

122. It was flat, open country with scattered scrub, and some very fierce fighting took place in appalling weather at Nyaungkashe, Abya, and Myikye. The village of Nyaungkashe, indeed, changed hands several times.

123. Air support thrown in by 221 Group, included the Spitfire and Thunderbolt squadrons operating continuous patrols or "Cabanks" in the Nyaungkashe area. The enemy took exceedingly heavy punishment. His determination to hold this area, at all costs, however, until the large Japanese forces to the north got down past Bilin, with the strategic town of Mokpalin on their right, safeguarded by the Sittang troops, was obvious.

124. Day after day, gun positions, troop concentrations, and river craft of all descriptions were subjected to intensive attacks by the air forces, bringing sincere thanks from the Army. On July 4th, No. 42 Squadron's Thunderbolts had a most successful day, when a 105mm gun was wrecked and two other guns silenced at Nyaungkashe.

125. It was at this time that some forces of 7 Indian Infantry Division found themselves in a precarious position as a result of the determined Japanese thrust, but, assisted by air attack, succeeded in extricating themselves.

126. "With the help of excellent air support quickly given," wrote Lieutenant General Messervy to Air Vice-Marshal Bouchier, A.O.C. 221 Group, "I have been able to extricate some four hundred men, including sixty wounded, from a difficult situation with good knocks to the Japs at the same time."

127. It was noted throughout these air operations, and further substantiated by ground reports, that a considerable number of Japanese troops were killed as a result of air attacks.

128. By July 11th, the Japanese offensive at the Sittang Bend had been contained, though the enemy still retained their foothold on the right bank of the Sittang, opposite Mokpalin.

Air Power Assists the Guerillas.

129. As the month advanced, a notable movement of enemy troops endeavouring to cross the Sittang River in parties at various points between Shwegyin and Kyaukke, kept the Spitfire squadrons on continuous patrol over the Sittang River exceedingly active. Thunderbolt squadrons, too, came down from the Meiktila area to attack forces of Japanese numbering, in some instances, one thousand strong, as they made their way eastwards. The large scale break-through from the Pegu Yomas had not yet started.

130. It was in this area of the Sittang, and also in the east, on the right bank of the Salween, that the organised guerillas, which had been brought under the control of 12th Army, ambushed hundreds of escaping Japanese troops moving down from Loikaw to Papun, and literally massacred them. No enemy party was safe from these guerillas under Force 136 who, with portable W/T, kept base informed of the enemy's movements and as a result provided the Mosquitos and Spitfires with definite targets, which they bombed and strafed untiringly.

131. The guerillas' flag was seen regularly by pilots heading for their targets. They were assisted by large indicator arrows on the ground, and even cryptic messages which the

levies had conceived. On one occasion, pilots, correctly interpreting a message, "In M", located a Japanese force in a marsh.

132. Following a heavy raid on Pa-An, one of the principal staging villages used by the Japanese while moving down the Salween valley, a message sent from our land forces to 273 and 607 Squadrons on July 1st said:—

"More than five hundred Japs killed in last heavy raid on Pa-An. Did not tell you before as awaiting confirmation. Congrats to pilots."

133. An earlier report had described this whole area after the raids as covered in dust and smoke, with Japanese soldiers seen running about in panic and rushing for shelter as aircraft came down to strafe them. The Mosquito Squadrons got equally effective results for, during a strike at Kawludo, an enemy staging post in the Salween valley, north of Papun, a ground report stated that over one hundred Japanese troops had been killed.

134. Thunderbolts and Spitfires carried out a very successful attack on July 15th and 16th, in the Shwegyin Chaung area of the Sittang, and a message from Kyadwin to 113 Squadron and 607 Squadron said:—"Tell R.A.F. strike great success."

135. North East of Kyadwin, at Paungzeik, Mosquitos of 47 Squadron, on July 16th, made a bombing and strafing attack in the Paungzeik valley and 51 dead Japanese were counted after the attack. Yet another attack by aircraft on the 19th, at Shanywathit, resulted in two direct hits being made on a house which was full of Japanese troops, and over eighty are believed to have been killed.

136. The reports of successful air strikes against the escaping enemy were many and varied. In the credit for their success the guerillas of Force 136 must equally share. Their daring in approaching large enemy parties and making sudden furious assaults on them with gunfire and grenades before retiring to their hideouts to plan further surprise raids, was outstanding in this final killing of the Japanese in Burma. The risks, too, which they ran, while blatantly guiding aircraft on to enemy concentrations, frequently involved them in hazardous escapes. Many escapes were only made possible indeed, by aircraft swooping in between the levies and the enemy, strafing the Japanese pursuers. If caught, guerillas were tortured cruelly by the enemy.

Tribute to R.A.F. from Guerilla Leader.

137. A tribute paid to the Royal Air Force in Burma came from the leader of one of these courageous parties operating in the Okpyat area of the Sittang.

"Both I and every guerilla would like to make it known to every pilot who took part in the battle of the Okpyat area just how much all the brilliant offensive action of the R.A.F. fighter-bomber pilots was appreciated," wrote Captain J. Waller, British Officer in charge of Force 136 Guerillas, Okpyat. "From our point of view on the ground, we wished that we had more air ground strips so that we could write in full — 'Hats off to the R.A.F. pilots. You are killing hundreds of Japs and your perfect co-ordination and patience in reading our crude signals is saving the lives of many thousands of defenceless civilians.'"