

elements of the air supply system and the unstinted efforts of the U.S.A.A.F. and R.A.F. transport squadrons available that the target figure was reached and surpassed in June. But by the end of May it was clear that the enemy's disregard of air transport as a major factor in the battle was to render his ambitious and costly offensive a failure.

The Advance from Ledo.

52. Throughout the whole period the supply of the Chinese-American forces operating from Ledo under General Stilwell had been proceeding. These troops were advancing down the Hukawng and Mogaung Valleys and thereby gradually bringing the opening of an overland route to China nearer realisation. Each advance took them further from their bases, and consequently their calls for air supply were increasing, necessitating up to 100 sorties per day. Landing grounds were constructed wherever possible along the path of the advance, and light aircraft were employed with good effect. The Dakota (C.47), however, remained as the greatest single factor in maintaining the advance. In April the entire 50th Chinese Division, numbering almost eight thousand men, was flown from Sookerating to Maingkwan, while by then all the combat troops in North Burma, both American and Chinese, had become dependent upon air supply. In May, a fast moving column of American troops, known as Galahad Force and supported entirely by air, made a considerable detour and caught the enemy unawares, seizing the main airfield at Myitkyina on 17th May. All units of Troop Carrier Command in the north had been standing by to carry in those forces which General Stilwell believed adequate to defeat the expected enemy counter attack. Brigadier-General Old was waiting at Shinbuiyang to conduct the initial glider operation in which troops and engineering equipment were to be conveyed, and himself towed the first glider into Myitkyina. Transport aircraft followed the gliders almost at once. In the course of thirty-six hours of intensive operations by both day and night, during which ground fire was continually encountered, and one enemy air attack was successful in shooting down a Dakota (C.47) and destroying others on the ground, there were landed a complete Chinese Regiment, six light anti-tank batteries, twelve Bofor guns and crews, one airborne engineer company and a Chinese mortar company. Many loads of ammunition, food and stores were also conveyed. Before the end of the month further troops, in numbers equivalent to a division, had been taken by air to Myitkyina, and the first stage of the reconquest of Burma and the reopening of the Burma Road was completed.

Evacuation of Casualties.

53. It would be incomplete to close this account of the operations of transport aircraft under my command without some mention of a further aspect of their work. During the first five months of 1944 the aircraft of Troop Carrier Command flew no less than twenty-three thousand sick and wounded back to safety. It may safely be said that but for the provision of air transport the greater proportion of these would have had little hope of survival. The alternative was many days' journey by sam-

pan, mule and ambulance, and perhaps rail, to the nearest base hospital. Moreover, a proportion of the casualties evacuated were from the columns of Special Force fighting in enemy occupied territory. The 2,126 casualties evacuated from the division by the end of May would have been a total loss had they not been flown out by air.

54. Although evacuation of casualties by air was no new phenomenon in this theatre of war, nevertheless it first assumed considerable proportions during the Arakan battle in February and reached its peak during the struggle for Imphal in April. Transport aircraft, when they landed to deliver supplies frequently received casualties for the return journey. When, however, supplies were dropped, the intervention of light aircraft was necessary for the journey from a small advanced landing ground to a strip further back where a Dakota might land. But since neither heavy nor light aircraft could be spared throughout this period specifically for the evacuation of casualties, the removal of sick and wounded remained an "ad hoc" matter arranged on a basis of expediency and improvisation. R.A.F. medical personnel at airfields were insufficient to deal with the load of casualties which, due to operational exigencies, might be entrusted to them with little or no warning by a flight of transport Dakotas. And so, although the care of all wounded at airfields was officially an R.A.F. responsibility, nevertheless help in this matter was gladly accepted from the Army.

CONCLUSION.

55. Thus air transport played a decisive part in the three great battles of the period. By the end of May the reconquest of portions of northern Burma was in sight, and the garrison of Imphal was still an offensive force. The events related above make a reiteration of the importance of transport aircraft unnecessary. In connection with the operations, however, certain lessons were learned which I would emphasize. First, it is essential that Army Commanders should not be allowed to regard air transport as an auxiliary arm upon which they can call without reference to the appropriate Air Force Commander. Secondly, the Army must be impressed with the necessity for the quick turn-round of aircraft; during intensive operations loads must be ready for the aircraft as they land. Too often crews wasted valuable hours waiting at an Army Supply Base because their freight had not been assembled ready for loading. Thirdly, when the Army are the main customers of air transport forces, the fullest day-to-day liaison and discussion of problems must be combined with clear statements as far in advance as possible of what they require in the way of air transport, and for what purpose, in order that priorities may be allotted.

56. It is to be noted that the inadequacy of the Army ground organisation for supply by air operations became recognised by the Army as and when these operations became large-scale undertakings. Steps were taken to improve the ground organisation in the light of the experience gained during the operations. The first step was to provide Indian Air Supply companies at supply loading airfields. A further important development was to create Army staff organisations both to control the