

JAP RULE IN BURMA

New Delhi.

After two years of Japanese rule, of methodically being looted of their possessions, homes and even self respect, the peoples of Burma are welcoming troops of the Allied Airborne Invasion as liberators from oppression, writes an R.A.F. Public Relations Officer who has just returned from covering activities of the Third Tactical Air Force at our forward bases behind the enemy's lines.

For the first time since Japanese overlordship, a British observer has brought first hand eyewitness information out of Burma. The facts of Japan's "enlightened" rule speak for themselves. For two years Burmese villagers have been living under hardships imposed on them by Japanese. Their cattle have been taken away from them, young men were forcibly conscripted into coolie gangs; all the food Japanese can lay their hands on is stolen; villages have been ransacked; temples and religious monuments were defiled by Japanese soldiers who swaggered about declaring themselves to be "lords of the earth".

I visited a number of small villages in a valley and found the headman and villagers were giving every assistance and co-operation to our forces. I talked to these people through an interpreter of the Burma Intelligence Corps and all had the same story to tell - of ill treatment and poverty at the hands of the Japanese troops.

Their once prosperous life in a fertile valley has become a struggle for existence. Their cotton crops were taken away from them. They were only allowed to cultivate their paddy fields on rare occasions. When their hard earned harvest was ready the Japanese took it for themselves.

One headman told me he had been in charge of the village since 1934 and had been given a reward of 100 rupees and a dah (a large bush knife) by the British Government. It had always been a mark of social standing for any Burman to carry arms but the Japanese took his dah away from him. He had few of his cattle left in the fields as they had all been stolen by Japanese troops.

/He said



He said material for shirts is very scarce because they had not been allowed to keep their cotton crop. His own shirt was made from a parachute used for dropping supplies and was given him by British soldiers.

Salt was unobtainable. Matches were scarce but could be bought for the equivalent of two rupees eight annas per box. British cigarettes had not been seen since 1942.

I saw for myself the reactions of the Burmans towards our troops and our reoccupation of Burma. They were only too willing to help us out. A message was sent to one village that we required thatched grass roofing for a hospital building. Next morning the headman with some villagers brought thatching grass to the hospital. When they were offered payment for their work they refused to take it. "We don't want money for helping you" they said. "We just want you to drive out the Japanese and that will be ample repayment for our work."

The friendliness towards our troops is not confined to one particular area. Everywhere I travelled inside Burma I have come across many similar cases. When Japanese troops came near one village women and children were sent away into the jungle until the enemy left. At all villages I visited women and children were busily working or interestedly watching the work of our troops.

Engineers clearing stretches of jungle would let children sit on the tractors next to them. One American engineer was given a gift of bananas and eggs after taking a little boy and girl for a ride.

Before I came out of Burma a headman said to me; "Tell your government and people in India that we are patiently waiting for them to come back. We are very pleased to see your troops again but we want to see more of you so you can drive the Japs away. The British have always been kind to us and governed us well. We will do all we can to help you come back into Burma."

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