

railway trucks. A fuel supply for the Kowloon power station was thus assured, but the margin was so close that on one occasion the power house was within 15 minutes of closing down completely.

412. Railway workshops were also under the initial supervision of a R.A.F. staff, which was later augmented by suitable personnel through arrangements with Civil Affairs. Under R.A.F. supervision these workshops completed repair to three locomotives, some twenty goods wagons, and three passenger coaches. As a result, the rolling stock augmented by this output from the railway workshops was sufficient to meet the requirements of the railway within the colony.

413. Even Hong Kong's municipal water supply included an element of R.A.F. supervisory staff, though in this respect the water supply as a whole had suffered little during enemy occupation and therefore met existing requirements.

414. The morale of our Air Forces in the execution of these extraordinarily varied tasks was wonderfully high, and once the initial excitement and novelty associated with their misemployment in the role of shock troops, guards, policemen and municipal authorities had worn off, R.A.F. units took stock of the situation and turned their attention to the tasks of resuming their normal service duties.

THE LIBERATION OF ALLIED PRISONERS OF WAR AND INTERNEES

Operations "Birdcage" and "Mastiff"

415. The relief and liberation of almost 100,000 Allied prisoners-of-war and internees confined in Japanese prison camps throughout the vast territories of South East Asia, is an episode in the Far Eastern War which relied almost entirely upon Air Power for its success in the initial but vital stages of its operation.

416. It would be inaccurate to record that the Air Forces alone were responsible for the ultimate rescue and liberation of these thousands of prisoners, but the Air Forces of this Command carried out vital tasks as follows:—

(a) Spread the news of Japanese surrender in millions of leaflets dropped over the principal towns and known sites of Japanese prison camps scattered throughout South East Asia.

(b) Warned Allied prisoners-of-war and internees of their impending liberation.

(c) Dropped medical supplies, medical teams, administrative personnel and W/T operators to make first contact with prisoners and to signal back vital information regarding numbers imprisoned and supplies required.

(d) Air dropped, or air landed, quantities of food, clothing and other necessities to relieve the privations suffered at prison camps.

(e) Evacuated by air hundreds of prisoners from Malaya, Siam, French Indo-China, Sumatra and Java, including cases of very serious illness.

417. In a message to all formations of Air Command which took part in the inauguration of this task on August 28th, 1945, the operation was described as "the greatest mercy mission of the war".

418. It was a mission of paramount importance to thousands of families in Britain, the Dominions and, indeed, in Holland, who eagerly awaited information about relatives interned and captured during the Japanese conquest of Malaya in 1942.

419. In Singapore alone, about 35,000 prisoners were held in the various Japanese prison camps throughout Singapore Island, the most notorious of which was the Changi Gaol. The inmates of these camps had been subjected to coarse indignities and even torture.

420. The feeling in Britain found expression in a message from the British Foreign Secretary to the Supreme Allied Commander, South East Asia, in which he drew Admiral Mountbatten's attention to the numerous enquiries which the Government had received since the publication of atrocity stories from Singapore and elsewhere, and saying that there was grave concern in respect of Sumatra, since deaths actually reported by the Japanese through the International Red Cross were much higher in proportion to numbers anywhere else in the Far East.

421. It can be seen, therefore, how well suited was Air Power to perform this vitally important task involving great distances across great tracts of land—a task also in which speed was essential for its success.

Operation "Birdcage" launched.

422. As soon as the Japanese surrender had been universally accepted and confirmed, action was taken to issue instructions contained in specially prepared leaflets to:—

(a) Japanese Prison Guards.

(b) Allied Prisoners-of-war.

(c) Local Japanese forces.

(d) The local native population.

423. The operation to implement this action was allotted the code name of "Birdcage," and was launched by the Air Forces of Air Command on August 28th, operating from bases in Ceylon, Cocos Islands, Bengal and Burma.

424. Thereafter, Operation "Mastiff", was planned to ensure that medical aid, comforts, food, clothing, R.A.P.W.I. Control Staffs where necessary, and any other essential preliminary needs were introduced into the camps as early as possible.

425. Operation "Birdcage" was completed by August 31st. In the space of four days, leaflets had been dropped over 236 localities and 90 prisoner-of-war camps throughout Burma, Siam, French Indo-China, Malaya and Sumatra. Where sorties were at first rendered abortive by weather and by difficulty in locating targets or by mechanical trouble, they were persisted with on the following days. Very few priority targets remained uncovered. One group of towns in the hinterland of Malaya was successfully covered only at the third attempt.

426. In addition to Liberator sorties flown from bases in Ceylon, Cocos Islands and Bengal, Thunderbolts operating from Burma dropped one million leaflets on thirteen localities in Southern Burma extending as far south as the Kra Isthmus. No target was left uncovered. One Thunderbolt was lost during these operations—the aircraft crashing in flames at Kraburi.