

23. *Air Operations on the North West Frontier.*

Modern high speed aircraft were used on the North West Frontier of India for the first time. There were however, no tasks of any importance to carry out.

North West Frontier operations are now purely an Indian Air Force commitment, and the Frontier area has served as a useful training ground for its squadrons. Intelligence and photographic facilities have been developed, the Kohat runway extended, and organisation undertaken to modernise what has hitherto been a most backward area from the point of view of the air forces.

24. *Balloon Barrages.*

Subject to weather conditions, balloons were flown continuously at Calcutta for the protection of the Docks area and Howrah Bridge, also at Jamshedpur to defend the Tata Iron and Steel Works, and at Colombo to protect the harbour and dock installations and certain parts of the city. The barrage at Trincomalee, originally intended for the protection of the oil tanks and consisting of some seventeen balloons only, was extended to include in its scope the whole Naval anchorage at Trincomalee—China Bay. Additional commitments undertaken in November included the defence of the harbour and docks at Chittagong, and balloon protection for merchant shipping and Fleet auxiliaries.

Subsidiary operations have included the flying of balloons at 1,000 feet on patrol ships which go out daily at dawn to guide friendly submarines into harbour. Captains of these submarines speak highly of the assistance in locating the patrol ship provided by the flying of these balloons. Submarines are frequently well off course, and time is saved and danger averted by this method of homing. Moreover, balloons have been flown for anti-aircraft calibration, radar calibration and meteorological purposes.

In no cases have the areas provided with balloon protection been subjected to low level air attacks. During the monsoon period one new squadron and nine ancillary units were formed.

25. *Air Sea Rescue.*

Owing to the shortage of Air Sea Rescue aircraft and marine craft, few units had been brought into operation as yet, and the important work of rescuing the survivors of shipwrecked vessels or "ditched" aircraft had devolved on operational squadrons. Twenty-one incidents were recorded, ten of which occurred in the Bay of Bengal, two in the Arabian Sea and eight off Ceylon, involving in all one hundred and eleven persons, of whom sixty-nine were rescued. The credit for most of this work is due to General Reconnaissance Squadrons, but one of the Chittagong Air Sea Rescue units, in its first operational sortie, succeeded in rescuing three out of five members of a Wellington. On a further occasion Lindholme dinghy gear, which has now been distributed, was successfully dropped to a distressed U.S.A.A.F. aircrew.

26. *Estimates of Results.*

The decision to operate during the monsoon season has been more than justified by the results achieved.

Attacks on shipping by the U.S.A.A.F. and on the port of Rangoon by both U.S.A.A.F. and R.A.F. aircraft more or less prohibited the use of this port to the enemy. Similarly, Akyab was consistently bombed.

The new Burma Siam railway was under construction during the period by the enemy (who used prisoners of war labour for it under conditions of bestial cruelty) and has since been completed. This probably eliminated the port of Rangoon as a link in the enemy line of communication, and reduced its importance as a target for our bombers. At the same time it remained to be seen how far this new railway was itself vulnerable to air attack, in spite of the enemy's duplication of bridges and other measures to preserve it from interruption.

An estimate of the damage to transportation facilities can be gathered from the following table of claims for the period made by the Bengal Air Command:—

| | | |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----|-------|
| Sampans destroyed | ... | 160 |
| Sampans damaged | ... | 2,624 |
| Power driven water craft and barges destroyed | ... | 12 |
| Power driven water craft and barges damaged | ... | 193 |
| Locomotives destroyed | ... | 9 |
| Locomotives damaged | ... | 143 |
| Rolling stock destroyed | ... | 27 |
| Rolling stock damaged | ... | 464 |
| M.T. destroyed | ... | 42 |
| M.T. damaged | ... | 142 |

Much of the material enumerated above cannot easily be renewed.

As regards casualties inflicted on the enemy, intelligence reports showed that attacks from the air had great effect. In Arakan where most of such attacks were made, enemy losses were conservatively put at 500 killed and many more wounded from June to September.

Our losses during the period under review were thirty-one aircraft, including four destroyed on the ground at the beginning of November.

27. *Morale of Air Personnel.*

The strain of maintaining a continuous effort and carrying out operations in very trying heat and humidity undoubtedly had its effect at times on the morale of the men. This was remedied by maintaining a high standard of training, with the result that the fighting spirit of all was high when the period ended.

I cannot commend too highly the manner in which the men of ground organisations carried out their duties during very bad monsoon conditions. If any are to be singled out, I would mention the maintenance personnel who never failed to keep the serviceability of operational aircraft at a high standard, and I would also pay particular tribute to the ranks employed at radar units and wireless observer posts. Many of these detachments were completely isolated for long periods, and had to be maintained by air alone.

INFORMATION OF THE ENEMY.

28. *Enemy Situation in Burma on the 15th November, 1943.*

Throughout the monsoon Burma was held by the Japanese with four divisions. By the 15th November a fifth Japanese division had arrived in Burma, and the dispositions of Japanese forces in the country were believed to be: