

Feb. 25th—Last Japanese effort failed to establish air superiority over Rangoon.

March 7th—Demolitions at Rangoon commenced, Rangoon evacuated and General Alexander's Army commenced withdrawal up Prome Road.

March 21st—Japanese inflicted severe reverse on R.A.F. Wing at Magwe.

April 12th—Air operations based in India and Assam in support of the Army commenced.

May 20th—General Alexander's Army withdrawn to India and Air operations against the enemy in Burma continue.

3. On the 12th December, 1941, I was informed by the Air Ministry that I was to take over Command of the Air Forces in Burma. It was proposed to reinforce Burma with a force of 4 Fighter Squadrons, 6 Bomber Squadrons and 1 G.R. Squadron with the object of making a front in Burma should the Japanese campaign against Malaya prove successful. On the 14th December I left England. I met the Commander-in-Chief in India, General Sir Archibald Wavell, and the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Air Marshal Sir Patrick Playfair, on the 28th December in Delhi, where the land and air situations were explained to me.

#### PART I—AIR SITUATION ON MY ARRIVAL IN BURMA AND CONSEQUENT REQUEST FOR REINFORCEMENT.

4. On the 1st January, 1942, I flew to Rangoon to take over command from Group Captain E. R. Manning. He met me at Mingaladon aerodrome and I proceeded to Group Headquarters. It was necessary to make an appreciation of the air situation as a first step.

5. During the first seven days of January I visited the airfields in Burma, the Station, Squadron and Detachment Commanders and met the Military and Civil Authorities. The Governor of Burma was H.E. Sir Reginald Dorman Smith, G.B.E., the Army in Burma was under the command of Lieutenant-General T. J. Hutton, C.B., M.C., while the Senior Naval Officer at Rangoon was Commodore C. Graham, R.N.—Commodore Burma Coast—who succeeded Capt. J. Hallett, R.N., up to that time N.O.I.C. Rangoon.

6. I found that the air garrison of the country comprised one Squadron of the American Volunteer Group, armed with P.40's at a strength of 21 I.E. based at Mingaladon, and No. 67 R.A.F. Buffalo Squadron of a strength of about 16 aircraft, also based at this Sector Station. Apart from the personnel of 60 Squadron—whose aircraft had been retained in Malaya—and the Communication Flight equipped with aircraft of the Moth type belonging to the Burma Volunteer Air Force, there was at that time no further aircraft in the country. Reinforcing aircraft for the Far East were, however, flying through Burma to Malaya and the Dutch East Indies.

7. The American Volunteer Group, whose primary role was the defence of the Burma Road, under the command of General (then Colonel) C. L. Chennault, was based at Kunning. A Squadron of the A.V.G. had been detached by the Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek for the defence of the Port of Rangoon,

the only port through which supplies for China could be passed.

8. Control of the R.A.F. in Burma had been somewhat chequered. Up to the 15th December, 1941, it was organised as Burgroup—later 221 Group—under A.O.C. Far East. On the 15th December 1941, this Group was transferred to the command of the C.-in-C. India. Almost immediately after my arrival in Burma 221 Group became Norgroup under the command of General Wavell, Supreme Commander South-Western Pacific Command, though remaining under the C.-in-C. India for administration. After the fall of Java, Norgroup reverted again to the Command of C.-in-C. India.

9. *Airfield lay-out and topography.*—Geographically, Burma is a cul-de-sac with a long tongue of jungle escarpment reaching South from Moulmein to Victoria Point. The Port of Rangoon therefore provided the only means of maintaining an Air Force in Burma, since on the West, Burma is cut off from India by the dense jungle escarpments of the Arakan Yomas, in the North by the Naga Hills, in the East by the Karenni Hills, while the Pegu Yomas, a mountain range, divides the waters of the Sittang and the Irrawaddy which flow almost their entire distance through Burma to Rangoon and the Gulf of Martaban. Thus there were two Valleys in which airfields could be made.

10. The main line of airfields ran from Victoria Point to Moulmein, to Rangoon and Mingaladon and then up the Valley of the Sittang through Toungoo to the East, through Heho and Namsang and up to Lashio in the North, a total distance of some 800 miles. This line of aerodromes faced the enemy air force based in Thailand and because the territory to the East and South East of this line of air bases was mountainous country covered by jungle, through which there were few if any communications, it followed that situated here adequate R.D.F. and telephone warning of the approach of enemy aircraft attempting to attack our bases was impossible. Had Toungoo, Heho and Namsang been situated with their attendant satellites in the Irrawaddy Valley, warning would have been possible and satisfactory as long as the communications in the Sittang Valley remained in our hands. This fact gravely influenced the air campaign.

11. In general, the aerodrome development and construction undertaken on behalf of the Far East Command by the Government in Burma showed an extremely good state of affairs. Indeed, remarkable. All airfields had one or two all-weather runways fit for modern aircraft of the heaviest type. Accommodation for personnel, P.O.L. and bombs and ammunition were available and all-weather satellites were provided for most airfields. Moreover, at this time of the year the paddy fields were hard and, provided labour was available, a runway suitable for fighter or bomber aircraft could be prepared in a week. Thus airfield accommodation for a considerable air force was available in Burma. The weakness of the lay-out, however, was, as already stated, that the four main airfields between Toungoo and Lashio (inclusive) had little or no warning.