

357 Squadron

Appendix Precis

357 Squadron, R.A.F.

Note: this document was in the appendices for June 1945

Precis of Commanding Officer's Address to All Ground Personnel on 8th May 1945.

Burma Campaign

Capture of Rangoon.

We have all been working very hard for the past few weeks and the operational effort from this Squadron has been considerably intensified, and I feel that you all ought to know what we have been doing, and how the Squadron has greatly assisted and made possible the speedy capture of Rangoon with comparatively light losses, by the 14th Army.

Present disposition of our Forces.

You can see from the wall map the disposition of our forces in Burma. You will see that there still remains a considerable area under Jap control, but it is held mainly by isolated garrisons whose fighting efficiency has been greatly reduced by Allied bombing and strafing. All the main roads and railways have been captured by us, and our forcers are astride the road at Pegu, which provides an escape route out of Burma to Siam. However, a considerable amount of cleaning up of Jap forces in Burma still remains. Now for the job that we have been doing:

Drive on Rangoon

After the capture of Mandalay the main axis of advance of the 14th Army was obviously going to be down the road and railway to Toungoo, and then direct to Rangoon. In order to make the drive as quickly as possible so as to arrive at Rangoon before the monsoon, protection from the flanks to left and right of the valley running down to Rangoon was necessary. Without this protection, the Jap would have little difficulty in ambushing our armoured vehicles and transport columns as they moved south down the road to Rangoon.

To provide the necessary protection, the Army asked for airborne troops to be landed in strategic positions to harry the Jap forces and prevent them interfering with the advance of the main army.

Use of Guerrilla Forces – Supply Drops

Now on the map you will see the areas into which those airborne troops were parachuted. The country is very wild and mountainous, and it was a difficult job to put the men down in the right places without injury, and unfortunately casualties did occur. The men that were put in were British Officers commanding small parties of 10 to 15 Burmans, and their job was to organise the local Burmese living in the villages into guerrilla parties of considerable size. The parties were then armed with weapons dropped by Liberators in large quantities. Rifles, Sten guns, hand grenades, mines and many other gadgets were dropped, and, of course, food.

All this started in February, and as soon as the Japanese discovered what was happening, they despatched troops to the hills to destroy the parachutists. Unfortunately for the Japs, they did not realise what they were up against, and before very long they had committed large forces to attack the guerrillas in the hills, who were becoming more powerful every day.

while the Japs were thus engaged in a major battle with our forces, the 14th army started to advance with lightning speed down the road to Rangoon, and any Jap reinforcements which were brought north up the road from Rangoon were ambushed by the guerrillas and destroyed. A Jap Major-General was killed in his staff car in this way.

Squadron's Responsibility

357 Squadron

The entire responsibility for keeping these chaps supplied and reinforced has been ours, and of course, 358 and 200 as well. but I think we have played the biggest part in the operation, as the majority of the personnel was dropped by the Dakotas.

Praise from the 14th Army

General Slim, the Commander of the 14th Army, has said that, but for the work of the guerrillas, the capture of Rangoon before the monsoon would not have been possible.

The next stage in the Far East

Well, the next stage is Malaya and Singapore, and you can see on the map the operations we are doing in this area. Guerrilla forces are again being organised, so that when the army fights its way down the Malaya Peninsular, or if and when an amphibious landing is made on the coast, the Jap forces will be so weakened that resistance to any landing will be negligible.

Operations to French-Indo-China are still going on, but conditions are bad for organising resistance, as most of the Frenchmen have been rounded up by the Japs since they decided to occupy and administer the country completely.

Well, that is roughly the picture as it is today.

Termination of the War in Europe

The victory in Europe means that the war in the Far East can be intensified many times. Large amounts of material and aircraft will be coming out here, also large numbers of personnel.

We cannot in any way afford to relax our efforts, but I am sure that your tasks from now on will become much easier, and there would be every chance of more men returning home. There is one important thing to remember. Normally it will take 4 to 5 months for the manpower in Europe to be re-deployed out here. There will be a vast amount of sorting out to be done, so that you cannot expect any immediate releases. However, the A.O.C. has asked me to say that the fact that a man is serving in the Far East will have no effect on his release by groups, and when his group comes up, he will be returned home at once.

Victory Celebrations

I am hoping that we shall be able to have a holiday for Victory Celebrations as and when operations permit. About these celebrations, there is one most important thing to bear in mind: on no account must you get into any arguments or fights with the civil population. You will remember the unfortunate disturbance last Christmas.

The war in the Far East is not yet finished, and we cannot afford to slow up or relax in any way.