

191. The enemy followed this up with further raids at 14.10 and 14.30. In all the scale of attack was 59 bombers and 24 fighters that day.

192. On the 22nd March, plots of movements were received from the R.D.F. set at 08.04 and 08.11 hours. Immediately afterwards there was a temporary breakdown of the W/T. link which, combined with interference, prevented the reception of plots in the operations room until the enemy attack had developed at 08.45 hours. Two Hurricanes had been sent off to intercept a high flying enemy reconnaissance aircraft heard over the airfield at 08.30. They had not yet made contact when at 08.47 hours 27 bombers with an escort of ten plus fighters appeared over the aerodrome, followed a quarter of an hour later by a second wave of 27 bombers also with fighter escort. As no warning of these raids had been received, no further fighters were sent off to engage. The two Hurricanes already in the air engaged the Japanese formation and damaged two.

193. Considerable damage was sustained. The runways were rendered unserviceable, communications were broken down and a number of aircraft, both bombers and fighters, were destroyed on the ground.

194. Immediately afterwards, the Commander of the Second Pursuit Squadron, A.V.G., reported to Group Captain Seton Broughall that in view of the absence of warning and the scale of attack he was compelled by the terms of his instructions from General Chennault to withdraw his remaining flyable aircraft to refit. At this stage of the action only three P.40s and three Hurricanes remained flyable, the Hurricanes alone being operationally serviceable. The A.V.G.'s P.40s withdrew to Loiwing that afternoon followed by their ground party.

195. At 13.30 hours reconnaissance aircraft were again reported approaching and two of the three remaining Hurricanes were sent up but failed to intercept. While they were returning to land at 14.30 the enemy again commenced his attacks with two waves of 27 and 26 bombers respectively, each accompanied by fighter escort. This terminated the enemy's attacks.

196. Great damage had been done and 9 Blenheims and at least 3 P.40's were destroyed on the ground, 5 Blenheims were unserviceable, while 3 Hurricanes had been destroyed in air combat. The remaining 20 aircraft (6 Blenheims, 3 P.40's and 11 Hurricanes) were flyable but unserviceable due to normal unserviceability or damage from enemy action. These aircraft, except the P.40's, were flown out to Akyab.

197. This grave reverse to Burwing—the R.A.F. detachment in Upper Burma—was the result of our weakness in fighters, the weakness of the warning system at Magwe and the complete absence of aircraft pens and bad dispersal arrangements at this airfield so hurriedly occupied. There has been a good deal of criticism of the subsequent hasty move of Burwing from Magwe, while it had an adverse effect on the morale of both the Army and the civil population.

198. The convoy left Magwe for Lashio and Loiwing early on the morning of the 23rd. Salvage and refuelling parties were left behind.

199. On the nights of the 22nd and 23rd respectively, I met General Alexander and Group Captain Seton Broughall at Maymyo. It was confirmed that Burwing would be withdrawn to Lashio and Loiwing—the only remaining aerodrome where fair warning existed—for refitting.

200. In the meantime it was proposed to try and make good the warning at Magwe, to put it into a proper state of defence and fit for Burwing to return there for operations. As the convoy had already left Magwe I issued instructions for the R.D.F. set to be turned round and sent back to Magwe and for the salvage and working parties at Magwe to be strengthened.

201. Loiwing was the only airfield left with reasonable warning and therefore the proposal to leave Magwe and to refit at Loiwing was not unsound despite the great distance of the latter airfield from the area in which the Army was operating. By use of the advanced landing grounds, limited support could be given to the Army until the defence at Magwe was satisfactorily completed and the aerodrome re-occupied. At Lashio warning was weak.

202. As events turned out it would not have been possible to reoccupy Magwe since the airfield fell into enemy hands 3 weeks later and the organisation of the warning system and the provision of works—for which only limited labour then existed—could not have been done in time. Additionally, the observer corps belt in the Sittang Valley and the Valley of the Irrawaddy was gradually being rolled up and with it any warning from this source.

Enemy Action—Akyab

203. The enemy had also found our small force at Akyab. A similar action took place which commenced on the 23rd, was repeated on the 24th and on the 27th. Our fighters intercepted on 2 occasions inflicting a loss of 4 enemy aircraft destroyed and 3 probably destroyed for a cost of 6 Hurricanes.

204. Although warning was received on the 27th, low flying enemy fighters caught our small force unprepared on the ground on this occasion. 2 Hurricanes got into the air and engaged, 1 being shot down. 7 Hurricanes were destroyed on the ground and a Valencia. Instructions had already been issued by Air Headquarters, India, to withdraw Akwing from Akyab to Chittagong as warning was so weak. Akyab would continue to be an advanced landing ground for refuelling aircraft and to enable our Hudson reconnaissance to reach the Andaman Islands. A small R.D.F. set with a limited range of 20 miles, had been flown in and was operating, but the observer corps warning for Akyab was poor. The posts were few, only the outlines of communication existing owing to the difficult nature of the country.

205. These two actions—at Magwe and at Akyab—in effect terminated the R.A.F. activities based in Burma. The supply of aircraft now became the critical factor. The necessity to build up our defence in North Eastern India and Ceylon brought about a decision by the Commander-in-Chief, India, not to re-equip Burwing. The maintenance of a small force in Burma was uneconomical in view of the lack of warning and increasing weight of attack.