

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 Muri 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 reformed 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