

air crews were motored into their accommodation. They arrived at the "kutchas" strip before dawn the next morning to fly their aircraft. This we found the only method of ensuring secrecy of the strips and the security of equipment from the damage caused by night bombing. With large numbers of small bombs the enemy's night bombing of Mingaladon was accurate and effective. If Rangoon were to be evacuated when the warning had entirely gone, I proposed to guard the security of my fighters by the use of these strips, and evacuate the parent airfields. The bombers on account of their range could operate from Magwe and refuel and rearm in the forward area, but the fighters with an extreme fighting range of 135 miles would have to be brought back along the Prome Road in steps of some 50 miles so that security could be provided for our retiring columns.

140. All preparations practicable were made to improve the warning system at Akyab and Magwe, but with the time and resources available this proved to be a hopeless task. Furthermore, much work was necessary at Magwe to make it a satisfactory base, and labour was difficult to get. The provision of satellite "kutchas" strips was, however, undertaken to provide dispersion. Magwe, although it had a runway still under construction, had been a civil air port and, since it lay in the back area of Burma, was not intended in the general plan to be an operational aerodrome. Anti-blast protection in the way of pens or dispersal arrangements had not been started. Had, for example, Toungoo been situated where Magwe was, it would have been a different story and the situation in regard to P.A.D. measures would have been much more satisfactory for the operation of a mixed Wing.

141. Final preparations to continue to fight the battle over Rangoon, and for the withdrawal to the North, were taken in hand at once. Rear Headquarters was opened up at Magwe on 22nd February with forward Headquarters in Rangoon.

Formation of "X" Wing.

142. To control the fighter action and the bombing offensive action in support of the Army throughout this phase, I formed an "X" Wing Headquarters under the command of Group Captain Noel Singer, D.S.O., D.F.C., with a strong staff, reasonable communications, and good mobility. The role of "X" Wing was to maintain air superiority over Rangoon until the demolitions of the oil interests at Syriam and Thilawa, the docks, power stations, munitions and stores had been completed and until the Army had withdrawn from the area and thereafter to provide air superiority over the area in which the Army was moving, until it reached Prome.

143. The detachments on Toungoo, Heho, Namsang and Lashio would continue in operation to enable limited air action to take place in support of the Chinese, while a landing ground was prepared at Mandalay to serve Rear Headquarters at Maymyo. A scheme was drawn up to enable detachments to be withdrawn from forward aerodromes should the situation necessitate—with preparations for the evacuation of equipment, stores, etc. Arrangements had been made with Army Headquarters

that in these circumstances all petrol and oil would be handed over to the Army for the use of the Armoured Brigade and M.T. columns.

144. On the 23rd February the Sittang Bridge was blown. Except on the days on which the enemy had thrown the weight of his attack against the Rangoon defence, his bombers and fighters flew over their forward troops advancing through the jungle. Air action was carried out against our troops intermittently on most days. As explained previously, we did the best with the slim fighter resources available to support the Army in this respect.

145. On the next two days, the 24th and 25th, the final attack was made by the Japanese Air Force on the Rangoon defence system with the object of attaining air superiority over the area. As noted elsewhere, this failed in a signal manner and severe casualties were inflicted on the enemy. Thereafter, until the fall of Rangoon, his fighter force was occupied purely defensively over the area in which his advance was taking place, formations of up to 40 plus operating each day. When possible, therefore, in order to keep them on the defensive, bombing operations were carried out in the area in which the enemy fighters were working. We attempted to make interceptions but with no great success, since their fighter effort was only over the area of operations at certain times. On the 23rd, however, a message was received from the 17th Division and interception did take place in which 2 enemy aircraft were shot down.

146. Our fighter effort which had built up to no less than 44—Hurricanes and P.40's—on the 17th February, dwindled away after the air battle on the 24th and 25th and after our air operations over Tenasserim to a low mark of under 10 on the 28th February, due to the lack of maintenance, spares and the number that were "shot up" in the air battle. The figure, however, gradually increased again to 27 on the 4th March, but fell to an average of about 17 aircraft from this date until the 10th March.

147. As regards bombers, the effort built up to 16 on the 17th February and fell away during the battles in Tenasserim to a low mark of under 5 on the 25th February for exactly the same reasons as described above. It built up, however, to 12 aircraft on the 28th February and to an average of about 10 serviceable from that time until the 10th March.

The Battle of Pegu.

148. On the 23rd February I visited the 17th Division at Pegu with General Hutton. The Armoured Brigade had now arrived and was mostly deployed in this area. The enemy used the hours of darkness to cross the Sittang and pressure was exerted against our forces at Waw on the 26th February. Between this time and the 5th March the battle developed.

149. On the 4th March General Alexander arrived at Magwe. He flew down with me to Rangoon. I accompanied him on his visit with General Hutton to the 17th Division at Pegu. The enemy had engaged our forces round Pegu and an infiltration in strength, accompanied by light tanks, had taken place to the North through the jungle country of the lower Pegu Yomas in the direction of the Prome Road—our line of communication. This movement