

tional control of the United States and Royal Air Force troop carrier forces, previously under my command, had been transferred in accordance with your direction, in August, 1944. A full report on these operations is being issued by the Commanding General of the First Allied Airborne Army, Lieutenant General Louis Brereton, who had relinquished the command of the United States Ninth Air Force to take over this new appointment.

376. Besides the aircraft of the troop carrier air forces, the aircraft of A.E.A.F., United States Eighth Air Force, R.A.F. Bomber Command and R.A.F. Coastal Command were engaged in support of these operations. The co-ordination of the activities of all the air forces concerned in a supporting role was carried out at my headquarters at meetings with representatives of the interested commands.

377. The chief meeting took place on 12th September, and at this meeting the principal tasks of the air forces were assigned. These tasks were:—

(i) The attacking of airfields and known flak positions by heavy bombers.

(ii) The dive bombing of flak positions which might be developed by the enemy during the operation.

(iii) The provision of top cover along the route to be followed by the airborne trains, and a fighter screen east and north of the dropping and landing areas.

(iv) The provision of night fighter patrols.

(v) The arrangements for dummy drops.

(vi) The arrangements for diversions by R.A.F. Coastal Command.

(vii) The arrangements for re-supply of airborne forces by heavy bombers on D+1.

378. All these operations as planned at this meeting were actually carried out, and in addition, the air forces continued to lend support to the ground operations during the whole period that the intense phase of the operation lasted. I have referred to some of these activities by the air forces at other points in this Despatch, but below is summarised briefly what was actually done.

379. On the night of 16/17th September, R.A.F. Bomber Command attacked with 200 Lancasters and 23 Mosquitoes, four airfields at Leeuwarden, Steewijk-Havelte, Hopsten and Salzbergen. These enemy airfields were those from which fighters could attack the transports and gliders carrying the airborne forces. Nearly 900 tons of bombs were dropped with good to excellent results on these airfields. On the same night, 54 Lancasters and 5 Mosquitoes dropped 294 tons of bombs on flak positions at Moerdijk, also with good results. On the following morning, 85 Lancasters and 15 Mosquitoes dropped 535 tons of bombs on coastal defence batteries in the Walcheren area. For these daylight operations Spitfires of A.D.G.B. provided escort.

380. These operations by R.A.F. Bomber Command were followed up on the morning of D+1 by heavy bombers of the United States Eighth Air Force which attacked 117 flak positions along the routes to be followed and near the dropping and landing zones, just prior to the arrival of the troop carriers. In these attacks, 816 heavy bombers dropped 3,139 tons of bombs with fair to good results in most cases. A further six bombers also attacked the airfield at Eindhoven.

381. During the afternoon of D+1, 18th September, 252 heavy bombers of the United States Eighth Air Force dropped 782 tons of supplies to the ground forces with good to excellent results.

382. The airborne forces were carried in two great trains of troop carrier aircraft and gliders, one following a northerly, the other a southerly route. The plan for the protection of these two trains of troop carriers provided for a high cover of fighters and a force of fighter bombers at low level, ready to dive bomb any flak positions that opened fire. On the northern route, aircraft of A.D.G.B. carried out these two tasks, as far as the turning point near 'sHertogenbosch, employing 371 fighters for this purpose. Fighter aircraft of the United States Eighth Air Force then took over covering the train of troop carriers to the dropping and landing zones. Fighters of this air force also provided top cover to the train approaching over the southern route, and in addition, provided a fighter screen to the east and north of the dropping and landing zones. In these tasks, 548 fighters were employed. In addition, 212 fighters of the United States Ninth Air Force dive bombed flak positions along the southern route between the turning point and the dropping and landing zones.

383. The attacks on the enemy flak positions along the routes were very successful. The great bulk of the land batteries were silenced and in addition, several flak ships and barges off the Dutch Islands were destroyed.

384. The G.A.F. reaction to these very large scale operations was small on D-Day, approximately 30 enemy fighters only being seen, seven of which were shot down. On the second, third and sixth days, however, the German Air Force reacted much more strongly, and up to the end of the operation a total of 159 enemy aircraft were destroyed over the area.

385. Throughout the operations, the Allied air forces continued to cover the airborne forces, to lend direct support to the ground forces and particularly to attack flak positions. In all, the supporting air forces flew over 7,800 sorties in support of Operation "Market". A total of 114 aircraft were lost, in addition to the casualties incurred by the troop carrier forces.

386. The Air/Sea Rescue Service functioned most efficiently during these airborne operations. A string of 17 launches was placed across the North Sea on the northern route and a further string of 10 launches along the southern route. In addition, special reconnaissances were flown, spotting for ditched planes and gliders. Most of the ditching occurred on D+2, when the weather was bad and the tow-lines of many gliders parted. On this day, one launch picked up all the personnel from five ditched gliders. In all 205 personnel were saved by the Air/Sea Rescue Service during these operations.

Attacks against Enemy Naval Targets.

387. I now turn to the duties of the Air Force in assisting the Allied Navies in dealing with enemy naval units trying to interfere with the landing and the subsequent ferrying of reinforcements and supplies by our ships across the Channel. The following brief review covers these operations from the time of the assault to the end of September, 1944. The main burden was shouldered by R.A.F. Coastal Com-