

withdrawal to the Sittang position commenced. On the 22nd our forces had reached the right bank of the Sittang.

107. During this period air operations continued at the maximum intensity practicable in support of the Army. The air battle of Rangoon still continued. With the loss of Moulmein we lost our forward air base in this area. Consequently, air operations, both fighter and bomber, were carried out from the main air base at Rangoon. Furthermore, with the capture of territory by the enemy, our warning system in Tenasserim was rapidly rolled up. Now warning of the approach of enemy raids over Tenasserim was impossible. For the defence of Rangoon we still had observer posts to the East of Rangoon, while our R.D.F. set provided some warning. But the interception of enemy aircraft supporting the Japanese Army was impracticable unless such attacks took place when our fighters were present over the line.

108. The Supreme Commander, General Sir Archibald Wavell, visited the command during the last week of January and on the 5th February. At these meetings I explained the air situation and our urgent need for reinforcements, particularly the acceleration of the 2 reinforcing Hurricane Squadrons which had been promised and for an allocation of 24 Hurricanes per month from the flow. As regards bombers, I asked for 2 further reinforcing Blenheim Squadrons, for 16 Blenheims to equip 60 Squadron and for 12 Blenheims a month from ABDA Command flow of maintenance aircraft, and additionally for the Mohawks to re-equip the 2 Lysander Squadrons. General Wavell said that he would do what he could to meet these requirements, but explained the pressing need for air support in Malaya and the N.E. I.

109. During the period 16th to 23rd February the maximum effort that could be put forward by the bombers was 102 sorties, in which 89,992 lbs. of bombs were released in low flying attacks on the enemy, accompanied by machine gun fire. Such objectives as the railway station at Moulmein, troop concentrations and M.T., river traffic and aerodromes were bombed. Direct hits on such things as trains and paddle steamers in Sittang were observed. Fighter support for the Army and the security of our bombers continued.

#### *Air Action on the Bilin-Kyaikto Road.*

110. For the first time in the campaign the enemy provided a satisfactory bombing target. On the 21st an enemy column of some 300 or more vehicles, ox-carts and M.T. was reported on the road between Bilin and Kyaikto. The "bomb line" ran North and South through Kyaikto. The total fighter effort of the Rangoon defence and what bombers were at readiness were ordered to attack at 16.25 hours. The first sortie off was one of 12 P 40's at 16.30, closely followed by 8 Hurricanes at 16.40. A total of 38 fighter sorties and 8 Blenheim sorties were engaged in the attack. Direct hits were reported on M.T. and horse transport accompanied by many fires. The village of Kyaikto through which the column was passing was also set on fire. At 16.25 hours the Army Headquarters moved the "bomb line" to a line running North and South 2 miles West of Kyaikto.

111. The enemy had during the afternoon of the 21st penetrated through the village of Kyaikto and moved along the road running North to Kimmun. That afternoon their infantry were seen by the Duke of Wellingtons West of this road (and North of the Kyaikto Road). Their thrust that night at the Sittang Bridge took place up this road when they worked round our left flank and attacked the Bridge in the rear of the 16th and 46th Brigades. It is evident that although our air attack in some weight on the enemy's main column could not have entirely prevented his attack from developing, it must have reduced its scale and intensity.

#### *Alleged bombing of own Troops.*

112. There was an incident reported on this day and remarked upon in Army reports. It is alleged that our troops at Mokpalin were bombed and machine gunned by some Blenheim aircraft between 12.00 and 15.00 hours. The facts are that at the request of Army Headquarters 8 Blenheims bombed Kawbein (near Bilin) in the morning and landed back at their base after mid-day. After an exhaustive enquiry, in which I have taken the opinion both of Officers who were in the air and on the ground, I have failed to reach a firm conclusion that our aircraft did, in fact, bomb our own troops at this time and place. The enquiry is complicated by such statements as "the attacking aircraft were identified by roundels on the underside of their wings"—our Blenheims have roundels on the upper side of the wing but certainly not on the underside, and the possibility that the Japanese used captured Blenheims during this campaign should be considered. There is, moreover, a great similarity between the plan silhouette of the Japanese Army 97 medium bomber and the Blenheim, and there must have been a number of enemy bombers flying over Mokpalin about this time because the enemy effort was concentrated on the Sittang area, a few miles to the West of Mokpalin. Since, however, the country between the Rivers Sittang and Bilin is closely covered in jungle, I consider it not improbable that some crews by mistake may have bombed the wrong objective. The enemy effort reached on this day a total of 90 fighters and 12 bombers in action in the Sittang area. The Sittang Bridge was the scene of the heaviest attacks.

113. In the meantime, Mandalay had its first attack by 10 bombers on the 19th.

114 *G.R. Escort for Shipping.*—Such escort to shipping, G.R. reconnaissance and coast-wise search in the Gulf of Martaban as was practicable was carried out with the slim effort available. Fighter support against bomber attack was provided once our convoys came in range.

115. To extend the range of our reconnaissance for this purpose and to give forewarning of enemy naval movements in the direction of the Andaman Islands, it was decided to locate reconnaissance aircraft at Port Blair. The construction of a landing ground in the Andaman Islands presented some difficulty, but after considerable work it was possible to construct a runway of 800 yards at Port Blair. The only type of reconnaissance aircraft available that could be operated from such a base was the Lysander and 2 of these aircraft were fitted