

*Attacks on Enemy Communications.*

235. I have dealt with the task undertaken by the air forces (see para. 51 et seq.) of dislocating, prior to D-Day, the enemy rail system. I considered that one of the most important contributions which the air could make to the ground battle, after the launching of the assault, was to continue this work of dislocation. With this view you agreed, as did the other Commanders-in-Chief.

236. In order to gain a clear picture of the state of enemy road and rail communications, as I saw it at D-Day, reference should be made to the two maps\* facing pages 14 and 18. The lines in Northern France and Belgium were very seriously disorganised, but the lines south of Paris/Rheims/Luxembourg were not nearly so devastated, nor were the railways south of the Seine. Of the bridges over the Seine below Paris, all except two were cut, and although the Loire bridges had not been cut, the crossings at Tours, Orleans, Angers and Saumur had all been rendered impassable by attacks on the railway junctions. In addition, there had been an enormous reduction in the capacity of the whole rail system in Northern France and Belgium.

237. The interruption of enemy communications during the post assault phase falls naturally into two separate periods:—

(a) From the moment the contending armies had joined battle, it became of paramount importance that the enemy should be denied the freedom of movement necessary to prepare and mount successful counter-attacks, and that the reinforcements he sought to bring into the battle zone should not only be hampered in movement, but also subjected to the severest casualties possible by air attack.

(b) After the break through of the Allied armies, the task of the air forces against communications was to harry the fleeing enemy columns, block the defiles and police the river crossings, thereby removing the possibility of orderly retreat.

In the following paragraphs I try to show how these two tasks were carried out.

238. *Attacks on Rail and Road Systems—June and July.*—In the earlier part of this period I was concerned to impose the maximum delay and to inflict the heaviest casualties on the flow of reinforcements and supplies to the enemy armies. The attacks were carried out according to a prepared pattern. This pattern was necessarily developed as the situation changed, following the information I received from deep and tactical reconnaissance.

239. The weather during June severely hampered operations. Frequently I was denied vital information on the progress and direction of German troop movements. Despite this handicap of weather, however, reconnaissance squadrons operated effectively, and the information they provided proved invaluable to the Army Commander as well as to myself.

240. Immediately the battle started, the enemy began to transfer his immediate reserves to the battle zone over the railways between the Seine and the Loire. Action against this movement consisted of low flying fighter bomber attacks against the trains and of line cutting by

fighter bombers. The fighter bombers of the United States Ninth Air Force particularly had developed a very effective technique of line cutting. I also employed medium bombers with excellent results in attacks against sidings being used as detraining points.

241. By D+1, those parts of the enemy close reserves which had escaped these attacks had been committed to the battle. I therefore decided to initiate a series of attacks against railway junctions in the tactical area and thus establish a line beyond which enemy movements by rail to the battle zone could not proceed. R.A.F. Bomber Command attacked Rennes, Alencon, Fougères, Mayenne and Pontaubault and followed up with attacks on the next two nights, on Dreux, Evreux and Acheres. Within the boundary of the tactical area thus drawn, A.E.A.F. fighter bombers caused such destruction that after three days, all railway and all major road movement by day had been virtually halted.

242. The enemy was forced to travel mainly by night and along minor roads. No. 2 Group of the R.A.F. Second Tactical Air Force, whose crews had been specially trained in night harassing, by the light of flares, operated light and medium bombers, frequently in very difficult weather conditions, with outstanding success against this movement.

243. Outside the tactical areas, both road and rail movements were dealt with by fighters of the United States VIIIth Fighter Command. Their fighter bomber attacks on line cutting and against railway centres, and also in offensive fighter sweeps against road and rail movements were outstandingly successful.

244. On 12th June, I re-drew the boundary of the tactical area as follows—along the Seine to Vernon, thence to Dreux, Chartres, Le Mans, Laval and St. Nazaire. Within that area the tactical air forces policed all roads and railways. Outside that area, the United States Eighth Air Force was busy attacking the Loire bridges to prevent any reinforcement from the south; but due, no doubt, to the threat of Allied invasion on the Mediterranean coast, there were no heavy enemy movements from the south for some time.

245. The principal difficulty in maintaining a complete blockade on all movement in the tactical area was the persistent bad weather which hampered the air operations very considerably. Further, the enemy showed great energy and ingenuity in repairing rail cuts and in running shuttle services between cuts. Because of these factors, the enemy was able to move a certain amount of material by rail within the tactical area itself, though he had to move mainly by night.

246. Apart from the forces in Brittany which it was anticipated would move by road, the main source from which the enemy could draw his reinforcement at this time was the Pas de Calais area. I therefore arranged for R.A.F. Bomber Command to attack centres in that area. On the night of 12-13th June, that Command made heavy attacks on Poitiers, Arras, Cambrai and two rail centres at Amiens. On the following night Douai, St. Pol and Cambrai were the targets. These attacks, together with those of the fighter and fighter bombers harassing movements on the railway lines, effectively delayed the transfer of the enemy reserves into the battle zone.

\* Maps not reproduced.