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JUNGLE AIRSTRIPS.

As the hunt for the Communist terrorists drives deeper into Malaya's jungle, the importance of the jungle forts as striking bases increases.

Until recently these 11 forts at strategic points along Malaya's jungle backbone were serviced by naval helicopters, but now the Royal Engineers have undertaken to build each fort a landing strip so that light aircraft can land with supplies and reinforcements. This will free the helicopters for more direct pursuit and attack of the terrorists. At each fort, aborigines are employed by the R.E.'s. to clear the strip. Most sites can then be levelled by light tractors, but the only way to get these in to the inaccessible forts is to dismantle them and carry them piece by piece in helicopters of the Royal Navy.

Each load must weigh no more than 600 lbs. and sometimes a single helicopter must make 5 or 6 trips to bring in one tractor.

Mechanics and fitters are waiting at the forts to put the parts together again, and in a few hours the work of levelling the strip can begin. But a few of these forts perch in such difficult territory that a light tractor can make no headway. For these forts nothing less than a bulldozer will do. Undismayed by such a task, Army engineers methodically strip down the 6-ton machine at the water's edge, charter a small fleet of perhaus fitted with outboard motors, and send the parts on a perilous 2-day journey upstream.

Meanwhile, Naval helicopters start delivering to the forts the tools and the men to put the parts together again.

Sappers and men of R.E.M.E. (the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers) make light work of what must surely be an Engineer's nightmare - assembling a bulldozer in conditions like these; without all the amenities of a modern workshop, only jungle poles, ropes, a few tools and a team of stout-hearted men with skill and the ability to improvise.

A tractor that came up by river is at work in no time - a bulldozer takes a few days to assemble.

Already strips, each 200 yards long, are finished at 7 or 8 of the 11 forts, and the helicopters which were tied down in keeping them serviced, are now free for operations against the terrorists.

Now its time for the Royal Air Force to take over. Their pioneer aircraft, specially designed for this type of work, can land and take off in 50 yards. So the forts are reinforced and supplied, and the good work of care and protection of the aborigines can be built up and extended, thus cutting them off from the terrorists who were forcing them to supply food.

Thus, too, more combined operations against the terrorists can be mounted until no sources of food remain to them, and there is nothing left but surrender.