

which by far the greater proportion was in Italy. The dividends paid by the supply dropping became increasingly evident as the Allied armies made their advance. In addition to harassing the enemy's retreating columns, the Italian Partisans in many cases entered towns before the arrival of our troops and succeeded either in occupying them, or in reducing enemy opposition to our attacking forces.

THE EMPLOYMENT OF AIR FORCES DURING THE BATTLE.

336. By way of Summary I should like to draw attention to the salient features of the employment of the Air Forces during the battle. Initially, before the armies could move without sustaining heavy casualties, the way had to be blasted open by the Mediterranean Allied Strategic Air Force and kept open by the Tactical Air Force. Whenever there was a commitment too big for the Tactical Air Force to deal with, the heavy bombers of Strategic Air Force were called upon. On the Tactical side, the development by Desert Air Force of fighter-bomber technique reached perfection. Strong points and defended obstacles a few hundred yards ahead of our ground forces were habitually attacked on call from the ground forces concerned.

337. The air attacks were maintained throughout the night as well as the day and caused heavy enemy losses. Before the battle, all our Boston and Baltimore Squadrons had been trained for effective tactical bombing by night. Joined by a number of Mosquitoes, they were able to maintain at night the interdiction and close support already successfully accomplished by day; they did this with outstanding success and gave the army tremendous help, fully justifying their conversion from day to night bombers.

338. The inclusion, also of No. 205 Group (Night Bombers) in the Strategic Air Force made possible a round-the-clock employment of heavy bombers in a tactical role. The importance of this was not so much in the weight of bombs dropped, but in the fact that we had at our command a heavy night bomber force, so trained that it could paralyse at one blow a vital communications centre or a concentration of enemy troops. The perfection of a technique for close support for twenty-four hours a day helped the ground forces immeasurably in attaining their object of destroying the enemy South of the Po.

339. The scope of the Air Force's effort can best be gauged by an Army Commander's remark:—"I don't suppose there has ever been a campaign where the Army has asked so much of the R.A.F. and where the R.A.F. has given such wholehearted and devastating support, always in the closest proximity to our men." This close support by our aircraft gave our troops great moral as well as material aid. Whenever a difficult position or obstacle was reached by the Army they were able to call on the air forces to attack and remove it. The positions were invariably very close to our own troops and to see them reduce with such effective accuracy and without any air opposition by the enemy kept the morale of our troops at a very high pitch.

340. From the enemy's own description, taken from a captured document, a very clear picture of the intensity and "attention to detail" with which our fighter-bombers pinned down enemy movement can be obtained. The German document covers the few days from the 9th to 13th April:—"Even single despatch riders, isolated telephone line maintenance personnel, messengers and bicyclists were attacked by fighter-bombers. Single tanks were attacked by as many as fifteen fighter-bombers at a time." It was little wonder that the Germans were unable to move.

341. The battle began, as indeed it continued, as an outstanding example of combination and co-operation, not only between the personnel of the British and American nations, for that had already been achieved, but within the Allied Air Forces themselves. Day bombers, night bombers; day fighters, night intruders; all worked with perfect precision and unceasing devotion to duty. Before the last day fighter had landed, Mosquito intruders were airborne and covering the dusk period, closely followed by other Mosquitoes, Bostons, Baltimores and Invaders keeping the battle area, and beyond, constantly covered throughout the night. In the morning the day fighters were airborne before the Mosquitoes flying through the dawn period had landed. This constant vigil was maintained till the German surrender. And reinforcing the constant jabbing by these Tactical Air Force aircraft, would come the sudden massive blows of the heavy bombers, who were employed both day and night closer to our forward troops than ever before in the Mediterranean theatre.

A BRIEF ASSESSMENT OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF AIR POWER TO THE VICTORY IN THE ITALIAN THEATRE.

342. My object in the next few paragraphs is to set down some of the outstanding ways in which air power contributed to the victory in Italy. I do not pretend that it is anything like an exhaustive analysis, since that would require an examination of many factors which are outside the scope of this despatch, and are rather matters for the historian, such as the effect of the Allied strategic bombing of German industry upon the ability of the German Armies in Italy to make war. I have confined myself chiefly to the facts that were apparent in the Italian situation, and the ways in which Italian-based air power was known to have affected that situation.

343. In the first place, the enemy's position on the eve of the battle was undoubtedly critical, and air power was the major factor in causing this situation. Though his ground positions were strong enough, he was desperately short of all those things which are required to wage modern warfare successfully, e.g. fuel, ammunition, transport, aircraft, tanks and guns. And it was the Air Forces which had caused him to lack all these vital things.

344. His shortage of fuel was due directly to the strategic use of air power, assisted by the advance of the Russian Armies. This advance in itself was greatly assisted by that same strategic air power. Whatever may have been the overall supply position of ammunition, tanks and guns for all the German Armies on all the fronts, those in Italy without doubt received such reduced supplies that their position was