

64. At the beginning of July, Air Vice-Marshal Sharp and Satterly arrived at Air Command on their return from the West Pacific where they had been making preliminary arrangements for air bases of Tiger Force.

65. I then learned that, owing to the lack of airfields, operations by the V.H.Bs. (Very Heavy Bombers) were not expected to begin until the end of 1945. This delay greatly simplified the problem of providing staging posts for Tiger Force aircraft through India and Burma since, by the time Tiger Force could be in transit, both the monsoon and "Zipper" would have finished, leaving fair-weather airfields available for Tiger Force in the Rangoon area.

66. It was indicated by the visiting Air Vice-Marshals that A.C.S.E.A. were expected to provide staging facilities, not only for the initial aircraft, but also for the reinforcement flow and for a daily transport service of three aircraft each way. They further expressed the hope that the maintenance of their reserve aircraft would be accepted by this Command.

67. I consider it worthy of note that while Air Command South East Asia was barely making do with transport resources of Dakotas which still constituted the major life-line of the 12th Army, engaged with the Japanese at bay in the Sittang area of Southern Burma during July, the representatives of Tiger Force assumed that Yorks and C.87s would be forthcoming as a matter of course, for their transport requirements.

68. Other examples of this clash in priorities were not lacking, for it was disappointing to learn from Air Ministry by signal on July 21st that, owing to prior needs of Tiger Force, no Lancasters or Lincolns could be expected save for Air/Sea Rescue before mid-1946.

69. My appeal to Air Ministry for Lancasters and Lincolns had been for no other reason that I was concerned about the future heavy bomber supply situation in the Command. I took the long view that we could not expect to rely upon U.S. supplies of Liberators and, as the result of the difficulties which were already arising over spares and maintenance backing, I was, therefore, anxious to start the re-equipment of the heavy bomber squadrons and to introduce Lancasters vice Liberators into Air/Sea Rescue, Meteorological and several training units.

PART II.

THE AIR WAR IN BURMA AND BEYOND.

AIR SUPERIORITY.

Won and Maintained after Air Battles over Arakan in 1943-44.

70. Allied air superiority in South East Asia was won and maintained in the Theatre after the air battles over Bengal and Burma late in 1943 and the Spring of 1944, and remained almost unchallenged until the final surrender of the Japanese.

71. This air superiority is not always given its full value when the fortunes of war in Burma are weighed. Without it, the history of the indomitable 14th Army might well have centred around a fighting force, justly capable of defence, but not capable of sustained offence. Air superiority too, meant a

"safe conduct" for the air transport fleets engaged upon air supply and reinforcing of the advancing troops. At one time no single Dakota in Burma could with safety have taken the air on any supply mission had not the air lanes been protected by our short range fighters.

72. Air superiority, whether used for the close support of the ground forces, or the interdiction of lines of communication far beyond the battle area, or in air supply or in casualty evacuation, was indisputably ours, a fact which Japanese Army Commanders themselves confirmed after their surrender in August, 1945.

73. In the Japanese Army, one Commander had said, there had never been any real plan to develop the Military Air Forces. The air weapons he said, had been neglected from the beginning in favour of ground weapons. Ever since the China Incident, however, there had been a growing feeling that Japanese air power must be developed at all costs, but this realisation had come too late, and even then, the Army's claims had over-ridden the long term policy which recognised the absolute necessity of a wide expansion of air power and the production of aircraft.

74. Another Japanese officer, after fighting against us in South East Asia, said that almost always the Japanese Army had left the construction of airfields until the last, having concentrated firstly upon its own ground defences.

Few Airfields left to J.A.F. in Burma.

75. While the main Japanese Army had retreated to Moulmein after the fall of Rangoon in May, it still preserved enough strength to make a spirited stand during July at what came to be known as "The Battle of the Sittang Bend."

76. The Japanese Air Force, on the other hand, had been driven out of Burma completely broken. No attempt, indeed, was made to alleviate the distress in which the thousands of trapped Japanese forces in Burma found themselves during July.

77. Only twelve months earlier, the Japanese Air Force in South East Asia had made 333 sorties in May of 1944 in their last bid to tip the scales in their favour at the siege of Imphal, but had failed. For them, this air effort was a record for the Japanese Air Force for any single month when the targets were Allied airfields and troop concentrations in the Manipur Valley.

78. The enemy had behind them at that time the important air bases at Shwebo, north of Mandalay, and, in Central Burma, they possessed the airfields at Meiktila, Magwe, Pyinmana, Prome and Toungoo. Their most southerly bases were those which comprised the Rangoon group of airfields.

79. The Allies' sweep through Burma and the capture of Rangoon however, had taken all these airfields from the Japanese. All that remained to them in Southern Burma were three serviceable airfields located at Tavoy, Mergui and Victoria Point, on the Tenasserim Coast, and these soon became the regular targets for our aircraft based at Rangoon.

80. In June, 1945, yet another indication of the weakness of the Japanese air power in South East Asia in face of air superiority was