

2. DEVELOPMENTS AFTER DECEMBER, 1941

The whole of this background was shattered in December, 1941, by the dramatic entry of Japan into the war, which necessitated a reorientation of the whole effort of the Dominion to meet the new aggressor. Reinforcements to the Division in the Middle East were suspended, and Forces and supplies began instead to flow northwards into the Pacific. With the rapid fall of Singapore and the spectacular ten weeks' southward drive of the Japanese Forces, an intense urgency came to be attached to the speeding-up of defence works already in hand in New Zealand itself and sponsored by New Zealand in the Pacific area.

Perhaps the best measure of the extraordinary change in tempo which occurred at that time is provided by the jump in war expenditure as shown in the accounts of the Public Works Department, which continued to play by far the most important part in the whole constructional field. As compared with £3,600,000 in the first seven months of the war, £3,400,000 in the following twelve months, and £5,300,000 in the next twelve months (which included the beginning of the new phase), the expenditure of this Department jumped to £16,500,000 in the one year from April, 1942, to March, 1943.

Reasons of security did not permit any disclosure at that time of the nature of the work which was done. In the 1943 Public Works Statement the whole £16,500,000 was dismissed with the following cryptic paragraph:—

The past year has been one of very great activity in order to meet the requirements of the Armed Services, and practically the whole of the available resources of the Department have been engaged on these works. The growing scarcity of man-power has made it difficult to meet all demands, but in spite of this a very large volume of engineering and building work has been put through.

As might be expected at a time when the major task was to provide against invasion, the swing was largely towards Army work, which alone accounted for an expenditure of some £5,300,000. The list of Army works done is very long, but the following items taken from it will give some idea of the field covered: gun-emplacements for all calibres, anti-aircraft defences, local defensive works, tactical roads and bridges, brigade and divisional camps, mobilization camps, instruction-rooms, portable huts by the thousand, concrete pillboxes, preparations for demolition of bridges, road-blocks, tank-traps, detours, vehicle-stores, petrol-stores, rifle-ranges, hospitals, internment and prisoner-of-war camps, underground operational centres, emergency electric-power systems, camouflage works, &c.

Scarcely less was the total expenditure on Air Force works in the same year, amounting as it did to £5,100,000. Some of the more outstanding items were: radio-direction stations, meteorological stations, wireless-telegraph stations, dispersal pits, bulk-fuel stores, launches and launch bases, emergency moorings, underground operation rooms, together with large numbers of camps, hospitals, workshops, hostels, camouflage works, hangars, and aerodromes with concrete runways long enough to accommodate Flying Fortresses.

Naval works to a total cost of £900,000 were included in the same year. These consisted of signal stations, controlled-mine stations, anti-boat and anti-submarine booms and nets, training bases, mine and armament depots, oil-stores, hydrographic survey work, &c.