

and disorganised to prevent the Allied ground forces' quick pursuit across the river in strength, and in causing the collapse which followed.

310. Confirmation of this is given by the statement by General von Senger, commanding the German XIV Panzer Corps "It was the bombing of the River Po crossings that finished us. We could have withdrawn successfully with normal rear-guard action despite the heavy pressure, but due to the destruction of the ferries and river crossings we lost all our equipment. North of the River we were no longer an Army".

311. Similarly General von Vietinghoff, German Supreme Commander, said: "The crossings of the Reno and the Po Rivers were decisively influenced by the employment of the Allied Air Forces. The smashing of almost all ferries and bridges made an ordered retreat across the Po no longer possible. The troops amassed at the crossing points and often had to swim to the other bank without heavy weapons".

*The Final Stages of the Battle. 25th April to 2nd May.*

312. On the 25th, both Eighth and Fifth Armies were largely across the Po. From their bridgeheads, a series of columns were sent racing northwest, north and northeast, and before long had severed the escape route into the foothills of the Alps north of Milan, so that those elements of the German army which had managed to get across the Po to the west of the main Allied crossings, soon found themselves confined in what was, for all practical purposes, a very large prisoner of war camp. In northeast Italy, on the 1st May, New Zealand forces had linked up with the forces of Marshal Tito in the Trieste area.

313. Towards the end of April, with only four German Divisions left which bore any resemblance to intact fighting formations, it was clear that any attempt to hold the Southern Redoubt was hopeless, particularly as Army Group "G" in Southern Germany was also on the point of collapse. One course alone was open to the German Commander—unconditional surrender. The surrender instrument was signed at Field Marshal Alexander's Headquarters at the Royal Palace of Caserta on the 29th April, and the "cease fire" took effect on the 2nd May.

*Air Effort in the final stages of the Battle. 25th April to 2nd May.*

314. The outstanding air activity in support of the Army's pursuit of the defeated enemy was an operation named "Corn-cob," which aimed at blocking or delaying his retreat into north-eastern Italy by destroying the road bridges over the Adige and Brenta Rivers.

315. On the 20th April, there were nine road bridges serviceable across the Adige between Verona and the Adriatic coast. On that day, 272 M.A.S.A.F. heavy bombers destroyed three of these at Rovigo, Barbuglio and Lusia. On the 23rd April another attack was delivered by M.A.S.A.F. aircraft which put out of action the bridges at Badia Polesine, Legnago, Bonavigo, Albaredo, and Zevio. The ninth bridge, at Cavarzere, was destroyed on the 24th April by Tactical Air Force medium bombers.

316. With all the road bridges down over the Adige river the retreating Germans sought

to use ferry crossings instead. They were prevented from doing this to any large extent by constant patrols of Desert Air Force aircraft from the 24th to the 26th April. On the 26th, Spitbombers found well over one hundred motor vehicles waiting to be ferried across the river and immediately attacked them. The damage inflicted was, however, curtailed by the onset of bad weather.

317. The second phase of Operation "Corn-cob" was the interdiction of road bridges across the River Brenta, between Bassano and the east coast. Along this stretch of the river there were still ten bridges serviceable for motor vehicle traffic. Bad weather interfered with the execution of the plan, but nevertheless from 23rd to 26th April, seven of the ten targets were cut or blocked by either M.A.S.A.F. heavy bombers or M.A.T.A.F. medium bombers. The targets affected were the three road bridges at Padua, the Chioggia railway bridge (which had been converted for the use of road traffic), the diversion around the previously destroyed bridge at Friola, the bridge at Corte, and a bridge west of Chioggia.

318. During the early days of the retreat, fighter-bombers by day and night intruders by night continued to attack enemy movement wherever it could be found. After the 27th of April, it could be said that the Air Force's task was finished. The Army was moving so fast against little resistance that pre-arranged targets were no longer possible. In fact, the ground forces did not meet any defence which required bombing from the air, and the battle, such as it was, had passed out of the range of the Spitbombers.

319. After the unconditional surrender took effect on the 2nd of May, sweeps were made in the Trieste area on the 3rd of May to impress unruly elements there, and prevent any incident on a large scale arising from the Yugoslav claim to the city.

*Interdiction of Railways during the period of the Offensive.*

320. Although the blockade of Northern Italy by the disruption of the frontier railway routes continued to be an important item of the air programme throughout April, the satisfactory interdiction prevailing as the result of the previous long offensive made it possible to reduce the M.A.T.A.F. effort against these distant rail targets as soon as the ground conflict re-opened.

321. The most striking feature of the attacks on railways was now the big effort of the M.A.S.A.F. bombers, which operated against targets nominated by M.A.T.A.F., and thus allowed the latter to concentrate primarily on operations directly connected with the battle. Following their big effort of 8th April, 265 U.S. heavies four days later hit rail targets across the Venetian plain and along the Brenner route. Another large scale assault, prior to the enemy's retreat, was made on the 20th by 500 escorted American heavy bombers who attacked the Brenner route bridges and marshalling yards.

322. When it became evident that the enemy was being driven from the Po Valley a policy was formulated of conserving railway facilities in North Italy. Only targets definitely associated with the supply or withdrawal of the