

activities of the Army elements on the airfields, and to organise the flow of Army supplies both from base to airfield and from airfield to aircraft. These developments did not, however, reach completion during the period covered by this despatch.

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III.—STRATEGIC AIR FORCE

57. Operations by heavy and medium bombers sought to accomplish the following tasks:

- (i) Denial and destruction of *the enemy's lines of communication.*
- (ii) Destruction of *airfields and other military installations.*
- (iii) Destruction of *industrial and stores areas.*

58. In addition to these, the Strategic Air Force was often called upon to furnish direct support to ground forces and to provide aircraft and crews for transport operations.

59. For the transshipment of sea-borne supplies to Burma, there were available to the enemy the ports of Rangoon, Moulmein, Tavoy and Mergui; the three latter are all connected by rail or road to Rangoon. In addition to these, the enemy could use the port of Bangkok and two lesser ports in the Gulf of Siam, Koh Sichang and Sattahib, both with adequate communications to Bangkok. From here the vital Burma-Siam railway, which was completed about the beginning of the period under review, could transport supplies to Moulmein, thence across the Salween by ferry to Martaban, rail again to the Sittang River where the bridge was down, once again a ferry, and so to all points of use by rail. Among the measures designed to deny these facilities to the enemy was the laying of a total of 89 mines in the harbours of Rangoon, Moulmein, Tavoy and Mergui, and, further afield, at Bangkok and the Gulf of Siam ports. Though the number of mines laid was not large, the results exceeded expectations. Moreover, it must be remembered that the effort involved was considerable, sometimes necessitating flights of 2,300 miles. The enemy's lack of efficient minesweeping equipment caused much delay in the clearance of harbours, and intelligence reports show that considerable dislocation and damage was caused to shipping.

60. Attacks against rail communications accounted for almost 25 per cent. of all operations. Destruction of the larger installations was allotted to the heavy bombers, with particular emphasis on Rangoon, Bangkok and Mandalay. Wellingtons operating by night were directed mainly against railway centres. The Mitchells' (B.25) performance and characteristics made them particularly suitable for railway sweeps and the destruction of bridges. In this connection, the spiked bombs that came into use in March proved invaluable and were used to tear up stretches of the permanent way at intervals over many miles of track. Bridges of strategic importance were attacked continuously and attacks were repeated each time the enemy completed repair work. An excellent example of this was the Sittang Bridge at Mokpalin. Destroyed during the evacuation from Burma, the bridge was repaired after long and arduous work by the enemy. The progress of the work was carefully followed by reconnaissance, and as soon as it was completed the bridge was wrecked once more in

a single operation. It has not been repaired since this attack.

61. The overall strategy of rendering each part of the railway system ineffective was exemplified in the spirited low-level attack on the Burma-Siam railway by American Liberators (B.24), the series of attacks on marshalling yards at Bangkok and Moulmein, and the mining of the ferry crossings at Martaban and Mokpalin. At shorter range, the railway from Rangoon to Myitkyina was subject to continuous attacks, with the result that throughout its length there was always one bridge or more out of action. Amongst these bridges which were put out of action were the Mu River, Myittha, Meza, Kyungon, Zawchaung, Budalin, Songon, Natmauk, Tantabin, Swa, Tangon, Ye-u, Sinthe, Pyu, Bawgyo, Pyawbwe, Myingatha, Natkyigon, Daga and Myothit. Whenever intelligence indicated that enemy troops or supplies were moving in quantity, sweeps were undertaken along the stretches of track approaching the battle fronts.

62. Attacks on road facilities and communications began in earnest in April 1944, when the threat to the Imphal Plain assumed serious proportions. One enemy division moving north from the Tiddim area had, as its main line of supply, the motor road leading from Ye-u. Two other divisions attacking from the east across the Chindwin were largely dependent upon the road from Wuntho. Mitchells (B.25) and Wellingtons began on the 18th April an almost daily assault upon these vital arteries and the supplies moving along them. While the former carried out low-level daylight sweeps, the latter took up the rôle of intruders by night, replacing Beaufighters which Third Tactical Air Force considered could not be usefully or economically employed on moonless nights. The sum of these attacks, other aspects of which I have described elsewhere in this Despatch, contributed greatly to the constant shortage and slow transit of men and supplies which dogged the enemy throughout his offensive.

63. The effort by strategic bombers to neutralise the Japanese Air Force was directed primarily to the destruction of airfield installations and supplies. At the beginning of February a large-scale operation by night was undertaken against the Heho group of airfields in conjunction with Beaufighters, who were to follow up the attack at dawn. From the Strategic Air Force point of view, the operation was highly successful, photographs revealing many bomb patterns in vulnerable areas. The Beaufighter attacks were hampered, however, by early morning mist.

64. Of industrial targets, oil installations were one of the primary objectives. A concentrated bombing programme was carried out against facilities at Yenangyaung in which American daylight bombers demonstrated their accuracy to such an extent that twice Beaufighters operating in the area the following night reported large fires still burning. In late 1943 this plant was producing 600 barrels of crude oil daily, from which were extracted 5,000 gallons of petrol. By May, 1944, the daily processed yield had been reduced to 1,680 gallons. Installations at Chauk, Lanywa, and Thilawa were dealt with in a like fashion. Attacks against other industrial areas were reserved for the few large towns where targets