

427. I think it is worthy of note that Operation "Birdcage" was carried out in very different conditions. Even more important still was the fact that an all round trip of many of the sorties was equivalent to a trans-Atlantic flight. Nevertheless, 75 per cent. of the crews reached their targets, which included towns and camps as far east as Hanoi, Tourane and Saigon.

Success of Leaflet Dropping.

428. The news of Japanese surrender contained in the millions of leaflets dropped met with great enthusiasm throughout the scattered territories of South East Asia. They were picked up on the streets of towns and read eagerly by the civilian population. The messages also dropped to the Allied prisoners-of-war stated, "We want to get you back home quickly, safe and sound".

429. Many of the prisoners had been Japanese forced labour for the building of the notorious Bangkok-Moulmein railway—a slave task which will take its place among the list of incredible efforts carried out by captive men.

430. August, 1945, saw the greatest effort in leaflet dropping attempted by aircraft of the Command.

431. Prior to the surrender, and immediately after, some 33,000,000 leaflets were dropped over the enemy-occupied territories in South East Asia. This form of psychological warfare had been stepped up very considerably after the defeat of the Japanese in Burma, and in July the total dropped by aircraft of the Command reached 22,000,000.

432. One particular form of leaflet, dropped over the trapped Japanese forces in the Pegu Yomas of Southern Burma during July, not only called upon the enemy to surrender after telling them of the hopeless position of their homeland, but, on the reverse side offered them a safe conduct through the Allied lines with the added assurance that they would be given food, medical attention and honourable treatment.

Launching of Operation "Mastiff".

433. The saturating of towns and prison camps with leaflets announcing the Japanese surrender was, in itself, a laudable effort, but the main task which awaited the Air Forces was unquestionably that of Operation "Mastiff" in bringing practical relief and comfort to those who needed them most.

434. Hundreds of these prisoners were emaciated, gaunt and pitiful beings—some, indeed, were too weak to stand upon their legs. The majority of prisoners were deficient of proper clothing. There were instances, too, where some were completely naked.

435. The need of medical supplies was perhaps the greatest, for the Japanese had shown little ability or willingness to appreciate the needs of prisoners-of-war in many cases. The immediate requirements in drugs, therefore, could only be taken to sufferers by air, and, as a large percentage of prisoners and internees, particularly in Singapore, were affected by malaria, it was estimated that 1,250,000 tablets of Atabrine, or substitute, were essential for delivery each week.

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436. The "Mastiff" operation in the early stages was carried out by ten Liberator squadrons (including one R.A.A.F. squadron) and one Dakota squadron. Three Liberator squadrons operated from bases in Bengal—Jessore, Salbani and Digri—covering targets chiefly in Siam and French Indo-China. From bases in Ceylon another three Liberator squadrons operated over Malaya and Sumatra, while areas in Malaya and Java were supplied by three Liberator squadrons based in the Cocos Islands, though these were chiefly employed on targets in Sumatra.

437. The Dakota squadron operated from Rangoon over Siam and the Tenasserim Coastal Area of Southern Burma. The tasks undertaken by this Dakota squadron must not be confused with the all-out effort made by five Dakota squadrons of No. 232 Group, R.A.F., based on Rangoon, which were employed on the air-lift to Bangkok, where the Don Muang Airfield was quickly in use. The operations of these Dakota squadrons in the air landing of supplies and in the evacuation of prisoners-of-war was one of the outstanding features of the air operations associated with "Mastiff".

438. From 1st to 5th September, approximately 200 Dakota sorties were flown from Rangoon, and some 400 tons of stores were dropped or landed. The same aircraft carried back 4,000 prisoners-of-war and internees. On the following week the Dakotas carried out a further 360 sorties, and dropped or landed 600 tons of stores. On their return trips they carried back some 3,700 prisoners-of-war. It was a tribute to the enthusiasm shown by the Dakota aircrews at this time that 12th Army, by September 10th, was able to report that approximately 9,000 prisoners-of-war had been carried back to Rangoon from Bangkok. Early in the month, practically all the U.S. prisoners-of-war had been evacuated from the Bangkok area, the figure being approximately 162. This evacuation was carried out chiefly by U.S. airlift, which was also responsible for bringing out a number of British and Allied sick.

Use of Thunderbolts and R.A.A.F. Liberators.

439. Though not actually engaged upon Operation "Mastiff", a number of Thunderbolt aircraft flew from their bases in Burma and assisted in the problem of locating camps and determining their circumstances. Many of these Thunderbolt sorties were rendered abortive by weather, but other sorties resulted in the bringing back of valuable information. It was noted, for example, that several of the prison camps on the Burma-Siam railway, in the area stretching N.W. from Kanchanaburi, were deserted and empty, while prisoners-of-war in other scattered camps greeted the appearance of the Thunderbolts with understandable enthusiasm expressed by frantic cheering and waving.

440. The inclusion of a series of sorties by Liberators of the R.A.A.F. which took off from bases in North Western Australia to drop supplies over Magelang Airfield, in Java, also greatly assisted in the success of operations in the opening weeks. These aircraft landed in the Cocos Islands, loaded up with fresh supplies, and repeated the drop on Java en route back to Australia. The R.A.A.F. Liberators completed 21 sorties, all of which were successful. Other sorties of a similar nature were