

reduction in strength, and with the monsoon at its height, a change in policy was necessary, and a new Operational Directive (No. 10) declared that objectives would be tactical targets best calculated to assist Fourteenth Army; communications, shipping and railways, with particular attention to the Martaban—Pegu, Pegu—Mandalay and Bangkok—Nampang sections.

113. In October, the Seventh Bombardment Group returned to Strategic Air Force, and in the following month, Nos. 99 and 215 Squadrons returned to the line having been re-equipped from Wellingtons to Liberators. With one more accession to its strength (No. 358 Squadron formed within the Command and operating by January), Strategic Air Force reached its full power for the vital six months to follow. Its operational function was accordingly expanded from October onwards to include all the duties of strategic bombers, including mining, and the Force was ready for the decisive campaign which lay ahead.

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114. Operations fell into well-defined categories, the first of which was the effort against shipping and harbour installations; the second, and most important, was the interdiction of the overland supply routes into Southern Burma; and the third the destruction of the enemy's powers of resistance in Burma by disorganising his internal communications, razing his dumps, and denying him the use of his airfields and military installations.

(I) *Attacks against Shipping and Harbours.*

115. Although the main weight of attack fell upon railways, some effort was directed towards the furtive and well-camouflaged shipping which plied the coasts, seldom moving by day and never venturing far within the radius of action of strike aircraft. Such operations were carried out with the purpose of deterring the enemy from committing his supplies to the perils of the sea rather than of sinking the ships en route. It was a policy of denial rather than of destruction. This choice was necessary since shipping was never frequent enough to justify intensive search for it, and the most remunerative targets were therefore harbours, docks and port facilities. Of these Mergui, Martaban, the new port of Khao Huagang, and Bangkok were most often attacked, and considerable destruction achieved. A typical intelligence report on a raid against Bangkok in March, for example, was—"Concentrated and successful attack causing destruction of forty per cent. of the storage units; sixty Japs killed".

116. Accepting that enemy shipping was hard to search out, Strategic Air Force had resort to the policy of hindering what it could not destroy. Mining was already proved by photographic reconnaissance as being a profitable method of delaying the passage of supplies, for in harbours already mined there had been a serious curtailment of Japanese shipping, and such craft as continued to approach the harbours anchored outside so that cargoes had to be lightered ashore.

117. Thus from August onwards plans and technique for very long-range mining were developed and soon bore fruit. In September

the Pakchan river, housing the newly constructed port of Khao Huagang, was heavily mined and the flow of coastal traffic seriously disrupted. Similar operations against Bangkok, Goh Sichang and Tavoy followed. In October a remarkably successful flight was carried out to the inner approaches of Penang harbour. Fifteen Liberators each laid four 1,000 lb. mines "precisely in the positions ordered", with no mishap or failure although the round trip was over three thousand miles. Such operations continued throughout the campaign against all ports and anchorages along the Tenasserim Coast and from March onwards against those in the Gulf of Siam. Mining was the special and exclusive province of No. 159 Squadron R.A.F. who throughout the period laid the impressive total of 1,953 mines at ranges which a year before would have been considered impossible. The following results were observed from reconnaissance:

(i) Jap launch and passenger steamer sunk near Victoria Point (February).

(ii) 3,000 ton tanker Kuisho Maru sunk at Bangkok (January).

(iii) 200 ft. M.V. sunk at Bangkok (March).

(II) *The Interdiction of the Southern Burma Supply Routes.*

118. If the anti-shipping effort was intangible in effect, that against railways was spectacular, and its results immediately apparent. By far the greatest attention was paid to the Bangkok-Moulmein railway on which an overall total of 2,700 tons of bombs were dropped. With the interdiction of nearly all alternative routes, this railway was of paramount importance to the Japanese to supply and maintain their forces in Burma. Approximately two-thirds of the railway pursues a winding course in jungle hill-covered country, and it is not suitable for low-level attack, in addition to providing first-rate concealment. But as the strength and efficacy of the bomber force grew and the Burma—Siam railway became more vital, techniques were developed for its neutralisation. No precise date can be given for the introduction of these methods. A *modus operandi* was hammered out and in use before it became a doctrine, but its broad principles were as follows:—

(i) Bridges were the best targets because they were the most vulnerable and the most difficult to repair.

(ii) The underlying motive was to isolate segments of the line, and then to destroy at greater leisure the rolling stock and locomotives stranded thereon.

(iii) Diversity of attack was necessary to confuse the enemy.

(iv) Close photographic reconnaissance was maintained to detect any abnormal build-up at sidings or stations which would repay attack.

119. These principles were followed to such good effect that between January and April the average number of bridges unserviceable at one time was 9.2 over the stretch of railway from Pegu to Bangkok. It has been estimated that this reduced the traffic from 700-800 tons to 100-200 tons a day. The value of the attacks needs no further emphasis.