

120. Operations similar in concept but less in intensity were maintained against the Bangkok—Chiengmai line, the Kra Isthmus railway, and the Bangkok—Singapore line. In all cases, the enemy reacted by placing the strongest A.A. defences he could muster along such a dispersed network of lines, by rebuilding and repairing bridges with beaver-like zeal, and by constructing as many as four by-pass structures at one crossing to counter or anticipate our attack.

(III) *Destruction of the Enemy's Powers of Resistance within Burma.*

121. To sever the external supply routes was not enough, for the enemy held at least six months' reserves of supplies that were contained in vast dumps, mainly dispersed in the Rangoon area. Therefore, during March and April, systematic destruction was initiated on the Rangoon Dumps in conjunction with XXth Bomber Command. Their destruction was vital, since with the stores contained therein the enemy might have been able to delay our advance and even halt it above Toungoo. The Dumps contained about 1,700 storage units well dispersed in revetments, and of these, photographic evidence alone showed 524 destroyed, and ground observers reported that well over 50 per cent. destruction was achieved.

122. The attacks on Japanese Headquarters and concentration areas can be illustrated by a strike on 29th March against the Japanese Burma Area Army Headquarters located in Rangoon. Reports indicate that four hundred Japanese, with a high proportion of officers, were killed. News of the attack spread to the Allied prisoners in Rangoon, and was the cause of considerable encouragement to them. The enemy's evacuation of the city a month later is much more understandable in the light of these attacks, which made Rangoon such a dangerous area even before ground forces were within striking distance. Mandalay had already suffered such attacks, notably one in January when it was reported by agents that six hundred Japanese were killed. The part played by such air blows in persuading the enemy to abandon his strategic positions earlier than anticipated must surely have been great.

* * * *

"Special Operations."

123. Air operations in connection with intelligence and guerilla raising activities in this theatre have increased greatly during the past year. From a strength of two squadrons totalling 15 U.E. aircraft in June, 1944, resources were increased by the end of April, 1945, to three squadrons and one flight totalling 61 U.E. aircraft. The dividend that has been paid definitely justified the effort involved. From a handful of informants supplying skimpy information at great risk, the organisations grew, by the end of the campaign, into a powerful force capable of exerting a considerable influence on the course of the battle, and the air effort to support them reached a total of 372 sorties in the lunar month 18th April to 17th May. Between November, 1944, and May, 1945, over 1,350 sorties were flown, in which 2,100 tons of stores and 1,000 liaison officers were dropped behind the enemy

lines. The effort for the preceding comparable period resulted in 34 tons of stores and 35 bodies being parachuted in.

124. One of the major results of the great effort involved was the prevention of the Japanese Fifteenth Army from taking any part in the defence of Toungoo during our advance, and rendering unnecessary the major battle which Fourteenth Army anticipated in front of the town. Other guerillas killed up to seven hundred Japanese, including a General, in the Toungoo-Rangoon area alone.

125. From the Air Force point of view, the great value of the Special Duty effort flown by Strategic Air Force was the provision of targets for the tactical Groups. During the final fortnight of April almost the whole of the long-range Fighter-Bomber resources of No. 224 Group were employed on Force 136 targets. Troop trains were caught at rest and a pagoda reported as a petrol/ammunition dump blew up with a huge explosion.

126. Special Duty operations in this theatre are of vital interest to the Air Forces in view of the difficulty of locating targets without the help of informants. Thus the diversion of effort to secret work has not been grudged, and current developments, foreshadowed in the R.A.F. Airborne Commando, will make the information supplied by operators behind the lines of even greater value. It is emphasised that parties should be thoroughly briefed in the limitations and potentialities of air strikes and that they should develop a speedy and accurate method of reporting if a full harvest is to be reaped from the information whose garnering depends so much upon the operations of our S.D. squadrons.

* * * *

PART SEVEN.

PHOTOGRAPHIC RECONNAISSANCE.

127. At the opening of the period, photographic reconnaissance was carried out mainly by the aircraft of the Photographic Reconnaissance Force commanded by Group Captain S. G. Wise, D.F.C. These included the Spitfires, Mosquitos and Mitchells of 681 and 684 Squadrons, R.A.F., operating from Alipore, and the Mustangs, Mitchells and Liberators of three U.S.A.A.F. squadrons, the last of which specialised in mapping. A fourth U.S.A.A.F. squadron flying Lightnings, began to operate in September.

128. The dense cloud banks habitually shrouding the operational area of South East Asia during the period of the monsoon interfered greatly with photographic reconnaissance, but advantage was taken of the northward passage of the monsoon in August to procure the first large-scale and survey cover of northern Sumatra by Mosquitos detached to operate from Ceylon. Other detachments were later sent eastwards to operate with the forward tactical air force headquarters from Tingaw Sakan (where at the beginning of September an American tactical reconnaissance squadron was placed under the P.R. Force), Imphal, Comilla and Chittagong in preparation for the forthcoming campaign, and these were later reinforced and moved forward in step