

damage or more to the enemy than the Hurricane II—especially as the air battle usually took place at medium altitude heights below 19,000 feet.

61. As regards bombers, the Blenheim with its power-operated turret gave a good account of itself against enemy fighters—only on one occasion was a Blenheim known to be shot down by enemy fighters. This, however, was mostly due to the provision of fighter escort to bombing raids or careful routeing which would give the bomber formation the best chance of avoiding enemy fighter interception.

62. *Conclusion.*—To sum up on equipment, fighter for fighter we were superior and it was only when heavily outnumbered, and without warning and proper airfield facilities, that the enemy were able to get a decision. Their bombers were "easy meat" for our fighters if interception took place, while our bombers were satisfactory for their task, though light on range and much inferior to the enemy in bomb lift and numbers.

### PART III—THE AIR SUPERIORITY BATTLE OVER RANGOON.

63. *Situation.*—From the initial attack carried out by the Japanese air force on the 23rd December against Rangoon and the second attack which followed 48 hours afterwards, in which the bomber formation on both occasions numbered between 70 and 80, with escort of some 30 fighters, it was obvious to me that I had against me at close range a Japanese air force of about 150 plus. A severe set back had been inflicted on the enemy in these two attacks by the P.40's of the A.V.G. and the Buffaloes of 67 Squadron and not less than 36 enemy first-line bombers and fighters were claimed as destroyed on these two days. The situation, therefore, that faced me on my arrival on 1st January was that I must with my small but growing fighter force defend the base facilities at Rangoon, the docks, the convoys arriving and departing and the air bases at Mingaladon and Zayatkwint. If these could be preserved from a damaging scale of day bombing attack, we should be enabled to secure our interests hereabouts and to get in our land and air reinforcements and maintenance. Additionally, I should have to be prepared to aid the Army in any operations they undertook with both fighter and bombing action.

64. *Plan.*—Thus my general plan was to keep my fighter force concentrated in the Rangoon area, to accept such enemy bombing attacks as might be made on any other objectives in Northern Burma, to fight the enemy in the defence of the base and lean forward to hit the enemy wherever and whenever I could with my small but total force.

65. To achieve this, against a numerically superior and constantly growing air force, I must do all I could to reduce the scale of air attack on the Rangoon area, yet still be able to meet attacks on the bases in sufficient force to inflict a high casualty rate proportional to the scale of attack—thus making such attacks in this area abortive and wasteful for the enemy.

66. *Reduction of the scale of attack.*—To reduce the scale of attack I therefore commenced to lean forward with a portion of my fighters, and by using advanced air bases like Moulmein, Tavoy and Mergui to attack enemy

aircraft wherever found. Further to weaken him I must spread my bombing action in daylight to widely dispersed but important objectives such as Chiengmai, Meihongsohn and Chiengrai in the North and in the South his aerodrome and railway communication system running down the Eastern coast of the Malaya Peninsula from Bangkok to Singora. As Singora was a main base for Japanese operations in Malaya this action was especially favourable. Thus I hoped to make him disperse his fighters by forcing protection for these widely separated points and so weaken him in the central sector opposite Rangoon. I gave instructions accordingly on 2nd January.

67. *Offensive Fighter and Bomber action.*—Such enemy airfields as Chiengmai, Meihongsohn, Lampang, Rahong, Mesohit, Prachuab Girikhan, Jumbhorn and Kanchanburi were searched and attacked if enemy aircraft were present. Later when in enemy hands Moulmein, Mingaladon and Highland Queen were attacked and loss inflicted on the enemy. Hangars, M.T., launches, enemy troops and trains were also attacked.

68. *Results.*—Attacks in pursuance of this policy during the campaign resulted in the P.40's and Hurricanes and Buffaloes claiming 58 enemy bombers and fighters destroyed on the ground. In addition, a large number were damaged but could not be computed. Furthermore, attacks by bombers taking part in the air superiority battle also accounted for a considerable number. Such, however, is the difficulty of assessing results by bomber attack that no claims were made; but from the strike of the bomb lift and its position either amongst or close to enemy aircraft concentrations on the ground, further considerable losses must have been inflicted on enemy first-line aircraft.

69. This was a handsome contribution towards the air superiority battle in Burma and reduced the scale of air attack against Rangoon and our troops.

70. But this form of action was later reduced in effort, since General Chennault at this time was not anxious to undertake offensive operations with the P.40's against ground targets on account of the shortage of equipment. The Buffalo Squadron was reduced to two or three serviceable aircraft with engines too worn out to permit of flying far over jungle country. The Hurricanes with an effective range of 135 miles were unable to reach anything but the closest enemy objectives.

### *The Air Battle.*

71. The air battle over Rangoon lasted from 23rd December, 1941, until 25th February 1942. The weight of enemy attack was directed intermittently against air bases at Rangoon with the object of destroying our growing fighter force and achieving air superiority over Rangoon to the point where it would be possible for him to undertake unrestricted day bombing operations on a destructive scale.

72. During this period of about 8 weeks, 31 day and night attacks were made—one in great weight. After sustaining serious losses—38 claimed destroyed—in the first 3 attacks terminating on the 4th January, the enemy resorted to night bombing, his scale of effort varying between 1 or 2 heavy bombers up to 16.