

Ministry of Defence
Naval Historical Branch

WAR WITH JAPAN

VOLUME I AND VOLUME II

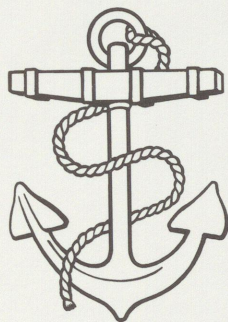


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Ministry of Defence
(NAVY)

WAR WITH JAPAN

VOLUME I
BACKGROUND TO THE WAR



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CONTENTS

	<i>page</i>
PREFACE	vii
CHAPTER I	
Factors affecting Allied Strategy	
SECTION	
1. The area of operations	1
2. Climate	2
3. Alliances and agreements, 1902-1936	3
4. The Philippine Islands	4
5. The U.S. naval and air bases	5
6. Problem of the Netherlands East Indies	5
7. British interests in the Far East	6
8. Strategic importance of the Far East	6
9. Strategic importance of Singapore	7
10. Effect of disarmament	8
11. Defencelessness of Hong Kong	8
CHAPTER II	
The Problem of Far Eastern Defence	
12. The steps of Japanese aggression	11
13. United States imposes economic sanctions on Japan	13
14. Defence problem in the Far East on eve of European war	14
15. British naval forces in China reduced	15
16. Anglo-Japanese incidents	16
17. Far East defence problem re-examined	17
18. Defence of Australia and New Zealand	19
19. Negotiations with Indo-China after fall of France, June 1940	20
20. Japanese penetration of French Indo-China	22
21. Japanese domination of Siam	22
22. Japan occupies south Indo-China, July 1941	23
23. Pressure on the Dutch East Indies	25
24. Threat to Burma	25
25. Mr. Churchill's views	26
26. Operation 'Matador'	27
27. Military and air commands in Far East co-ordinated, October 1940	28
CHAPTER III	
Measures to Secure International Co-operation	
28. Difficulty of forming a united front	29
29. The Tripartite Pact, September 1940	29
30. Singapore Defence Conference, October 1940	31
31. Raiders in the Pacific and Indian Oceans	33
32. Anglo-Dutch staff conversations, November 1940	34
33. United States prepares for war	35
34. War potential of the United States	36
35. Anglo-Dutch-Australian Conference, February 1941. The 'A.D.A.' agreement	37
36. Protection of Australian and New Zealand shipping	39

CONTENTS—*contd.*

CHAPTER III—*contd.*

SECTION		<i>page</i>
37.	United States-British staff conversations in Washington: A B C—1	40
38.	Employment of the United States fleets	44
39.	Japanese-Russian Neutrality Pact, 13th April 1941 ..	45
40.	Reinforcement of Singapore	46
41.	American-Dutch-British (A.D.B.) conversations, April 1941	47
42.	Reinforcement of Hong Kong	49
43.	Draft agreement (A.D.B. 2) drawn up, August 1941 ..	50
44.	British-Dutch (B.D.) conversations, Singapore, April 1941	51
45.	The operational plans (Plenaps)	51
46.	Germany attacks Russia, 22nd June 1941	53
47.	Freezing of Japanese assets, July 1941	54
48.	Japanese preparations for war	55
49.	The Atlantic Conference, August 1941	56
50.	War breaks out, 7th December 1941	57

CHAPTER IV

Military Potential of Japan

51.	The imponderables in Japan's position	59
52.	Japanese industrial potential	60
53.	Manpower	61
54.	Economic situation of Japan	62
55.	Coal	64
56.	Steel	64
57.	Petroleum	65
58.	Rail transport	68
59.	Japan's merchant shipping	68
60.	Naval construction and repair	70
61.	Japanese shipbuilding	71

CHAPTER V

The Japanese Navy

62.	Modernization of the Fleet, 1936	73
63.	Organization of Japanese Combined Fleet	73
64.	Operational employment of Japanese naval forces ..	76
65.	Japanese submarines	77
66.	Japanese naval air force	79
67.	Suicide tactics and weapons	80
68.	Research and inventions	80
69.	Co-operation with the army	81

CONTENTS—*contd.*

CHAPTER VI

Japanese War Plans

SECTION		<i>page</i>
70.	Japanese naval planning organization	83
71.	Basic plan	84
72.	Supporting plans	85
73.	Protection of Japanese lines of communication ..	86
74.	Plan for further expansion	87
75.	Period of consolidation	88
76.	The 'Z' operation plan, May 1943	88
77.	The 'Y' operation plan, May 1943	89
78.	The 'A' operation plan, May 1944	90
79.	The 'Sho' or 'Operation Victory,' July 1944	90
80.	The 'Ten' operation plans, March 1945	92
81.	The 'Ketsu' or 'Final' operation plan, March 1945 ..	93

CHAPTER VII

Allied Strategy and Control

82.	United Nations Control set up	95
83.	United States command system	95
84.	Strategic theatres delimited, March 1942	96
85.	Defence of the Indian Ocean	98
86.	Decision to defeat Germany before Japan	99
87.	Importance of China	99
88.	Employment of air power as the striking arm	100
89.	Defensive strategy	101
90.	Period of Allied holding operations ends, June 1942 ..	103
91.	Limited offensive phase	104

CHAPTER VIII

Plan for Defeat of Japan

92.	Basic requirements for invasion	107
93.	Central Pacific campaign planned	108
94.	Blockade by air	109
95.	Central Pacific force formed	109
96.	Dangers of divided control	110
97.	Decision to exploit air superiority	112
98.	Aerial preparations for invasion of Japan	113
99.	Work of the submarines	114
100.	Surrender of Japan	114

CHAPTER IX

Surrender of Japan

101.	Recognition of defeat, Spring 1944	117
102.	Peace Administration formed, April 1945	118
103.	Faulty basic strategy	119
104.	Sea power and blockade	119
105.	Decision to surrender	120

APPENDIXES

		<i>page</i>
A.	United States air forces	123
B.	Extracts from United States-British staff conversations	125
C.	Japanese fleet readiness, 1931-1945	132A
D.	Japanese military potential	132B
E.	Japanese operational plan for commencing hostilities ..	134
F.	Course of action of Japanese navy in operations against U.S.A., United Kingdom and Netherlands	137

BIBLIOGRAPHY

INDEX

ILLUSTRATIONS

	<i>Frontispiece</i>
Admiral Sir Percy Noble	<i>Facing page</i> 20
Singapore Naval Base	" " 20
H.M.A.S. <i>Sydney</i>	" " 21
Kowloon	" " 36
Japanese battleship <i>Yamato</i>	" " 36
Japanese battleship <i>Kongo</i>	" " 36
Japanese light cruiser <i>Hosho</i>	" " 36
Admirals Layton, Helfrich and Hart, Allied Commanders-in-Chief in the Far East on the outbreak of war	} <i>Between pages</i> 36-37
Admiral I. Yamamoto, C.-in-C., Japanese Combined Fleet	}
Vice-Admiral C. Nagumo, C.-in-C., Japanese First Air Fleet	
Japanese battleship <i>Ise</i> after fitting of flight deck	<i>Facing page</i> 37
Japanese converted carrier <i>Jango</i>	" " 52
Japanese cruiser <i>Atago</i>	" " 52
Japanese submarine <i>I/401</i> showing aircraft hangar and catapult	" " 52
Japanese cruiser submarine of the <i>I-5</i> class (1,900 tons) ..	" " 52
Floatplane taking off from Japanese submarine	} <i>Between pages</i> 52-53
Japanese Small Army Supply submarine <i>Yu-3</i>	
H.M.S. <i>Dorsetshire</i>	}
U.S. <i>Essex</i> class aircraft carrier	
U.S. <i>L.C.I. (G)</i> firing rockets	<i>Facing page</i> 53
H.M.S. <i>Prince of Wales</i>	" " 68
H.M.S. <i>Repulse</i>	" " 68
U.S. Hellcat taking off	" " 69

	<i>page</i>
FIG. 1.—Destruction of Japanese Merchant Ships Tonnage by Principal Allied Agents	120

PLANS

(at end of text)

1. The Eastern theatre and Pacific
2. Political state in 1941
3. Area of operations: 5,000 miles from north to south,
6,500 miles from east to west
4. Distances
5. Areas of responsibility
6. The ABDA and ANZAC areas
7. Japan

PREFACE

This volume is the first of six that will deal with the naval operations in the war with Japan. As its title implies, it is intended to provide a background against which the events described in subsequent volumes may be seen in correct perspective. After war with Germany broke out in September 1939 few naval officers had time to study the steps of Japan's aggression, the most dangerous manifestations of which occurred between that date and December 1941, when she plunged into full-scale war. Even fewer officers knew of the measures being taken in secret to improve our defensive power in the Far East if we should be forced into war. Both these subjects are dealt with in the present volume of the Naval Staff History.

Two further subjects are covered. It was thought useful to provide a short summary of the strategy of the war with Japan, which is less well known to British naval officers than that of the war in the west since it fell to the Americans to conduct it, at least, as far as concerns the Pacific where most of the fighting at sea took place.

Finally, it was felt necessary to describe Japan's military and economic situation, for it is only since the war ended that American research teams have laid bare the details of Japan's war potential. Indeed, it is not too much to say that the full story of the war could not have been told but for the work of organizations such as the United States Naval Technical Mission to Japan, the United States Strategic Bombing Survey, the Joint Army-Navy Assessment Committee, and the Allied Translator and Interpreter Section of General MacArthur's staff.

The remaining five volumes will cover the operations of the war with Japan as follows:—

- Vol. II. Defensive Phase: Pearl Harbour to the Battle of Midway, with the Aleutian Operations.
- Vol. III. The Campaigns in the Solomons and New Guinea.
- Vol. IV. The South-East Asia Operations and Central Pacific Advance.
- Vol. V. Blockade of Japan.
- Vol. VI. Liberation of the Philippines and the final operations.

Operations in the Indian Ocean will be dealt with chronologically within the framework of the volumes listed.

The relevant Battle Summaries prepared by the Historical Section should be read in conjunction with the above five volumes. In them are described in detail several of the more important operations of the war, of which, in order to avoid repetition, summaries only are given in the volumes of the Naval Staff History referred to above. References to the Battle Summaries will be made in the text as necessary.

CHAPTER I

FACTORS AFFECTING ALLIED STRATEGY

(See Plans 1, 2, 3, 4)

1. THE AREA OF OPERATIONS

The area in which Japan in December 1941 undertook active operations of war extended over nearly a quarter of the habitable globe. It included the entire western Pacific and Far East, from the Aleutian Islands to Australia and from the Hawaiian Islands in mid-ocean to the Andamans in the Bay of Bengal; four thousand miles from north to south—as far as from North Cape to Suez; five thousand miles from east to west—twice the span of Europe from Lisbon to the Urals. Sporadic operations were even undertaken far beyond the confines of this area, to Madagascar and Sydney, N.S.W., and the west coast of the U.S.A.

The area was marked by three other outstanding characteristics in addition to the vastness of its spaces; great natural wealth, an absence of industrial potential, and the inability of its people to protect themselves if attacked by a foreign power. Only in the case of Japan were these characteristics reversed. Her country was poor, even the few raw materials to be found were mostly of inferior grade; she had built up the only considerable industrial complex in the Pacific and Far East; and within this area there was no nation immediately capable of standing against her armed forces.

When Japan loosed war upon this all but defenceless area the great distances involved rendered peculiarly difficult the task of the nations attacked in resisting and fighting back. For the United States, to whom it fell to lead the campaign of reconquest, the shortest route to Japan was across the top of the world. This was blocked by weather, consequently the Americans had to work down across the Equator by way of the Hawaiian Islands, towards Australia, and then north by the twin routes Solomons—New Guinea—Moluccas—Philippines; and Gilberts—Marshalls—West Carolines—Ryukus. Japan had the advantage of lying on the west side of the Pacific from which distances to the strategic areas were shorter than from the east side. Moreover, she was almost centrally situated in her chosen theatre; and with the exception of a few outlying areas, such as the Bay of Bengal, where only limited operations were undertaken, the entire theatre was included within a circle of some 3,000 nautical miles radius from Kyushu, the industrial heart of Japan. On the other hand, the main war potential of the Allies was located in the North American continent, the United Kingdom, and to a limited extent in Australia and India. Passage from Great Britain to the British base at Singapore occupied weeks; whilst 4,700 miles separated Pearl Harbour, the American base in the Hawaiian Islands from both Manila in the Philippine Islands, the furthest away American commitment, and Panama at the Pacific end of the Panama Canal. From San Francisco to Brisbane, where a U.S. base was formed, is 6,193 miles.

The work of keeping commitments such as Singapore and Manila supplied by sea involved the employment of a large amount of shipping. For instance, in the course of a year a tramp steamer could make the round trip from the west



ADMIRAL SIR PERCY NOBLE, K.C.B., C.V.O.

[Frontispiece

coast of the United States to Manila no more than perhaps two and a half times. To move to Australia from the United States the ground units and material to service the American aircraft which operated from that continent during the War required two and a half months. To land and maintain American forces in Australia entailed the employment of more than twice the ship tonnage necessary for American forces of like size in Europe or North Africa.

2. CLIMATE

With the exception of the Ryuku Islands and the Aleutians almost the entire area in which naval and military surface operations took place lay within the tropics and for the most part in their hottest region. The whole of these tropical operations were carried out in the western part of the Pacific, where temperatures are higher than on the eastern side. The trade winds sweep the warmer surface waters continually across the ocean from east to west, whilst the western side lacks also the cooling effect imparted to the eastern by the volume of cold water brought by currents and winds setting towards the Equator along the coasts of North and South America. Within the tropics the variation in temperature throughout the year is so slight as to be negligible. The climate is monotonously hot and trying to Western nations. The conditions of the sailor's life naturally cause him to be less affected by unhealthy climates than the soldier ashore. Nevertheless, the high temperatures, and the enervating effect of the excessive humidity and heat of certain areas such as the Solomon Islands and New Britain, where some of the hardest fighting occurred, and Manus in the Admiralty Islands, where a great naval base was formed, were trying to the men afloat in crowded warships.

In the early days of the war the operations of British and Dutch submarines which took place entirely within the tropics were particularly affected by the conditions, and patrols were consequently of short duration. The modern British 'S' and 'T' class boats, which began to arrive on the East Indies Station in January 1943, and subsequently worked largely from Fremantle, were fitted with air conditioning plant. This, combined with the comparative lightness of enemy anti-submarine measures, which allowed the submarines to work much on the surface, enabled them to carry out patrols of very long duration.

On shore, the Americans met the situation by mechanization; a man was never allowed to do what could be done by a machine.

In contrast to the tropics, certain operations took place in the Aleutian Islands, in a region a little below the Arctic Circle that seldom sees the sun. In winter bitterly cold and constantly swept by sudden violent gales, in summer shrouded in cold fogs, throughout the year continually under rain or snow it may be said to be one of the worst areas in the world for campaigning. These conditions particularly affected the operations of the air forces of both antagonists. In the Central Pacific, too, weather conditions are uncertain and subject to unpredictable fluctuations, rendering routine missions hazardous. As the war proceeded, however, the steady advance of the Allies in technology assisted them more and more to overcome difficulties caused by bad weather. Extension of the range of aircraft, utilization of radar, and the development of electronic aids to navigation and aircraft control all came to the operational aid of aircraft.

3. ALLIANCES AND AGREEMENTS, 1902-1936

Throughout the great area of the Pacific Ocean the strategic conditions between the two world wars were artificial, based on agreements which were kept by all parties to them with the exception of Japan, the only power in the Pacific and Far East which threatened to disturb peace through aggression. Japanese aggression may be said to have dated from 1895. In that year, on the conclusion of a successful war against China, Japan annexed Formosa, indicating her purpose of establishing herself in China. More than a generation was to pass before the fulfilment of this step in her expansion. During that period our own relations with Japan were governed by the Anglo-Japanese alliance negotiated in 1902, renewed in 1905, and re-affirmed in 1911 at a time when the decision was taken to reduce our naval strength in the Far East and concentrate it in Home waters to meet the growing naval power of Germany. A special clause was introduced into the treaty in 1911 with the object of safeguarding ourselves against all possibility of being involved in war with the United States.

Towards the end of the First World War, 1914-1919, the claims of Japan, that her geographical position lent her special interests in China, caused some uneasiness in London, Washington and the Dominions. It was not only in China that Japan had ambitions, for she was also looking towards the Pacific where in 1921 she was confirmed in occupation under Mandate of the Marianas, Caroline and Marshall Islands which she had occupied during the First World War, 1914-1919: islands lying athwart American communications with the East, and doubtfully supervised by the League of Nations. It was clear that the Anglo-Japanese Alliance despite the special clause in the 1911 treaty was a possible source of friction with the United States, and consequently at the Washington Conference of 1921/1922 for the alliance there was substituted a Four Power treaty between Great Britain, France, the United States and Japan. Under the treaty the four powers agreed that in the event of a controversy arising out of any Pacific question the whole subject would be referred to a conference of the Powers for consideration and adjustment.

Other provisions of the treaties signed at Washington were the fixing of a ratio of capital ship and aircraft carrier tonnage and a qualitative limitation on cruisers between Great Britain, the U.S.A. and Japan, and an agreement to maintain the *status quo* as regards defences and naval bases in a specified area of the Pacific including—

For Great Britain.—Hong Kong, but not Singapore or islands adjacent to Canada, Australia, or New Zealand.

For the United States.—The Philippines, Guam and the Aleutians, but not Hawaii or islands adjacent to Alaska, the Pacific coast, and Panama.

For Japan.—Formosa and the Pescadores, and the Ryuku, Bonin and Kurile Islands, but not the homeland or islands adjacent.

For Japan, this 'standstill' agreement was most valuable, the important point being the American pledge not to increase the defences of Guam or the Philippines. The American delegation no doubt conceded this in the belief, almost certainly justified, that Congress would not in any case approve the expenditure of money or the political commitments which the formation of fully defended bases at Guam and Manila would entail. The Americans were in the course of constructing defences at Guam when the 1922 treaty on the

limitation of armaments necessitated work being stopped, and it was not resumed after the termination of the treaty at the end of 1936, for the island lay in the very heart of the Mandates, a constant irritant to Japan which Congress did not desire to aggravate.¹

4. THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS

The large archipelago of the Philippine Islands is, geographically, simply a northward extension of the Netherlands East Indies. Its northernmost point is less than 200 miles from Formosa. The main route from Singapore to Hong Kong passes 360 miles to the westward of the Philippines, whilst the Palau Islands, which were under Japanese mandate, lie 420 miles to the eastward. The Philippines contained numerous anchorages suitable for naval use but the only defences were at Corregidor, at the entrance to Manila Bay, where the Americans had a secondary naval base. The facilities for operating aircraft were good, and on the outbreak of war in December 1941, the main air strength of the Americans in the Western Pacific was based in Luzon.

It had been the settled policy of the United States Government since 1916 to relinquish control of the Philippine Islands as soon as possible, and existing legislation provided for complete Philippine independence in 1946. In pursuance of this policy, and as a result of the deliberate decision of Congress, the United States' military position in the islands had been progressively weakened, and it was recognized that Manila could not be held in face of determined attack. Nevertheless, the islands were United States territory, and if attacked by the Japanese, it was possible the United States would become involved in war, though apparently it was not until the middle of 1941 that the American intentions on the subject became known to H.M. Government.² Yet the pledge to maintain the *status quo*, together with the established ratios of capital ship tonnage, had ended the ability of the United States to give immediate effective support single handed to her Far Eastern policies. Reliance on treaty promises, which they honoured, placed both the United States and Great Britain at a disadvantage with a Japan which paid mere lip service to her undertakings.

Any change in the *status quo* was a matter of close concern to the Dutch and ourselves on account of its possible reactions on the security of our communications, interests, and possessions in the Far East and on the integrity of territory of great strategic and economic importance, namely the Netherlands East Indies. Manila could furnish Japan with a valuable repair base situated on the flank of our line of communications from Singapore to Hong Kong. If the Japanese should obtain a sufficiently thorough control of the Philippines they could prepare there an expedition against Singapore secretly and an expedition to occupy Borneo could be undertaken. The Philippine air bases would increase the range of Japanese aircraft, and the Philippines would be a valuable source of supply of raw materials and a stepping stone to the oil and rubber of Borneo and the Netherlands East Indies.

¹ Even as late as 1939 and again in 1940 the House of Representatives cut out of the Navy Appropriation Bill a provision which would have permitted the development of Guam as a listening post; and when in February 1941 considerable sums were voted for the development and fortification of the base it was too late.

² 'According to information available in Singapore, it was doubtful, at any rate up to the middle of 1941, whether the Americans intended to defend the islands, or whether they did not.' Brooke-Popham, *Despatch on the Far East*, p. 15.

5. THE U.S. NAVAL AND AIR BASES

The nearest United States base for the Philippines was Pearl Harbour in Oahu Island, Hawaii. Since 1935 the Americans had given these islands first priority and provided them with more complete garrisons and munitions than any other of their overseas possessions: and in 1940 Pearl Harbour became the base of the Pacific Fleet. Nevertheless, as a fleet base Pearl Harbour suffered from grave deficiencies. Its army anti-aircraft defence was meagre; and the long range patrol aircraft of the local Army-Navy defence forces, even though supplemented by those of the Fleet, were insufficient for effective distant reconnaissance. The harbour was entered by a single channel; whilst its exposed position rendered concealment of fleet movements practically impossible in this area believed by the Americans to be filled with Japanese agents.¹ At Midway, westernmost of the Hawaiian Islands, the point of departure on patrol of United States submarines based on Pearl Harbour, the Americans had a small naval and air base, but the area of the island group was too small to enable it to be rendered capable of sustained defence. As regards other United States bases the inclusion in the '*status quo*' area of the former base at Dutch Harbour in the Aleutians had destroyed its main value; whilst the geographical position of the base at Kodiak Island, Alaska, which like the Hawaiian Islands was excluded from the '*status quo*' area limited its importance to the maintenance of communications with North Russia and the defence of North America.

Between the United States naval base at Hawaii and her almost undefended possessions Guam and the Philippines, there lay three blocks of Japanese mandated islands containing potential bases and anchorages. Visitors to these remote islands were effectively discouraged by the simple fact that Japanese ports, unless expressly opened by agreement, were legally closed to foreign ships. With the exception of the westernmost island of the Carolines, Palau, intercommunication was by Japanese vessels only, and no aircraft other than Japanese landed on any of the airfields constructed on the various islands. When finally, in 1933 Japan withdrew from the League of Nations, she kept the mandated territory, defining it as 'an integral part of the Japanese Empire.' After 1938 she made no further annual reports to the League and all pretence of international supervision vanished. The islands were increasingly treated as a closed military area. The natural result was the growth of belief that naval bases were being prepared. Actually, little was done beyond planning. Japan's naval budget was slender, and she preferred to spend her money on mobile forces rather than fixed bases and defences.

6. PROBLEM OF THE NETHERLANDS EAST INDIES

The Mandate had also brought Japan in proximity to the Netherlands East Indies, an extensive and rich area whose natural resources were coveted by the Japanese. The most important islands were Java, Sumatra and Borneo, but the group included a large number of other islands extending some 2,700 miles to

¹ On the other hand, *the Report of the Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbour Attack* (Senate 79th Congress Document No. 244), p. 54, states that Japanese Intelligence found great difficulty in obtaining information of the U.S. fleet at Hawaii, and depended on collecting, making into statistics and analysing 'bits of information obtained from naval officers at Washington, newspapers and magazines published in America, American radio broadcasts, signal intelligence, passengers and crews of ships stopping over at Honolulu, other foreign diplomatic establishments, commercial firms and similar sources.'

the east of Singapore. Distributed throughout were numerous good anchorages, and there were secondary naval bases, incapable of resisting full scale attack, at Surabaya and Tanjong Priok, both in Java. Submarine cables linked up some of the larger islands and the Dutch had developed a good system of wireless communication, though many settlements depended on occasional visits of ships for communication with the outer world.

Japan was in a position to launch against the Netherlands East Indies a full scale attack; and with a vast area to protect the problem of defence was most difficult for the Dutch. They had no fleet that could be sent from home, and their security rested ultimately on the power of the British fleet to control the sea communications in the area within which the Netherlands East Indies lay. The strategic position of Java was of great importance, for in Japanese hands it would constitute a potential threat to Singapore, Australia and the Indian Ocean. If Japanese penetration of the Netherlands East Indies had a strategic motive it was considered by the Chiefs of Staff that the eventual object would almost certainly be the neutralization of Singapore. The integrity of the Netherlands East Indies was consequently a major British interest, but under the conditions existing when the question of their defence was examined in 1936-1937 it was considered inadvisable to announce this. The Chiefs of Staff were of the opinion that Japan could not altogether ignore international reactions which might follow if she attacked the Netherlands East Indies, although such considerations would be unlikely to deter her if she saw material advantage to herself in gaining possession of the territory.

7. BRITISH INTERESTS IN THE FAR EAST

The Netherlands East Indies constituted but one of our many interests in the Far East. Apart from the Commonwealth countries of Australia and New Zealand, Malaya was a source of essential raw materials and its integrity was important to the security of the naval base at Singapore. Burma was of importance by reason of its oil resources and in connection with the sea and air communications to Singapore.

The Marshalls and Carolines marked the southern limit of Japan's territorial influence. Southward of these lay an immense number of islands over which the British, Dutch, Americans and French held sway. They were of strategic values to us as fuelling bases, possible landing grounds for air forces and positions for wireless stations. The sufficient development of a system of communications would reduce Japan's chances of using any of the islands in our possession as fuelling bases. The islands would be of value to Japan for raider operations against our trade in order, for example, to cause such dispersion of our forces as to delay the arrival of our Fleet at Singapore, or at least in going forward to Hong Kong. From these islands too, the Japanese might carry out raids on Australian and New Zealand ports in order to create an outcry for the despatch of additional forces for local defence.

8. STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE FAR EAST

From the time that the Anglo-Japanese alliance was brought to an end in 1922, and the Naval centre of gravity shifted from the North Sea to the Far East after the surrender of the German navy in 1918, the consideration and maintenance of a Fleet base at Singapore became a cardinal point in British

Far Eastern strategy. The reasons for this may be briefly summarized. Firstly, such a base capable of providing for a modern Fleet would, as stated above, contribute to the security of Australia and New Zealand in the event of Japanese aggression, and also to the security of our interests in the Indian Ocean area including the sub-continent of India, Burma and Ceylon. Secondly, along the sea routes connecting the United Kingdom with India, Burma, Australia and New Zealand, would pass in time of war, not only food and raw materials of supreme importance to our existence, but also troops and military equipment for operations in the Far East, in the Middle East or on the European continent as events might dictate. Thirdly, political, economic and sentimental considerations made it imperative that British strategy should take full account of public opinion in Australia and New Zealand to whom we were bound, not only by the bonds of kinship and as common members of the British Commonwealth but by specific undertakings to defend them against aggression. The same considerations applied in that we were trustees for the security and prosperity of the sub-continent of India, a country with a huge population of a great military potential and dependent upon us for defence against external aggression and internal disorders. A fleet at Singapore would contribute to each one of these factors. In addition in a war with Japan it would enable us not only to act on the defensive but to bring pressure on Japan and call a halt to her designs in Indo-China and the Netherlands East Indies.

9. STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF SINGAPORE

Whilst the construction of the Singapore base would thus contribute to the security of our Far Eastern interests the policy of His Majesty's Government, affirmed in March 1935, when the attitude of Germany and the progress of her rearmament compelled us to undertake an enlarged defence programme, was directed to establishing friendly relations with Japan such as had existed during the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Japan's attitude, however, rendered this policy no easy one to follow, and the whole position was kept constantly under review. At the Imperial conference of 1937 the Australian and New Zealand governments submitted a number of defence matters for consideration. On the question of the possibility of the invasion of their territories the Chiefs of Staff expressed the opinion that for this purpose Japan would require the control of the sea communications in the Pacific or Indian Ocean for an indefinite period. The presence of a British fleet based on Singapore, or its prospective arrival, would deprive Japan of this control and therefore she would be unlikely to contemplate invasion. The importance of Singapore was particularly emphasized. The Chiefs of Staff went so far as to say that in their opinion the survival of the Commonwealth would depend on the security of the United Kingdom and the security of Singapore. They added that it was beyond our powers to spare fleets for more than one of the two important areas outside Home waters, namely the Mediterranean and the Far East. Surrender of our sea power in the Far East would it was considered, be far more serious than weakness in the Mediterranean, since it would enable Japan to undertake deliberate operations against Singapore, which in the absence of any prospect of relief might fall, leaving India, Australia and New Zealand and the sea routes open to Japanese attack. His Majesty's government agreed with the views expressed by the Chiefs of Staff and decided that no consideration for the security of our position in the Mediterranean would be allowed to interfere with the despatch of the Fleet to the Far East even if the United States withheld aid. The Chiefs of Staff

also expressed their opinion that Japan would almost certainly avoid any action that would antagonize the United States; but as regards this the Foreign Office stated that aid from the United States could not in any event be relied upon.

At the same time they stated that there had recently been signs that Japanese policy in regard to China had taken a new direction and that they were hopeful of an improvement in the general situation in the Far East. This hope was not fulfilled. On the contrary Japan went steadily forward with her plans for a new order to be established in East Asia, nor did the outlook at home improve. In March 1938 Germany marched into Austria just one month after the official opening of the Singapore naval base.

10. EFFECT OF DISARMAMENT

To implement the policy outlined above and to meet the possibility of a conflict with an increasingly armed Japan our plans contemplated a powerful British fleet able to operate in Eastern waters and based on a secure Singapore. For this purpose His Majesty's Government laid down a standard of Naval strength which would allow of a fleet being stationed in the Far East adequate to exercise a deterrent effect on Japanese aggressive designs, and at the same time to maintain in Home Waters a force able to meet the requirements of a war with Germany. This was to put a severe strain on our naval resources. Our naval strength in the years since the first world war had been allowed to deteriorate. In cruisers and auxiliary craft of all kinds we were particularly weak. This was partly the result of treaty obligations but more especially it was due to financial stringency and the policy of successive governments in carrying out disarmament before any general agreement on this had been reached. The question inevitably arose as to whether we could give security to our interests in the Eastern theatre, safeguarding the communications to and from that area, and at the same time keep an adequate reserve for a war with Germany. The problem was made easier by the fact that in such a war we would almost certainly have France with her powerful navy as an ally, though this was being offset by the increasing possibility that Italy would also enter the war on the side of Germany.

11. DEFENCELESSNESS OF HONG KONG

The defence of Hong Kong, our only other base in the Far East, the commercial centre of vast British interests in trade and shipping, was reviewed in June 1937. For many years past it had been recognized that Hong Kong, situated approximately half-way between the mainland, within striking distance of the island of Formosa, and at the end of a long line of communications from the nearest British base, was capable of only limited defence; and a decision of the Committee of Imperial Defence in May 1921, that there was no possibility of making Hong Kong sufficiently secure against attack, was responsible for starting an investigation into the measures necessary to construct a main naval base at Singapore, the other ports considered, Trincomalee and Sydney, being too remote. Ten years later Hong Kong was even less defensible than in 1921, for it could be neutralized by Japanese air forces operating from Formosa. There were no airfields on the island, and defence of airfields on the mainland would have needed a very large garrison. In October 1935 a Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence considered what measures could be taken to prevent the loss of the base from which it was hoped to operate

submarines and light craft during the 'period before relief.' The Sub-Committee recommended the provision of air defence, an increase in the infantry of the garrison, and improvements in the naval defences—booms and mine-fields. The recommendations were approved 'in principle,' but no action followed. As long as the expectation lasted, that soon after the outbreak of war with Japan it would be possible to despatch to the Far East a powerful fleet which in certain circumstances might effect the relief of Hong Kong, the policy remained to provide sufficient garrison to hold Hong Kong Island itself and deny the use of the anchorage to the enemy until the arrival of the Fleet in the Far East. At that date the likelihood of attack from the landward side was considered remote.

In reviewing the situation of Hong Kong in June 1937 the Chiefs of Staff concluded that the place should be considered as an important, but not vital, outpost and should be defended for as long as possible, though there was no certainty how long the garrison could hold out. It was unlikely the Fleet would be strong enough to make any use of the base, and though it was recognized that abandonment of Hong Kong would mean the end of any political influence in China and any material effect we might hope to exercise on Chinese resistance to Japanese penetration yet, from the military viewpoint it might be better, on the eve or on the outbreak of war with Germany to withdraw the two British battalions in North China and two of the four battalions in Hong Kong, rather than lock them up and perhaps lose them. However, the Chiefs of Staff considered that the weight that must be given to political and psychological considerations was such, that there could be no question of evacuating or reducing the garrison of Hong Kong itself; on the contrary the battalions from Shanghai and Tientsin should be withdrawn to reinforce Hong Kong.

The seizure in May of the following year by the Japanese of Amoy, 300 miles north-east of Hong Kong, necessitated a fresh review of the situation. In August the Chiefs of Staff made their recommendations. It was considered that Hong Kong could not be preserved even as a base for submarines and small craft, and the policy must be simply to deny the anchorage to the Japanese. The recommendations for an increase in the garrison and strengthening of the coast and naval defences made in 1935, were now for the most part approved by the Committee of Imperial Defence; though before the troops could be made available the Munich crisis intervened, and the consequent necessity of providing an Expeditionary Force for the Continent left little hope of reinforcement of overseas garrisons.

In October 1938 the Japanese landed at Bias Bay, 50 miles up the coast from Hong Kong and occupied Canton, thus cutting off Hong Kong from the territories controlled by the Chinese National Government. In June of the following year they occupied Hainan Island, off the coast of Indo China some 300 miles south of Hong Kong, and the isolation of the colony was almost complete.

CHAPTER II

THE PROBLEM OF FAR EASTERN DEFENCE

(See Plans 1, 2)

12. THE STEPS OF JAPANESE AGGRESSION

During the last decade of the uneasy peace between the two World Wars Japan made good use of the preoccupation of the two Powers principally concerned with preventing aggression in the Far East : Great Britain with the ugly renaissance of Germany, and the United States with recovery from the 1929 crash and the earnest desire not to be involved in another war. From 1927 onwards she manifested an increasing disposition to interfere in Chinese internal affairs ; and on the 17th April 1934 a spokesman of the Japanese Foreign Office issued the 'hands off China' statement making clear a purpose to compel China to follow the dictates of Japan and to permit only such relations with China by other countries as the Japanese Government saw fit. In September 1931 her expansionist intentions were made plain, when her armed forces, on a pretext of local disorders, attacked in Manchuria, a province she had never ceased to covet since the Treaty of Portsmouth had compelled her to evacuate all but its southern extremity after her victorious war against Russia in 1904-5. Her troops now occupied several strategic points, and in the following year set up the puppet state of Manchukuo in despite of her undertaking in the Nine Power Treaty of 1922 to 'respect the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of China,' and her adherence to the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 renouncing war as an instrument of national policy.

Japan was led to take this action in part through the necessity for obtaining at least a measure of control over China, an important source of her iron and coal imports, and her principal market for textiles and other manufactures, since the economic depression of 1929 had compelled Western nations to restrict their imports of goods produced under labour conditions unrelated to European or American standards. Manchuria was also to become a Japanese arsenal, providing coal, steel, and non-ferrous metals, while the development of Manchurian industry would absorb some of Japan's surplus labour. These expectations were not fully realised. Strategically, the domination of Manchuria was the first step in Japan's plan for expansion, for it could furnish the firm base on the Continent of Asia necessary for operations either against China or the U.S.S.R. It was an indispensable advanced base for air power, troops, and supplies.

China appealed to the League of Nations, and on 30th September 1931 the League called on Japan to remove her troops from Manchuria, but without result. In December the League appointed a Commission to conduct an inquiry on the spot. The Commission found that Manchukuo was the artificial creation of the Japanese General Staff, in which the wishes of the population had played no part. On 24th February 1933 the Assembly condemned Japan as an aggressor by 41 votes to 1 (Japan), whereupon the Japanese delegation walked out of the Assembly. A month later, Japan gave notice of her intention to withdraw from the League. Supported only by the power of phrases the League was powerless, nor was any individual state willing to bring effective pressure to bear on Japan. The three principally interested, the British Commonwealth, the Netherlands and the United States, laboured under all the disadvantages

attending unarmed, peace-loving democracies defied by a bandit state. An arms embargo on both China and Japan would have penalized the former, since China alone of the two was dependent on imported arms. An embargo directed only against Japan would probably have resulted in her seizing arms destined for China, thus doubly penalizing the latter.

In December 1934 the Japanese Government divested itself of the last of the restrictions to which the principal nations of the world had voluntarily submitted since the First World War 1914-1919, and gave notice of intention to terminate the Washington Naval Treaty of 1922. In the following year a Naval Conference opened in London, and on the refusal of all the other states taking part, to consider her proposal for a uniform maximum level for the fleets of all nations, irrespective of their needs and responsibilities, Japan withdrew from the Conference. She was silent on the question of the state of fortifications in the Pacific which was governed by Article 19 of the Washington Treaties. Her policy in Manchukuo and China had been inimical to British interests and there had been incidents of ill-treatment of British subjects. Finally, on 27th November 1936 by signing the Anti-Comintern Pact Japan openly associated herself with a rearming and sabre-rattling Germany, indicating the common designs of these two states in foreign policy, and foreshadowing the parallel courses of aggression which they were to follow during the ensuing years.

The invasion of China by Japan, logical sequence to the domination of Manchuria, took place no later than the following year. Pursuant to the provisions of the Nine Power Treaty of 1922, nineteen nations in November 1937 participated in a conference convened at Brussels with a view to studying peaceable means of hastening the end of the regrettable conflict which prevailed in the Far East. The government of Japan refused repeatedly to participate in the conference, and abrogated to itself alone the right to decide on matters affecting China. It was consequently impossible to bring the conflict in China to an end, and the conference suspended its work before the end of the month in which it was convened.

The year witnessed a great expansion of Japan's war potential. By this date she had built up a large fleet. The information of the British Government was that the modernization of her nine capital ships was complete and a great increase had been made in the personnel of the Navy that would give her a trained surplus to man new construction. The fourfold expansion of the Japanese Fleet air arm between 1932 and 1938 was nearing completion. Large naval oil reserves had been accumulated and an oil law passed which increased the commercial oil reserves. Japan had been continuously importing large quantities of scrap iron, rubber and other raw materials. Fleet manœuvres on a very large scale were held with increasing frequency, and the readiness of her Fleet for war had been accelerated with considerable haste. Her defence expenditure was equal to approximately half her budget, and the service chiefs were demanding even larger votes.

Whether correct or incorrect, the belief was held in London, however, that maintenance in the Japanese Navy was poor; and the relative efficiency of Japan's fleet was assessed by the Chiefs of Staff as at best eighty per cent. of the British. Consequently, our margin of seven battleships over and above the six which it was essential to retain in Home Waters, would bring us almost to parity with the Japanese. In those days, before the United States had shown the world that victories could be won by making intelligent use of the mobility of aircraft carriers even without battleship support, the strength of fleets was calculated in capital ships.

It was no longer possible to cherish any illusions as to Japan's intentions; her ultimate aim was to exclude Western influence from the Far East and to obtain control of Far Eastern resources of raw materials. All that we could do, however, in face of the darkening European horizon and with our defence programme barely started, was to work for better relations.

Neither was the United States Government under any illusions as to Japan's intentions, and from this date their policy towards her was based on the assumption that Japan definitely contemplated securing domination over as many hundreds of millions of people as possible in eastern Asia and gradually extending her control through the Pacific islands to the Netherlands East Indies and elsewhere, thereby dominating in practical effect half the world. All possible assistance was rendered to China by diplomatic protests to Japan, the grant of loans and credits, and later of lend-lease and other supplies to China. But the reluctance of the American people to become involved in war found expression in the neutrality legislation of 1935 and 1937 and was demonstrated by the peaceful settlement accepted by the United States Government of the incident of the 12th December 1937, when the gunboat *Panay* of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet and two of three American tankers on the Yangtze River were deliberately shelled, and, on the failure of the shore batteries to sink them were bombed and destroyed and their crews and passengers machine gunned by Japanese aircraft.¹

13. UNITED STATES IMPOSES ECONOMIC SANCTIONS ON JAPAN

The U.S.A. did, however, begin to move gradually against Japan, by economic pressure, and as a first step refrained from putting into effect the Neutrality Act of 1937 which provided, amongst other things, that in a war in which the U.S. was not a participant the Government should forbid the export to belligerents of any arms, munitions or implements of war; halt American loans or other financial aid; and at the President's discretion, require that exports of any kind to belligerents should be on a 'cash and carry' basis, that is, the goods must be sold before shipment and must be carried in other than American vessels. Enforcement of the Act would have favoured Japan at China's expense, and the President, exercising the discretion provided by law, refrained from applying its provisions to the conflict between China and Japan on the grounds that there had been no declarations of war. In the face, however, of widespread bombings of Chinese civilians by the Japanese, the Government of the United States in July 1938 placed into effect 'moral embargoes' on the sale of aircraft and aeronautical equipment to countries whose armed forces were using aircraft for attack on civilian populations. This was followed next year by similar discouragement of the sale of materials essential to aircraft manufacture, and facilities for production of aircraft fuels.

The next step was to remove the bar which existed to the adoption of retaliatory measures against Japanese commerce, by terminating the 1911 Treaty of Commerce and Navigation between the United States and Japan, which contained a most-favoured-nation clause. The treaty was denounced on 26th July 1940, and terminated, according to the provisions of its articles, six months later. With its termination the legal impediment to placing restrictions on trade with Japan was removed, and although no steps openly aimed at her were taken, in July and October 1940, under the Export Control Act, the

¹ 'A United States Naval Court of Inquiry at Shanghai brought out unmistakable evidence that the sinking was deliberate.' Morison, *The Rising Sun in the Pacific*, p. 18.

President placed an embargo on the export of high grade aviation spirit and a partial embargo on petroleum, petroleum products and scrap metal which particularly hit Japan. The effect of imposing these economic sanctions was to cut off from Japan by the winter of 1940-1941 the shipment of many strategic commodities important to a war effort.

14. DEFENCE PROBLEM IN THE FAR EAST ON EVE OF EUROPEAN WAR

The British Far Eastern War Plan was originally cast under the conditions of the Treaty of Versailles and the Washington naval shipbuilding ratio of 5 : 5 : 3. The Plan visualized no opposition to us in Europe and only a small deterrent force was provided for European waters: the remainder of the British Fleet was to proceed to the Far East to oppose the only enemy likely to threaten the Empire at that time. As work on the War Plan went on, however, doubts grew as to whether such a large portion of the British Navy would actually be permitted to leave European waters. Such a thing had never occurred in past history. Large fleets had, in the XVIII century, been despatched to the West Indies, but always in quest of a similar detachment from enemy forces.

When our military policy in the Far East was reviewed in June 1937, however, the assessment of our defence requirements was still based on the assumptions that any threat to our interests would be seaborne, and that we should be able to send to the Far East within three months a fleet of sufficient strength to protect Australia, New Zealand and India and give cover to our communications in the Indian Ocean. By 1939 the circumstances were quite different from those which the original Far Eastern War plan had envisaged. Owing to the rise in power of Germany and Italy and the aggressive policy of both countries, the main threat to the British Empire now lay in Europe. Nevertheless, having regard to the steady Japanese penetration in China the priority given to Japan in our naval dispositions was second only to that of Germany,¹ and our defence policy still contemplated the sending of a small balanced fleet to the East in the event of hostilities.

At length the course of Japanese aggression southward towards Indo-China and Malaya constituted a threat to our Far Eastern interests including the security of Australia and New Zealand. This continued Japanese aggression also threatened United States interest. As a consequence secret informal talks took place during 1938 between representatives of the British and U.S.A. staffs concerning naval co-operation in the event of a war with Japan. The continued deterioration in Europe and the Far East led to further talks in 1939 when an officer of the Plans Division of the Admiralty was sent secretly to Washington for further discussions with the Chief of Naval Operations and the head of his Plans Staff. No Official record of these conversations was made, but it was mentioned that in the event of our being engaged in war with both Germany and Italy, we might not be able to reinforce our Eastern fleet. Command of the Pacific in this event would have to be assured by the United States fleet. No definite commitments were however made, and there was no change made in our own war plan for sending a fleet to the East in the event of emergency with the object of securing Singapore and our communications in the Indian Ocean, securing Australia and New Zealand against attack, and supporting economic measures against Japan. The important trade routes and supply lines which it was essential to keep open were from the Cape to Colombo,

¹ Chiefs of Staff European appreciation 1939-1940, Singapore. Paper No. D.P. (P) 44.

Colombo to Aden, and Australia to Aden, Singapore, the Cape and Panama. Trade on these routes was considered too large to be run in convoy and evasive routing was decided upon. There were considerable difficulties in regard to plans for providing protection due to the shortage of ships and long distance aircraft. The defence plan proposed that in each of the focal areas off Australia and New Zealand there should be a force consisting of one or two cruisers and some escort vessels or destroyers, whilst the China Squadron would consist of three or four cruisers, an aircraft carrier, and a division of destroyers and submarines, the latter being divided between Singapore and Hong Kong, at both of which bases there would be certain local defence flotillas.

It was obvious that the attitude of the United States might eventually be the determining factor and on the initiative of the Minister for Co-ordination of Defence their reactions to the situation were sought in June 1939. Nothing definite resulted. At that date there was no likelihood of armed intervention by the United States unless she herself was attacked, though the possibility of economic pressure was not ruled out.

With the outbreak of war in Europe the strategic situation underwent a further change. The increased gravity of the threat to the security of the United Kingdom and the vital Atlantic sea communications combined with the uncertain situation in the Mediterranean made it out of the question to consider sending a fleet of the requisite strength capable of at least neutralising the Japanese fleet estimated at that time to consist of 10 capital ships, all of which had been modernized, 12 8-inch cruisers, 25 6-inch cruisers together with 6 aircraft carriers, 5 seaplane carriers, 83 modern destroyers and 61 submarines. Fortunately, however, although Japan was in control of the entire China coast from the Gulf of Pechili to Hainan Island¹ tension had eased somewhat for the time being owing to Japanese dissatisfaction over the Russo-German non-aggression pact signed in Moscow on 23rd August, the effect of which was to expose the Japanese position in Mongolia and Manchuria to danger. This even enabled the Admiralty to withdraw certain ships on the China Station in order to ease the heavy burden thrown on the British Navy in the face of the attack on the ocean lines of communications by the German pocket battleships and submarines.

15. BRITISH NAVAL FORCES IN CHINA REDUCED

At the start of the war our naval forces on the station consisted of the four cruisers of the 5th Cruiser Squadron (*Kent*, flagship of the Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Sir Percy Noble), *Cornwall* (flagship of R.A. 5th C.S.), *Birmingham*, and *Dorsetshire*, the 21st Destroyer Flotilla (nine destroyers, of which one was refitting), five destroyers for local defence of Hong Kong and Singapore, five escort vessels (three of which were refitting), the aircraft carrier *Eagle*, and the 4th Submarine Flotilla (17 submarines, seven based on Hong Kong and ten on Singapore; three of these were refitting). On the 2nd and 3rd September respectively the *Cornwall* and *Eagle* were ordered to be detached to the East Indies Station for duty in the Bay of Bengal, where the *Dorsetshire* joined them in a hunting group on the 25th October. The *Kent* was ordered to reinforce the Home Fleet on 4th November, and the *Birmingham* left on the 8th January 1940 for the Mediterranean. One division of the 21st Destroyer Flotilla was

¹ Though it was not known at the time Hainan, which had been occupied in February 1939 was used as a training centre for the Japanese troops which attacked Malaya in December 1941.

ordered to the East Indies on 28th August, and on 6th September the remainder of the flotilla was withdrawn to the Mediterranean. Four submarines were taken at the end of October for duty on the East Indies Station, and the escort vessels in November–December for convoy duties on the east coast of the United Kingdom. At the end of March 1940, owing to the uncertainty of the Italian attitude, the Admiralty decided to move various slower ships and some submarines from the East Indies and China Stations to the Eastern Mediterranean, and the remaining submarines were withdrawn from the China Station.

To replace the cruisers the three 22-year old 6-in. gun cruisers *Durban*, *Dauntless* and *Danae*, with inadequate anti-aircraft armament and poor endurance for ocean work were sent from the Reserve Fleet at home, and the *Liverpool* arrived from the East Indies Station towards the end of 1939, as flagship, but had to be withdrawn to the Mediterranean in the following April owing to the attitude of Italy. Three armed merchant cruisers were sent from Australia to replace the escort vessels: they were withdrawn to reinforce the East Indies Squadron on the declaration of war by Italy and the fall of France, in June 1940.

On the Yangtze and West Rivers there were 20 gunboats, half of which were in that part of the river occupied by the Japanese, who disliked their continued presence there. The West River (Si Kiang) flows into the western side of the Canton delta, and with the Japanese advancing in the province of Kwangsi towards the Indo-China frontier it was thought prudent to withdraw the gunboats, for they were a potential cause of friction, and the officers and men might more profitably be employed elsewhere. The first four were withdrawn to Singapore in October 1939, but withdrawal of the remainder did not begin until the following summer. In all, ten went to Singapore where most of them were refitted as minesweepers or anti-submarine vessels, and two were employed in the Mediterranean. One, the *Peterel*, remained in commission at Shanghai with a special complement as a wireless telegraph link.

The British troops in north China also constituted an irritant to the Japanese and could well be used elsewhere. The battalion from Tientsin was withdrawn to Egypt during the winter of 1939–40 and passed through Singapore in January 1940, but the two battalions at Shanghai did not arrive at Singapore until September of that year.

16. ANGLO-JAPANESE INCIDENTS

A cruiser was maintained on patrol as continuously as possible in the approaches to Japanese waters whilst submarines and escort vessels watched the China coast as far north as the Shantung Peninsula. For a time after their arrival from Australia the three armed merchant cruisers were employed on patrol north of Hong Kong. Other duties of our naval forces were to intercept any German merchant ships that might leave neutral—Japanese or Netherlands East Indies—ports, and to keep watch for German vessels suspected of being fitted out as commerce raiders in Japanese harbours. From Singapore and Penang patrols in the Sunda Strait and off the west coast of Sumatra and the Nicobar Islands were largely maintained by escort vessels and submarines. The few obsolete flying boats available for air reconnaissance were badly overworked. As the months went by the reduced cruiser strength barely sufficed

to meet and escort into Singapore and Penang the troop convoys from Australia, India and Great Britain; whilst reports of raiders in the Indian Ocean imposed further calls on our exiguous forces.

Our system of contraband control entailed control and search at ports and on the sea routes for war material destined for Germany, traffic in which there was good reason to believe Japan was engaging; and in pursuance of this, on 21st January 1940 the *Liverpool* intercepted the Japanese liner *Asama Maru* in 34° 35' N., 140° 32' E., some 35 miles from the coast of Japan, in the approaches to Tokyo Bay, and removed from the ship 21 German officers and men, on their way to Germany via Vladivostok. They were the survivors of the German S.S. *Columbus* which had scuttled herself some weeks earlier in the North Atlantic. Although strictly in accordance with International Law irritation in Japan at the restrictions imposed by our system of economic warfare found expression in hysterical agitation due, as our ambassador believed, to the underlying animosity of the war party for the existing moderate regime, though the Japanese advanced reasons as jejune as that the incident occurred within sight of the sacred mountain Fuji Yama and the boarding officer omitted to sign the ship's log. Hard upon the *Asama Maru* incident there occurred what was no doubt intended by the Japanese as a reprisal, the stopping off Foochow and searching of the British S.S. *Wing Sang*. This affair, like the former, was peaceably settled; but the British Government considered it advisable to make concessions where circumstances permitted, and in future control had to be conducted with considerable tact and discretion.

17. FAR EAST DEFENCE PROBLEM RE-EXAMINED

After the fall of France in June 1940 the Far East situation became even more delicate. The British Empire stood alone against the combined strength of Germany and Italy. The invasion of Great Britain seemed imminent, and the challenge of the German Air Force had yet to be met. It was of great importance that no pretext should be afforded the Japanese for any form of intervention in the war; and the Admiralty instructed the Vice-Admiral, Malaya, to reduce the extent of the conversations he was holding with the Dutch naval authorities and avoid giving any appearance of close co-operation with them in plans for safeguarding their interests in emergency.¹ The Japanese were pressing for the Burma Road to be closed, a demand to which the British Government had to accede in order to avoid the probability of war, so strong was Japanese resentment at the passing of supplies to China along this, the only route still open; and on 18th July the Prime Minister announced in the House of Commons that Great Britain had consented to close the Road for three months, 'pending negotiations for a wider settlement' of the dispute between China and Japan.² The situation was so dangerous that in the following month the Chiefs of Staff advised that if Japan, whilst avoiding open war should decide to eliminate our interests in China, now confined to the inessential outpost Hong Kong and our strategically useless garrisons in North China, we must submit. Though we were spared this humiliation a further affront quickly followed. In 1930 Great Britain had returned to China the leased territory of Wei-hai-wei, but retained naval buildings and other facilities on Liu-kung-tao, an island in Wei-hai-wei harbour. This lease expired on

¹ Admiralty message 1057, 19th June, 1940 to V.A. Malaya.

² The Burma Road ran from Lashio in Burma to Kunming in China and thence to Chungking to which city the capital of China was moved in 1938. The total length of the road was 770 miles.

30th September 1940 and a renewal for another 10 years was entered into; but the Japanese puppet government at Nanking refused to recognize the lease, and on the 9th October, following the landing of armed parties from the puppet Chinese Navy and the Japanese cruiser *Iwate*, the Admiralty gave orders for British naval personnel to be withdrawn. The equipment and stores were withdrawn during the month.

Almost immediately after Great Britain had consented to close the Burma Road, the Japanese Cabinet fell. The new Government at once issued a threatening, if vague, statement of foreign policy and a Japanese special envoy publicly laid claim to the raw materials of the Netherlands East Indies. In the same month of August the Chiefs of Staff produced the result of a fresh examination of our defence problem in the Far East. It was concluded that any attempt to produce an adequate naval concentration at Singapore in the world situation at the time would be unsound. The interests which we must do our utmost to defend even in the absence of a fleet could be reduced to essential sea communications and the territorial integrity of Australia and New Zealand, Malaya, Burma, and the Netherlands East Indies. An open clash with Japan must be avoided and we must play for time.

Our ability to counter in some measure, without a fleet, the threat to our sea communications in the Indian Ocean and across the Pacific to Australia and New Zealand and thereby ensure the security of India, Malaya and Australasia, depended upon the retention of Singapore as a footing from which we could eventually retrieve the position when stronger forces became available. But it was recognized that the basis on which the Singapore defence plan rested had broken down, since we were now faced with the problem of defending our interests in the Far East, without an adequate fleet. Also the probable occupation by Japan of Indo-China, which began in the following month, her intrigues in Siam, and the increased range of aircraft all contributed to the development of a serious overland threat to Malaya as opposed to a sea-borne attack on Singapore Island or southern Johore. Nevertheless, it was held that even the establishment of Japanese shore-based aircraft within range of Rangoon, Penang, the Malacca Strait, and Singapore, and the provision of bases for submarines and light naval craft would not seriously endanger our vital sea communications and therefore could not justify our going to war; neither would an attack on Indo-China or invasion of Siam constitute a threat to our vital interests sufficient to be regarded as a *casus belli*.¹ It was important to try, as far as we could, to prevent Japan from gaining one position after another which would increasingly threaten the security of Malaya and our communications to Australia and New Zealand, and it was thought that unobtrusive measures of an economic character might check Japanese control of Indo-China and Siam.

On the other hand, a Japanese attack on the Netherlands East Indies would directly threaten our vital interests. Though the Chief of the Naval Staff, Sir Dudley Pound, voiced his great anxiety regarding our naval commitments in the Far East and the danger of extending them the majority view of the Chiefs of Staff Committee was that failure to support the Dutch if they were attacked and had the will to fight would have the most unfortunate effect in the Dominions and upon American opinion, and would not increase our chance of ultimately avoiding war with Japan. It was true that if Japan made the seizure of the Netherlands East Indies her object, we were not, under present

¹ Tel. Abbey No. 23 in A.C.N.S.(F) Tels., Vol. 1 (Matador).

conditions, strong enough to prevent her from getting a foothold; but our chances of preventing the islands from being overrun would be much improved if the Dutch resisted, in which case we ought to offer them full support, both economic and military. Appreciation of Japan's economic position showed that if she was, on a long term, to withstand successfully the economic weapon that could be used against her by Britain and the U.S.A., on whom she depended for markets and for essential raw materials, she must gain possession of the oil, tin and rubber of the Netherlands East Indies. If the Japanese were to occupy the Netherlands East Indies their naval forces would have free access to the Indian Ocean, the security of Singapore would be endangered by the establishment of shore-based aircraft at close range, and Malaya would be cut off from Australia and New Zealand.

Informal conversations had been opened by the Dutch as long ago as 1936, regarding the defence of the Netherlands East Indies in conjunction with Singapore. The Cabinet did not at the time consider we were strong enough to guarantee concerted action, but the Dutch were encouraged to improve their defences and acquire up-to-date aircraft, and our Air Staff advised them in confidence on air strategy. Spheres of responsibility for the employment of British and Dutch air forces had been agreed in principle with the late Netherlands East Indies Naval Commander-in-Chief in 1939. The present Commander-in-Chief, Vice-Admiral C. E. L. Helfrich, a capable and energetic officer who was strongly in favour of co-operation, in August 1940 proposed to Admiral Noble certain arrangements in the event of either country becoming involved in war with a third power, and various unobtrusive arrangements for co-operation were made locally. It was considered inadvisable however to initiate official conversations until we had strengthened our position in Malaya and were able to offer effective military assistance to the Dutch; whilst the latter, too, were hesitant, for negotiations with Japan were in train, and the Governor-General of the Netherlands East Indies, to whom, and not to the fugitive Dutch Government in London the naval and military commanders were responsible, was most anxious that no hint of possible co-operation with British forces against Japan should reach Japanese ears.

18. DEFENCE OF AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

In the difficult situation in which we found ourselves after the fall of France we had been compelled to withdraw the assurances given to the Australian Government at the Imperial Conference in May 1937 that in the event of war with Japan we should despatch a Fleet to the Far East.¹ The commitments on which the strength of the fleet to be sent would be calculated were stated in May 1937 as a hostile Germany but in the following month the Australian Delegation was assured, in regard to the possible intervention of Italy, that no anxieties or risks connected with our interests in the Mediterranean could be allowed to interfere with the despatch of a fleet to the Far East.² Whilst the Chiefs of Staff were preparing their Far Eastern Appreciation, the Prime Minister, Mr. Winston Churchill, sent to the Prime Ministers of Australia and New Zealand a word of reassurance on the Pacific situation as it affected these two Dominions.³ It was pointed out that though it went against the grain to

¹ C.I.D. Paper E (P.D.) 37.

² C.I.D. Paper 450 (of 15th June 1937).

³ Personal and secret telegram 11th August 1940 in P.D. 09175/40.

adopt a yielding policy towards Japan, it was hoped by this means to avoid war, but if Japan did declare war it was thought very unlikely she would attempt a large scale invasion of Australia or New Zealand. Her object would be to get control of the valuable raw materials in the Netherlands East Indies. Developing their exportation, together with the war in China, would keep her fully occupied. Moreover, the American Fleet would constitute a deterrent to serious adventuring so far from home as Australia. If however, contrary to prudence and self-interest, Japan set about invading Australia or New Zealand on a large scale, the British Government stated categorically that in the defence of these Dominions we should sacrifice every interest except only the defence and feeding of Great Britain, on which everything depended. The Eastern Mediterranean was about to be reinforced with more first class units: if vital to the safety of the two Dominions we should at once cut our losses in the Mediterranean and despatch this fleet to their aid.

The scale of attack on Australia or New Zealand was assessed by the Chiefs of Staff as cruiser raids possibly combined with a light scale of seaborne attacks against ports, and the seizure of an advanced base in the Pacific Islands, Suva in Fiji being the most probable objective. To threaten the security of Australia or New Zealand would require the control of sea communications in the Pacific or Indian Ocean for an indefinite period. The presence of a British Fleet based on Singapore, or its prospective arrival, would deprive Japan of this control and she would therefore be in the highest degree unlikely to contemplate any invasion.¹ It was considered that the possibility of invasion could be ruled out altogether if American intervention was a strong probability.²

19. NEGOTIATIONS WITH INDO-CHINA AFTER FALL OF FRANCE

The entry of Italy into the war and the fall of France in June 1940 had put an end to the modest assistance rendered to the British China squadron by the French squadron in Indo-China. A Franco-British Conference on co-operation in the event of war with Japan had been held in Singapore some twelve months previously, but had achieved little more than a statement of the problem.³ The French forces based on Indo-China were slender, no more than two cruisers, four sloops and a submarine, and there was little likelihood of their reinforcement; now, however, French co-operation and the basic assumption of collaboration in war entirely disappeared. Although the Governor-General of Indo-China, General Georges Catroux, a de Gaullist sympathiser, announced his intention to continue co-operation with Great Britain in the Far East, the French Naval Commander-in-Chief, Far East, Vice-Admiral Jean Decoux, an agent of the Petain Government, refused the invitation of the Commander-in-Chief, China, to bring his squadron to Singapore out of Japanese reach. Admiral Noble was able in July, however, to arrive at a verbal agreement with Admiral Decoux, by which both countries undertook to refrain from warlike naval activities against each other on the China Station. No French ships capable of conversion to armed merchant cruisers were to leave the station or proceed to Japan. French merchant ships would not be intercepted, stopped or boarded by British warships except for flag verification; the French would keep their shipping out of Japanese controlled waters.

¹ C.O.S. 579 (JP).

² C.O.S. Telegram No. 17, para. xiii (Admty. Tel. 1856/15/10/40 to Commander-in-Chief China (862) (R) Commander-in-Chief E.I. (345).

³ C.O.S. 951 (JP) and Paper No. J.P. 481.



SINGAPORE NAVAL BASE



H.M.A.S. Sydney

of the Indo-China Government, it was clear to Vice-Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton, who on 12th September 1940, on the expiration of Admiral Noble's term, became Commander-in-Chief, China, that in practice their policy in an admittedly difficult situation would be dictated entirely by their own interests, and it would be necessary to keep a strict watch on their adherence to the terms of the Agreement.

20. JAPANESE PENETRATION OF FRENCH INDO-CHINA

The position of the Indo-China Government was naturally an extremely difficult one. They were in no position to resist Japan in the last resort and they had at the same time to obey Vichy and the Armistice Commission at Wiesbaden.

Japan had lost no time in exploiting the situation in order to get facilities in Indo-China. At the time, war supplies for China were being transported over the Yunnan railroad from Hanoi to Kunming, the Japanese having blocked the Canton-Hankow line. Japan now demanded that Indo-China should prohibit the transport of military supplies to China over this route. She despatched a naval force to the west to 'watch the import of goods and materials,' and also sent a commission to Haiphong. The real purpose of these moves, namely to bring Indo-China, now that it was deprived of French protection, within the sphere of Japanese influence, was indicated by a broadcast by the Japanese Foreign Minister, Mr. Arita, on 29th June, in which he proclaimed that East Asia and the South Seas constituted a group related culturally, racially, and economically, and destined to unite 'under a single sphere.' On 22nd September 1940, after the delivery of a Japanese ultimatum, the Indo-China Government signed an agreement allowing Japan naval and military bases in the country and the right to station troops there. This resulted in the virtual occupation of Tongking by the Japanese, who next day began landing troops at Haiphong covered by a large portion of the 2nd China Expeditionary Fleet reinforced by Combined Fleet units, including an aircraft carrier. In the course of these activities an event occurred which, though completely unimportant, is not without interest: Japanese troops on the Tongking-Kwangsi border attacked the French Foreign Legion post at Dong Dang, and for the first time in the history of the Legion, their troops were forced to surrender.

The reimposition of the embargo on trade with Indo-China by which Admiral Layton immediately replied to the Indo China-Japanese agreement, was intended as an indication to the French of the great distaste with which we viewed any Japanese infiltration into Indo-China, which was bound to undermine our strategic position in the Far East. The only direct threat to our interests which the Commander-in-Chief, Far East, Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham saw in the occupation of Tongking was not to Burma or Malaya, but to the Chinese section of the Burma Road. He saw some reason to believe, however, that the occupation had been effected with a different aim namely to extricate Japanese forces in Kwangsi, who were malaria-ridden and in a difficult position.

21. JAPANESE DOMINATION OF SIAM

The situation underwent a change, however, in November 1940, when the long-standing dispute between Indo-China and Siam about their frontier territories was fomented by Japan into sporadic hostilities and resulted in the

penetration of south Indo-China by the Japanese and a possible threat to Siam which had already been envisaged in London. On 25th January 1941 the French were forced to accept Japanese 'arbitration,' one result of which was that Japan obtained the right to employ armed forces in Siam to ensure peace and order. Siam and Indo-China were both precluded from entering into any agreement with a Third Power aimed directly or indirectly against Japan.

The Southern Provinces of Siam possessed a strategic significance relative to the land, sea, and air communications of Malaya out of all proportion to the importance or prestige of the country itself. The extent to which Japan could count on making use of Siamese territory might exert an important influence on Japanese strategy in an attack on Singapore. The domination of Siam by Japan was consequently a matter of much importance to Great Britain. Relations between Siam and the British authorities in the Far East concerned the Commander-in-Chief, China, directly in connection with the supply of commodities such as oil to that country. The Siamese were anxious to preserve to the last the economic and political advantages accruing from friendly relations with ourselves. During the spring and summer of 1941 consideration was given at Singapore to the possibility of inviting Siamese observers to Malaya so that they might see for themselves the progress in our military preparations; and the Commander-in-Chief, Far East, and the Chiefs of Staff discussed the possibility of providing Siam with military and air equipment and instructors, to assist her to defend her independence. But the little we could provide was finally adjudged more likely to defeat than accomplish this purpose, and if any aircraft could be spared Sir Robert Brooke-Popham was inclined to send them to the American Volunteer Group for operations based on South China or Burma, rather than post them in Siam whose attitude was suspect.¹ Since we could not impress the Siamese by our strength nothing we did or did not do in the way of supplying Siam with oil, or buying her rubber and tin, or furnishing her with the meagre quantities of war materials which were all we could spare, would have made any noticeable difference to her course of action. Siam, like Indo-China, naturally fell more and more under the domination of Japan, and it was recognized in London that the actual acquisition of bases in the country would be the almost certain outcome of the Japanese infiltration into Indo-China, which was steadily taking place.² In May 1941 the French were forced to sign a far-reaching economic agreement granting special privileges to Japanese business and shipping interests and allowing the Japanese to take out large quantities of bauxite, rice, coal, tin, zinc, manganese, and rubber.

22. JAPAN OCCUPIES SOUTH INDO-CHINA

Germany's attack on Russia in the following month closed the Siberian route to Germany, and there was serious danger of traffic in French ships from Indo-China to France developing as a channel of supply to the enemy. After a period, during which sailings from Saigon to France were completely suspended as a result of interceptions of a number of ships round the coast of Africa by the Royal Navy, the French started moving their vessels in convoy both between

¹ The A.V.G. consisted of three squadrons of fighter aircraft. In August 1941 they were given permission to carry out operational training in Burma, where they were given the sole use of the R.A.F. airfield at Toungoo and use of Mingaladon airfield. They began operations on 8th December 1941; they assisted in the defence of Rangoon, and after the fall of Burma, operated in China. On 4th July 1942 the remaining nucleus was inducted into the U.S. Air Force.

² C.O.S. (41) 104.

Saigon and Madagascar and between Madagascar and Dakar, where they joined the main convoys running to Casablanca or through the Straits of Gibraltar to Marseilles. An attempt to stop the first convoy, which sailed from Madagascar on 12th August, was unsuccessful. Another attempt was made to intercept in the Indian Ocean a further convoy which left Saigon for Madagascar about 7th September (Operation 'Snip'). A force consisting of the carrier *Hermes* and the cruisers *Enterprise*, *Mauritius* and *Hawkins* carried out a search, but were unsuccessful, due probably to the loss on the way to the area of operations, of one of the two Royal Air Force Catalinas, detailed to assist, which necessitated the other Catalina being diverted from the operation to search for the missing craft.

A further method of evading our controls was also adopted. The m.s. *François L.D.* loaded a cargo of 6,700 tons of rubber in Saigon and sailed on 15th August ostensibly for Kobe. She arrived at Casablanca where she unloaded her rubber, without having been heard of at any intermediate point, having been refuelled through German agency en route.

During July the Japanese began to establish themselves in southern Indo-China and on the 29th of the month, by the 'Mutual Defence Pact' they obtained the right to participate in the defence of the country and to occupy eight airfields. Indo-China was the strategical centre of the Far East and the natural mounting place of any military operation aimed at Malaya, Burma or the Netherlands East Indies. At the time, conversations were under way between the United States and Japan looking for an agreement for peace in the Pacific. The Japanese ambassador's explanation to the United States Government of the inconsistency of this further act of aggression with the peace conversations in progress was that it was precautionary, to ensure their supplies of rice and raw materials and as a measure against the determination of 'certain foreign powers' to encircle Japan militarily. For the real truth, however, the United States Government, whose experts had broken the Japanese code, were not dependent upon ambassadorial equivocations. An intercepted despatch of 14th July 1941 from Canton to Tokyo,¹ stated 'the immediate object of our occupation of French Indo-China will be to achieve our purposes there. Secondly, its purpose is, when the international situation is suitable, to launch therefrom a rapid attack,' the implied objectives being Singapore and the Netherlands East Indies.

The establishment of the Japanese in southern Indo-China, though it did not in itself directly affect our vital interests and consequently did not justify any reversal of our policy of avoiding war with Japan completely upset the strategic equilibrium in the Far East and brought the threat of attack on British possessions nearer, for Japan now had a potential fleet anchorage in Kam Ranh Bay and air bases within operating distance of northern Malaya and diversionary raiding distance of southern Malaya.² From Kam Ranh Bay the Japanese could develop a serious threat to British sea routes in the Indian Ocean, even whilst Singapore remained in our hands. All sea communications to the Middle East from the United Kingdom by way of the Cape and from Australia and New Zealand passed through the Indian Ocean. The oil from the Anglo-Persian oilfields was brought to the Middle East by this route, and to England via the Cape.

¹ Quoted in *Report of Joint Committee on Investigation of the Pearl Harbour Attack*, Senate, 79th Congress of the U.S.A., Document 244.

² Appreciation of the situation (re Siam), W.O. Tel. to Commander-in-Chief F.E., 1530/10/9/1941 and C.O.S. (41) 104.

'After the occupation of French Indo-China,' continued the intercepted Japanese despatch, 'next on our schedule is the sending of an ultimatum to the Netherlands East Indies. In the seizing of Singapore the Navy will play the principal part.' The despatch even stated the number of troops required—one division to seize Singapore and two the Netherlands East Indies.

23. PRESSURE ON THE DUTCH EAST INDIES

In the Netherlands East Indies, where the Japanese had recently been making economic demands they encountered a spirit very different from that which they found in Indo-China, though the Netherlands Government found it impossible, in the absence of any assurance of assistance from the United States, entirely to resist the demands. In September 1940, the Japanese Government had sent a special delegation to Batavia to discuss the whole complex of economic relations between Japan and the Netherlands East Indies. The delegation appeared to have no instructions from its government and the preponderance of service personnel in an ostensibly economic mission gave grounds for suspicion that the Japanese were more interested in infiltration than negotiation. After a good deal of pressure from the Dutch side, the delegation eventually produced an agenda, a feature of which was a demand for astronomical quantities of raw materials. Final Japanese demands were produced on 14th May, and the Dutch said their last word in a memorandum of 6th June. While firmly resisting every suggestion that the Netherlands East Indies formed part of the 'co-prosperity' sphere, the Dutch found it necessary to offer supplies of important materials. Their offers did not satisfy the Japanese,¹ who, after a violent campaign which failed to move the Dutch, withdrew their delegation.

24. THREAT TO BURMA

The penetration of Siam which was one of the rights obtained by Japan through her intervention in the frontier dispute with Indo-China, a dispute which as we have seen she herself fomented, was of overriding concern to Burma. The Imperial importance of Burma lay in her oil and mineral resources, her guardianship of the sea and air communications from India to Singapore, and the fact that the country was the channel for supplies to the Chungking government along the Burma Road. For purposes of general defence, Burma was an outpost of India, and any threat to the country threatened India and our whole Imperial position east of Suez. Attack on Burma, as the Combined Chiefs of Staff later pointed out, became a possibility, however, only after deeper penetration into Indo-China and the occupation of Siam.² Even then the routes to Burma were so poor as severely to limit the size of available force with which an overland attack could be made on the country. Nevertheless, there were two objects that were not difficult of attainment. The first the cutting of the Burma Road, would have a serious effect on Chinese resistance; whilst the denial to us of Burma's resources, through air bombardment of Rangoon and possibly of vulnerable points in eastern India, would be of grave concern. Occupation of Siam by the Japanese, besides making Burma liable to invasion by land as well as by sea and air, would bring her within close range of airfields from which heavy sustained bombing could be carried out.

¹ War Cabinet Far Eastern's Committee, Memo. by Minister of Economic Warfare F.E. (41) 136, 7th July 1941.

² ADB 2 Section 16 (see Section 43).

The subject was examined during the course of a defence conference held at Singapore in October 1940 and recommendations were made for defence. It was difficult at that stage to assess the scale of Japanese naval action against Burma and in the Bay of Bengal, but it appeared likely that so long as Singapore remained in our hands the main form of attack by sea would be an attempt to mine the approaches to Rangoon. The only naval force in Burmese waters was the Burma Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, which was raised in 1940. The force had a few motor launches and auxiliary vessels. There were several other craft building at Rangoon, but these had been held up mainly owing to the delay in obtaining engines and fittings from England. In case of grave emergency it might have been possible for a limited number of A/S and M/S vessels to be made available temporarily from India, provided the Japanese were not operating against Indian ports at the time.

One unusual condition prevailed in Burmese waters, which would facilitate landing operations by the Japanese from Siam. This was the existence of Japanese motor fishing vessels of some 70-80 tons and 10 knots speed, capable of towing four or five large sampans, which could transport up to 1,000 or more troops with stores and light guns from a point such as Renong, on the north-west coast of Siam, to Victoria Point, Mergui and Tavoy. These craft had for years operated in the Andamans and Nicobars and used the waters off Burma as far north as Akyab. The passage of expeditions such as described could not be opposed by surface vessels, for the Japanese would make use of little known and extremely shallow passages in which they would escape observation unless a constant patrol by light-draft craft were maintained. Such craft were not available in numbers in any way approaching requirements. The Conference recommended immediate provision for anti-submarine patrols and minesweeping services in the approaches to Rangoon, and that every endeavour should be made to hasten the building programme already in hand.

25. MR. CHURCHILL'S VIEWS

When in July 1941 the Japanese threat to Siam was reinforced by the landing of Japanese troops in south Indo-China, Japan had already been informed by the United States and ourselves that a move of her troops into Siam would be a menace to the security of our respective possessions. But there was a growing feeling in London that the only hope of saving the country from ultimately sharing the fate of Indo-China, was a plain warning of the danger that such a move might lead to war, though without definite American backing the Chiefs of Staff view was that any warning to Japan would be merely bluff. It was thought in Washington, however, that Japan would probably recoil before the ultimately overwhelming might of the United States, a view with which Mr. Winston Churchill himself concurred as appeared from a personal minute addressed to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the Chiefs of Staff Committee on 16th July 1941:

'I must repeat my conviction that Japan will not declare war on us at the present juncture, nor if the United States enters the war on our side. I agree with the views of the Chiefs of Staff that we are in no position to declare war upon Japan without the United States being on our side. Therefore, I do not consider that a war between Britain and Japan is likely at the present time. If contrary to the above views Japan should attack us, I am of opinion that the United

States would enter the war as the weight upon us would clearly be too great. Nevertheless, since the threatened Japanese moves in Indo-China are of serious menace to us, further precautions in the Far East should be taken so far as they are possible without condemning us to misfortunes in other theatres.

Two days earlier, as we have noticed, an intercepted Japanese despatch decyphered in the United States indicated that Japan's motive in penetrating into south Indo-China was to obtain an assembly point for launching a sudden attack. Two months earlier, on 14th May, the Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs had categorically stated to the American Ambassador in Tokyo that Japan was determined to carry out her southward expansion, and unless Great Britain ceased reinforcing Malaya and taking other measures to strengthen her position in the Far East it might be impossible for Japan to avoid war.¹ As is now known, Mr. Churchill's minute actually coincided with the initiation of preparations for a major war by Japan, in accordance with decisions taken at the Imperial Conference in Tokyo a fortnight earlier: a war which the order for freezing Japanese assets, issued a few days later, made inevitable.²

26. OPERATION 'MATADOR'

The Japanese penetration of south Indo-China and Siam created an overland threat to Malaya which the Chiefs of Staff held could best be countered by an advance into the Kra Isthmus where we could not allow Japan to establish herself without opposition, so plain would be the threat to Singapore; and they accordingly instructed the Commander-in-Chief, Far East, to complete preparations for a rapid move to Singora (Songkhla) to deny the Japanese sheltered waters for disembarking troops and unloading supplies if their forces should enter northern Siam or if it were necessary to forestall an attempt by Japan to occupy the Kra Isthmus. He was not to move, however, without authority from London.³

The question of anticipating the invader by advancing into southern Siam had been under consideration in Singapore in December 1940, soon after the formation of General Headquarters, Far East, and was later considered by the Defence Committee in London. Detailed plans for carrying out the operation, which eventually became known as 'Matador' were drawn up, and considerable preparations were made in connection with it. It was not until 5th December 1941, however, that the conditions considered essential by those locally responsible for conducting the operation, were fulfilled. The C.-in-C. Far East, was given freedom to put the plan into effect without the unavoidable delay which reference to London would have entailed, if information was received that a Japanese expedition was advancing with the apparent intention of landing on the Kra Isthmus, or if the Japanese violated any other part of Siam.⁴ In the event, the plan was not carried out principally owing to the uncertainty of Japan's intentions and the importance of refraining from violating Siamese neutrality until her intentions became clear.

¹ *Report of Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbour Attack*, Senate, 79th Congress, Document 244, p. 14.

² See Chapter III, Section 47.

³ Operation 'Sandwich.' Tel. C.O.S., F.E. No. 24, 9th August 1941.

⁴ Brooke-Popham, *Despatch*, para. 50 (M.09931/45).

27. MILITARY AND AIR COMMANDS IN FAR EAST CO-ORDINATED

During the all too indefinite period before a fleet in the Far East again became available the policy of the British government in the event of war with Japan was to rely on air power, backed by such naval and land forces as could be made available. The Australian and New Zealand naval forces serving abroad would be returned. Air forces of any strength would, however, take some time to assemble and our immediate efforts would be directed to reinforcing and re-equipping our land forces in Malaya, since the holding of Singapore was universally recognized as the key to our position in the Far East. It was intended to despatch to Singapore immediately on the outbreak of war, a force consisting of approximately one battle cruiser, one aircraft carrier, one cruiser and five destroyers, but this force would also be required to give increased protection to air/sea communications in the Indian Ocean during the intervening period before the arrival of our Far East Fleet.¹

Meanwhile, our military commanders in the Far East were doing their utmost to prepare for possible conflict. Admiral Layton's first task on arrival at Singapore as Commander-in-Chief in September 1940,² to which base Admiral Noble had shifted his flag at the end of June, was to draw up in conjunction with the General Officer Commanding, Malaya, and the Air Officer Commanding, Far East, a tactical appreciation of the situation based on a summarized version of the appreciation of the situation by the Chiefs of Staff cabled to Singapore on 16th September.

Experience in the production of the tactical appreciation showed the need for improved co-ordination of the British military and air commands in the Far East. Though the defence of the entire Far East with Australia and New Zealand was fundamentally a naval problem, it was in order to emphasize the reliance placed on the Royal Air Force for the defence of Malaya that an air officer had been selected for the appointment of Commander-in-Chief, Far East, responsible to the Chiefs of Staff for the general operational control of the British land and air forces in Malaya, Burma and Hong Kong, and for the co-ordination of plans for the defence of these territories. He was also responsible for the British air forces in Ceylon and for such squadrons of the Royal Air Force as were to be stationed for coastal reconnaissance in the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal. The co-ordination of the Military and Air Commands in the Far East under Sir Robert Brooke-Popham coincided with the first of a series of conferences and discussions between the interested Powers,³ which continued right up to the outbreak of war. Yet even when conducted on the very highest level⁴ they failed to achieve the one result which all were aware was of such overriding importance that all others paled beside it, namely an unmistakable warning to Japan that in the matter of meeting her further aggression the United Kingdom and the United States of America were solidly and indissolubly united as one.

¹ Tel. Boxes Series No. 12, 27th February 1941.

² Vice-Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton was appointed Commander-in-Chief China on 10th July 1940, assumed command on 12th September 1940.

³ Sir Robert Brooke-Popham's appointment was dated 17th October 1940, but he did not reach Singapore until 14th November.

⁴ Between the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of Great Britain at the "Atlantic Conference" in August 1941.

CHAPTER III

MEASURES TO SECURE INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

(See Plan 5 and Appendix, A, B)

28. DIFFICULTY OF FORMING A UNITED FRONT

The conversations, conferences and discussions which took place between October 1940 and December 1941 illustrated the difficulty of obtaining international agreement as to action against a common danger when interests differed. Public opinion in the United States at this time seemed to be against becoming involved in war and to wish that any aid should be limited to providing material and economic assistance. This necessarily exerted a restraining influence on the United States Government. The British view on the other hand was that it was unlikely Japan would enter the war against us if it was made clear that such action would bring in the United States against her. Without the United States, neither the British Commonwealth nor the Netherlands singly or together were in a position to take effective action to meet the danger of war in the Far East. The Commonwealth was engaged alone in a life and death struggle in Europe and could ill spare any diversion of sea, land or air forces from the main theatre, whilst the Netherlands had been overrun by the enemy and its military forces based on the Netherlands East Indies were in no position to meet the might of Japan.

The impulse behind the determination of Japan to expand lay in the requirements of the Japanese industrial machine. That machine had to be fed and its food was oil and rubber and other commodities abundant in South-East Asia but almost non-existent in the islands of Japan. In Japan there were two factions, the one prepared to go to war out of hand and the other not immediately ready to contemplate extreme measures. Both were united on one point, however, the necessity of obtaining by some means the secure supply of raw materials to compensate for the paucity of domestic resources which seemed to them to impose rigid limits on the growth of their output and income. Apart from nationalistic and military ambitions this was a powerful additional motive for the various acts of aggression by Japan since 1931.

29. THE TRIPARTITE PACT

If there ever existed any likelihood that the government of the Netherlands East Indies, and to a lesser extent that of Great Britain, could have made to Japan concessions sufficient to satisfy her need for the riches of the south it probably disappeared in the autumn of 1940, when Japan took steps to ensure German support in the event of her actions provoking the United States into war. On 27th September, five days after the signature by the Vichy government of the agreement permitting Japan to establish bases and station troops in Indo-China, a 10-year Mutual Assistance Pact was signed by Germany, Italy and Japan, by which the latter recognized the establishment in Europe of a 'New Order' as defined by Germany and Italy, and these acknowledged the leadership of Japan in establishing a like order in the Far East. The three