

however, retarded owing to the land communication difficulties within the area, and I had to give orders that No. 96 (Dakota) Squadron should be given the task of flying-in-bithess from Bengal to Mingaladon. The task was completed to scheduled time.

43. I regret that the Air Forces should have had to call upon the Army for airfield construction in Burma owing to the absence of R.A.F. airfield construction units and Air Ministry Works Supervisory personnel in this Theatre. There is no doubt that the American system of providing aviation engineer battalions in Burma proved better and more satisfactory. It might also be noted that some fifteen thousand R.A.F. constructional personnel were allocated by Air Ministry to the Tiger Force Operation in the Pacific, although South East Asia Command was deplorably short of engineers, and it must have been evident that this new Air Force was most unlikely to operate before the defeat of the Japanese.

Hastening Construction of Burma Airfields.

44. Early in June, my Air Marshal Administration visited Rangoon to obtain first-hand details of the problems being encountered, and to hasten construction of airfields as much as possible. On my own visit to Rangoon on June 15th, I was assured by Major General Administration, Headquarters, A.L.F.S.E.A., that all points brought up by my Air Officer Administration were receiving attention.

45. The enormous increase in the Air Forces' radius of action which the new airfields under construction would afford was foreshadowed in June, when R.A.F. heavy bombers, operating from bases in Bengal, attacked and sank a 10,000-ton Japanese tanker in the Gulf of Siam. One aircraft damaged by flak was forced to land at Mingaladon Airfield, Rangoon, which was not yet completed, and over-ran the available length of the runway, killing the crew.

46. The continued pressure by Air Command on the Army for more speedy construction brought better results, and it was a little more heartening, on June 28th, to be given dates estimated for the various stages in the completion of the following airfields in the Rangoon area:—

Zayatkwın—1,750 yards. A/W runway by July 20th.

Zayatkwın—2,000 yards. A/W runway by July 31st.

Mingaladon—1,750 yards. A/W runway by July 31st.

Mingaladon—2,000 yards. A/W runway by August 15th.

47. By October 1st, it was estimated that Mingaladon Airfield would be capable of accommodating a total of 150 aircraft for operational purposes. The airfield at Zayatkwın was expected to handle 130 Thunderbolts or Mosquitos, and would be staging through the Squadrons for "Zipper" by 1st October. Pegu was also being developed as quickly as possible as a heavy bomber airfield.

48. While it was expected that squadrons would be able to move into the new airfields by the end of July, No. 224 Group, which had been linked with Lieutenant-General Sir Philip Christison's 15 Corps in some of the fiercest fighting in Burma, was preparing to leave the

Arakan with its units and to proceed to India for training and re-equipment in preparation for the mounting of "Zipper".

49. The move of 224 Group squadrons was greatly delayed and handicapped on account of the shortage of shipping and the inadequate land transport facilities in Burma. The fact that Army units were also leaving Burma at the same time did not make the position easier for the movement of Air Force personnel and their equipment. June, indeed, ended with the move of 224 Group far from complete, and it soon became apparent that units would not succeed in clearing from the Arakan before the third week in July.

Withdrawal of U.S.A.A.F. from Air Command, South East Asia

50. On June 1st, 1945, because of our air dominance, the narrowing front, and the fact that the tactical situation after Rangoon permitted no offensive action by the 10th U.S.A.A.F., the British and American Air Forces reached the parting of the ways in South East Asia Command. The American commitment in Burma had ended with the capture of Northern Burma and removal of the enemy threat to the supply line to China.

51. Each Air Force was now to prosecute the air war against the Japanese in neighbouring Theatres. For the Royal Air Force, the offensive now headed down the Malay Peninsula to Singapore. For the U.S.A.A.F., however, the route lay across the Himalayas to China, since the sphere of the American Command was designated the China-Burma-India Theatre. Yet another reason for the withdrawal of the 10th U.S.A.A.F. was the critical air supply situation in the Northern Combat Area Command, due mainly to the high rate of effort at which the 10th Air Force Transport Squadrons had been operating and which was now beginning to tell on personnel and aircraft alike. At the same time, the American squadrons required refitting and rest before their impending move to China.

52. The withdrawal of American Squadrons for service in another Theatre did not affect the strategic situation in South East Asia Command. The only aircraft which could have been retained with advantage were (a) the transports which were being phased out gradually to bridge the gap until the arrival of our Stage 2 aircraft, and whose withdrawal could not be further delayed on account of the urgent need in China, and (b) the photographic Liberators of the 24th Combat Mapping Squadron.

53. The period of integration between British and American Forces in South East Asia had shown a very real spirit of close co-operation—a fact which I emphasised in a special Order of the Day published on June 1st, announcing the withdrawal from Air Command, South East Asia, of the United States Army Air Forces under Major General George E. Stratemeyer, Eastern Air Command, Calcutta.

54. In my Order of the Day, which I sent to General Stratemeyer, I revealed how air power had followed the basic principle in modern warfare—that the air battle had first been won before embarking on the land battle. Once the air battle was decided, air power was then able to provide the ground forces with direct forms of assistance.