

No. 84 (B) Squadron.

697. This unit arrived as a reinforcement much strung out after a long flight from the Middle East. Its crews set a fine example of throwing themselves into the fight at once under many handicaps. Particular credit is due to the Commanding Officer, the late Wing Commander J. R. Jeudwine D.S.O., O.B.E., D.F.C., whose leadership and courage were a great inspiration to others. He led a small party which escaped from Java in an open boat across the 1000 mile crossing of the Timor Sea to Australia, a typical example of his spirit.

M.V.A.F.

698. At a critical time of the fighting in Southern Malaya, a number of successful reconnaissances were carried out by this unit to locate bodies of our troops who had been cut off by the enemy, and to locate the enemy's infiltrating forces. These reconnaissances were performed in unarmed Moth aircraft (originally the property of Malaya's flying clubs) at tree top height over a battle field dominated by Japanese Zero fighters. Their value was great to the Army, then closely engaged with the enemy. Pre-eminent in this work was the late Flight Lieutenant Henry Dane, M.V.A.F., whose qualities as a leader and a man were a byword amongst those who knew him. His example was largely responsible for the excellent work done throughout by the M.V.A.F.

Technical Personnel.

699. A word of recognition is due to the Technical Personnel of the Command.

700. Before war broke out they handled great quantities of stores and equipment which arrived in Malaya greatly in excess of the new stations' power, and that of the Command's backward maintenance organisation, to absorb them. Many aircraft were erected and rapidly passed into commission and many others were overhauled during the period of the Command's expansion.

701. During the war itself, technical personnel worked untiringly in most difficult circumstances. Aircraft and equipment had to be dispersed as a protection against bombing, mostly to improvised dispersal points in rubber plantations or scrub. There they were erected, overhauled and serviced with little or no protection against tropical downpours.

702. An example of such work was the erection of the first 50 Hurricanes which arrived in Singapore in mid January 1942; it was a particularly fine feat. Within a few days all were ready to take the air, the first in under 48 hours: during that time they had been unloaded in crates at the docks, conveyed many miles by road to scattered hide-outs in rubber plantations, and there rapidly erected despite tropical rain, blackout conditions at night and a great shortage of specialised tools.

703. It would be invidious to select any particular unit for special mention. Suffice it to say that most meritorious technical work of all kinds was performed by units throughout the command at all stages of the operations in Malaya and the N.E.I. under very severe conditions. Not least of these handicaps was an almost complete breakdown of the backward

maintenance organisation of the command which was brought about by circumstances that first overloaded and then disrupted it.

704. I will mention only one name, that of the late Wing Commander E. B. Steedman, whose unflagging efforts did much to inspire others to overcome their difficulties. He subsequently lost his life as a prisoner of war for refusing, it is believed, to divulge technical information about Spitfires. His spirit remained unbroken to the end.

Personnel in the N.E.I.

705. Those who landed in unavoidable disorganisation in the N.E.I. were required to reorganise into a fighting force within a few days with very limited resources indeed. I wish to express my gratitude to them for the very loyal manner in which they gave their best services, in particular to our squadrons who had to face a well organised enemy in overwhelming numbers. Their behaviour is particularly creditable, coming as it did after many reverses, and was in the best tradition of the Service.

Finally, I am indebted to all those who, at the end, were willing, despite shortage of arms, lack of training, and lack of most essentials, to fight in the hills in a form of warfare about which they knew nothing, namely in infantry warfare and in the jungle at that, and to do so against an enemy whom they knew to be well-equipped and highly trained in this form of fighting. That they were unable to put their willingness to the test was no fault of theirs. I wish to place on record my gratitude for the loyal response they gave to the call made upon them. Their conduct deserves the highest praise.

SUMMARY.

706. One can summarise in a few words the reason for the initial reverses in the Far East.

707. We lost the first round there because we, as an Empire, were not prepared for war on the scale necessary for the purpose. When war broke out in Europe it absorbed the Empire's resources to such an extent that only a fraction of the strength could be deployed which had been calculated to be necessary for withstanding Japanese aggression in Malaya—navy, army, air force and civil organisation alike being much below the required mark. When Japan attacked she proved to be even more formidable than had been expected, the result being that she swamped our underdeveloped defences before they could be supported.

708. Mistakes undoubtedly occurred, as they always do in war when the unexpected happens on the scale that it did in the Far East. But credit should be given to those on the spot who did their best to take the first brunt of the enemy's overwhelming strength with inadequate means, and who gained thereby the necessary time for other forces to be collected to prevent his further advance towards Australia and India.

P. C. MALTBY,
Air Vice-Marshal.

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