

and 1940-41 Calendars. There is a full list of file references, twenty-three pages of biographical notes and personal and subject indexes.

The work is very generously laid out and a pleasure to use, but the compilation is not, in all cases, impeccable. It happens that two important texts (the UK Chiefs of Staff Far East Appreciation of August 1940 and Churchill's prefatory telegram of 11 August to the Australian and New Zealand Prime Ministers) were published, as far back as 1963, in Vol. III of the New Zealand war history documents. For the Appreciation the Australian text notes two places where there were decyphering queries (pp.96 and 99) but there is no reference to the rendering in the published New Zealand version or the unpublished PRO version. Several paragraphs are left out and this is indicated by 'Matter omitted', but the last two paragraphs are also left out without any indication at all. In the case of Churchill's telegram, the celebrated assurance that if Japan set about 'invading Australia and New Zealand on a large scale' he had the Cabinet's authority to promise that Britain would cut its losses in the Mediterranean and go to their aid, ends with the words, 'sacrificing every interest except only defence position of this island on which all depends'. (p.85) In the New Zealand version this reads, 'the defence of the safety of this Island' and the PRO version (CAB 65/14 p.85) has 'the defence and feeding of this Island'. Decyphered documents present problems for historians. It is a pity that the sort of verification which has often been done with Bruce's and Casey's copies of their letters, was not extended to other cases where known copies existed. These are minor blemishes. The volume is of high standard, and reasonably priced.

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The Rise and Fall of the Singapore Naval Base. By W. David McIntyre. Macmillan, London, 1979, xiii, 289pp., illus. U.K. price: £15.

SINGAPORE was the Yorktown of the second British empire: 'the worst disaster and largest capitulation in British history', Churchill called it. It is not surprising that the literature on it is considerable. That on the campaign began with the comments of contemporaries and participants, but it has not ceased yet. Since the opening-up of the archives, more attention has been given to the strategy lying behind the building of the base at Singapore in the interwar years. Among the results are the works of Callahan and Hamill, this fine book (marred only by misprints), and more recently Paul Haggie's *Britannia at Bay* (Oxford, 1981).

Professor McIntyre does not deal in great detail with the campaign, though his summary is excellent. His concern is more with the long-term factors that helped to bring about the disaster. Here his account is detailed. But what is most appreciated is the evidence of an analytical mind at work (and, at times, of a sense of humour).

The second empire was in many respects a surprising phenomenon, contrasting in its huge extent with the size and resources of its metropolis. A monopoly enter-

ing an age of renewed competition, it was bound to be ephemeral. The main problem of the interwar years—indeed it had been a problem pre-war—was that Britain was overcommitted. To this problem there was no clear solution. Empire was more difficult to abandon than to acquire: international as well as internal factors obstructed abandonment, and they were not ‘fanciful’, as possibly Professor McIntyre implies (p.229). But it was also difficult to defend, given the straitened resources of the British, the autonomy of much of their empire, the impossibility of reconciling the interests of diplomatic partners.

If, as Professor McIntyre says, there is widespread agreement that lack of resources was the ultimate reason for the disaster (p.211), there is much less agreement over the use of the resources that were available in Malaya. Yet it may be that all the controversy over this really suggests that the decisions that were taken or not taken made little difference. Does that mean that the strategy itself was mistaken?

The concept of building a naval base at Singapore resulted from the first world war, as a result of which the defence of the empire had clearly to be put on a world-wide rather than a European basis. The concept was in the event combined with the notion of a single fleet, the base being ready for the transfer of that fleet in case of need. This strategy, though not without its critics, like Richmond, who spoke of defending a two-hemisphere empire with a one-hemisphere fleet, was not unreasonable, provided the fleet was not allowed to run down, and provided the Versailles settlement was sustained in Europe. But neither of the provisos was satisfied.

The strategy, however, remained, not so much because of illusions about its validity, as because of lack of alternatives. A deal with Japan, a pact with the US, rapid rearmament, were all impossible. So was ‘rearmament in the Dominions, with a greater element of self-reliance’ (p.216). Haggie suggests that Britain should have committed itself more fully to the League at the time of the Abyssinia crisis, as the best hope of sustaining the international order from the collapse of which it had most to lose. He also suggests (p.210) that Britain was the loser from its ‘vague and one-sided arrangement’ with the Dominions, in which it was pledged to go to their assistance if attacked, but itself enjoyed no such guarantee in return. But, as McIntyre says (p.216), the strategists had to face up to ‘the Commonwealth as it had then evolved’. Perhaps Haggie is more concerned with a larger question, the failure to face up to defending an empire so loosely held together.

The fall of Singapore was to promote changes in Britain’s colonial policy. The weakness of the defence of Malaya seemed to point to the weakness of a ‘plural society’. Planning for post-war Malaya, and indeed for other territories, took account of this in a new stress on partnership and nation-building. It was never very clear how Britain would contrive to resolve the problems of co-ordinating commonwealth defence that had proved so intractable even among a relatively small number of dominions pre-war. But the attempt to build a ‘third empire’ was in any case a vain one. Not only did Britain not dispose of the resources substantially to promote the massive economic and social changes involved in nation-building. It failed to recognize that the inadequacy of plural societies in the modern world meant also the irrelevance of empire. The British had again over-committed themselves.

Britain’s other illusion was that it had a special relationship with the inheritors of the first empire, the USA. Churchill recognized, as Professor McIntyre

indicates, the importance of American participation in the war (cf pp.179, 193). There is no evidence that he failed to provide adequately for the defences of Singapore in order to precipitate it. He seems rather indeed to have believed that the Japanese would be deterred, rather than provoked, by US-UK collaboration. But if he was right to believe that Britain could achieve victory only with the US alliance, he was mistaken not to recognize that the Americans did not want to preserve the international order either. They, too, wanted an end to the empire. The British empire could not survive, even if Britain were victorious. But the débacle at Singapore, to which the under-estimation of the Japanese contributed, made its survival still more dubious.

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