

hours required to deliver them. In the event of abortive trips producing a back log at Toungoo, aircrews were briefed to proceed to that area on supply dropping operations, after which the aircraft landed at Toungoo or Magwe and carried out second and possibly third trips before returning to base.

221. During the flare up in ground operations in the third week in July, when the break-through from the Pegu Yomas by the trapped Japanese forces began, air supply to the Allied ground forces engaging the Japanese assumed considerable importance until the battle had ended. Rainfall was widespread over the whole area of operations, and difficulties under which aircraft had to operate were acute. With exceedingly bitter fighting taking place, and thousands of Japanese troops pressing forward in their anxiety to escape, the state of the ground situation was ever fluid, and made the accurate dropping of supplies no easy task. Many of the dropping zones used, indeed, were less than 100 yards from local enemy forces and there were occasions when a dropping zone was surrounded by Japanese troops and some of the containers overshot the mark and fell into enemy hands. It speaks well for the aircrews trained in dropping supplies that more containers did not fall into the hands of the Japanese, whose desperate plight during the previous two months was due to lack of air supply and to the fact that the enemy were cut off from their Headquarters and bases in Southern Burma and Siam by our land forces. Even in this last and major battle with the Japanese in Burma it was significant that air supply—of which the enemy had none—was one of the cardinal factors in assuring triumph for the Allied ground forces and disaster for the enemy. Air supply in Burma made history which outdistanced in merit and achievement the more publicised air supply operations of the war in Europe such as that of Arnhem, or the food dropping to the Dutch in Holland. These, without doubt, were important and commendable efforts in themselves, but they bore no comparison to the enormous and sustained efforts of transport aircrews who faced the hazards of monsoon weather.

End of the War Affects Air Supply Operations.

222. With the Japanese surrender in South East Asia in August, air supply operations to the Allied ground forces in Burma took on a new aspect in keeping with the new situation.

223. This did not mean that the commitment of the air supply squadrons would cease, or indeed, that fighting in Burma was entirely over. On the contrary, it was expected that in certain respects air supply commitments would increase. There could be no doubt, however, that the nature and the location of loads which would be carried, would greatly change. Evacuation of prisoners-of-war and internees, the "fly-in" of Allied ground forces to occupy large and vast territories held by the Japanese, were all commitments which faced the transport squadrons in South East Asia on the cessation of hostilities. Materiel of war, on the other hand—so important a cargo throughout the campaign in Burma—ceased to have a first priority. Movement of personnel, carriage of rations and civilian supplies replaced the transport of military supplies.

224. Operations of the transport squadrons during August fell into two distinct categories. The first half of the month, when Japan was still at war, supply operations continued much the same as on previous months. After 15th August, when surrender was announced, the situation became somewhat confused.

225. The supply tasks by aircraft during the first half of August were confined principally to the carrying of ammunition and petrol for the two most active areas of fighting in Burma—the Mawchi Road and the lower Sittang—where the remnants of the Japanese forces who had survived the July "Killing" were still holding out. There were, of course, other numerous and important supply tasks, the biggest of which was the stocking of airfields in Southern and Central Burma in preparation for the sustained effort which would be required once the assault on Malaya, under operation "Zipper", began.

226. One squadron during the first half of August had the sole task of taking food supplies to the civilian population of Northern Burma. This was an important commitment owing to the lack of other means of transport.

Operations to relieve Allied Prisoners of War.

227. With the Japanese surrender in the second half of August, there came orders for the move of six R.A.F. Transport squadrons to the Rangoon area to transport stores, and to evacuate Ps.O.W. from Siam, French Indo-China, Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies. As the result of these squadron moves, and the military situation at the time, the number of normal transport operations fell away very considerably. The majority of the trips, indeed, were concerned with moves by squadrons and the stocking up of the Rangoon airfields with provisions for the liberated territories and the P.O.W. Camps.

228. August 28th—the historic date on which Operation "Mastiff" was launched to bring relief to the thousands of Allied Ps.O.W. in the prison camps throughout the vast territories of South East Asia—saw the transport squadrons, as well as other aircraft of the Command, including those of the R.A.A.F., take part in what was described as "one of the greatest mercy missions of the war."

229. Many of the flights undertaken in these operations were equivalent to a Transatlantic flight, and yet 75 per cent. of the crews succeeded in reaching their targets and dropping their messages as well as parachuting medical supplies, Red Cross parcels and teams of medical and signalling personnel provided mainly by airborne formations. Later, many thousands of Ps.O.W. and internees were evacuated from these territories by air.

230. It is not difficult to visualise the plight in which our Allied Ps.O.W. would certainly have found themselves after the official Japanese surrender, had not all resources, including Air Power, been used, and organised quickly, to bring relief, comfort and sustenance to these unfortunate men, many of them too weak to stand on their own legs. Only Air Power could have penetrated these vast territories throughout South East Asia with the speed required to initiate that essential relief. The pin-pointing of many Japanese P.O.W. camps, in addition to the great distances flown.