

critical. As for morale, in the words of the German Supreme Commander: "Allied air power was decisive in that as a result of their complete lack of an air force of their own, and without the promise of the help of a like force, the German troops felt still more the Allied superiority of materials."

345. To add to the cares of the German commanders, because of their limited ability to make air reconnaissance they could have had only a very imperfect knowledge of the detailed preparations that were being made for the offensive, while the Allied commanders, through the unfettered freedom of air reconnaissance enjoyed by M.A.A.F. were completely informed about the enemy's defences and dispositions.

346. The extreme effectiveness of the assistance given by the Air Forces to the ground forces during the battle itself is also beyond doubt. I shall not attempt to evaluate which of the forces made the greater contribution—nothing would be gained by that since they were so essentially a team, working together in perfect harmony, the one taking advantage of the opportunities created by the other; but the following points show the great importance of the part played by air power at this time.

347. The air bombardment of the German fixed defences in the early days of the battle was probably the decisive factor in enabling our ground forces to overcome them rapidly and with a minimum of casualties. German prisoners of war testified that the dropping of fragmentation bombs on such a large scale caused many casualties, and, especially in the region of Ferrara and Lake Comacchio, greatly reduced the resistance of the German troops. Again, communications between higher and lower commanders were completely disrupted; even radio and telephone communications were delayed threefold. The German Supreme Commander's statement testifies to the effect of this. "The smashing of all communications connections was especially disastrous. Thereafter, the orders failed to come through at all, or failed to come through at the right time. In any case, the command was not able to keep itself informed of the situation at the front, so that its own decisions and commands came, for the most part, too late."

348. Even when those decisions were made, and the commands given, air power prevented their being carried out effectively. Movement of local reserves by day was to all intents and purposes prohibited by the inevitably high losses which would have followed, while movement by night, though still possible, was also attended by heavy losses. To quote the German Supreme Commander once again: "Local reserves, which should have moved by day, often arrived with great delay at the ordered position. Even tanks could not move by day because of the employment of fighter-bombers. The effectiveness of fighter-bombers lay in that their presence alone over the battlefield paralysed every movement."

349. Another important point was that because of the complete air superiority enjoyed by the Allies, our Air Observation Post aircraft could operate completely unhindered and therefore with maximum efficiency. The final result was that these aircraft had only to appear within sight of the German artillery to cause

the latter to cease fire, and so in this manner, in vital phases of the battle, an essential element of the enemy's defence system was denied him.

350. Orderly retreats could not be conducted by the Germans because of the air attacks on their lines of communication in the battle area. Through the destruction of almost all the crossings of the numerous canals, trans-shipment was made much more difficult, forcing the enemy to leave much heavy equipment behind. In that way, retreat imposed by the ground forces was turned into a rout by the air forces.

351. And at the Po crossings, as I have already shown earlier on in the description of the battle, rout was turned into destruction, again by the use of air power.

352. Such were the effects of air power upon the Germans. There was a reverse effect upon our own troops. Their morale was heightened by the constant presence of friendly aircraft, by the complete absence of enemy aircraft, and by the knowledge that their casualties would always be kept to a minimum because the air forces would be there to lend a hand with the task.

#### FINAL REMARKS.

353. In concluding this despatch I wish to place on record the remarkable team work of the three Services under the leadership of Field Marshal Alexander, the Supreme Allied Commander. The mutual understanding was complete at every level within the Theatre, between the three Services themselves as between the Allied Forces generally. This atmosphere of the happy family working for a single purpose, with no thought except for the general good, was a decisive factor in the success of the operations.

354. Finally, I wish to pay my tribute to the magnificent spirit shown by the officers and airmen under my command whose achievements I have described. When I assumed command of them they had made a long journey from Egypt to Northern Italy. Many of the Squadrons had been engaged for over four years in continuous and bitter fighting. The airfield strips were far from ideal. The Heavy Bomber Squadrons on the Foggia plain had been living under canvas throughout the winter in camps which were often a sea of mud. The Maintenance and Administrative Units had also been operating under the most severe conditions of weather and accommodation.

355. Yet the spirit of all ranks in every unit remained at the highest level. The one desire of the Squadrons was to get to grips with the enemy, and if he was not to be found in the air they sought him out relentlessly on the ground. The maintenance personnel in Squadrons and in supporting units toiled ceaselessly to keep the aircraft flying at the very high rate of effort that the battle demanded. It was a joy and an inspiration to command such a force, whose mastery over the enemy resulted in so complete a victory.

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