

range from established air bases, principally in Burma. Had it not been for the diversion of considerable military resources to the capture of undefended Rangoon, I would have preferred an intermediate step to Singapore which would have permitted adequate air support and staging of aircraft. Time, however, was not on our side. In view of the Army's commitments at Rangoon, and of the naval disinclination to make an assault without a suitable anchorage nearby, the prospects of any intermediate operation completely faded away.

31. The "Zipper" plan, on the other hand, gave the recently occupied Cocos Islands a new and important rôle as an offensive air base in addition to its primary function as a staging post to the South West Pacific. Originally, it was intended that the garrisoning Air Forces to be based in the Cocos should comprise one Single-Engined Fighter and one Coastal Torpedo Fighter Squadron. The inclusion of the Coastal T.F. Squadron was mainly on account of a possible threat of enemy sea-borne attack. This threat, however, had steadily declined. In consequence, the operational rôle of the T.F. Squadron virtually disappeared, while the limited range of T.F. aircraft precluded them from employment offensively against targets within and beyond the Netherlands East Indies barrier. Therefore, I decided to substitute one Long Range General Reconnaissance squadron in the Cocos in place of the T.F. Squadron, thus enabling General Reconnaissance Liberator aircraft to carry out strikes from the Cocos on targets along the coast of Malaya and N.E.I. An additional advantage of the Cocos was the certainty of more favourable weather conditions during the monsoon.

32. In short, the R.A.F. developed the Cocos Islands into a most valuable offensive air base, and air staging post.

THE AIR BUILD-UP IN BURMA FOR FUTURE OPERATIONS.

33. From the review of strategy and planning for the impending assault of Malaya, it was evident that the air forces would be called upon to fulfil commitments extending over a vast area from Central Burma southwards to Southern Malaya and around N.E.I., until the defeat of the enemy in the South East Asia Theatre.

34. As the result of this trend in future operations, the problem of command and control of the Air Forces became far wider in responsibility than that which had obtained hitherto. Accordingly, it was decided that operational command and control of all R.A.F. Groups other than those serving in Burma should be exercised directly by Headquarters, Air Command, South East Asia, through the respective Group Commanders. Air power, it was realised, would soon embark upon a large-scale intensification of operations against the Japanese, not only in South East Asia, but also in the South West Pacific Theatre.

35. While the tempo of air operations had eased off considerably after the capture of Rangoon, the immediate task nevertheless facing the Air Forces was to secure bases and all weather airfields for the future redeployment and reinforcements of the squadrons in Burma and Malaya in the quickest possible time.

36. The decrease in air operations which coincided also with the arrival of the monsoon, was, in every respect, a welcome relief for squadrons. The task of the preceding six months in supporting and supplying the Allied land forces in the non-stop advance to Rangoon had exhausted R.A.F. personnel to a degree never experienced in the Middle East or North West Africa or the Central Mediterranean during 1942-1945. Headquarters S.E.A.C. required our squadrons to operate at maximum effort for a longer period than called for in other Theatres. Aircraft, too, had withstood the gruelling test of climate and semi-developed airfields. In the race through Burma to beat the Jap and the monsoon, No. 221 Group Headquarters had moved four times; moves of Wing Headquarters totalled twenty-five, and squadrons made no less than 112 movements. These moves by the Air Forces in Burma through a tortuous country whose roads and communications were notoriously bad, had meant some disorganisation and much discomfort, but hardly an operational sortie had been lost owing to any forward movement. Neither the men, nor the aircraft, however, could go on indefinitely. For the former a period of rest was necessary; for the latter, re-equipment was in many instances, already long overdue.

37. It was during this lull in operations that certain of these squadrons in Burma were rested and re-equipped before the next phase in the campaign in South East Asia was due to begin. The "Battle of the Break Through" by thousands of Japanese forces trapped in the Pegu Yomas of Southern Burma had still to come—a battle in which the Air Forces had conspicuous success.

38. At this time there were ominous signs that the Japanese Empire was beginning to reel under the fury of American air attack, which was now directed upon it without pause.

39. With the next blows in South East Asia about to descend upon Malaya, the trend of the Air Forces was a movement to the south—as far south as possible with Southern Burma as the springboard for the major operation which was to come.

40. The plan required a gradual movement of squadrons of fighter bombers, light and medium bombers and indeed, heavy bombers, to Southern Burma. It was hoped that by August, 1945, Mingaladon Airfield, Rangoon, would be capable of providing facilities for 100 aircraft, Toungoo with a capacity for 70 aircraft; Pegu 70 aircraft; Zayatkwint 48 aircraft; Pabst 50 aircraft; Myingyan 70 aircraft; and Meiktila 70 aircraft.

41. This phased build-up was by no means firm, for there was a decided lack of engineers' information on the eventual ability of certain of the more important and vital airfields. In face of Army representations that the original plan for the net of airfields in Southern Burma could not be met without diverting Army engineers from other tasks in Rangoon, I had to agree, most reluctantly, to a much reduced constructional programme in the Rangoon area.

42. On entry into Rangoon, speed in airfield construction was absolutely essential. Delivery of bitness, for servicing the only airstrip, was,