

*Closing the Net around the Enemy in Burma*

96. By the end of June, the net was gradually tightened around the isolated Japanese land forces holding out in the Pegu Yomas in Central Burma. The monsoon continued. The heavy rains made the movement of Allied troops and their supporting arms exceedingly difficult on the fringes of the Pegu Yomas and along the Mawchi Road east of Toungoo.

97. The Japanese, however, got no nearer to escape. Whenever weather permitted, the squadrons of 221 Group were overhead endeavouring to locate the enemy in the most difficult of wooded country, and bombing on every occasion whatever targets presented themselves. For days, aircraft continued to search for heavily laden animal transports which the enemy were pressing into service to carry accoutrement of every description. Even lumber elephants, taken from their work in the famous Teak Forests of Burma, were employed in carrying light guns and other heavy equipment for the enemy. If the monsoon proved a handicap to the Allied Forces it was worse for the Japanese, who were completely cut off from sources of supply. In the Pegu Yomas, the plight of the enemy, as a result of the vigilance of air power and the movement of Allied ground troops, became desperate as they struggled against malaria and starvation, or suffered foot-rot and stomach and skin troubles. Some, indeed, were like skeletons when captured, while the remainder, still imbued with fanaticism of glory and death, rather than disgrace in surrender, struggled on.

98. In their jungle strikes and "hunting" expeditions, the squadrons obtained a large number of good results in spite of the difficulties of weather and thick ground cover. If the enemy looked for a lull in operations as a result of the monsoon, thus giving them an opportunity to regroup, they got none from the R.A.F. squadrons and ground forces.

99. In the Mokpalin area, where No. 20 Squadron had damaged much enemy transport, a message sent by Headquarters, 4 Corps, after the strike, said:—

"Thanks for the magnificent efforts yesterday on the Mokpalin road."

100. When Mosquitos of 47 Squadron went out on a strike, they bombed a village north east of Nyaunglobin, where it was reported that the Japanese, moving south, had taken cover during the day. The Mosquitos dispersed their bombs well among the bashas and on dumps of packing cases seen on either side of the roadway, while many low flying attacks made across the area did extensive damage.

101. An Army report which reached 221 Group Headquarters stated that during an air attack in the Meprawse area, some 30 to 40 bullock carts carrying food were accounted for, two petrol dumps destroyed and 50 to 70 Japanese troops killed.

102. Up the Mawchi Road, Hurricanes went after a number of guns or tanks stated to be moving in the district. Two attacks which they made on heavily camouflaged objects, revealed large guns with limbers or tractors. They left the targets in flames.

103. The plight of the enemy as a result of these jungle strikes worsened. A report brought in, following an air strike by No. 11

Squadron, said that "the villagers reported that they carried away 30 Japanese corpses after the strike."

104. Some time earlier, a strike by Nos. 79 and 261 Squadrons brought the following message from Headquarters, 20 Indian Infantry Division:—

"One 75 mm gun, one 70 mm gun, one 77 mm A/T gun, one 20 mm A/T rifle, six pistols, six swords, approximately 100 rifles, three stacks of ammunition and much artillery ammunition,"

were found by ground forces after a successful air attack.

105. In the last week of June, the main concentration of Japanese forces in Central Burma, was opposite Nyaunglobin, with protective forces north west of Pegu and south west of Pyu, which gave R.A.F. Thunderbolts opportunities for attacks. During one raid, six aircraft of 79 Squadron bombed the village of Thaington. Some days later it was learned that 170 Japanese and 40 mules had been killed.

106. On the Sittang river too, where movement by the enemy became more active, Spitfire aircraft undertook patrols down the river, damaging and sinking small river craft of every description almost daily, thus helping our ground forces to interrupt enemy efforts in that area to escape across the river.

*"Force 136" and Sittang River Air Patrol.*

107. There were other major difficulties which stood in the way of the trapped Japanese forces in escaping from Burma. The guerilla tactics of "Force 136", which later played a conspicuous part in the slaughter of the enemy on the Sittang River, helped to seal this stretch of water against any large scale enemy crossing.

108. The forces of Burmese guerillas, which began to assume considerable importance at this time in Burma, had caused the utmost concern to small parties of Japanese stragglers, who suffered severe losses at their hands. These guerillas had been operating with success during the latter weeks of March, and throughout April, but they were even more active during June and July, as the Japanese casualty figures testified.

109. Organising the Burmese patriots was the work of the British Organisation in Burma known as "Force 136". It was an independent body which operated both with the Air Forces and the Army. The Force consisted of trained and specially picked officers who were dropped by parachute into enemy-occupied areas to organise Burmese levies and to wage surprise attacks against the Japanese. This guerilla warfare demanded the closest liaison with the Air Forces. Supplies, including arms and ammunition, were air dropped once the parties of levies had been organised.

110. It was through the machinery of "Force 136" too, that much valuable information on enemy dumps, troop movements, headquarters, and concentrations of transport carrying food, stocks and equipment, was passed by W/T to Army Headquarters, and special air-strikes quickly organised for the squadrons of 221 Group, R.A.F. These tasks were carried out eagerly by pilots, and many profitable and successful strikes were made against the