

open the Tamu-Palel road westwards, and against 31 Division which was operating against Kohima. The four Vengeance squadrons flew over 2,000 sorties during this month. Their bombing was extremely accurate, and in addition to direct support tasks they attacked enemy dumps and camps. On the 8th April No. 82 Squadron carried out its last operations on this front and then rejoined No. 224 Group. Over 750 sorties were flown by Hurricanes in offensive sorties against fleeting targets and troop positions.

90. In May, direct support operations centred around Kohima, where the town itself and the Aradura Spur to the south were eventually cleared of the enemy after intensive attacks by Vengeances and Hurricane fighter-bombers against bunker positions and slit trenches. To the south of Imphal, where the enemy made several attacks on the Tiddim road from the west and also on Bishenpur, fighter-bombers and ground-attack fighters attacked concentrations of enemy troops and vehicles. Further south on the Tiddim road, Moirang was also attacked by fighter-bombers and Vengeances. During this month Vengeances flew over 1,000 sorties on the 4 and 33 Corps fronts and Hurricane fighter-bombers 1,693.

91. In this battle the Strategic Air Force again assisted with its heavier striking power. In May the Wellingtons of Nos. 99 and 215 Squadrons flew 125 sorties against tactical targets, American Liberators (B.24) 12, and Mitchells (B. 25) 106. Apart from one attack on the Mintha-Tamu road, the whole of this effort was made against targets on the Imphal-Tiddim road, especially in the neighbourhood of milestones 120 and 87, two points of great tactical importance in preventing enemy reinforcements from coming up the road. Attacks against enemy strongholds included one against the village of Ningthoukhong, which was accurately bombed by forty-eight Wellingtons and Mitchells (B.25) on the 9th May. Once again, however, the enemy withstood the effects of the bombardment and was able to repulse the subsequent assault by ground troops.

92. The enemy's efforts to deploy in the Imphal Plain during the month were decisively defeated by the Hurricanes and Vengeances which attacked at extremely short intervals any concentrations in the foothills reported by ground troops through the Army Air Support Control operating at a high standard of efficiency. By the end of the month, Fourteenth Army were going over to the offensive and it was possible to predict that the threat to Imphal had been averted. Constant attacks on the tracks through the jungle which served as his Lines of Communication had prevented the enemy bringing his full potential strength up to the perimeter of the plain, and the effectiveness of air attack in thick jungle had impressed on him the futility of advancing over open country without overwhelming forces. The attacker was becoming the attacked; the period of attrition and defence was over, and the squadrons supporting 4 and 33 Corps could look forward to the prize for which all air forces hope—the annihilation of an enemy in retreat.

93. Positive results in the form of men killed, storage areas devastated, and transport destroyed are hard to achieve against an enemy

with such a high standard of camouflage and concealment who, when on the offensive, moves in small groups with little impediment. No army can maintain its standard of camouflage in retreat, however, and as this despatch is being written, the air forces in this theatre are proving again what has been and is being demonstrated in every other theatre of war, that an enemy experiencing overwhelming pressure from advancing ground forces provides the best targets for air attack. The experience gained by Army Commanders, who have come to realise the limitations and possibilities of air support during the period of trial, is now paying full dividends, the results of which should form an impressive achievement during the monsoon operations now beginning.

94. During these six and a half months the American squadrons of the Northern Air Sector Force had, as their primary task, the maintenance of the air superiority necessary to guarantee the safety of the air route to China and of the bases of the Air Transport Command. They were also, however, responsible for giving air support to General Stilwell's Chinese-American Forces in their advance down the Ledo Road, which culminated in the assaults on Kamaing, Mogaung, and Myitkyina.

95. By February the ground forces had successfully advanced as far as Maingkwan in the Hukawng Valley, and the Mustangs and Kittyhawks comprising the force had given valuable support in the form of attacks against camps, concentrations of troops, M.T. and stores, both in the valley and along the road from Kamaing to Mogaung. The work of ground attack squadrons in sweeps along the flanks of the road was reported by prisoners of war as particularly effective. Liberators (B.24) and Mitchells (B.25) were also used in attacks on this sector of the front, dropping 155 tons of bombs on Kamaing, 93 on Mogaung and 40 on Myitkyina. This support continued when the Hukawng Valley had been left behind, and by the end of the period covered by this despatch Mogaung was being invested by ground forces and the main strip at Myitkyina, taken on 17th May, was in the hands of the N.A.S.F., forming a potential advanced all-weather base.

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V.—ATTACKS ON COMMUNICATIONS

96. The comparative lack in Burma of large static targets suitable for heavy bombers has been offset by the extreme vulnerability of the Japanese lines of communication. No. 27 Squadron, R.A.F., has been operating on Beau-fighters against these communications since January, 1943, and No. 177 Squadron, R.A.F., similarly equipped, from September of the same year. As a result of their persistent and ubiquitous attacks, both by day and by night, the enemy has been driven to remove the main weight of his transport from road to river and from river to rail. His major movements have been restricted to the hours of darkness, and for protection during daylight he has been compelled to resort to an ingenious and complex system of camouflage coupled with the establishment of an extensive network of gun posts as a supplement to his more orthodox anti-aircraft defences. The Taungup Pass road, the shipping on the Irrawaddy, the Ye-u and Myitkyina railway lines, as examples, have long