

Indeed, such air forces of ours operating in these circumstances would be destroyed piecemeal, giving but small returns for considerable losses.

206. Burwing continued, however, as an organisation, and although bombers were flown in to Lashio and Loiwing to operate for a few days and return to Calcutta, very little could be achieved. Eight Hurricanes that were flown in on 6th April lasted only a few days in the face of Japanese attacks on Loiwing.

207. With the reverse that the Chinese 5th Army sustained on the Southern Shan front on 20th and 21st April which led to the rapid advance of the Japanese to Lashio, Burwing was withdrawn to China to provide British re-fuelling parties at main Chinese air bases. The personnel of 17 Squadron were withdrawn via Myitkyina to take their part—re-equipped with Hurricane II's—in the Calcutta defence.

208. But using the depth towards India, our bomber operations were continued on a slight but growing scale. Much remained still to be done for the support of the Army and the evacuation of our wounded and civilians.

PART VIII.—WITHDRAWAL OF BURMA ARMY TO INDIA.

209. General Alexander's Army moved from the oil field area through the dry zone of Upper Burma to Mandalay with Headquarters at Shwebo, the final withdrawal taking place across the River Chindwin through Kalewa and over the Manipur Road through Tamu. The Army passed through the forward screen of 4th Corps troops on the Lochao pass on the 18th May and General Alexander's force finally reached Imphal on the 20th May.

210. The enemy air force now extended their patrols over a wide area in Northern Burma and carried out attacks on Lashio, Mandalay, Loiwing and Meiktila. Support was given to their forces operating against our Allies in the Taunggyi and Mawlaik areas whilst flying boats based on the Andaman Islands commenced attacks on shipping in the Bay of Bengal between 28th March and 5th April.

211. The Japanese reinforcement of Burma took place during the first week in April. Under the cover of a vigorous attack on Ceylon and on our shipping in the Bay of Bengal on 6th April a convoy of ships reached Rangoon. We were powerless to prevent this. Fortress aircraft of the U.S.A.A.C., however, attacked with five and a half tons of bombs an enemy force in the Andamans and straddled a cruiser and a transport. Further night flying attacks were carried out on the enemy convoy at Rangoon with useful results—fires and explosions being seen in the dock area.

212. During the eight weeks from 21st March, when the Magwe action took place, until May 20th, when the Burmarmy was finally withdrawn to India, action with bombers and fighters continued against the Japanese in Burma.

213. The fighter action was limited to such fighter sorties as could be carried out within the range of the Mohawk Squadron based at Dinjan. Bomber action was exerted either from aerodromes in Assam—Tezpur and Dinjan—or from bases in the Calcutta area, using Chittagong as a forward landing ground.

One hundred and three tons of bombs were released on the enemy in these attacks. On arrival in Eastern India Squadrons were re-formed and aircraft reconditioned slowly but as quickly as possible.

214. On the 12th April the first attack was made in support of General Alexander's right flank, when 9,000 lbs. of bombs were dropped on Japanese troops at Nyaungbintha. The enemy and his transport were also attacked at Singbaungwe, Allanmyo, Magwe, Sandoway and Taungup. In all 15,000 lbs. of bombs were released.

215. Attacks, helped by some long range bombers of the U.S.A.A.C., continued on objectives of all kinds. In all 58 raids took place in support of the Army's withdrawal, some to reduce the scale of air attack and the remainder in direct support of the Army. Most of the bombing took place on General Alexander's right flank, although three raids were directed against such places as Mongpaw, Laikha and Kongchaiping on the Chinese front.

216. Such airfields as Mingaladon, Akyab and Myitkyina were kept under a harassing scale of attack. Operations against Akyab and Myitkyina were particularly effective and when the enemy attempted to establish himself there on forward bases, bomber action made these untenable by the destruction of his first-line aircraft on the ground.

217. Of the 58 raids, 13 were undertaken by aircraft of the U.S.A.A.C. and 45 by the R.A.F. A total of 231,900 lbs. of bombs in all were dropped, mostly followed by low flying machine gun attacks.

218. The enemy were using river craft to out-flank the Army in Burma. This line of communication was continuously harassed by our aircraft and a total of some 30,000 lbs. of bombs were released on steamers, barges and wharves while the attack on a concentration of river craft at Monywa on the 4th and 5th May was, by its delaying action, largely instrumental in preventing the Japanese encircling movement of the right flank of our forces, then withdrawing from Yu to Kalewa, a movement which if successful would have proved embarrassing to our Army.

219. A single Blenheim which had attacked Akyab on the 22nd May was engaged by 4 Army O.R. fighters. The fight lasted 20 minutes and was broken off by the remaining 3 fighters when 70 miles out to sea the aircraft of their leader, the Japanese air ace Lt.-Col. Takeo Kato, was shot down in flames. No other Allied aircraft attacked Akyab on that day.

220. Requests for bombing action and tactical reconnaissance were made by General Alexander to Headquarters in Calcutta. Reconnaissances continued, 55 being completed for Burmarmy.

221. No. 31 air transport Squadron had been placed at my disposal equipped with D.C.2 and later some D.C.3 aircraft. This Squadron did magnificent work. Their daily effort was about 3 aircraft and considerable air transport requirements had to be met. Food had to be dropped on the 3 routes along which the evacuation of civilians from Burma was taking place. These routes ran from Shwebo-Kalewa-Tamu