

BURMA FIGHTING

New Delhi, April 10

The first detailed story of the grim hand-to-hand fighting which led to the capture of a village 150 miles in the enemy's "guts" in Burma has reached the special force headquarters. The official army observer who was present at the capture was himself killed in the same area a few days later, 20th March 1944.

After British and Gurkha troops had taken part in some of the grimmest hand-to-hand fighting yet on this front, Japanese troops broke and fled leaving their "stronghold" position in our hands. The attack by our infantry was the climax of two days fighting during which the Japanese after infiltration had wounded a number of our men and subjected a isolated platoon to intense mortar and machine gun fire. Air support was immediately given and the officer commanding our troops himself led the counterattack on the blazing village. Surprised by our troops' determination and ruthlessness, the enemy broke and fled in confusion down the railway line pursued by accurately aimed bursts of LMG fire.

Allied planes had earlier heavily bombed the village and strafed enemy positions to the west and southwest. Large patches of bush could be seen burning. It was obvious from remnants of Japanese equipment salvaged from the destroyed village that the troops stationed there had been both well equipped and trained. They were surprised by the British attack and had obviously regarded their station as a rest base. "Luxuries" usually issued to Japanese troops were found. The rapid and drastic elimination of these crack troops is but one of the enemy's troubles. Our "flying columns" will now be liable to swoop on any of the Japanese detachments. Approximately 70 Japanese bodies were recovered. The wrecked village was still smouldering three days after the attack. By then the position had been consolidated and troops were relaxing before the next battle. Above Allied fighters patrolled; below mounted patrols rode out to search for Japanese positions. British and Gurkha officers and other ranks bathed and washed their clothes confident after their victory and glad of this opportunity to rest. Grim reminders of battle still lay on the streams bank. Bullocks, blasted by the bombing lay on their sides. Further down the bridge spanning the stream lay broken, the centre span leaning drunkenly into the water. Around the area lay the parachutes of the supplies dropped by our heavy aircraft the night before. Their loads had been removed and they shone in the bright sun forming grotesque shapes over treetops and bushes. Relaxation in the stream for removal of days of grime accumulated on their hands was the only rest permitted our troops.

Work on consolidation and improvement of conditions must continue as stray Japanese reaction to this success is anticipated.

It is estimated that over fifty per cent of the Japanese troops in this area were either killed or wounded. Our troops had marched over a 4000 feet mountain through thick jungle and undulating country. Japanese communications by rail to the north have been severed but the Japanese are bringing up reinforcements, including artillery.

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