

front line troops. Consequently barges were attacked wherever found and lock gates linking rivers with canals were effectively put out of action by bombing. Attacks were also made on shipping and harbour installations at Trieste and other Istrian ports, and on one occasion on shipping in Venice harbour.

Attacks on dumps and installations.

212. As a complement to that part of the interdiction programme which aimed at stopping the flow of supplies into Italy for the enemy ground forces, a campaign was also undertaken against his dumps, supply points and installations, in a further effort to reduce his strength and ability to withstand an Allied offensive. This campaign reached its climax in March when over 2,000 sorties were flown against such targets; 42 ammunition, 19 fuel and 3 other supply dumps were destroyed, while 18 factories were destroyed and 16 damaged.

213. This effort was continued during early April prior to the Army offensive and a new feature was added by attacks against the enemy's methane gas plants. Twenty-five such targets were destroyed or damaged, again restricting the enemy's fuel supplies since this gas could be used as a substitute for petrol.

214. In April M.A.S.A.F. further increased its effort in the campaign against supplies, and in particular dropped 860 tons of bombs on Italian armament works and 768 on stores targets.

The results of the interdiction policy.

215. The claims made by M.A.T.A.F. against enemy communications in the first three months of 1945 are an indication of the success achieved by the interdiction policy. In that period, 242 road and railway bridges were destroyed; 416 damaged; 4,155 road blocks and rail cuts were made; 2,249 M.T. and armoured vehicles were destroyed, 2,255 damaged; 267 locomotives were destroyed, 982 damaged; 10,244 units of rolling stock were destroyed or damaged; 126 vessels and small boats were sunk, 466 damaged.

216. Though I should be the first to admit that bare figures such as these do not necessarily prove that the interdiction policy achieved its aims, the statements of responsible prisoners-of-war show that it did prevent the enemy building up his strength sufficiently to withstand our ground offensive in April, and most seriously impeded his troop movement. For instance, General von Senger, Corps Commander of the German XIV Panzer Corps, stated:—"The effect of Allied air attacks on the frontier routes of Italy made the fuel and ammunition situation very critical." Again, General von Vietinghoff, German Supreme Commander, Italian Theatre, stated:—"Rail traffic was struck in the most protracted fashion by the destruction of bridges. Restoration of bridges required much time; the larger bridge sites were detoured, or the supplies were reloaded. With the increasing intensity of the air attacks, especially on the stretch of the Brenner, the damaged sections were so great and so numerous that this stretch, despite the best of repair organisation and the employment of the most powerful rebuilding effort, became ever worse and was only locally and temporarily usable."

217. The interdiction policy was also largely successful in its other objective—that of preventing any large scale withdrawal from the Italian front. In an attempt to provide reinforcements for the Western front, the enemy did in fact withdraw three divisions by the end of March, but it must have been a heartbreaking affair for him. The distance they had to travel from the front to Austria was about 150 miles and given uninterrupted facilities, this should have taken them about five days. The first, the 356th Division, took three weeks; the second, the 16th S.S. Division, took a month; while the third, the 715th Division, also took a month. Perhaps the most significant fact was that these divisions left much of their heavy equipment behind them.

218. It can be stated with complete confidence that the success of the interdiction policy was a major factor contributing to the defeat of the enemy in the Italian theatre. Air power had successfully accomplished the task of preparing the way for the Army's offensive.

PART V.

THE FINAL OFFENSIVE IN THE ITALIAN THEATRE.

INTRODUCTION.

219. This Part of my despatch covers the period from April 9th to May 2nd—the twenty-four days in which German power in the Italian theatre was completely destroyed. It falls into three main parts; a section on the planning for the offensive, a section on the use of air power during the battle, and a section on the battle itself.

220. In my description of the battle, I have attempted to relate the air activities to the particular activities on the ground to which they pertained. In some cases, it has been possible to do this by a day to day narrative, taking air and ground activities together. In other cases, a day to day narrative, to be clear, would require to be more detailed than is desirable for the purposes of this despatch, and in such instances, I have taken a complete phase of the ground activities over a period of days and then followed it by a description of the air effort connected with it.

221. Using this treatment, the description of the battle falls into five parts:

(a) The Eighth Army battle from 9th to 14th April, which breached the Senio and Santerno River lines. This is described day by day.

(b) The Fifth Army battle from 14th to 20th April, in which the Fifth Army fought its way to the Po Valley. The initial part of this is treated day by day, and the latter part as a complete phase.

(c) The Eighth Army battle from 15th to 20th April, in which a route was forced through the Argenta Gap. This is treated as a complete phase.

(d) The combined Eighth and Fifth Armies' offensives from 21st to 24th April, in which the enemy tried to escape across the Po. This is treated as a complete phase.

(e) The final stages of the battle, from 25th April to 2nd May, treated as a complete phase.