

Direct support of the Army was centred on the Arakan operations where the main fighting took place. The nature of the country, mainly dense jungle, made location of the enemy forward troops usually impossible; and though considerable success was achieved on occasions by bombing on targets indicated by artillery fire or pin-point methods, greater effect was obtained by attack on objectives in the immediate rear of the enemy's forward troops, *i.e.*, sampans and small boats on the waterways, bullock carts and other vehicles on the roads, or the forward movement of troops. These attacks were carried out chiefly by low-flying fighters.

Attacks on communications in Burma were made on railways (marshalling yards, bridges, rolling stock), on road-bridges and transport, on river craft, on depôts and similar objectives. In general, the R.A.F. bombers attacked the short-range targets up to 250 miles from our forward airfields, while the Americans with their larger range and bigger armament attacked the more distant objectives. All bombing by U.S. aircraft and by R.A.F. light bombers was carried out by day, night bombing being carried out by R.A.F. medium and heavy bombers. Hurricanes with long-range tanks were also used for attacks on transportation.

The defence of India against air attack requires little mention. In December 1942, as recorded in my last despatch,\* the enemy made a series of small raids on the Calcutta area. In response to my request for night fighters, a flight of Beaufighters arrived in Calcutta on January 14, 1943. On January 15th three enemy aircraft attempted to raid Calcutta and were all three shot down by a single Beaufighter. Four enemy aircraft made a raid on January 19th, of which two were certainly destroyed and one probably. There were no further attacks west of the Brahmaputra.

34. Apart from attacks on India, the enemy air force made occasional raids on our forward airfields and attacks on our troops or bases in Arakan. These attacks had little success; and generally the enemy's air activity was surprisingly small. Our constant attacks on his airfields forced him to keep his main air forces outside range of our bomber effort; his practice was to fly in a force of bombers from Thailand or Malaya, carry out one or two raids and then fly back again to distant bases. His bomber raids were always escorted by fighters; these fighters were a match or more than a match for our Hurricanes, unless they could gain an effective height before the approach of the enemy; and it became obvious that re-equipment with Spitfires of at least some of our fighter squadrons was required.

35. Supply dropping was carried out to maintain the 77th Brigade (see paragraphs 24 to 28), also to our forward troops in the Chin Hills and in the extreme north-east of Burma between Fort Hertz and Sumprabum, where our levies were operating. 300 tons of supplies were dropped on 77th Brigade and nearly 1,500 tons on other forces. Operations were over jungle country in difficult conditions, but not a single aircraft was lost.

36. The R.A.F. from North-East India also carried out regular sea reconnaissance over the Bay of Bengal, while aircraft from Southern India and Ceylon patrolled convoy routes and shipping lanes.

Photographic reconnaissance was carried out regularly over Burma; while long-range aircraft also made photographic reconnaissance flights over Sumatra, the Nicobar Islands, Andaman Islands and the west coast of Thailand.

#### ADMINISTRATIVE EFFORT.

37. These operations by land and air on India's north-eastern frontier, though on a comparatively small scale, required a very considerable administrative effort to support them. The difficulties of the lines of communication to Bengal and Assam were stated in paragraphs 10 to 13 of my last despatch.\* Work on the improvement, both of the railways and on Inland Water Transport routes, has been continuous, but has not always been able to keep pace with the increasing demands. In particular, the narrow gauge railway to North-East India had during the first half of 1943 to meet the following demands, which competed with each other:—

- (a) Supply of troops of IV Corps in Manipur to enable them to advance into Burma;
- (b) Supply of American and Chinese troops in Ledo area and for Ledo road construction,
- (c) Supplies to be transported by air route into China;
- (d) Materials and labour for construction of airfields in north-east Assam;
- (e) Supplies for civil population of Assam.

The first of the above demands involved the building up of depôts and stores along 350 miles of road; materials for a very large programme of road construction (see paragraph 22); the making of additional hospitals and other administrative establishments; as well as the daily maintenance of nearly 100,000 men, at distances up to over 200 miles from railhead.

The continual increase of American and Chinese forces employed on the Ledo road in the extreme north-eastern corner of Assam threw an additional strain on the transportation system. In February, after the visit of General Arnold to Chungking (see paragraph 43), the Americans suddenly decided to double the monthly tonnage target of air-borne supplies to China, from 10,000 to 20,000 tons. Though it did not prove possible, during the period under review, to reach the higher figure, plans had to provide for the delivery of this additional quantity of supplies at air-head, and for large increase of petrol, oil and other supplies for the extra aircraft required on the Chinese route. Further, the Americans demanded as a matter of urgent necessity the construction of more air-fields in Assam, which involved the transport of large quantities of materials and the diversion of engineering resources and labour from other important projects.

Besides all these military needs, the civil population of Assam had to be kept supplied by the same tenuous line of rail. If the priorities between all these conflicting requirements had remained constant, the task would have been difficult enough; but it was continually being complicated by the introduction into the programme of some fresh project of prior urgency; which often meant the removal of the limited resources in labour, machinery,

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