

Evacuation of Rangoon.

164. I had been with General Alexander until 14.00 hours. He had told me of his decision to evacuate Rangoon, and the code word for blowing demolitions and evacuation was issued just before midnight on 6th March. With his agreement I moved Headquarters "X" Wing from Rangoon to Zigon, the first "kutchha" strip from which we would operate in support of the Army's withdrawal along the Prome Road. A small party of Officers and airmen were left behind to complete the demolition of the operations room and the facilities at Norgroup Headquarters. They were then to go on to Mingaladon and help to complete the demolitions at this airfield. This party came out with the Army.

PART VI—AIR OPERATIONS COVERING
WITHDRAWAL UP THE PROME ROAD.

165. There was a heavy haze on the 7th and 8th, which interfered with observation by fighters, made worse by the great pall of smoke from the burning oil which rose to a height of 15,000 feet and was blown North over the area of operations as far as Tharrawaddy. General Alexander's force failed to dislodge the road block at Mile 22 on the 7th, but on the morning of the 8th was able to overcome this resistance, and the withdrawal of our Army commenced North up the Prome Road.

Operations from Zigon.

166. The rough surface of Zigon proved unsatisfactory for Hurricanes. I had to decide whether to risk damaging Hurricanes—which when damaged might not be repaired—or to operate the fighters from Magwe where their range would not have enabled them to provide security over our troops. The following day from Zigon the fighter effort was maintained.

167. The column of our withdrawing Army was reported by aircrews to be some 40 miles long, mostly M.T. vehicles and tanks—an admirable target for enemy bomb action in country where there was little or no cover from air attack and no possibility of getting off the long straight tarmac road.

168. But the state of air superiority finally established on 25th February still continued. Fighter patrols were carried out over the line from Zigon to Rangoon. The Army, without molestation from the enemy air force, was thus able to take up and consolidate its position on the Petpadan-Tharrawaddy line.

169. As regards fighter sweeps to secure the withdrawal, the Hurricanes at Zigon carried out about 12 to 18 sorties a day until "X" Wing had withdrawn from Prome to Magwe on the 11th March. It was then disbanded on the formation of Burwing at Magwe. Group Captain Singer, who arrived on the 12th March, took over the command of Akwing, which was then in formation at Akyab.

170. Operations from Zigon resulted in the tail unit of a Hurricane giving way on an average of 1 in every 5 landings. A bamboo skid was fitted to the tail of the Hurricane which then took off and landed at Magwe for repair. 2 Buffaloes were badly wrecked by the aerodrome surface and were eventually burnt. 1 Blenheim and 1 Lysander were also rendered unserviceable, but were repaired and flown out before the airfield was left.

171. The sole Japanese air attack driven home at this time was directed against the town of Tharrawaddy, where the bomb lift of 10 bombers was disposed of on civilian quarters causing a number of civilian casualties.

172. G.R. Reconnaissance in the Gulf of Martaban and the Bay of Bengal continued and escort was provided for the last convoy which carried detachments and demolition parties. All ships got safely away.

Operations from Park Lane.

173. The range for fighters was now shortened and, consequently, "X" Wing moved to Park Lane, a "kutchha" strip North of Prome. This move was completed on the night of the 9th March. The enemy did not locate and attack the fighters at Zigon or Park Lane.

174. Fighting continued and on the 25th March the Army had taken up their position on the Prome line, with the 1st Bur. Division's move from Toungoo to Allammyo in progress.

175. During this period, from the 7th March to the 21st March, the bomber force was either held in readiness for close support of the Army or attacks were made in order to reduce the scale of air attack and so aid the fighters in their task of security. Attacks on enemy objectives in support of the Army were also carried out. A total of 31,500 lbs. of bombs was released with good results on such objectives as troop concentrations, aerodromes, road and railway communication and river craft. Constant reconnaissance was carried out over the entire front towards Rangoon and in the Valley of the Sittang, while a close watch was kept on our old air bases in the Rangoon area and at Moulmein for signs of the arrival of the enemy air force and reinforcements. Some effort, however, was wasted because bombers available were held standing by for objectives which the Army did not provide.

176. The enemy attacked Toungoo on the 17th March and carried out reconnaissance of our airfields up the Burma Road, Tangan, Namsang, Nyaunglebin and Meiktila—obviously searching for our air force.

Formation of Burwing.

177. Burwing, comprising No. 17 Hurricane, No. 45 Bomber Squadron, the elements of an Army Co-operation Flight, 1 weak A.V.G. Squadron and the R.D.F. Station, had been formed at Magwe under the command of Group Captain Seton Broughall. This was a fully mobile mixed Army support force which, by instructions from Air Headquarters, India, was placed under the operational control of General Alexander on the 18th March.

Air Directif—9th March.

178. On the 9th March I flew to Akyab to meet Air Marshal (now Air Chief Marshal) Sir Richard Peirse, the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Air Forces in India.

179. The Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief issued a Directif in which I was told to maintain my two mixed Wings at Magwe and Akyab and to support the Army in Burma and to organise the air defence of Calcutta, Asansol and Tatanagar in India, and of Digboi oil installation in Assam; also to continue from India offensive bombing operations in support of the Army in Burma. Additionally, a further