

166. Not all the stretch of railroad was within range of the R.A.F. Liberators. With persistence, however, they succeeded in getting as far south from their bases in India as the Bay of Bandon at the Isthmus of Kra, to inflict heavy damage on the important railway junction of Jumbhorn at the narrowest part of the Isthmus.

*Enemy's concern over Systematic Damage*

167. I must express most sincere admiration for the aircrews who flew these Liberators such abnormally long distances, frequently through atrocious monsoon weather, to bomb their targets in Siam and Malaya.

168. Crews of Bomber Command in Europe flew 1,200 mile round trips to Berlin when attacking targets in the capital of the Reich, but the R.A.F. Liberators in South East Asia flew from their bases in India round trips well over 2,000 miles to bomb objectives at Bangkok, and other targets on the Isthmus of Kra. This is equal to a flight from London to Naples or well to the east of Warsaw—flights, it should be noted, which the R.A.F. Liberators in my Command carried out regularly against the Japanese.

169. The concern of the enemy over the systematic damage to, and destruction of, their lines of communication in Siam and Malaya was revealed in a document which came into our hands entitled "Protection of Communications". This document called upon Japanese Unit Commanders to overhaul their A.A. defence methods as "enemy aircraft are carrying out continuous and unceasing attacks on our rear communications and planning to cut our rear lines altogether. We must perfect our counter-measures."

170. The enemy's increased vigilance, however, appeared to make no material difference to the preservation of their rail bridges, dumps, water towers, locomotives, rolling stock and shipping.

171. On June 5th, seven Liberators attacked railyards at Surasdhani on the Bangkok-Singapore line. Surasdhani was an important supply post for the Japanese and, to reach it, our bomber crews flew for 17 hours, mostly across the Bay of Bengal, and through some of the worst weather which the monsoon during 1945 had produced. This flight of 2,400 miles was one of the longest undertaken, up to that time, on a heavy bombing mission in this Theatre. The bombing was well concentrated, and the results were good. Subsequent reconnaissance confirmed all claims made by the crews.

*Liberators sink 10,000-ton Japanese Tanker.*

172. A shipping strike in Siamese waters on June 15th, when a 10,000-ton Japanese tanker was set on fire and left sinking by the stern, was one of the most noteworthy operations of its kind during the closing stages of the war against Japan in South East Asia.

173. To effect this strike, aircraft had to make a round trip of approximately 2,500 miles to the expected anchorage, the route being almost entirely over the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea.

174. The tanker was the largest enemy vessel reported in Siamese waters for many months, and was believed to be one of the last of its

size remaining to the Japanese in the Southern Area. It was sighted by a Sunderland aircraft of 222 Group when it was apparently trying to make a northbound run through the Gulf of Siam and along the east coast of the Malay Peninsula. The tanker had an escort.

175. The Air Forces at the disposal of 231 Group for this strike were four heavy bomber squadrons—Nos. 99, 159, 355 and 356, equipped with Liberator Mark V aircraft. A detachment of six aircraft from No. 159 Squadron, based in India, moved down temporarily to Akyab, on the Arakan, for the operation. This enabled the aircraft of the detachment to load up during the night and to take off at 0900 hours on the day of the strike. They were, therefore, the last squadron in to attack.

176. Due to exceedingly bad weather encountered by all aircraft on the route to the target, a number of the aircraft were forced to abandon the operation and returned to base. The master bomber and deputy master bomber were, unfortunately, included in this number. The remaining aircraft, which pressed on, came upon their target in the early afternoon as the tanker was moving past Samui Island. An escort was some distance away.

177. Three aircraft of 99 Squadron attacked the tanker at low level but did not succeed in securing hits. All three aircraft were damaged by A.A. fire from the escort vessel and the tanker itself. One aircraft had a fin shot off. After delivering its attack, it eventually reached Mingaladon Airfield, Rangoon, where it crash-landed. The second aircraft, also damaged, by A.A. fire, crash-landed at Akyab.

178. The battle against the tanker was continued later with three aircraft of 356 Squadron attacking at low level, and a direct hit produced fire and a series of explosions. The tanker still fought back fiercely, and all three aircraft were damaged by A.A. fire, one of which crashed when landing at Salbani in Bengal. The fight continued with the arrival of three further aircraft from 159 Squadron which pressed home the attack, claiming four and possibly six hits. With smoke billowing to 7,000 feet, the tanker was left burning from stem to stern and sinking. The tanker's escort succeeded in making its escape.

179. Subsequent reconnaissance showed that the tanker was sunk, the funnel and mast were seen showing above the sea.

180. Loss of so vital a supply vessel as an oil tanker of 10,000 tons, particularly at a time when supply meant everything to the enemy in South East Asia, added further to the embarrassment of the Japanese.

181. For this outstanding success I sent a message of congratulation to Major-General J. T. Durrant, S.A.A.F., who, on June 15th, had assumed Command of 231 Group, vice Air Commodore F. J. W. Mellersh, C.B.E., A.F.C., repatriated to the United Kingdom.

182. The attack on the Japanese tanker ended a month of most successful shipping strikes by the air forces of 231 Group during June, for, on June 1st, Liberators had surprised enemy vessels at Satahib in the Gulf of Siam, when a 335-foot submarine depot ship—"Angthong"—was sunk.