

several occasions, also, elements of the Strategic Air Force have acted in a tactical rôle and furnished most valuable close support both by bombing and by ferrying supplies.

120. *Tactical Air Force.* The successful provision of ground support in this Theatre, although facilitated by our complete air supremacy, is faced by two difficulties:—

(a) the problem of target recognition in dense jungle (enhanced, as it is, by the enemy's skill in camouflaging his positions and dumps), and

(b) the Japanese skill in building field defences which require direct hits from heavy bombs to neutralise them.

The difficulty of target recognition was, to a great extent, overcome by use of smoke and wireless.

121. The occasions when air support has been called for and most effectively provided are too numerous to mention but it has not always been easy to assess the results achieved. I have no hesitation in stating, however, that neither in offence nor defence could the Army have achieved the success it did, had it not been for the casualties inflicted on the enemy, and the disruption in forward areas of both their land and water communications by Eastern Air Command. Further, the effect produced on the morale of our troops by the obvious evidence of our air superiority has been most inspiring. Conversely, its disheartening effect on the enemy is evidenced by the statements of prisoners and from captured documents.

122. *Air Transport Operations.* In November 1943, only one R.A.F. Transport Squadron was available for operations with Fourteenth Army, but two Troop Carrier Squadrons, U.S.A.A.F., were working with General Stilwell's forces in the Northern Sector, and other squadrons, both British and American, were on their way as reinforcements. Other reinforcements were sent subsequently from the Mediterranean and elsewhere.

Unified operational control of these forces was effected in December by the formation of Troop Carrier Command, Eastern Air Command, under Brigadier-General W. D. Old of the U.S.A.A.F., with Headquarters at Comilla, where were situated the Headquarters of both Fourteenth Army and 3 Tactical Air Force, as well as the main supply bases. On the 1st May, in order further to integrate air transport with army operations, Troop Carrier Command was placed under the control of the Air Commander, 3 Tactical Air Force, until it was dissolved on the 4th June—a measure rendered necessary by the increasing dispersal of the operational areas and the growing intensity of General Stilwell's operations in North Burma.

123. It is only possible for me here briefly to mention the major air transport operations carried out during this period. These were, in chronological order:—

(a) The routine supply-dropping missions to our detachments in the Chin Hills, which I mention because of the hazardous flying conditions.

(b) The maintenance of 81 (West African) Division in the Kaladan, which was entirely dependent on air supply.

(c) The maintenance of the Chinese divisions advancing south-east from Ledo, which included supplies for our Fort Hertz garrison and the Levies operating in that area.

(d) The delivery by air of some 2,000 tons of supplies of all kinds to 7 Indian Division during the fighting between the 8th February and the 6th March.

(e) The fly-in of the Brigades of Special Force to the centre of Burma.

(f) The move by air of 50 Indian Parachute Brigade from Northern India to the Imphal area, followed by the transfer of the personnel of 5 Indian Division, two brigades of 7 Indian Division, together with a proportion of their heavy equipment, including artillery, from Arakan to the same area. An infantry brigade of 2 British Division was flown from the Calcutta area to Jorhat in North-Eastern Assam.

(g) The air supply, on an unprecedented scale, of 4 Corps during the period that the line of communication to Imphal was cut.

(h) The evacuation by air of 16 Brigade of Special Force from the Hopin area to India.

(i) Concurrently with all the above, the evacuation of casualties from Arakan, North Burma and Imphal, which had a most beneficial effect on the morale of the troops engaged.

124. It is not within the scope of this Despatch to give a detailed account of the operations, but I wish to comment on two of them: the maintenance by air of 7 Indian Division, when cut off in the Arakan, and that of 4 Corps when surrounded in Imphal. The former was the first occasion, in this theatre of war, when a large formation was supplied by air, and was thus able to maintain its positions after its land communications had been severed. This allowed us to inflict a crushing defeat on the enemy. The latter—the air supply of 4 Corps—deserves a more detailed account:

The magnitude of the effort involved in keeping an Army Corps of four divisions and the air forces based at Imphal supplied, was enormous, when it is regarded in relation to the number of aircraft available.

Calculations showed that the Army required 323 tons *per diem*, and the supporting R.A.F. squadrons 75 tons, if we were to hold Imphal. This target figure was, generally speaking, maintained, though we had anxious periods when a shortage of aircraft seemed probable and when bad weather restricted flying. There is no doubt that, if we had not had air supply, we should have lost the Imphal Plain and the position on the eastern frontier of India would have been grave.

125. It is with gratitude and admiration that I acknowledge the immense debt which the Army owes to the Air. No one who, like myself, has watched them, is likely to forget the courage, determination and skill of pilots and crews who have flown through some of the worst weather in the world, and over appalling country in performing their allotted tasks.

Enemy Strengths and Dispositions.

126. To trace the Japanese build-up in Burma, it is necessary to go back to July, 1943, when their total strength consisted of four