

role of the force was reconnaissance and the attack of enemy surface vessels in the Bay of Bengal in aid of the security of our sea communications.

Formation of Akwing.

180. My Headquarters were moved from Magwe to Akyab on the 12th March, where I commenced forming Akwing. On the 17th this Wing comprised 135 Squadron, armed with obsolete Hurricane I's and 1 Hurricane II, a G.R. Flight and a small air communications detachment. It was proposed to make good the warning (R.D.F.) and to build the Wing up with 1 Bomber Squadron (113 Squadron) when Blenheims became available from flow and 1 G.R. Squadron (139 Squadron) when Hudsons became available.

181. On the 17th March I flew to Calcutta to meet the Commander-in-Chief and the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief. My Headquarters was in process of opening in Calcutta.

PART VII—REVERSE INFLICTED ON MIXED WING AT MAGWE.

182. On the 22nd March I returned to Burma to inspect Akwing at Akyab and Burwing at Magwe. On landing at Akyab I received a telegram from Group Captain Seton Broughall to say that the enemy had attacked Magwe in force the previous day. This was immediately followed by a signal telling me that heavy attacks had recommenced and closing the aerodrome to approaching aircraft. He reported that nearly all the first-line aircraft had been written off or damaged and asked for approval to move to Lashio and Loiwing to rehit. I telegraphed agreement and flew on to Mandalay where I arranged for Group Captain Seton Broughall to meet me.

The Bomber Attack at Mingaladon.

183. Examining this action in full detail:—On the 20th March reconnaissance carried out by Burwing had disclosed concentrations of the enemy air force taking place in the Rangoon area. More than 50 aircraft were reported on our old airfield at Mingaladon. Group Captain Seton Broughall decided to attack the following morning in an effort to reduce the scale of attack in Burma which his intelligence staff had put at 400 plus in all. A raid of ten Hurricanes and nine Blenheims of 45 Squadron accordingly took off. The Blenheims were intercepted by enemy Naval "O" fighters 40 miles North of Rangoon and fought their way in to Mingaladon. The bomb lift of 9,000 lbs. with stick adaptors was dropped on the runways among the enemy aircraft. The formation fought their way back to Tharrawaddy. During this gallant engagement in which 18 enemy fighters were encountered the Blenheims shot down two enemy fighters and claimed two probably destroyed and two damaged. Most of our aircraft were shot up but none were shot down. There were no casualties to personnel except one pilot wounded.

Low Flying Fighter Attack on Mingaladon.

184. The Hurricanes carried out a low flying attack. Nine enemy fighters were claimed as destroyed in air combat while 16 enemy bombers and fighters were destroyed or damaged on the ground. This was a magnificent air action. Some Hurricanes were badly

shot up while one crashed on our side of the line through lack of petrol, following combat. O.C. Burwing intended to repeat the attack that afternoon, but while final preparations were being made for this sortie, the enemy commenced their considerable attack on the air base at Magwe.

185. It should be appreciated that on this day at Magwe all serviceable operational aircraft, fighters and bombers, of my command were present with the exception of one Hurricane II and nine worn-out Hurricane I's, ex O.T.U., at Akyab.

Enemy Attack on Magwe Begins.

186. Over a period of some 25 hours, commencing at 13.23, Magwe was attacked in force by the enemy. In all, the scale of attack reached about 230 fighters and bombers, which included 166 Army 96 and 97 medium and heavy bombers. It is calculated that a great weight of bombs, some 200 tons, were accurately released in patterns during this attack.

187. Similar attacks had been carried out against Rangoon without decisive effect. But at Rangoon there was good warning and the number of fighters available against such attacks was usually 20, rising on occasion to the high figure of 45.

Fighter Effort.

188. 21 fighters were present at Magwe when attacked, but as a direct result of the air action which had been fought over Mingaladon in the morning, *the number of serviceable aircraft at readiness to take to the air was only 12.* It should here be mentioned that the leaders and many of the fighter pilots at Magwe had been at two minute readiness day after day, from dawn to dusk, for a period of some eight weeks.

Warning.

189. The only observer corps system remaining to the East and South-East was the observer post belt as far South as Toungoo and Prome on the main line of communication, reporting through Mandalay, and a chain of posts on the railway line Pyinmana-Kyaukpadaung which reported direct to Magwe operations room over an R.A.F. W/T. link. There was no observer corps system to the West and North-East of Magwe—an outflanking avenue used by the enemy during this attack. The R.D.F. set was of wrong type, its arc of observation was to the South-East. The equipment had given three months hard service and no spares had been available. The warning was weak and unreliable.

The Enemy Air Action.

190. At 13.00 hours on the 21st March, a report was received of a single unidentified aircraft approaching and two Hurricanes were sent off to intercept, but were unable to make contact. At 13.23 hours the approach of an enemy formation was confirmed and all available fighters took off. But they numbered only four Hurricanes and six P.40s. At 13.30, 21 bombers escorted by ten fighters attacked, bombing and machine gunning the airfield. Our fighters intercepted and destroyed four enemy aircraft with one probable and one damaged, but the weight of the attack got home and considerable damage resulted in which communications were destroyed.