

than 20 per cent. of the April, 1944, level, and of petrol to about 10 per cent. It can be truly said that the attacks on the enemy's fuel production constituted one of the most successful air offensives ever waged.

#### *Assistance to the Russians.*

159. In November, 1944, it became evident that the advance of the Soviet forces through Hungary was destined to be one of the decisive thrusts of the war. It was equally clear that an excellent opportunity was presented to M.A.S.A.F. of using its striking power to aid our Russian Ally, by limiting the supply and reinforcement of the defending Axis troops south of the Tatra mountains. To achieve this aim, the air offensive had to dislocate the enemy's railway systems in Austria, Western Hungary, and Northern Yugoslavia. Although considerable damage had already been inflicted on vulnerable points of these systems, a far more comprehensive programme of air attacks was now necessary, but before this could be implemented, an exact picture had to be drawn up of the whole flow of enemy traffic to the south-eastern front. Before the end of 1944, by means of constant photographic reconnaissance and reports from ground agents and prisoners of war, the necessary information had been obtained and collated.

160. The first requirement of the Russian High Command was the dislocation of the railways from Linz and Vienna to Zagreb and the connecting lines to North-East Italy. This phase lasted approximately from the beginning of 1945 to 23rd February, 1945. Thereafter an additional commitment was the destruction of Western Hungarian marshalling yards and railway targets in Northern Yugoslavia, in order to dislocate the enemy troop movement northwards across the Drava river.

#### *The Main Targets.*

161. Before considering the implementation of the plan to aid the Russian armies, it is necessary to give a brief survey of the principal communication targets involved.

162. The key target of the whole railway network was the complex of marshalling yards immediately to the south-east of Vienna. Before the air offensive began in earnest, most of the military supplies and material from the Reich and Czechoslovakia were handled in these yards, which had ample facilities for the purpose. Of slightly lower priority, but equally large and complex, was the railway centre at Linz, further to the west. And between the two were the spacious yards at Amstetten, capable of dealing with all military traffic and unhampered by industrial commitments.

163. Southwards on the line from Vienna to Zagreb were four important railway centres at Wiener Neustadt, Bruck, Graz and Maribor, which had large classification yards with full facilities and repair depots.

164. East of the Vienna-Zagreb route the lines from the Austrian capital to Budapest were serviced by the Bratislava and Ersekujvar centres, north of the Danube, and those at Hegyeshalom and Komarom to the south of the river.

165. Further south, a number of minor lines branched east from Wiener Neustadt and Graz, passing through the centres at Sopron and Szombathely.

166. Complementary to the major targets were minor yards and sidings along the various lines, while rail traffic offered tempting targets to M.A.S.A.F. fighters.

#### *The Air Effort in March.*

167. In January and February well over 13,000 tons of bombs were dropped in meeting this commitment, and March saw a further stepping up of the effort. In that month, some 18,000 tons were dropped on Austrian, Bavarian, Hungarian and Yugoslav railway communications in order to aid the Red Army drive into Austria and Yugoslavia.

168. On about one third of the day missions, visual bombing was possible and the accuracy achieved was exceptional. Night bomber raids by No. 205 Group added to the disruption caused by the Fifteenth Air Force attacks.

169. In addition to the continued policing of the Vienna-Graz-Zagreb route, in answer to Russian requests, M.A.S.A.F. now intensified its attacks on the western Hungarian marshalling yards and northern Yugoslav railway targets so as to dislocate the enemy's northward movement across the Drava.

170. In neutralising the Germans' forward marshalling yards in western Hungary nearly 2,500 tons of bombs were dropped at Hegyeshalom, Komarom, Sopron, Szombathely and Ersekujvar (Nove Zamky). A further 132 tons were dropped on the Bratislava yards, just inside Czechoslovakia.

171. Meanwhile, in completing the disruption of the railway communications in Austria, southern Germany and northern Yugoslavia, M.A.S.A.F. dropped some 15,000 tons of bombs.

172. Of the fifteen bombing attacks delivered against the Vienna-Graz-Zagreb line the most important were five directed against Wiener Neustadt which, except for Bruck, was the only remaining railway centre on the line with a large and relatively intact marshalling capacity. The 1,743 tons of bombs dropped on this target left the yards severely damaged and completely blocked. Three heavy attacks were also made on the crowded yards at Amstetten, which had become the main centre for the sorting of traffic after the previous month's crippling attacks on Linz and Vienna, and these likewise resulted in the destruction of installations and the blocking of the yards with the wreckage of rolling stock.

173. Meanwhile, the air offensive was continued against railway targets at Vienna, Linz and Graz at high intensity. Among the many other railway targets attacked the strongest efforts were directed against those at Wels, Villach, Bruck, Steyr, Gmund, St. Veit, Klagenfurt and St. Polten in Austria; at Muldorf and Landshut in Bavaria; and Maribor, Zagreb and Dobova in northern Yugoslavia.

174. No. 205 Group again supplemented the havoc wrought by the United States day bombers by effective night attacks.

During the first seventeen days of March, also, M.A.S.A.F. fighters flew 333 effective sorties on strafing missions, which met with excellent results, particularly in the destruction of locomotives.