

was observed by low flying Hurricanes on reconnaissance. The 63rd Brigade had been accepted and General Alexander planned the last stand in the defence of Rangoon. Throughout this action which terminated on the 8th March with the completion of the demolition and the final evacuation of the Port of Rangoon, an interesting air situation arose.

150. It was of paramount importance that the last vital demolition on a big scale should be completed without the interference of hostile aircraft and that the movement of the Army which was disposed astride the Pegu Road and in Rangoon should be enabled to give last cover to demolition parties and to withdraw as planned through the cross-road at Taukkyan and North up the Prome Road. The Army was tied to the road on account of the nature of the country and the fact that it was mechanised.

151. As already noted, the air actions over Rangoon on the 24th and 25th had inflicted severe casualties on the enemy air force. From that day until the evacuation of the Army from Rangoon had been completed, until all our convoys and ships had left the Port in security and until our demolition parties had been withdrawn, no enemy bomber attempted to enter what had previously been our warning zone round the airfields of Rangoon, i.e., roughly a circle 40 miles in radius from the centre of the town.

152. I can only assume that when their last effort to establish air superiority failed, the enemy air force were determined not to incur further wastage until Rangoon fell. Consequently the demolitions and the withdrawal of our forces from Rangoon took place in a state of absolute air superiority.

153. As regards the enemy effort in the battle of Pegu, air attacks took place against Maymyo, Toungoo and Bassein, whilst considerable activity was maintained over the battle area.

154. On the 2nd March I gave instructions for the R.D.F. station, which had been made mobile to move to Magwe, to provide some R.D.F. warning for our new air base. Consequently, when the telephone observer corps system collapsed there was no warning in the area except that provided by observation from military points and airfields.

155. To offset this to some extent a "Jim Crow" Hurricane was kept over Rangoon by day.

156. During this critical phase, fearing that my fighter force might be caught on the ground and destroyed by surprise low flying fighter attack, I had moved them out to a newly prepared "kutchra" strip at Highland Queen from which offensive fighter patrols were maintained. To give the impression that the force was still at Mingaladon, wrecked aircraft fuselages and dummies were parked in the readiness position on the runways.

157. During this critical phase to the 7th March, the bomber effort was directed against the enemy wherever he could be found. The fighters accompanying the bomber raids came down to shoot up enemy objectives. 96,800 lbs. of bombs were released, and a considerable number of fighter offensive and protective sorties

carried out. Such objectives as enemy troop concentrations, trains, boats on the Sittang and M.T. columns were attacked with satisfactory results. The bombers operated from Magwe aerodrome using Highland Queen and John Haig as advanced bases.

158. General Sir Archibald Wavell, now Commander-in-Chief, India—to which Command Norgroup had reverted—visited Burma on the 1st and 2nd March. A meeting was held at Magwe on the morning of the 1st March in which the Commander-in-Chief reviewed the land and air situation. At this meeting H.E. the Governor, General Hutton and myself were present. I described the air situation and the need for reinforcing Hurricanes and Blenheims. With Rangoon now closely threatened, with our warning non-existent, with a slender fighter force of 20 serviceable Hurricanes and a few Buffaloes, with the A.V.G. force standing at 4 serviceable aircraft at Magwe, it was a position in which I said we should be unable to deny the enemy freedom of air action; while our bombing effort in support of the Army would be limited to the efforts of our quickly dwindling force of 16 bombers.

Attack on Highland Queen.

159. On the 6th, an enemy formation of about 20 plus aircraft which was flying over the Japanese troops advancing through the jungle towards the Prome Road over-shot its mark and, by accident and without warning, arrived flying low over Highland Queen where our fighters, some bombers and some G.R. aircraft were on the ground.

160. Fortune attended us on this occasion. The enemy shooting was bad and some Hurricanes were able to take off. Although no claims were made there were indications that 2 enemy fighters were damaged or destroyed. Two aircraft of ours were destroyed on the ground. The anti-aircraft defence of the aerodrome went into action satisfactorily. This was a raid which might well have been a decisive end to our small air force.

161. I immediately issued instructions for all aircraft to fly in from Highland Queen to Mingaladon, whence our last sorties were carried out.

162. Infiltrations by boat had taken place up the River Rangoon. Offensive action by our fighters was taken but movement continued by night. On the afternoon of the 6th March I left Wing Headquarters, Rangoon, and flew to my Headquarters at Magwe.

163. Our fighter force had for some days been split between Magwe and the forward bases round Rangoon, Highland Queen and Mingaladon. The Hurricane force which was then standing at about 15 aircraft was a mixed one comprising commanders and pilots of 17, 135 and 136 Squadrons, and operating from the forward bases was maintained from Magwe, where maintenance inspections were carried out. The P.40's of the A.V.G. which had done such sterling work were now suffering from acute unserviceability due to lack of spares and replacement aircraft. I therefore placed them in the defence of the air base at Magwe. This made good my promise to General Chennault that I would not employ them at airfields without adequate warning.