

with the ground forces. From the beginning of September onwards, a considerable measure of decentralisation in the planning and conduct of operations was introduced, with the purpose of giving squadron commanders more latitude in the allotment of sorties.

129. With the return of fair-weather conditions in October, the effort of the photographic reconnaissance squadrons rose to its former level, and during this month the daily average of sorties represented over a third of the total aircraft available in the whole force. The methodical cover of enemy airfields, communications and other targets was resumed, survey photographs being supplied as required by Headquarters Air Command, and Headquarters Allied Land Forces, South East Asia. In proportion with the increased flying, the photographic work of the photo sections of the P.R. Force was expanded, nearly 354,000 prints being produced during January, 1945, the peak month. Technical photographic developments included the introduction of the moving film camera on operational sorties, and the fitting into Mosquito aircraft of forward facing oblique cameras. The latter were first used on 14th February, when a set of stereoscopic pairs covering the Burma-Siam railway was thereby secured.

130. An exceptionally valuable photographic reconnaissance of the Burma rice areas was carried out by Squadron Leader C. Fox during 1944. The results shown by an analysis of the pictures were subsequently checked up on the ground, and were found to be correct within 5 per cent.

131. The main hindrances to the operations of the P.R. Force continued, even in the campaigning season, to be factors inseparable from flying in the tropics rather than the opposition of the enemy, which remained slighter than was usual in other theatres of war. Successful cover of the waterfront at Akyab, for instance, was secured in November, 1944, by two Spitfires flying at from 50 to 200 feet, at neither of which a shot was fired. But the lengthening range of Mosquito sorties month by month bore witness to the mastery of climate and terrain. It was in December, 1944, that the first cover of Puket Island was obtained, in the course of a flight involving a round trip of 2,100 miles, which marked the furthest penetration to be made in this area. This record was, however, eclipsed by another aircraft which in January flew 2,431 air miles in eight hours and 20 minutes to cover Moulmein and the railway from Bangkok to Phnom Penh. Finally on 22nd March a Mosquito XVI broke the long distance record for this type of aircraft in any theatre of war with a flight of 2,493 air miles in eight hours forty-five minutes, covering the Bangkok-Singapore railway to a point south of the Malayan frontier. It was thus that the Mosquito made amends for the structural defect which had seriously curtailed its use during November and December, 1944.

132. The work of the P.R. Force was co-ordinated at one end with the short-range photography of the tactical reconnaissance squadrons, while at the other end, long distance survey work over Malaya was undertaken by the Superfortresses of XXth Bomber Command, U.S.A.A.F. The P.R. Force was

responsible, for instance, for all the workaday survey and mapping required by the Fourteenth Army. As the Officer Commanding, No. 11 Indian Air Survey Liaison Section, R.E., reported in February, 1945, 684 Squadron, R.A.F. alone had achieved, in twelve months, three-quarters of the basic cover for the whole campaign and 1/30,000 cover for maps, photo-maps and artillery block plots over the battle lines from Dimapur nearly to Rangoon and Moulmein. The work of photographic reconnaissance in general in this theatre has, of course, been of all the greater importance owing to the comparatively meagre intelligence available from ground sources; for air force purposes alone it provided an indispensable factor in the maintenance of Allied air superiority by providing speedy evidence of the location of enemy aircraft, while the work of the Strategic Air Force would have been unprofitable without the coverage of targets it furnished.

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PART EIGHT.

GENERAL RECONNAISSANCE.

133. As the period under review opened, a deal of uncertainty existed as to whether the Indian Ocean U-boat warfare would be intensified by the arrival of long-range German U-boats. Such a possibility was not improbable, and had the contemplated threat materialised then, all General Reconnaissance air power in this theatre would have been harnessed under the co-ordinating and supervising control of IOGROPS.*

134. The period from June to August witnessed a decided increase in enemy U-boat warfare, although at no time can it be said that the threat reached alarming proportions. During these three months the enemy (operating with considerable wariness) sank thirteen ships of the medium-sized merchant vessel class, and, in turn, suffered the loss of one submarine as a result of a combined attack by aircraft and Naval Force 66.

135. In July, a concentration of enemy units in and around the shipping lanes to the east of the Maldives—resulting in the loss of five ships—portended a possible menace. In this connection it is worthy of comment that Catalina aircraft employed on rescue searches co-operated in the location and eventual rescue of 244 survivors.

136. Having regard to the amount of shipping in the Indian Ocean, and the fact that during August there were possibly five German units operating in these waters, the enemy's achievements might be considered singularly paltry. This is a tribute to the constant vigilance of General Reconnaissance aircraft in the flying of anti-U-boat sweeps and patrols. Such a policy might not have produced many sightings and kills—a consideration of the immense expanses of ocean to be guarded will clearly show the difficulty of locating enemy units—but it kept U-boats submerged and out of range of our shipping.

137. With September came a falling-off in U-boat operations, and this was continued during October and November. A slight in-

* Indian Ocean G.R. Operations.