

German Armies were attacked, and we had now to consider military needs after the end of the Italian battle, and those of the civil economy. The Strategic day bombers' last big attack on Italian railway targets was made on the 24th April, when a high proportion of 1,200 bombers and fighters bombed or strafed railway communications in North-East Italy and along the Brenner route, while the remainder attacked the continuation of these lines in Austria, Italian road bridges and supply targets. By night, in the meantime, No. 205 Group made two raids on the Verona Parma bridge, at the southern end of the Brenner. The operations of the M.A.S.A.F. day and night bombers against the railway system in Austria, Yugoslavia and Southern Germany, which in many cases directly affected the supply of Italy, are considered in Part IV.

323. From the 9th to 16th April, when the battle raged at full intensity, the Tactical medium bombers were able to devote little attention to their customary railway targets; from the latter date until the 27th (when bad weather grounded the mediums for the rest of the month) the offensive was continued against Brenner line targets and a smaller effort was directed against the north-eastern routes and two bridges in southern Austria and north-west Yugoslavia. The total sorties flown by the Tactical mediums during April against railway communications amounted to 1,374 in the course of which 2,688 tons of bombs were dropped. Seventy-seven per cent. of these sorties were flown against Brenner line targets.

*Results of the interdiction policy during April.*

324. Definite blocks on the Brenner route varied between five and eighteen throughout the month, so that at no time was continuous through traffic possible.

325. The three north-eastern frontier railway routes remained out by the destruction of bridges for the third month in succession. The important northern line was apparently given priority for repairs, but despite this, was never made fully serviceable. Spasmodic attempts were made to repair the central line for a time, but at last the unequal struggle was given up altogether. This had been the case with the southern lines for a long time.

326. Further south, through traffic was at no time possible across the Venetian Plain. The Brenta zone of interdiction was well maintained; in particular, an attempt to make the Padua north railway bridge serviceable was forestalled by a M.A.S.A.F. attack on the 11th April. More repair activity was apparent in the Piave River zone, but here again, M.A.S.A.F. heavy bombers prevented any return to serviceability of the Nervesa and Ponte di Piave diversions. Less interdiction was maintained at the Livenza River zone, but this was comparatively unimportant owing to the disruption at Nervesa, further west. In the Tagliamento River zone, the Latisana diversion was still incomplete when it fell into Allied hands, and that a Casarsa, kept out of action by M.A.T.A.F. fighter-bombers until the 12th, was knocked out for the last time by M.A.S.A.F. on the 24th.

327. In the north-central zone of the Po valley, through traffic was impossible between Verona and Milan until the 22nd April, but

the few bridges which were made serviceable after that date obviously availed the enemy little as the result of the campaign was then a foregone conclusion.

328. All the permanent railway bridges over the Po from Bressana Bottarone to the east coast remained out of action and no attempt was made to repair them.

*The part played by M.A.C.A.F. in the final offensive.*

329. In my description of the part played by the Air Forces in the final offensive, I have not thus far mentioned the work done by M.A.C.A.F. I should therefore like now to make specific reference to its efforts.

330. In operations connected with the Italian campaign during the month of April, M.A.C.A.F. destroyed 328 motor vehicles and damaged 234 more; destroyed or damaged 30 locomotives and over 230 units of rolling stock; and damaged three bridges. These operations were carried out especially at the western end of the Po Valley, thus enabling M.A.T.A.F. aircraft to be concentrated on the main battle front.

331. In its own particular sphere of activity, M.A.C.A.F. during the month of April damaged one ship over 1,000 tons, sank 12 smaller craft (including a midget submarine), and damaged 32 more. Air-sea rescue operations resulted in the saving of 118 aircrew personnel.

*Other Air Force activities during the battle period.*

332. With the very small air force at the enemy's disposal, only a very small part of the Allied Air Force's effort was required in counter-air activity. The enemy air effort was limited to occasional unsuccessful attacks on Allied photographic reconnaissance aircraft, and to small-scale ground attack activity by Stukas and Me. 109 fighter bombers in the battle area. This latter effort reached its peak on the night 22nd-23rd April, when ten to fifteen sorties were reported on the Fifth and Eighth Armies' fronts. After that date this harassing activity quickly declined as the Allied ground-forces over-ran the bases at Villafranca (10 miles S.W. of Verona) and Ghedi (10 miles SSE. of Brescia) and later at Thiene (15 miles N. of Vicenza).

333. Both long-range and short-range reconnaissance by the enemy was on a reduced scale during the battle and quite inadequate to give the German commanders any picture of developments on our armies' fronts and in the rear areas.

334. On sixteen of the seventeen nights from 8th to 25th April, Tactical Air Force night-fighters flew reconnaissance flights over the Ghedi, Villafranca, Bergamo (30 miles NE. of Milan) and Thiene airfields, and made attacks when opportune. Day attacks on airfields resulted in a total of 40 enemy aircraft destroyed on the ground and 27 damaged.

335. In April, M.A.T.A.F. supply dropping aircraft working with Italian Partisan Forces flew 711 sorties, of which 485 were effective; of the non-effective sorties, 107 failed because of lack of signals in the dropping areas. Nearly 950 tons of supplies were dropped, of