

crease during November was considered as a parting shot of little weight and trifling importance. As an explanation of this it is reasonable to assume that American aggressiveness in the China Seas and the Pacific was absorbing the attention of Japan, as was the European war the attention of Germany. Thus the expected threat did not develop but rather declined, and as a consequence the need for an over-all centralised control as vested in the organisation of IOGROPS diminished with the declining U-boat threat.

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Offensive General Reconnaissance.

138. The second half of the twelve months under review opened with No. 222 Group still being primarily concerned in supplementing the hunting and striking powers of the East Indies Fleet in anti-U-boat warfare. But it was becoming apparent that the U-boat threat no longer existed. Therefore, in the due consideration of alternative employment was conceived the undertaking of an offensive role. The mining of enemy waters in the Malacca Straits and the Chumphorn, Singora, Padang, Singapore areas; anti-shipping operations to deny the waters of the Andaman Sea to enemy shipping—this was to be the future employment of General Reconnaissance aircraft.

139. Mining operations were the first to commence, on the 21st January. From that date until 3rd May, 1945, 833 mines have been carried to enemy waters by No. 160 Squadron, the high percentage of 86.9 being successfully laid. The success of these operations, although not immediately apparent, will be revealed with the broadening of the operational scene in this theatre.

140. Only a short period of training was necessary to prepare No. 354 Squadron for its new assignment of low-level anti-shipping strikes, which were commenced early in February. A second Liberator squadron—No. 203—began to augment the anti-shipping effort in March. A statistical summary of the material damage inflicted as a result of these operations proves that these two squadrons played no small part in complicating the enemy's acute problem of shipping shortage.

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The Development and Control of Offensive General Reconnaissance.

141. The last four months had seen General Reconnaissance changing the nature of its operational function with deftness and adaptability. The reinforcement and development of this new offensive role was envisaged during March, when No. 346 Wing was formed at Akyab, to provide escort for "forward area" convoys and to make easily available a striking force against enemy shipping off the Arakan and Burmese Coasts.

142. One squadron of Sunderland aircraft based on the depot ship S.S. "Manela" constituted a significant part of 346 Wing. This vessel ultimately proceeded from Colombo to Rangoon via Akyab, and her advent to these waters was an important milestone in offensive General Reconnaissance. Should a situation develop wherein it was necessary to conduct anti-shipping and similar operations in a

theatre where the scene of operations might be constantly and rapidly changing (with a consequent paucity of adequate land-bases) then a mobile flying boat base would be an invaluable asset. If this situation did not develop, then the inherent mobility of such a unit could be usefully adapted to the requirements of Air Sea Rescue and Transport operations, where, as always, the lack of immediate land-bases establishes a major problem.

143. The period closed on an encouraging note. General Reconnaissance had already struck a worthwhile blow at enemy shipping, and plans were in hand for an intensifying of these operations in the months to come. In considering the strategic plan of anti-shipping sorties, mention should be made of the invaluable contribution of those General Reconnaissance Liberator and Mosquito aircraft based on Ceylon, in their day and night photographic reconnaissance over the Andamans, Nicobar Islands, Northern Sumatra and parts of Malaya. Meteorological flights were also flown regularly, and materially assisted weather forecasts for aircraft flying over vast expanses of water.

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PART NINE

ADMINISTRATIVE AND OTHER ASPECTS

(I) Administration.

144. Administrative development of Air Command, South East Asia, during the year was dictated by the following factors:—

(i) The move of Command Headquarters to Kandy.

(ii) The need for identifying group administrative areas inside India with the geographical boundaries of the Indian Army Command.

(iii) The traditional problem of administering units spread over vast areas with insufficient resources.

(iv) The desirability of removing from operational formations extraneous administrative burdens.

(v) The necessity for providing operational units with greater mobility.

(vi) The planning of the administrative network to sustain and control units advancing into Burma.

(vii) The formation of new units in anticipation of future operations, while hardly meeting present commitments with existing resources in manpower and material.

(viii) The development on an unprecedented scale of air supply for the Allied forces advancing into Burma.

145. The primary British interests in South East Asia were the re-conquest of Burma, the Federated Malay States and Singapore, the Netherland East Indies, Thailand and French Indo-China. British air responsibilities in South East Asia also included the air defence of India and of Allied shipping in the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. With these somewhat diverse objectives