

sixty sorties per month. Generally, planning did not exceed more than fifty sorties per month, in view of the maintenance difficulties, the extremely long sorties which had to be flown, and the fact that the Guerilla Organisations might not have continuous operations in hand. While it was possible to carry out the majority of the operations over Malaya with safety during daytime, or under last light conditions, it was not considered wise to make these flights in daylight in the immediate vicinity of Singapore.

285. The three principal home bases for the S.D. operations were at Jessore in Bengal, Minneriya in Ceylon, and later the Cocos Islands. The operations from the Cocos did not begin until mid-July, when sorties were flown to all parts of Malaya. From Bengal, the S.D. operations were principally over Burma and French Indo-China, but flights were also made deep into Malaya, one aircraft logging twenty hours thirty-nine minutes for one of its sorties.

Operations Increased for Malaya.

286. The strategic plan for the assault on Malaya called for an even greater effort by the S.D. squadrons based in Ceylon. By July, the underground forces had been so organised by our personnel, and supplied with arms and equipment to such proportions, that they constituted a very real threat to isolated garrisons of Japanese troops. The time was considered opportune to foster and galvanise these organisations into a formidable fighting force to harass the enemy at the time of our own landings in Malaya. For this purpose, therefore, it was decided to use heavy bomber aircraft, based on the Cocos Islands, to supplement the S.D. operations into Southern Malaya, and to employ these aircraft on the first ten nights of the July and August moon periods. These operations were controlled by Headquarters, No. 222 Group. Aircraft airborne from the Cocos Islands were routed in daylight through the gap in the Sumatra mountain range between 1° North and 2° North, and carrying a payload of 5,000 lbs. In this way, approximately 75 per cent. of the Malayan dropping zones was covered.

287. In order to carry out very long range S.D. operations within the Command with worthwhile payloads, Liberators at one time were operating with an all-up-weight (a.u.w.) of 66,000 lbs. This had paid a great dividend in establishing links with the underground forces in Malaya.

288. To keep the a.u.w. within the margin of safety, however, and at the same time carry the maximum payloads, it was necessary, on occasion, to cut the amount of extra petrol carried to the irreducible minimum; to strip aircraft of non-essential equipment, and to carry only essential crews.

289. In the weeks immediately preceding the Allied landings on Malaya, a considerable weight of weapons, ammunition and concentrated food was dropped to thousands of organised guerillas, together with trained guerilla leaders.

290. The operational records of the aircraft engaged on S.D. operations in the Command show that aircraft of No. 222 Group alone flew nearly 11,000 hours between May and

September, 1945. The Cocos squadrons, although not altogether fully experienced in S.D. work, speedily established an enviable reputation for accurate dropping. When it is realised, too, that the sorties carried out by Catalina aircraft entailed, for the most part, night landings on enemy waters in varying conditions of sea, without benefit of flare-path, some idea is gained of the high skill required from these R.A.F. pilots.

291. The sudden end of the war in South East Asia did not conclude the tasks of the S.D. squadrons, but brought instead a new series of commitments under Operation "Mastiff" for the relief and liberation of Allied prisoners-of-war, an aspect which is dealt with in a later chapter of this despatch.

Outstanding Operations by Lysander Aircraft.

292. Any report or narrative on S.D. operations would be far short of completeness without mention of the magnificent work done by light aircraft, notably Lysanders. The untiring efforts of Lysander pilots, indeed, greatly assisted Force 136 to carry on their activities behind the enemy lines during the drive through Burma, and I feel justified in singling them out for especial mention.

293. Particularly outstanding work was done by the Lysander Flight of 357 Squadron. Not only were personnel infiltrated, but seriously wounded personnel were evacuated from the field. In addition to the urgent operational stores flown in, commitments had included transport of Staff Officers to Party Commanders in the field, and the evacuation of enemy prisoners-of-war and documents.

294. The versatility of the flight had increased with each operation. Sorties often necessitated flying in foul monsoon weather and landing on very small strips. On one occasion a landing was attempted at Ntilawathihta, near the Papun-Momaung Road, on a very short strip and on wet and slippery grass. The aircraft slid into a deep ditch at the end of the strip, but escaped with negligible damage. In attempts to extricate the aircraft, lumber elephants would not go near, but the combined efforts of fifty local inhabitants eventually succeeded in hauling the plane back on to the strip; the pilot then flew back to base.

295. On many occasions Lysander sorties came near to failure owing to the presence of Japanese troops in the area. Force 136 nearly always had to cover the landing area for fear of surprise by Japanese patrols.

296. On another occasion, a pilot was involved in a skirmish between Japanese troops and Force 136 Guerillas at Lipyekhi, when his aircraft failed to start for the return journey to Rangoon. Firing took place across the strip, but the aircraft escaped damage. It was rendered serviceable next day by a rescue sortie, and was able to return to base.

297. Another escapade was accomplished when Squadron Leader Turner, Flight Commander, damaged his Lysander in an attempt to pick up personnel at Ngapyawdaw, near Kinmun. Shortly after he had landed, the neighbourhood was compromised by Japanese forces and repair of the aircraft was impossible. Attempts to rescue Squadron Leader Turner were abortive until ten days later,