

of a reasonable size presented themselves, notably Rangoon, Moulmein, Bassein, Insein and Prome. The Aircraft Factory and Arsenal at Bangkok received many hits from the 106 tons of bombs aimed at it. When considering the relative lightness of the attack, allowance must be made for the distance involved, which is equivalent to a return flight from London to Tunis.

65. While I had not originally planned to use strategic bombers in close support of ground troops, the Commanders on all three sectors of the front requested their help and were accorded it. I have dealt with these operations in more detail in the section devoted to Army Support, where it will be seen that the greater proportion were in direct support of IV Corps in front of Imphal. Wellingtons were initially employed on this task by daylight, with fighter escort, since the Mitchells (B.25) could more usefully be employed on sweeps along the various Lines of Communication. Subsequently, when Wellington crews had to be withdrawn for air supply duties, the Liberators (B.24) were used in a similar daylight rôle. This method of employment of strategic bombers was all the more acceptable to me since monsoon conditions made night bombing wellnigh impossible. The frequency of these attacks increased, and by the end of May No. 231 Group alone had been able to achieve the creditable total of 646 short tons of bombs dropped on Army Support targets.

66. The above duties of Strategic Air Force involved the dropping, from January onwards, of 6,741 short tons of bombs, of which R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. dropped almost equal proportions. The distribution of this effort was as follows:

	Per cent.
Military installations, dumps, etc.	54.7
Railroad communications ...	22.6
Airfields and landing grounds ...	10.2
Bridges ... ..	5.5
Shipping ... ..	3.5
Jettisoned ... ..	3.5

67. The Strategic Air Force carried out one more duty during the period, the reinforcement with crews and aircraft of the transport squadrons maintaining the life-line to forces cut off on the Imphal Plain. On 19th May forty Wellington crews were attached to Troop Carrier Command to help the over-worked crews there, and five aircraft and crews were detailed to carry 250-lb. bombs to the tactical squadrons operating at high pressure in the Imphal Plain. Despite bad weather, 544 bombs were delivered by 31st May. In the same period, No. 490 U.S. (Mitchell) Squadron delivered 380 tons of ammunition to the forces defending Imphal. The offensive power which these loads represented contributed to the eventual breaking of the Japanese offensive and enabled the normal transport aircraft to concentrate on delivering other supplies of which the Army was in urgent need.

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#### IV.—SUPPORT OF GROUND FORCES

68. Operations on land were renewed and maintained on a large scale during this period, so that there were greatly increased opportunities for giving support to our land forces.

The fact that we possessed and held air superiority enabled full advantage to be taken of these opportunities, and throughout the big battles—first in Arakan and then in Manipur and around Myitkyina—ground support reached dimensions which absorbed a large part of the total effort.

69. The successful provision of direct support to our armies in this theatre is faced by two great difficulties. The first of these is the nature of the terrain over which the fighting was taking place. Much of it is close, densely wooded, or covered with thick undergrowth, so that the recognition of targets presents a problem to even the most experienced crews. The second is the nature and characteristics of the enemy as a fighter on the ground. Three things distinguish him: his tenacity and stamina, which enable him to take great punishment from the air and still retain his fighting spirit; his skill in camouflaging his positions and dumps, which makes it very difficult to locate them from the air or the ground; and his beaver-like propensity for digging himself into the ground by excavations that range from a number of shallow fox-holes to hold one or two men to an elaborate system of bunkers unharmed by all but direct hits from heavy bombs. By virtue indeed of the nature of each, the terrain and the enemy are strikingly suited to each other.

70. The difficult nature of the terrain and the enemy's complementary skill in camouflage were overcome, to a great extent, by the intimate knowledge that aircrews came to have of the country over which they were operating. Another aid to target recognition was the use of artillery or mortar smoke shells. The enemy, however, on several occasions put down diversionary smoke to mislead our aircraft. One remedy to this ruse is the employment of coloured smoke which has recently arrived in the theatre.

71. The enemy's capacity for absorbing punishment from the air without losing his will to continue fighting was countered by the application to his positions of a fire-power or a bomb-load of such a magnitude as would seem in a European theatre to be out of all proportion to the objects it was hoped to achieve, having regard to the forces available.

72. Such a concentration of bombs over any area held by the enemy also helped in finding an answer to the gift of the enemy for camouflage and to the fact that the terrain lends itself to concealment. An area was often found to contain more bunkers than even the most careful and thorough reconnaissance had disclosed. If these attacks were confined to pinpoint bombing of those bunkers whose existence was known, then when the bombing ceased and ground troops followed up, other enemy positions were found untouched by the bombardment. For instance, at Kyaukchaw, attacked on 17th January by heavy bombers, it was thought even after bombing had taken place that there were only three bunkers, whereas there were actually eight. Only complete saturation of an area can ensure a chance of all bunkers being hit or the troops in them being at least held down.

73. The problem presented by the strength and depth of many of the enemy's bunker positions was never properly solved. The