that there was a superfluity of transport in the forward areas. Besides being very vulnerable to the encircling

tactics adopted by the enemy, it tended to block the roads when mobile operations were in progress. In fact, our organization based on trucks was less suited to the Malayan terrain than was the lighter transport of the Japanese. Steps were taken early to reduce this transport but, for operations in that type of country, establishments should be carefully overhauled to ensure that there is no more transport than is absolutely necessary in the forward areas.

#### SECTION LXIV.—ADMINISTRATION.

633. There is no doubt that the proportion of administrative personnel to the fighting troops was much greater on the British side than it was on the Japanese. This was due principally to the fact that the Japanese, an Asiatic race, were better able to live on the country and required less in the way of maintenance services. Another reason was the fact that two of our divisions, the 9 Indian and the 8 Australian, were each short of a brigade group of fighting troops while, in the case of the A.I.F., at least, the administrative services were complete for a full division. A third reason was the fact that there was a certain overlapping of Base Services between the Malaya Command and the A.I.F., due to the latter being organised as a self-contained force. It is for consideration whether, in similar circumstances in the future, some economies in manpower could not be effected by the fusion of some of these Services.

634. In general, the administrative organization described in Part I of this Despatch, which was designed with a view to an advance into Thailand but also to meet the contingency of an enemy attack on any part of the coast of Malaya, worked satisfactorily. Bearing in mind that rapid withdrawals were many times forced upon us the losses on the mainland, though considerable, were not excessive.

635. When the Japanese landed on Singapore Island, many important dumps, depots and other installations quickly fell into their hands. This caused serious embarrassments in the closing stages, but it does not indicate that the siting of these installations was faulty. The sites had been selected in accordance with a carefully considered policy of dispersion to avoid excessive losses from air attack and also to avoid as far as possible the already congested Singapore Town area. Most of these installations had been carefully camouflaged. The comparatively few losses sustained from air attack are a proof of the success of this policy.

636. One of the outstanding administrative lessons of the campaign was that troops in forward areas, if cut off temporarily from the normal supply system, must have sufficient reserves of ammunition, petrol, food, water, medical supplies, etc., to enable them to continue fighting. We were forced to the expedient of ordering units which were in danger of being cut off to hold reserves in excess of the normal field service scale—a wasteful procedure because these reserves could not all be carried in the event of a rapid move.

In this connection we felt very acutely the lack of any proper facilities for air supply. There is no doubt that, as was proved later in Burma and elsewhere, air supply is the only practical solution to this problem.

637. In the years preceding the war care for the welfare of the troops had been increasingly practised throughout the Army. It had perhaps to some extent tended to obscure the greater importance of the ability of the troops to endure hardships in the most trying conditions. In countries like Malaya troops must be able to operate independently of road and rail communications for considerable periods. This involves the ability to live on the country and, if necessary, to exist on short rations and with little water. Japanese columns in the Malayan campaign were frequently despatched into the jungle carrying a week's rations. They made great use of local resources and for long periods were able to dispense with the normal system of supply. It has been proved during this war, both during operations in the field and from the experiences in the prisoner of war camps, that Europeans are capable of enduring hardships under Eastern conditions and of living on Asiatic food to a much greater extent than was previously thought possible. This is a lesson which should not be forgotten. The training of troops to this standard, which was reached during the later stages of the war, should be maintained at all times.

#### SECTION LXV.—TRAINING.

638. While it is a fact that the Japanese troops being seasoned veterans were better trained for jungle warfare than were the British troops, it is quite wrong to suppose that no attention had been paid to this form of training in the Malaya Command. It is, however, true to say that the standard of training was uneven. The formations and units which had been in the country longest were on the whole well trained, but the great majority had arrived piece-meal within a few months of the outbreak of war. Many of them arrived with a low scale of weapons and it was only towards the end of 1941 that the authorised scale was approached. The 9 and 11 Indian Divisions only received their field artillery late in that year. This greatly interfered with continuity of training.

639. Most of our troops except those of the permanent garrison were inexperienced and semi-trained on arrival in Malaya. This was due to the rapid expansion of our forces which had taken place after the outbreak of the second World War and, in the case of the Indian units, to the fact that expansion had not started till a year later. Even the regular units had been so diluted as to lose some at least, and in some cases a great deal, of their pre-war efficiency.

In making the above statement I have no wish to blame the military authorities either in the United Kingdom, in India, or in Australia. I would rather thank them for the great efforts they made to help us with the very limited resources at their disposal.

640. Those units which had been longest in Malaya had naturally had most opportunities of training and of becoming accustomed to the novel conditions of warfare, but during the period immediately preceding the outbreak of hostilities opportunities for training had been greatly limited, partly by the construction of defence works and partly by the necessity of assuming from time to time a state of readiness in accordance with the political situation as it deteriorated. What was lacking was the ability to drop the construction of defences and take

a formation, complete with all its arms, off into new country and there carry out intensive training. It had, however, as explained in Section VII, been planned to do this during the three months commencing December, 1941, and there is no doubt that, had this been possible, many of the lessons which were learned after the war began would have been learned in time to turn them to good account.

641. Staff Rides and tactical training with and without troops had enabled the practicability of landing on the east coast during the period of the north east monsoon and also of moving through forest country to be accurately gauged but the ability of the Japanese to traverse swamps and cross water and other obstacles with little delay had not been fully appreciated.

In 1940, a Manual of Bush Fighting had been produced and circulated by Headquarters Malaya Command. This was subsequently supplemented by training instructions issued as and when required. But doctrine had not only to be disseminated but practised and it was for this that opportunity was lacking.

642. Successful fighting in jungle country is largely a question of the confidence and self-reliance of the individual. These cannot be acquired without a reasonable period of training in such conditions. Inexperienced troops from the towns and the plains opposed by seasoned troops specially trained in jungle warfare are necessarily at a disadvantage until they have had time to accustom themselves to these conditions.

643. The deduction from the experience of Malaya is that, if any parts of the British Empire, where the terrain is of the jungle type, are subject to attack at short notice by an enemy armed and equipped on modern lines, we should either maintain on the spot or be able to send there immediately when danger threatens a force fully trained and accustomed to these conditions. It is not sufficient to send in at the last minute inexperienced and semi-trained troops.

#### SECTION LXVI.—MORALE.

644. The lack of training and of experience of the great majority of the troops who formed the Army of Malaya has already been stressed in this Despatch. In this connection Field-Marshal Lord Montgomery has written:—

“ New and untried troops must be introduced to battle carefully and gradually with no failures in the initial ventures. A start should be made with small raids, then big scale raids, leading up gradually to unit and brigade operations. Great and lasting harm can be done to morale by launching new units into operations for which they are not ready or trained and which are therefore likely to end in failure. When new units and formations are introduced to battle there must be no failure.”

Those are very true words as all who fought in Malaya will testify. Unfortunately there was no time to put these precepts into practice.

645. The effect of having to fight without tanks and with little air support against an enemy well provided with such essential modern equipment cannot be over-estimated. All troops were affected by this in varying degree but more particularly the Indian soldiers

who had always been taught to believe in British might and had difficulty in accustoming themselves to these unexpected conditions. During the later stages also the loss of the Naval Base and the withdrawal of the Air Force to the Netherlands East Indies, necessary as it may have been, affected some, but by no means all, of the troops, especially those whose homes were then directly threatened. Finally there was the effect of extreme physical and mental exhaustion which resulted from continual day and night operations over a long period.

The military commanders did their utmost to improve matters by endeavouring to arrange short periods of rest for all front line troops in rotation. Unfortunately, owing to lack of reserves, this did not always prove practicable. The 11 Indian Division for example, which bore the brunt of the fighting in the north, was engaged almost continuously for the whole period of the campaign.

646. Those who have had the task of re-organising units which have suffered heavy losses in battle will know that time is required before full fighting efficiency can be regained. In Malaya it was never possible to make time available and units had to be sent into action again and again before they had recovered from their previous efforts. Their efficiency suffered accordingly.

647. In these circumstances, it was hardly to be expected that the inexperienced troops would withstand the trials of the campaign as steadfastly as would regular seasoned troops. Nevertheless, although they became more and more exhausted and were bewildered and often disheartened, their morale was never broken. Throughout the campaign there was a great deal of heavy fighting at short range and often hand-to-hand, in which our troops fought courageously and well. Such was the case, in particular, in Kelantan, on the Kroh and Grlik roads, at Kampar, at Kuantan, at Gemas, at Muar, in the Mersing area and in many places on Singapore Island. Nor should the less spectacular operations of administration, of communication and of command, which were going on steadily day and night, be forgotten. It stands to the credit of all ranks that, in the many critical situations which developed in the course of the long withdrawal down the Peninsula, the enemy, in spite of the great advantages which he enjoyed, was never able to effect a complete break-through—an occurrence which, in view of our lack of reserves with which to meet such a situation, would have spelt immediate and irreparable disaster.

648. In the final analysis, it is necessary that the influence of all the conditions under which this campaign was fought, which have been fully set out in this Despatch, should be carefully weighed.

649. I believe that few of the men who came to Malaya had any wide knowledge of the importance of that country, both strategical and economical, as an integral part of the British Empire. To most of them Singapore was known only as the site of the great Naval Base. They knew little of the geography or problems of the Far East generally. In consequence, they had but a very elementary knowledge of what they were fighting for, and in the case of the majority there was no time to bring this home to them after arrival in Malaya.

I believe that the problems and needs of our Empire should be much more widely taught in our schools and colleges and in the Army itself than was, at any rate, the case before the war.

#### SECTION LXVII.—THE INTELLIGENCE SERVICE.

650. It must be admitted that both during the period prior to the outbreak of hostilities and also during the operations themselves our information of the Japanese activities and intentions left much to be desired. This can be attributed partly to the extreme secrecy which the Japanese always maintain on military matters and also partly to our shortage of reconnaissance aircraft. But there were other shortcomings which cannot be attributed entirely to either of these two causes.

651. Before the Malayan campaign our knowledge of the potentialities of the Japanese Army and more especially of their Air-Force was very lacking. The ease with which their aircraft sank our two capital ships on the 10th December, 1941, following on their successful attack on the American fleet at Pearl Harbour, surprised not only us but the whole world. The ability of the Japanese to apply modern "blitz" tactics to jungle warfare was also greater than had been anticipated.

652. The attitude of Thailand remained uncertain until the last minute, although we knew from our reconnaissances that the Japanese had for some time been very active in that country and it was clear that these activities were being carried on with the connivance, if not with the assistance, of the Thai authorities. When war broke out Thailand immediately sided with the Japanese and opposed our advance into Thai territory.

653. The pro-Japanese propaganda, which had for some years previously been spread throughout the East; had undoubtedly had some effect. The Japanese came to Malaya well equipped with the means of continuing these activities and their stream of propaganda, much of it very crude, had its effect on some at least of the people of Malaya, and at times even on a few of the troops. It must be said, however, that those who served in the fighting forces, whatever their nationality, with very few exceptions disregarded this propaganda and conducted themselves with never failing loyalty.

654. Within Malaya itself the Police intelligence organization was handicapped by the complicated political structure of the country. Although certain Japanese subversive activities were brought to light almost simultaneously with the outbreak of hostilities and although the Japanese undoubtedly received some assistance from the population during the campaign, there is no reason to suppose that there was any widespread pro-Japanese organization in the country.

655. The future organization of intelligence in the Far East requires a separate study. It is sufficient to say in this Despatch that a much stronger organization is required than has existed in the past. It should be built up round a nucleus of men trained professionally in Far Eastern affairs with a knowledge of the peoples and their languages. Unless the problem is tackled thoroughly it will be difficult, as it proved in the past, to keep abreast of the great changes which are constantly taking place in that part of the world.

## SECTION LXVIII.—LOCAL FORCES.

656. The local Forces played their part in the Malayan campaign in the Navy, in the Army and in the Air Force. The newly formed Malay Regiment in particular acquitted itself with distinction, as did others of the locally raised units.

657. As in other parts of the Empire, which are peopled by coloured races, the resources of European manpower in Malaya were limited. The problem was to make the best use of these resources. In accordance with the principle that every part of the Empire should be responsible for its own local defence, as far as its resources permit, Local Forces, mostly on a voluntary basis, were raised and maintained by the Governments of Malaya. In the light of experience, it cannot be said that the best use was made of the material available.

A proportion of the Europeans were of course required to carry on the Government and other essential activities. Others, for various reasons, were not available for military service. It is with the balance, i.e. those who were available for military service, that this report deals. Many of these men were possessed of special qualifications, such as knowledge of the country, of the people and of the language. The problem was to make full use of these qualifications.

658. In the Malayan campaign the reinforcing units suffered much from lack of local knowledge and from their inability to converse with the inhabitants. As the campaign progressed and more of the local Europeans became available, this difficulty was met by attaching them to the reinforcing units, but in the earlier stages most of those available were employed with units of the Local Forces.

I recommend that each reinforcing unit on arrival in Malaya, from whatever part of the Empire it comes, should have attached to it an intelligence platoon of local Asiatics with European or Asiatic leaders and a team of interpreters, either European or Asiatic. These men should be supplied by the Local Forces, a proportion of which should accordingly be specially organized and trained for this purpose.

659. Another activity which might well devolve upon the Local Forces is the provision of commando groups whose role would be, in case of invasion, to harass the enemy's communications and rear installations. This is a task which could suitably be allotted to residents of the country districts who would in many cases be able to organize their commandos from among their own employees.

660. Those of the Local Forces, apart from the regular units, which are not employed in either of the above ways should be either organized and trained as specialist units, i.e. engineers, signals, armoured car units, railway units, dock units, etc., or for coast defence or garrisons of vulnerable localities.

There should be no attempt made to train the Local Volunteer Forces in ordinary mobile operations. They do not normally have the time for such training and in any case they would, in the case of major operations, be only a very small proportion of the total forces engaged.

661. Local Forces may be called upon to take their part in ensuring internal security or in the defence of the country in a major conflict. In the latter eventuality, the defence of Malaya

must ultimately depend on troops from outside acting in co-operation with the other Services. They will want all the assistance they can get from the Local Forces who should be trained primarily for this purpose.

## SECTION LXIX.—AIR.

662. The experience of modern war shows that superiority in the air is necessary before victory can be gained and at least parity in order that defeat may be averted. The Malayan campaign was no exception to this rule. From the opening of hostilities the Japanese Air Force was immeasurably superior to our own. The effect of this on our strategy was, as has been shown, disastrous. The reason for this lay primarily in the inferiority of our aircraft both in quality and in quantity and in the complete absence of many types of aircraft required in modern war. The shortage of aircraft as compared with what had been considered necessary has been shown in Sections VI and XV of this Despatch. The responsibility for these shortages definitely did not lie with the Air Officer Commanding Far East at the time of the campaign, the late Air Vice Marshal Pulford. He was, I know, fully alive to the inadequacy of the material at his disposal and did not fail to represent the situation.

663. Plans to reinforce the Air Force in Malaya by the air route from India and the Middle East were partly frustrated by the capture by the Japanese of the Victoria Point aerodrome in South Burma in the early days of the campaign. This made it impossible for fighters to reach Malaya by air, while the longer range machines had to fly via Sumatra. Fighters had to be brought by sea with the resultant delay.

The Dutch carried out the plans for mutual support in spirit and in letter. No praise is too high for their co-operative spirit during those critical days.

664. The influence of the aerodromes on the initial Army dispositions and on the subsequent strategy of the campaign has already been fully explained. It was only in 1941 that a combined Army and Air Force plan for the siting of aerodromes was agreed upon. It is of the utmost importance that the strategical and tactical problems of their defence should be fully considered before sites for aerodromes are finally settled.

During the campaign the aerodromes became a liability rather than an asset progressively from north to south as the enemy advanced. It was found impracticable to deny them to the enemy by demolitions for more than a very few days. We were therefore faced with the problem, not of holding them for the use of our own Air Force, but of holding them to deny their use to the enemy Air Force. The psychological effect on the troops who were ordered first to protect the aerodromes for the use of our Air Force and then, after seeing them evacuated and destroyed, to hold them in order to deny them to the enemy, needs no stressing.

665. It is to be hoped that British troops will never again be asked to fight with so little air support as was the case in Malaya. There had never, even before the war, been a sufficiently strong Air Force either in Malaya or within reasonable reach of it. If in future the defence

of so important a part of the Empire is to be entrusted in great part to the Air Arm, as indeed it certainly will be, it is most necessary that the nucleus at least of an adequate Air Force should be maintained at all times either in Malaya itself or in a strategic reserve held somewhere in the East. Where such vital interests are at stake it is unwise to take risks as regards the provision of such a necessary means of defence.

#### SECTION LXX.—AIR DEFENCE.

666. Prior to the outbreak of the second World War there were no modern fighter aircraft in Malaya and there was no warning system. The anti-aircraft gun defence was confined to the immediate defence of the Naval Base and other installations on Singapore Island. It had been built up in accordance with a War Office plan.

667. During the period 1939/41 considerable progress was made in the development of the air defences. Fighter aircraft arrived, a warning system which covered Singapore and the most southern part of Malaya was organised, some anti-aircraft guns and searchlights were made available for the mainland and a co-ordinated air defence system was built up. The air defence system was modelled on that of Great Britain but with very much more slender resources it naturally fell far short of the target. The aerodromes on the mainland were inadequately protected and no defence, other than passive defence, was possible for such important centres as Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Penang and many others. The defence of the Naval Base was reasonably strong judged by pre-war standards, though the equipment was still considerably short of the approved scale. The warning system suffered from the disadvantages inherent in a country which was still not fully developed and in parts of which the population was sparse.

668. During the years immediately preceding the war the anti-aircraft gun defences had carried out much useful training with the co-operation of the Royal Air Force but the value of the firing practices had been limited by the lack of the most modern target-towing facilities.

669. During the campaign the Air Defence System worked satisfactorily within its limits. In the later stages, however, the Singapore defences were seriously handicapped by the contraction, and eventually by the total loss, of the warning system. The height (over 20,000 feet) at which the Japanese almost invariably flew when attacking the Singapore area in the early stages rendered the 3in. guns ineffective and undoubtedly reduced their own casualties. On the other hand our Light Anti-Aircraft guns had good targets throughout the campaign both on the mainland and in the closing stages on Singapore Island. Figures of aircraft brought down by anti-aircraft gunfire are notoriously difficult to assess accurately but it can be said with confidence that well over a hundred were brought down by this means during the campaign, in addition to many others which were badly damaged.

670. The need for mobility of the gun defences was the outstanding lesson of the campaign. The operations on the mainland were always fluid while even within the area of the Singapore defences the static equipments were

at a disadvantage compared with the mobile ones. Had all the units been fully mobile few, if any, guns need have been lost and they could have operated to an even greater advantage than they did.

All the anti-aircraft guns and searchlights allotted for the defence of aerodromes and of the Lines of Communication should be fully mobile, and a high proportion of those in a permanent fortress should also have a good degree of mobility. It is unlikely that a lay-out designed in peace will meet the conditions of war, and mobility provides one means of making rapid adjustments.

671. The system adopted whereby the action of the fighters and the gun defences in the Singapore area were co-ordinated by a senior Air Force Officer worked smoothly and satisfactorily but the appointment in those conditions of an Air Defence Commander, who would have under him all means of air defence, would undoubtedly be advantageous.

672. The Passive Air Defence Services throughout Malaya had been carefully worked out and, though they needed strengthening as the campaign progressed, they functioned on the whole very efficiently. The provision of material defence against air attack was, however, inadequate judged by modern standards both for people and for property. In this connection, however, it is only fair to point out that the congestion in some of the principal cities in Malaya combined with the technical difficulties of constructing underground shelters in places like Singapore make it almost impossible to provide air raid shelters on a satisfactory scale.

#### SECTION LXXI.—LABOUR.

673. The failure of civil Asiatic Labour and, in the closing stages, of some of the military labour also under air attack was one of the most crippling events of the Malayan campaign.

674. Pre-war plans to organise civil labour had never reached finality and efforts made to raise additional Army labour companies had, as previously explained in this Despatch, been frustrated through delay in obtaining official sanction. In consequence, when war broke out, reliance had to be placed initially on the peace-time system of obtaining labour through contractors. This system soon proved to be most unsatisfactory, partly because much of the labour produced was unsuitable for the work in hand, partly because it was undisciplined and partly because the system was wasteful from the point of view of time spent on work. When sanction to raise additional Army Labour companies was received it was impossible to get the men owing to the wide difference between the scale of remuneration authorized and the rates current in Malaya. Early in January endeavours were made to improve matters by the appointment of a Director of Labour working directly under the Director-General of Civil Defence. He was, however, responsible only for labour on Singapore Island. An Army Director of Labour also was appointed. On the 20th January a measure to introduce compulsion was passed but there was no time for its value to be disclosed. The labour problem was never satisfactorily solved. To the end labour continued to disappear under air attack.

675. In the sphere of labour there is no doubt that the present long-range hitting power of the air arm, which can attack back areas equally with those near the front line, has created new and difficult problems. Especially is this the case where, as in Malaya, comparatively few of the people are natives of the country and where in consequence "defence of home" is not a strong compelling force. In such a case a much stronger control of labour is required than was actually in existence.

676. The problem is an intricate one. In Malaya it was complicated by the variety of languages spoken by the labourers and the impossibility of finding a sufficient number of supervisors who spoke those languages. There were also difficulties connected with remuneration, transportation, accommodation and food.

There is no doubt that during the pre-war period the problem was not tackled with sufficient vigour. When the danger of the situation became apparent and efforts were made to improve it, there was insufficient time to solve the many and intricate problems which arose.

677. Experience showed that by far the best results were obtained from properly organized labour companies under military control. The labourers were then subject to military discipline and were handled by their own officers and non-commissioned officers, some at least of whom could speak their language. These companies should have their own transport and should be housed as near as possible to the work in hand. They should be issued with regular rations. In this way only will it be possible in a country like Malaya to keep labour at work under modern war conditions and to get the best value from it.

Each of the Fighting Services should have its own labour force and the nucleus at least of these forces should exist in peace-time so that a rapid expansion can take place when war threatens. In Malaya the finding of additional officers and non-commissioned officers to supplement the permanent staff on mobilization should be another call on the Local Forces.

#### SECTION LXXII.—CIVIL DEFENCE.

678. It is now generally accepted that success in modern war depends upon the whole-hearted co-operation of all concerned, both in the Fighting Services and among the civil population, striving with a singleness of purpose to attain the common goal. In the Malayan campaign, fought within our own territory, that was of paramount importance. To organize the civil community and to prepare itself for prompt and vigorous action was clearly one of the Government's responsibilities.

679. A great deal of criticism has been levelled at the Civil Administration. Much of it is unjust. His Majesty's Government had laid down that the primary duty of the people of Malaya was to produce as much rubber and tin as possible for war purposes. The Civil Administration had to keep this object in mind while making at the same time preparations against eventual attack. It had also to watch over the interests of a mixed population of Malays, Chinese, Indians and Europeans. In the circumstances, it was inevitable that clashes of interests should occur.

680. When the war came many men and women of all races, both official and unofficial, played a creditable and often an heroic part in the defence of the country. Many of them lost their lives and many of them suffered a long period of imprisonment or internment at the hands of the Japanese. Most of those who survived suffered heavy losses of property. I wish to express my deep appreciation of the loyal assistance and self-sacrifice of these people.

681. Nevertheless, both during the period before the war and during the campaign itself an artificial and unwarlike atmosphere prevailed throughout Malaya. There seemed to be a lack of a united effort by people determined to repel the common foe at all costs. There were many causes for this—a lack of knowledge of war owing to Malaya's long immunity from it, an inability in some quarters to realise the real danger which threatened, the lack of common citizenship, and the high standard of living resulting from the wealth of the country's resources.

682. Difficulties arose from the complicated machinery of Government comprising as it did a large number of separate administrations. As this is a matter which is now receiving the consideration of His Majesty's Government, it is sufficient to say here that from a defence point of view it is essential that a simpler and more straightforward organization should be evolved.

683. I feel bound to record as a result of my experiences in Malaya that the Fighting Services throughout suffered from this lack of a strong and centralized administration able and ready to take prompt decisions and vigorous action.

#### SECTION LXXIII.—THE HIGHER COMMAND.

684. The advantage held by the seasoned Japanese troops as a result of the experience of active operations which many of them had had in China applied also in some degree in the case of the senior commanders. Whereas most of the Japanese commanders had had previous experience in handling large forces in the field in Far East conditions of warfare, few of our commanders had had the benefit of a similar experience. Many of them had had no experience whatever of tank warfare.

The importance of commanders in all parts of the Empire being given opportunities in peace-time of training with forces which they will be called upon to handle in war needs no stressing.

685. The Army of Malaya was composed of troops from many parts of the Empire—from the United Kingdom, India, Australia and Malaya—and comprised many different races. The various contingents varied widely in their characteristics. It was my duty and constant effort to weld these contingents into a homogeneous whole.

Between the two wars great progress had been made, by exchange of officers and by other means, in spreading a common doctrine throughout the armed forces of the Empire. There can be no question of the value of this, especially in theatres of war where, as in Malaya, forces are mixed. I recommend, from my experience in Malaya, that this policy should now be developed and greatly expanded because I believe it to be essential that all senior commanders and staff officers should not only have common ideas on the strategy, tactics

and staff work applicable to a major war but that they should also look upon all problems of defence from an Imperial rather than from a local point of view. With increased facilities for air travel it seems possible that this ideal may in the future be capable of attainment.

686. Throughout the campaign, Headquarters Malaya Command had the dual function of controlling forces in the field in quickly moving operations ranging over an area nearly as large as that of England and Wales and of dealing with the many matters, such as business with the Home Authorities and the Civil Government, which are necessarily the responsibility of the Headquarters of a Command overseas. Its strength, when war with Japan broke out, was approximately equivalent to that of the headquarters of a Corps and its establishment was not suited to its dual role. Although the staff was strengthened as more officers became available, it remained throughout the campaign too weak to fulfil adequately the dual task imposed upon it.

It would in my opinion have been of great assistance if there had been a single commander over all the Fighting Services and the Civil Administration. I and my staff would then have been much freer to concentrate on operations.

687. Reference has already been made in this Despatch to the disturbing effect of the numerous changes which took place in the Higher Command. During the short campaign there were in all five Commanders-in-Chief. Such rapid changes, though largely forced upon us by circumstances, are naturally not calculated to create an atmosphere of confidence.

688. It is not within the province of this Despatch to make concrete recommendations for the future organization of Command in the Far East. The defence of British Borneo and possibly also of Hong Kong must enter into the problem. It is obviously necessary to avoid overweighting the structure with too many headquarters, but I feel that a Supreme Commander in the Far East would be a great advantage both in peace and in war. Wide powers of decision, with considerable financial control, should be delegated to him. It is for consideration also whether in time of war the civil administrations as well as the Fighting Services should not come under his control.

689. As war has become an affair of nations and not only of the Fighting Services, I consider it of the utmost importance for the future that all senior commanders, civil officials and staff officers should be fully trained in the art of making war on a national basis. It must be a study in which all brains are pooled. There must be a corps of civilians and officers of each Service fit to staff and command the forces of the future and to understand the complete integration of civil and military efforts. In addition to what they learn in their own Services and Colleges, I am of the opinion that

a course at a Combined Imperial Defence College will be essential. For this purpose I would advocate a considerable expansion of the Imperial Defence College as it existed before the war and that graduation at that College should be an essential qualification for the higher military and civil appointments in the strategically important overseas parts of the British Empire.

#### SECTION LXXIV.—CONCLUSION.

690. The Retreat from Mons and the Retreat to Dunkirk have been hailed as epics. In the former our Army was able with the help of a powerful ally to turn the tables on the enemy; in the latter our Army was evacuated by the Navy with the loss of all heavy equipment. Each of these retreats lasted approximately three weeks. The Retreat in Malaya lasted ten weeks in far more trying conditions. There was no strong ally to help us and no Navy to evacuate the force, even had it been desirable to do so. It has been hailed as a disaster but perhaps the judgment of history will be that all the effort and money expended on the defence of Malaya and the sacrifice and subsequent suffering of many of those who fought in the Malaya campaign were not in vain. The gain of ten weeks and the losses inflicted on the enemy may well have had a bigger influence than was realised at the time on the failure of the Japanese to reach even more important parts of our Empire.

691. An analysis of what has been said in this Despatch shows that a great many of the causes which contributed to our defeat in Malaya had a common origin, namely the lack of readiness of our Empire for war. Our shortage in light naval coastal craft and in modern aircraft, our lack of tanks, the lack of training of most of our troops—especially the reinforcements—the lack of experience of modern war of some of the senior commanders and the weakness of our intelligence service can all be attributed to a failure to prepare for war at the proper time. This unpreparedness is no new experience. It is traditional in the British Empire. But it is becoming more and more expensive and, as the tempo of war increases, more and more dangerous. I submit that the security of the Empire can only be assured by making proper provision for its defence in time of peace. Even if this involves increased financial expenditure, the money will be well spent if it acts as an insurance against war or at least against a repetition of the disasters which befell us in the early stages of this war. If the Malayan campaign, in conjunction with other campaigns, has done anything to bring this fact home to the peoples of our Empire, it will not have been without merit.

A. E. PERCIVAL,  
Lieut.-General,  
*Formerly General Officer Commanding Malaya.*

## APPENDIX "A".

## DEDUCTIONS FROM JAPANESE APPRECIATION OF THE ATTACK ON SINGAPORE 1937. (See Section VI paragraph 21).

1. The use of territory in Southern Siam by the Japanese is a contingency which demands our careful study. It would enable them both to cut off our food supplies from Siam and also to establish Air Forces within striking distance of Malaya. Naval and Air Forces of sufficient strength to frustrate such an attempt are necessary. In addition everything possible should be done by diplomatic methods to keep the Siamese friendly to us.

2. The defence of the Northern Area of Malaya and of Johore is assuming increased importance. The scale of landing attacks, which was formerly confined to raids by parties of about 200 men, has now greatly increased. On the other hand, the defence of the Northern Area, as far as the Army is concerned, is still entrusted to the Federated Malay States Volunteer Force, assisted by certain units of the Straits Settlements and of the Unfederated Malay States, while the defence of Johore is entrusted to the Johore Military Forces, assisted by part of the Johore Volunteer Engineers.

None of these forces can be considered adequate in all circumstances for the task in hand. At least one Regular Infantry Bn., with R.A. and R.E. attached, is required for the Penang-Province Wellesley Area, and a similar force must be available to strengthen the forces in Southern Malaya.

3. Within Malaya itself the threat from the enemy within our gates is a very real one and is rapidly increasing. The possibility of attempts at sabotage by enemy nationals resident in Malaya has always been accepted. The number of these nationals compared with the strength of the garrison is now so great that it would be within their powers to do extensive damage unless proper precautions are taken to avoid it.

Recently this threat has been increased by the danger of civil disturbance. Labour in Malaya is being organised and the present return to prosperity provides a fruitful field for paid agitators.

It must be expected that an enemy would take advantage of all these conditions and that military operations would be prefaced by sabotage, and perhaps by labour troubles, on a large scale. In these circumstances, it is quite certain that the Police will be unable to assume the responsibilities under the Defence Scheme which hitherto they have accepted. Further

responsibilities would fall on the military for which Infantry would be required. It might not be possible to spare them from the present garrison.

4. The problem of the defence of Singapore has been greatly affected by the new Combined Operations equipment recently used by the Japanese on the China Coasts—in particular, the special landing craft in large numbers, the landing craft "carriers," the sea tanks, etc. The effect of this is that large numbers of men could be put into landing craft out of range of our fixed defences and thrown in a short space of time on to our beaches. In particular the beaches between Singapore Town and Changi have become more vulnerable than previously.

A strengthening of our Air Forces, of our local defence Naval Vessels and of our Beach Defences is required. In connection with the latter, it is for consideration whether authority should not now be sought to erect permanent defences in peace-time in the Siglap, Ayer Gomureh and Changi Sectors.

5. The Air Forces available in Malaya must be strong enough to deal with the scale of attack indicated in the appreciation and must be certain of being able to prevent the special landing craft "carriers" from closing our shores. They are not at present strong enough.

6. The Local Naval Craft, i.e. destroyers etc., which it is intended to base on Singapore are badly needed. Their arrival should not be delayed.

7. The probable effect of the fixed and A/M.T.B. defences, when completed, will be to act as a deterrent against daylight and M.T.B. attacks. The greater damage is likely to be landing attacks under cover of darkness. To counter this danger more Infantry are required. Singapore cannot be considered safe unless reinforcements are brought in before the attack develops. At least two additional battalions are required in the Island itself.

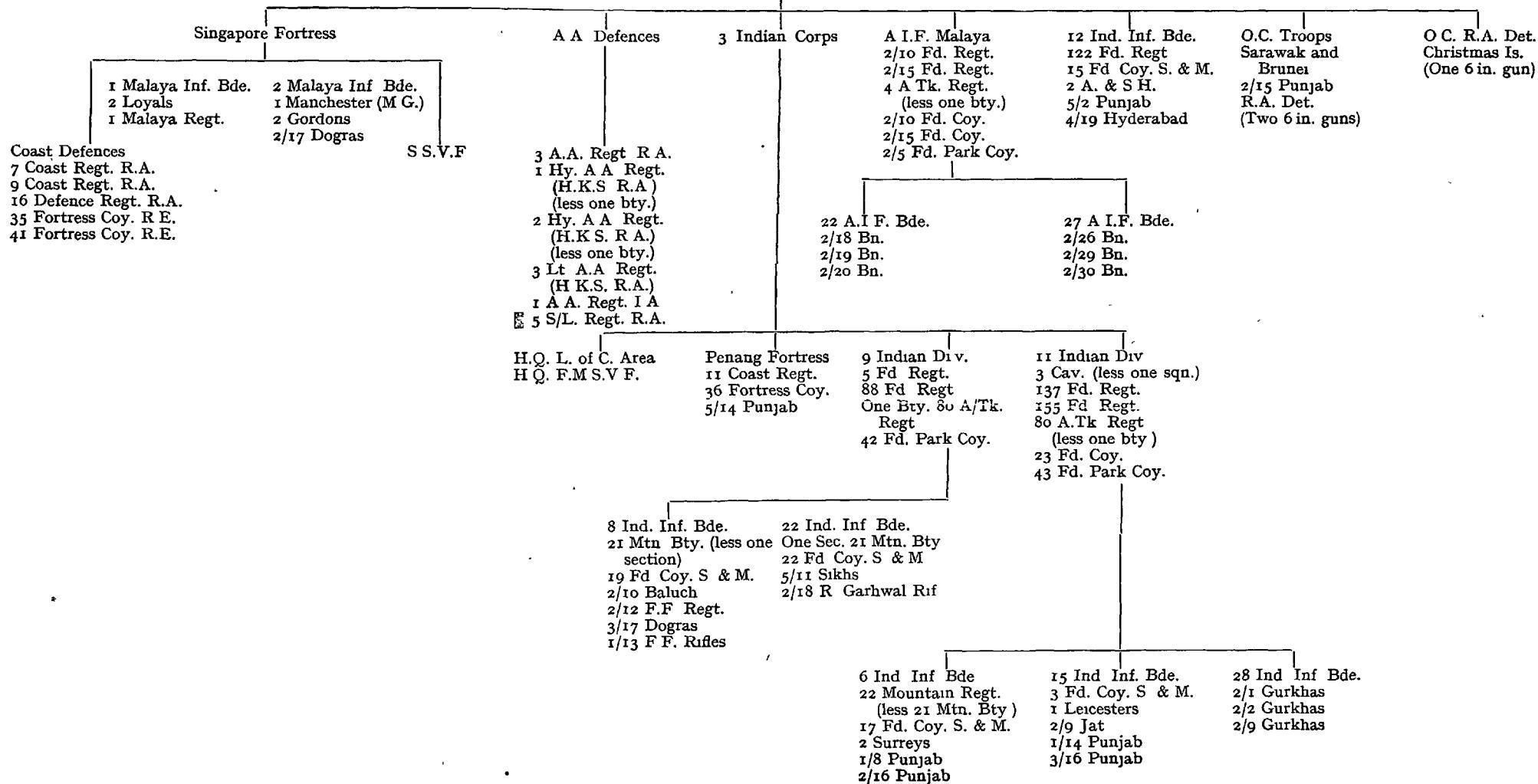
Further, the efficiency of the Volunteer units is still impaired by lack of equipment. It is suggested that a 3-year plan should be worked out, aiming at all requisites being available at the end of that period. If the money cannot be found under the present system, a new system must be adopted.

8. In the light of this appreciation and of recent information, the food supply situation is not satisfactory. The only really satisfactory solution will be to ensure that at any given time the necessary stocks are available within Malaya itself.

A.E.P.

## APPENDIX "B".

MALAYA COMMAND  
ORDER OF BATTLE—8 DECEMBER, 1941  
H.Q. MALAYA COMMAND



## APPENDIX "C."

23rd December, 1941:

HEADQUARTERS MALAYA COMMAND ORDER  
No. 28.

The broad policy is to continue opposition to the enemy on the mainland to cover the arrival of our reinforcements.

5. 3 *Indian Corps*.—Will fight the enemy wherever met and will NOT give ground till forced to subject to the condition that the Corps must remain in being as a fighting formation.

It is of importance to cover Kuala Lumpur as long as possible owing to the large amount of material stored in that area.

The lateral road Jerantut—Raub—Kuala Kubu provides the main communication between East and West Malaya. This important factor should be given full consideration in the conduct of the battle.

6. It is the intention to withdraw the Kuantan garrison at a time to be decided later, dependent upon the development of operations elsewhere and upon climatic conditions. Preliminary arrangements will be put in hand forthwith.

7. On completion of the withdrawal of the garrisons from Kelantan and Kuantan, the role of the 9 Indian Division will be:—

(a) to protect the Line of Communication Gemas—Kuala Lipis.

(b) to prevent the enemy repairing and using the Line of Communication Kuala Lipis—Kuala Krai.

(c) to form a reserve in the area Raub—Bentong.

8. The 11 Indian Division should therefore, if forced to fall back from its present position, fight the enemy in South Perak under instructions to be issued by the Commander, 3 Indian Corps, who will ensure that the operations of the two divisions are co-ordinated.

9. The Commander, 3 Indian Corps, will also be prepared for landings on the west coast of Malaya. For this purpose a small naval flotilla is being formed and will be based on Port Swettenham.

10. A.I.F.—While retaining his main forces for the defence of the east coast, the Commander, A.I.F., will at the same time make preliminary arrangements to deal with (a) an enemy advance down the main Kuala Lumpur—Singapore road (b) landings by small enemy forces on the west coast of Malaya.

11. C.A.A.D.—The C.A.A.D. will be prepared to provide the maximum possible A.A. protection for ships arriving with reinforcements while they are unloading.

12. *Singapore Fortress*.—The Commander, Singapore Fortress, will arrange for reconnaissance of the north shore of Singapore Island to select positions for the defence of possible landing places.

14. There must be NO unnecessary withdrawals.

15. Arrangements are being made by Headquarters Malaya Command to harass the enemy's communications.

Similar arrangements should be made by subordinate formations whenever the opportunity offers.

## APPENDIX "D."

Subject:—

## TACTICS.

Comd. 3 Ind. Corps.

Comd. A.I.F. Malaya.

Comd. Singapore Fortress.

1. The operations on land in Malaya have developed in a way which probably few of us anticipated to the full before the war started. There have been some normal attacks by formed bodies of the enemy, in which our adversaries have not shown up to any special advantage except that they have shown at times fanatical courage. But the operations have tended to develop more and more on guerrilla lines. The enemy is trying to dislodge us from our positions by flanking and encircling movements and by attacks on our communications. He has the advantage that he is far less dependent on his communications than we are, and also that, being rice-eaters, his soldiers are able to live on the country for longer periods than are ours. As I have said before, his Army is an Army of gangsters, relying for success more on weakening the morale of the troops than on any particular skill with his weapons. All reports go to show that, whereas his mortar fire is actually accurate but not very destructive, his small arms fire is generally wild and comparatively ineffective.

2. I believe that our young and inexperienced troops are now getting their second wind. I am confident that, if well led, they will prove their superiority over the enemy. We must play the enemy at his own game. It is developing into a guerrilla war, so let us also adopt guerrilla tactics. Formations should reduce their transport as far as possible by sending all vehicles which are not immediately wanted well to the rear. Every platoon and section should be taught to become both tank hunters and Japanese hunters. The object must be to destroy as many Japanese as possible and also to destroy the morale by constantly attacking him.

To do this we must have a good local intelligence organization. Every unit at least should have attached to it a Malay speaking and if possible Chinese speaking local European who should be able to build up a local intelligence organization. Some of these have already been made available: endeavours will be made to supply others on application.

3. While our policy for the present is to keep our forces in being as fighting formations this does not mean that casualties must always be avoided. Provided greater losses are inflicted on the enemy, casualties can and should be accepted within reasonable limits. The doctrine to be inculcated into every officer and man is that they must always be looking for a way of getting at the enemy. If they are cut off, they are well placed for attacking the enemy from behind, and should make every effort to do this before seeking to rejoin their own unit.

If on the other hand the enemy succeeds in getting behind us we must turn round and fight him. It is a guerrilla war and must be fought with guerrilla tactics.

A. E. PERCIVAL,  
Lieutenant-General,  
General Officer Commanding,  
Malaya.

6th January, 1942.

## APPENDIX "E."

MALAYA COMMAND OPERATION INSTRUCTION  
No. 33.*Information.*

1. Enemy has continued attacks on 11 Ind Div which has suffered heavily. 9 Ind Div is fresher but weak.

*Intention.*

2. Malaya Comd, in conjunction with R.N., R.A.F. and civil defence services will continue to ensure security of Singapore Naval Base.

*Method.*

3. Singapore Fortress will send one regular Ind bn to relieve A.I.F. bn in area Kota Tinggi on 10th January, 1942.

4. Comd A.I.F. Malaya will take over from 3 Ind Corps operational control of Settlement of Malacca and that part of Johore north of line G. Besar—Labis—Semerah with effect from receipt of this order.

5. A.I.F. will concentrate one A.I.F. bde gp (less two coys on Kluang and Kahang aerodromes) in area Segamat as soon as possible.

6. 45 Ind Inf Bde Gp will come under comd of A.I.F. Malaya with effect from receipt of this order.

7. 3 Ind Corps will withdraw from present posns into Johore, covered by maximum possible demolitions. Withdrawal will be carried out by rail and by M.T. as ordered by the Corps Comd.

"Withdrawal will be covered by rear-guards on the demolitions (.) A.I.F. as soon as it can do so is to send forward mobile detachments into Negeri Sembilan to relieve rear-guards of 3 Ind Corps and harass and delay the enemy by demolitions."

8. On entering Johore, 9 Ind Div and one twelve gun bty 80 A.Tk Regt will come under comd of Comd A.I.F. Malaya. 3 Ind Corps will arrange for G and Q staff officers of 9 Ind Div to report to Adv H.Q. A.I.F. Malaya as soon as possible for liaison purposes.

9. 3 Ind Corps less 9 Ind Div and one bty 80 A.Tk Regt will, on withdrawal, take over operational responsibility for Southern Johore up to and incl the line Endau—G. Beremban—Kluang—Batu Pahat. Date on which 3 Ind Corps will assume this responsibility will be fixed later. Until this date is notified, Comd A.I.F. Malaya will be operationally responsible for whole of State of Johore and Settlement of Malacca.

3 Ind Corps will be prepared to provide one bde gp of 11 Ind Div to take place of A.I.F. tps on rd Kahang—Kluang and to relieve two coys A.I.F. at Kahang and Kluang aerodromes (see para 5 above).

10. During latter stages of withdrawal, 3 Ind Corps will detail a staff officer to be at Adv H.Q. A.I.F. Malaya to advise as to when rds forward of posns held by tps under Comd A.I.F. Malaya may be demolished.

11. Comd Johore Malacca Area will continue to be responsible for administration of comd depots and units not allotted to formations in State of Johore and Settlement of Malacca.

12. 3 Ind Corps and A.I.F. Malaya will have equal running rights on all rds in Johore.

*Communications.*

13. Adv H.Q. A.I.F. Malaya will be established at Labis. Rear H.Q. A.I.F. Malaya will remain at Johore Bahru. H.Q. 3 Ind. Corps will be established at Johore Bahru after withdrawal.

K. S. TORRANCE,

*Brigadier.*

*General Staff, Malaya Command.*

9th January, 1942.

1220 hrs.

## APPENDIX "F."

MALAYA COMMAND OPERATION INSTRUCTION  
No. 35.*Information.*

I. (a) *Enemy.* 5 Division (H.Q. Labis) operating astride the road Segamat—Ayer Hitam and has Guards Division on the axis Muar—Ayer Hitam.

(b) *Own Troops.* Our forward troops are holding North and West of Yong Peng road junction. We also hold Batu Pahat.

*Intention.*

2. Our troops will be withdrawn to-night to positions covering Kluang and Ayer Hitam and including Batu Pahat.

*Method.*

3. Yong Peng road junction will be held during the withdrawal under arrangements to be made by Westforce. 53 Brigade Group less Loyals will be withdrawn under orders Westforce clearing Yong Peng road junction by midnight 23-24th January and will come under orders Comd. 3 Indian Corps on passing Ayer Hitam cross roads. Loyals will revert to Comd. Westforce.

Troops of 9 Indian Division operating on road Labis—Ayer Hitam will follow 53 Infantry Brigade under orders issued by Westforce.

4. Westforce will come under command of 3 Indian Corps as soon as last troops have been withdrawn south of Yong Peng road junction.

5. Garrison at Kahang may be withdrawn to Jemaluang area at discretion of Comd. 3 Indian Corps. Comd. Westforce will arrange flanking protection on the road Kluang—Jemaluang.

6. Main L. of C. Batu Pahat will be via west coast road.

*Administrative.*

7. The Comd. of the Kluang Area will be made responsible that the R.A.F. Petrol Dump at the Kluang Aerodrome which the Army is now using is destroyed if necessary to prevent it falling into the hands of the enemy.

*Inter-Communication.*

8. H.Q. 3 Indian Corps Johore Bahru. H.Q. Westforce, Rengam Area. H.Q. 12 Indian Division is moving to Pontian Kechil.

9. Ack.

K. S. TORRANCE,

*Brigadier.*

*General Staff, Malaya Command.*

Advance H.Q.M.C.

23rd January, 1942.

T.O.O. 1920.

## APPENDIX "G."

MINUTES OF CONFERENCE HELD AT  
HEADQUARTERS, WESTFORCE.

1515 HOURS. 25TH JANUARY, 1942.

Present—G.O.C. (Lieut.-General PERCIVAL).  
G.O.C. 3 Indian Corps (Lieut.-General Sir LEWIS HEATH).  
Comd. Westforce (Major-General GORDON BENNETT).  
Comd. II Indian Division (Major-General KEY).

1. Comd. II Indian Division reported that the force at Batu Pahat had been heavily engaged all the morning and that the coast road had been blocked near Senggarang.

2. Comd. Westforce reported that the situation at Kluang was confused but that we were still holding the Kluang road junction and he believed the counter attack carried out by the Sikhs had been successful.

3. The following decisions were taken:—

(a) Order the Batu Pahat Garrison to withdraw at once and link up with 53 Infantry Brigade in the Senggarang area.

(b) Westforce to withdraw to-night to the general line S. Sayong Halt—S. Benut. This position to be held until the night 27-28th January at least. Subsequent withdrawals to take place to positions, to be laid down in advance, which would in turn be held for a minimum fixed period and longer if possible.

(c) Movement of Eastforce and II Division to conform to that of Westforce, under orders to be issued by 3 Indian Corps.

(d) In view of a possible threat to the Pontian Kechil area Comd. Westforce to hold a good battalion in reserve, whenever possible, which could be made available to move rapidly to that flank.

K. S. TORRANCE,  
*Brigadier,*  
*General Staff, Malaya Command.*

Advance H.Q.M.C.  
26th January, 1942.

## APPENDIX "H"

PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT BY G.O.C. MALAYA  
FEBRUARY, 1942

The battle of Malaya has come to an end and the battle of Singapore has started. For nearly two months our troops have fought an enemy on the mainland who has had the advantage of great air superiority and considerable freedom of movement by sea.

Our task has been both to impose losses on the enemy and to gain time to enable the forces of the Allies to be concentrated for this struggle in the Far East. Today we stand beleaguered in our island fortress.

Our task is to hold this fortress until help can come—as assuredly it will come. This we are determined to do.

In carrying out this task we want the help of every man and woman in the fortress. There is work for all to do. Any enemy who sets foot in our fortress must be dealt with immediately. The enemy within our gates must be

ruthlessly weeded out. There must be no more loose talk and rumour-mongering. Our duty is clear. With firm resolve and fixed determination we shall win through.

## APPENDIX "J"

LETTER RE IMPLEMENTATION OF SCORCHED EARTH POLICY ON SINGAPORE ISLAND

It is of the utmost importance that no material of military value should be allowed in any circumstances to fall into the hands of the enemy. In the past, mistakes have been made owing to the responsibility for carrying out the destruction when the time comes not being clearly defined.

2. The policy approved by the Chiefs of Staff as regards Singapore is that as much surplus material as possible should be disposed of at once, either by removal or destruction, provided this can be done without destroying public "morale." As regards the rest, every possible preparation must be made at once and detailed schemes drawn up. Destruction by explosion or fire is normally calculated to destroy morale.

3. Responsibility for preparation and execution of schemes will rest on the military authority who is responsible for the dump, depot, or establishment concerned, i.e., Comd. H.Q. (Head of service concerned) will be responsible for Command installations; formation H.Q. for dumps or depots under their control.

4. Food stocks, medical stores, hospital equipment and water supply installations will NOT be destroyed.

5. As regards the orders to put these schemes into effect, if time permits the order will be given by me. It will be readily realised, however, that in the turmoil and confusion of an attack on Singapore it may not be possible to issue any order. Responsible authorities must therefore ensure that there are always on the spot day and night sufficient personnel with a reliable commander who will in the last resort and failing my orders act on his own initiative to ensure that the policy of His Majesty's Government is carried out.

A. E. PERCIVAL,  
*Lieutenant-General,*  
*General Officer Commanding, Malaya.*

Adv. H.Q.M.C.

1st February, 1942.

## APPENDIX "K"

MALAYA COMMAND OPERATION INSTRUCTION  
No. 40

Ref. Map Johore and Singapore 1/25,000

1. Enemy attacked Western Area in strength 9th February and succeeded in penetrating to the East of Tengah aerodrome. A party of the enemy is reported to have blocked the road Hong Kah Village 6917—road junction 6313 in rear of 44 Ind. Inf. Bde.

2. A.I.F. Malaya have been ordered to withdraw to and hold the line S. Kranji—Bulim Village 6919—S. Jurong. 6/15 Bde. has been placed under comd. of A.I.F. Malaya.

3. Should it be impossible to hold the enemy on the line mentioned in para. 2 above, G.O.C.

Malaya intends to withdraw to an inner position on which the final battle for Singapore will be fought.

4. General line of this inner position will be:

West Bank of Kallang River in 8711—thence west of the inundated area in 8611, 8612, and 8712 to Mt. Vernon 8814—north of Pierce Reservoir 8118—Hill 581 in 7616—west of Bukit Timah Village 7515—pt. 105 in 7412—Pasir Panjang Village 7409—thence along the south coast of Singapore Island to west bank of Rochore River in 8710. Pulau Blakang Mati, Pulau Brani, Pulau Tekong and the defended perimeter of Pengerang will also be held.

5. This position will be divided into three Areas:

Northern Area—Comd.—Comd. 3 Ind. Corps. Troops—3 Ind. Corps of 11 Ind. Div. and 18 Div.

Southern Area—Comd.—Comd. Southern Area (Major - General Keith Simmons). Troops—existing garrison of Southern Area.

Western Area—Comd.—Comd. A.I.F. Malaya.

*Note.*—Allocation of 12 Ind. Inf. Bde. and 44 Ind. Inf. Bde. will be decided later. At least one of these formations will be in Command Reserve.

6. *Boundaries.*—The defended area defined in para. 4 above will be divided into sectors by boundaries as follows:

Between 3 Ind. Corps and A.I.F. Incl. A.I.F. Electric Transmission Line 7716—incl. Swiss Rifle Club 7715—incl. road junction 780143—incl. Bukit Timah Road—road junction 838117.

*Between 3 Ind. Corps and Southern Area.*  
Incl. 3 Ind. Corps Macpherson Road—Serangoon Road—excl. Farrer Park—road junction 838117.

*Between A.I.F. and Southern Area.* Incl. Southern Area track 750107—Ayer Raja Road—Alexandra Road—road junction 809092—incl. road junction 812102—Grange Road—incl. road junction 827102—excl. road junction 829108—excl. road junction 838117.

Comd. Southern Area will be responsible for defence of Pulau Blakang Mati, Pulau Brani, Pulau Tekong and Pengerang.

7. Reconnaissances of Areas will be carried out at once and the plans for the movement of formations into the areas allotted to them will be prepared. Formations will arrange to move back and locate in their new areas units located in their present areas which are under command of H.Q. Malaya Command.

8. C.A.A.D. will remain responsible to G.O.C. Malaya for A.A. Defences.

9. H.Q. of G.O.C. Malaya will be located at Fort Canning (Battle H.Q.) together with H.Q. Southern Area.

10. Administrative adjustments which can be made now to fit in with the above organization will be put in hand immediately.

II. ACK.

Lieut.-Colonel  
for Brigadier,  
General Staff, Malaya Command.

Adv. H.Q.M.C.  
10th February, 1942.  
T.O.O. 0050.

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