notable. The stores areas at Taungup and Prome were watched and bombed from time to time.

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Tactical Support of the Northern Combat Area Command.

105. On the north-eastern sector of the front, direct air support to Special Force and later to Thirty-six Division together with the Chinese divisions and the American Mars Task Force further to the east, was provided by the P.47s., P.38s. and also by the B.25s. of the Tenth U.S.A.A.F. The general principles of army/air force co-operation were as on other sectors of the front, the Visual Control Post being known as the "air party". There were, however, two directions in which the technique of close air support as practised by the Tenth U.S.A.A.F. was more advanced than on the 221 and 224 Group sectors. The first was in the more highly developed signals methods used in R/T communications between the "air party" on the one hand and the attacking aircraft and also the light aircraft—L.5s.—used for observation on the other.

106. The second lay in the special use made in the N.C.A.C. area of photography for tactical operations. Photographs of all sorts were used—low level verticals, reconnaissance strips, obliques and pin point shots. A simple method was worked out by which a common photograph grid was accepted by both ground and air forces for marking photographs; this was all the more necessary in that the country through which the N.C.A.C. forces were advancing consisted of an expanse of jungle-clad hills with few natural features by reference to which a target could be simply identified. The effectiveness of close air support was acknowledged by the ground forces in this sector no less than elsewhere, despite the considerable obstacles offered by the wild terrain to an exact collaboration.

107. It was no doubt in part the very success of air support operations in the N.C.A.C. area that led to their comparatively early cessation. The country through which the land forces advanced with a continually growing momentum offered few or no sites for the construction of forward landing-grounds, and the leading army units tended more and more to draw away from the available air bases as a consequence. Enemy opposition also dwindled, and, from the end of March onwards, contact was lost with the Japanese. Thenceforward, the air effort was thus inevitably restricted to long-range attacks upon the transport routes, supply centres and bivouac points along the enemy line of retreat through the Shan States southwards into Siam.

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PART SIX.

STRATEGIC AIR FORCE.

108. Operations by heavy bombers in this theatre were conditioned by the restricted nature of the targets available and by the vulnerability of the all-important Japanese lines of communication. To understand the pattern of attack, and to assess its results, demands some knowledge of these circumstances, which are discussed in some detail hereunder.

109. The factors of climate, topography and the occupation of large areas of China combined to make the Japanese grip on Burma one which, it was early realised, the Allies would have great difficulty in prising loose. Notwithstanding his seemingly inviolable front, the enemy possessed an Achilles' heel in his poverty of natural resources and his consequent dependence on seas that he has never actually controlled. A high percentage of everything upon which his industry thrives must cross the sea in crude form to be processed in the homeland; thence it must recross the seas to arrive at the fighting line. From Japan to Burma the sea lanes stretch for some 4,000 miles, of which more and more were open to attack by Allied bombers as strength, experience and air bases developed. The railways which carried his supplies thence to the front were at the mercy of Allied bombers to an even greater degree.

110. Communications by sea were not disputed during 1942 and much of 1943. It was simple to follow the normal channels of commerce to the ports of Siam and Malaya in the east, Singapore in the south, and Mergui, Tavoy, Ye, Moulmein and Rangoon in the west. But Japan herself had proved by the sinking of the "Prince of Wales" and "Repulse" that control of the sea demands control of the air above the sea. In her early victory lay the seeds of her own defeat, for Allied aircraft disputed with her, and won, control of the air over all her lines of communication in Burma and Siam.

111. From the nodal ports, the railways of Burma and Siam constitute a system of strategically connected lines with a total length of approximately 5,000 miles. From Phnom Penh, north-west of Saigon, the railway goes west and north-west through Bangkok, Pegu and Mandalay, where it forks into two lines terminating at Lashio and Myitkyina with branches to Rangoon, Bassein, Kyaukpadaung, Myingyan and Ye-U. The tactical importance of all these railheads was reinforced by their strategic positioning on the lines of supply. Their function was not only to feed forward material from Japan, but to shuttle within the occupied territories the natural resources whose employment would ease the load on Japanese shipping—rice, tungsten, oil, tin and rubber. It has been estimated that at least 50 per cent. of the Japanese Army's requirements in Burma were produced locally.

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112. In June, 1944, the Strategic Air Force underwent changes in organisation and composition that materially reduced its strength and effectiveness during the monsoon months. The Twelfth Bombardment Group, comprising four squadrons of Mitchells, was transferred to Third Tactical Air Force, a step for which Air Marshal Baldwin had long pressed, and the Seventh Bombardment Group of four squadrons of Liberators was diverted to haul petrol to China. This was considered more remunerative employment for them than the conduct of bomber operations under active monsoon conditions. Strategic Air Force therefore retained only its British component, totalling three Liberator and two Wellington squadrons, excluding the Special Duty and Air Sea Rescue element. In consequence of the