

troops, Bailey bridge sections flown in by transport aircraft were available to mend the broken thoroughfare.

99. Attacks on watercraft in Burma were pressed home by ground-attack fighters of all types throughout the campaign, particularly along the Irrawaddy, always an important Japanese line of communication, and also on the Arakan coast and the waterways of south-west Burma, though, as along the land routes so on the waterways, the enemy moved mainly by night. A rough estimate of the total number of inland or coastal watercraft in enemy use successfully attacked is 11,822 of which 302 were power-driven units. Towards the end of the campaign, the Irrawaddy tended to become less a line of communication for the Japanese than a hindrance to their lateral mobility, so that boats collected for ferrying rather than supply craft provided the main targets. At the same time, air reconnaissance and attack was maintained at a high rate over the Bassein-Henzada district in order to discourage the enemy division located there from moving eastwards to reinforce the main battle-front in central Burma. In the course of April, the motor launches supplying this garrison formation were successfully attacked on a number of occasions, notably on the 25th, when their hiding-place south-west of Rangoon was located and bombed and strafed with rocket projectiles by a mixed force of twenty-seven Beaufighters and Mosquitos.

100. A word must be added in connexion with the patrols flown by Beaufighters to intercept enemy shipping in the Gulf of Martaban. Owing to the reduction through air attack of the carrying capacity of the overland routes of entry into Burma, the Japanese had increasing resort during 1944 to the shipment of goods northwards along the Tenasserim coast and thence westwards across the Gulf of Martaban to Rangoon, employing for this a number of coasters of wooden construction eighty to one hundred and twenty feet in length. A daily patrol was maintained by Beaufighters, whose base at Chiringa lay not far short of five hundred miles distant from the Gulf at its nearest point, and resulted in the sinking of twenty-eight coasters, many of which were destroyed at dawn or dusk soon before ships reached or after they had left the nooks in which they hid during the day.

101. Attacks by all types of aircraft likewise continued, throughout the campaign, to be directed against enemy bivouac and barrack areas and against storage points from small stacks of petrol drums near the front line to the great dumps north of Rangoon mentioned elsewhere in this despatch. Despite the undoubted accuracy of operations against this type of target, more particularly by Lightnings, Mosquitos and Mitchells, difficulties of terrain often forbade the assessment of results, even with the aid of photographs, and in default of the subsequent occupation of the target area by our own troops it has often only been a reference in a Japanese diary or an intelligence report which has arrived weeks or even months later which served to clinch the evidence of success. To take one instance out of many, it was not until several weeks after the event that the full success of the heavy raids of 8th February on targets at Yenangyaung was

confirmed, when two prisoners of war agreed that they had been most terrifying, and stated that one bomb had destroyed thirty-four motor vehicles parked under shelter, and that another had landed in a trench in which some thirty Japanese were sheltering, killing all the occupants.

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#### *Tactical Support of 15 Corps.*

102. Tactical support of 15 Corps followed lines closely parallel to those on which air support was furnished to the Fourteenth Army. There were, however, certain special characteristics which deserve mention. After the initial advance down the Kaladan Valley, the major forward moves of the ground forces were marked not by overland offensives leading to a break-through by mechanised formations, but by a series of amphibious landings at half-a-dozen points on the coast. Of the three island landings, those on Akyab and Cheduba were completely unopposed, while that on Ramree met only with slight opposition; few or no targets presented themselves and the air support on these occasions was therefore akin to a peace-time exercise. The mainland landings each achieved tactical surprise, but were all followed shortly by bitter fighting when the enemy entrenched himself in characteristic fashion and attempted to prevent the exploitation of the initial landing. Fierce battles then developed on the same general pattern as those for the Irrawaddy bridgeheads.

103. Two developments confined to operations by 224 Group deserve mention. The first was the use of Spitfires in the fighter-bomber role. The second was the employment, from February onwards, of airborne Visual Control Posts, whose success was undoubted. From a light aircraft they were able to discern targets in the coastal jungle that were well concealed from ground observation, and so to pass directions to the aircraft waiting to attack. Two of these teams were operating by the end of the campaign.

104. Indirect support of 15 Corps centred largely around the maintenance of air attacks upon the long supply line on which the Japanese depended for the existence of their troops in Arakan. Its forward end among the coastal waterways and along the parallel road southwards to Taungup was covered by ground-attack fighters of all types, while the eastward track from An to Minbu—whose existence had been established by Beaufighters on reconnaissance—and the mountain road from Taungup to the railhead at Prome, also yielded valuable targets. Stress was laid by the army in March and April, 1945, upon the need for maintaining a continuous interdiction of the latter road by cratering its surface or precipitating landslides by bombing, even at the cost of denying ourselves the future use of a much needed supplementary land line of communication to the Irrawaddy valley, and fighter-bombers and also heavy bombers of the Strategic Air Force were accordingly diverted to this purpose. Targets along the Prome-Rangoon railway were attacked as elsewhere in central Burma; in this, the destruction of its bridges by Lightnings of the 459th Squadron in February was especially