

initialled by Squadron Commanders. The claim was then admitted. Previous claims by the A.V.G. for aircraft destroyed in the air were agreed at this meeting.

PART IV.—THE LAND BATTLE—AIR OPERATIONS IN SUPPORT OF THE ARMY IN TENASSERIM.

86. *Situation at Sea.*—After the fall of Singapore and Java the Japanese had command of the sea in these waters. There was no effective naval force of ours based in the Bay of Bengal. Thus the littoral of Burma was thereafter under the threat of sea-borne invasion unopposed by the Navy. Consequently, reinforcement by sea of the Japanese Army in Burma took place unmolested after the fall of Rangoon. This was a vital factor in the defence of Burma.

87. The Joint Commanders' Committee telegraphed on several occasions pressing for the provision of ships and material to provide some further local defence at least for the Port of Rangoon and for light craft to support our operations on the coast of the Gulf of Martaban and Tenasserim. No ships were, however, available and none arrived—except those which escorted our convoys.

88. *The Land Situation.*—The land situation, which influenced air operations, has been fully described in the Despatches of Lieutenant-General Hutton and General Alexander. It is not proposed further to remark on this except in so far as it is necessary in order to make clear the influence of air superiority fighting and bombing action on land operations and vice versa. I should, however, make the point that until Mergui and Tavoy fell on January 19th, I assumed the security of Burmese territory from attack by the Japanese Army based in Thailand.

89. *Daily Planning of Close Support Operations.*—Bomber and fighter action in support of the Army during the land campaign up to the fall of Rangoon was decided each evening at a general staff and air staff Conference held at my Headquarters. General Hutton and I met morning and evening to agree joint action and review the changing situation. Subsequently, the programme was adjusted according to the requests made by the 17th (Indian) Division, to which an Air Liaison Officer had been attached. Communication was by W/T. and telephone. In general, the system worked satisfactorily.

90. *Tenasserim unsatisfactory for Bombing Operations.*—Close support bombing operations in the close jungle country in Tenasserim and to the East of the River Sittang was an unsatisfactory task for the R.A.F. At the request of the Army we undertook bombing operations in jungle country where it was impossible to see the enemy or to see our troops—indeed difficult to see anything except the tops of the trees. In such circumstances not only is the objective not seen but it is impossible for navigators to pin point their target with accuracy since there are no suitable land marks. The situation is made more difficult still by the knowledge in the mind of the crew that our positions were frequently outflanked by the enemy and therefore there was always the chance that our troops and the enemy were intermingled near the objective. When attempts

were made to give bombing objectives in forest clearings, crews often found on arrival that such clearings were overgrown with scrub and consequently the same difficulties arose. As, however, our forward troops in the jungle on the Kawkaik position and during the battle of Tenasserim had reported the enemy's promiscuous bombing of the jungle to be effective and as having considerable moral effect, I did not hesitate, while realising the risk to our own troops of bombing in such densely wooded country, to continue the task in order to do our best to help the Army.

91. Further obvious difficulties arose from the bombing point of view. For example, the enemy was frequently disguised in captured uniforms and native dress. This made recognition difficult. Moreover, they captured some of our transport during actions, while the native bullock carts, launches and private cars left behind and other vehicles were used freely. This made it difficult, and sometimes impossible, for crews to recognise the enemy in the open. Unsatisfactory, therefore, as the "bomb line" method was in such circumstances of cover, communications and moving battle, it had to be adopted as our primary security against the risks of attacking our own troops.

92. *First requirement—Army support.*—The fundamental requirement for the support of the Army in Tenasserim was the maintenance of air superiority over the Port of Rangoon, and the bases and supply depots in this vicinity. This secured the line of communication from serious bombing attack in the form and scale best calculated in this campaign to bring about a critical if not disastrous situation. Consequently I kept my small fighter force concentrated in the defence of Rangoon with the satisfactory results noted above.

93. *Security of Bombers and Fighter support for Army.*—From day to day, however, security for our bombers acting in support of the Army was necessary, since few as they were their destruction by enemy fighter action would have brought about a serious situation. Consequently, each day a careful appreciation of the air situation was made and a portion of the fighter force was thrown off from the Rangoon defence to undertake the Army support role. Indeed, when a particularly favourable ground target presented itself, I accepted the risk of an attack on Rangoon, and all fighters, with what bombers were available, were thrown in to support the land battle. The point here is that where the command of the fighters and bombers is undivided, such operations are practicable and close co-ordination between fighter and bomber operations can be readily achieved.

94. *Bombing of Bangkok.*—The aircraft and crews of 113 Squadron had arrived during the first week in January. The night of their arrival the enemy base at Bangkok, the main enemy base in Thailand, was attacked by 10 low flying Blenheims. 11,000 lbs. of bombs were dropped on the dock area in the centre of the town and fires were started. The Squadron was then withdrawn to Lashio to enable aircraft inspections to be carried out after its long desert flight. Owing to the shortage of tools and spares, it was the 19th January before the Squadron was in action again.