

defence of the area was based on the two brigade groups in Allanmyo and Prome, the remainder of the force being mobile and prepared to act offensively. On the Irrawaddy the detachment of the Royal Marines, which had covered the demolitions at Syriam, found the crews for a river patrol.

24. Operations resulting in the Loss of Toungoo. On the Toungoo front the concentration of the Chinese Fifth Army was seriously delayed by the movement of the rear echelons of the Chinese Sixth Army and also by the disintegration of the railway system which was beginning to set in as a result of enemy bombing. On the 24th March, the situation on this front was as follows:—(For Chinese Order of Battle see Appendix "A").

All Imperial units had been withdrawn north of Toungoo en route to the Irrawaddy front. The 200 Division was entrenched in and around Toungoo with the divisional cavalry unit holding the river line to the south. The Fifth Army Troops were in Pyawbwe with certain units forward under command of the 200 Division. The other divisions of the Fifth Army were:—

22 Division with leading regiment arriving at Pyinmana, rear formation at Lashio.

96 Division approaching the frontier.

On the 24th March, the Japanese made a surprise attack on the aerodrome north of Toungoo thus cutting off the 200 Division. The rear echelon of the 1 Burma Division, including the 23 Mountain Battery and Frontier Force Columns 1 and 4, were involved in the fighting for the aerodrome and put up a stout resistance. By the evening of the 26th March the whole of the Chinese 22 Division had been concentrated in the area Pyinmana-Yedashe and the leading troops of the 96 Division were approaching Pyinmana. On 28th March the 22 Division attacked south from Yedashe with the object of relieving the 200 Division at Toungoo but made little headway, and on the 1st April the 200 Division cut its way out from Toungoo, where it had been besieged for over a week, and passed through into reserve at Yezin, north of Pyinmana.

25. The Japanese establish Air Superiority. The air situation was, as has been previously mentioned, adversely affected by the loss of the Rangoon aerodrome. At this time there were in Burma only the following aerodromes fit for operational use:—

Magwe, Akyab, Lashio, and Loiwing (in China).

There were also the following landing grounds suitable only as A.L.Gs. or for fighters:—

Namsan, Heho, Mandalay, Meiktila, Piawbwe and Shwebo.

Toungoo aerodrome had by this time been rendered untenable by enemy bombing raids.

None of the above, with the exception of Loiwing, had an efficient warning system. This was partly due to lack of essential equipment and W/T personnel and partly to hills which acted as a screen to the approach of hostile aircraft.

So far as the air was concerned, the operational advantages were now with the enemy and this was soon demonstrated in the severe reverse which was sustained by the R.A.F. at Magwe on the 21st and 22nd March when a large number of aircraft, both fighters and bombers, were destroyed on the ground. This

reverse forced the R.A.F. and the A.V.G. to withdraw from Magwe to Loiwing, 400 miles further north, and this reduced very much the effectiveness of the air force.

The supply of aircraft now became the ruling factor in the air situation in Burma. In view of the limited amount of aircraft available at this time, that is to say the end of March and the beginning of April, for the defence of India and Ceylon, it was decided that all R.A.F. units should be withdrawn from Burma, where it was uneconomical to retain aircraft in operational conditions which rendered high losses inevitable. However, an R.A.F. organisation known as "Burwing" was retained at Lashio and Loiwing and aircraft were flown over from India from time to time; but very little could be achieved in the circumstances prevailing.

That the decision to withdraw the R.A.F. to India was right there can be no doubt, but this decision left the Japanese with almost undisputed command of the air and this had a serious effect on the civil population and the working of the utility services and a somewhat lesser effect on the morale of the troops.

26. Effect of Bombing on Public Utility Services. At the end of March and the beginning of April, the Japanese commenced to make heavy bombing raids on centres of communication in Central and Upper Burma, raids being made on such places as Prome, Meiktila, Mandalay, Thazi, Pyinmana, Maymyo, Lashio and Taunggyi.

Except for the damage to house property, the material effect of these raids was not very great but the moral effect amongst the civil population was enormous. After a heavy raid on a town, the life of that community came practically to a standstill, the population moving into the jungle. From the military aspect, the effect on the working of the public utility services was most serious. Many railway employees and I.W.T. workers in the employment of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company left their jobs. The Police force disintegrated, the power supply broke down and the Post and Telegraph service, to whom a tribute should be paid for the manner in which a large number of personnel stuck to their jobs, was affected to a lesser degree.

The effect of bombing on public utility workers was accentuated by the presence of their families, many of whom had not at this time been evacuated and it is a point for consideration in the future, that all workers in services on which military operations depend do better, when they know that their families have been removed to a place of safety.

PART III.—THE BATTLE FOR THE OILFIELDS.

27. Operations South of Prome On the 26th March the Japanese commenced to operate against the positions held by 1 Burcorps in the Irrawaddy valley. Prome was bombed on the 26th March and three quarters of the town was burnt. On the 27th March four to five thousand Japanese and Burmese were reported to be on the west bank of the Irrawaddy opposite Tonbo. On the same day, at the request of the Generalissimo, I despatched from Chungking a telegram ordering offensive operations on the Irrawaddy front in order to relieve pressure on the Chinese Fifth Army, which at this time was heavily engaged. On the 28th March the Japanese advance guard on the east of the