

188. Of the remaining four routes, which were the ones to which the main weight of the interdiction programme was applied, the most important was the Brenner line running south from Innsbruck via Trento to Verona. The remaining three routes ran across Italy's north-eastern frontier. They were:—

(a) the Tarvisio route running from Tarvisio to Udine and on to Treviso;

(b) the Piedicolle route via Jugoslavia, which joined the Tarvisio route at Udine; and

(c) the Postumia route, also via Jugoslavia.

189. Though the four routes mentioned above were the most important from the point of view of the interdiction policy, attention was also given to the moderately dense network of railways serving Northern Italy.

190. The interdiction was carried out in a series of zones. The Brenner route was attacked along its whole length from Innsbruck to Verona, while the three north-eastern frontier lines were attacked in the frontier zone, and also along the Tagliamento, Livenza, Piave, Brenta and Adige River zones, to the south-west across the Venetian Plain. Lastly the routes in the Po Valley were attacked at the crossings of the Po River and its tributaries. The whole system provided a series of good targets in the way of bridges, viaducts, marshalling yards and sidings.

#### *Air Effort in January and February.*

191. The interdiction programme began in earnest on 10th January, 1945, and from then until the ground offensive began on 9th April, M.A.T.A.F. devoted some 75 per cent. of its total effort to this task. Previously, M.A.T.A.F. had operated primarily in the Po Valley, but during January and February air operations against the frontier railway zones were given top priority, and action against the more southerly communications leading to the battle area became a secondary consideration.

192. The 57th Wing concentrated mainly on the Brenner Pass route, assisted by the XXIIInd Tactical Air Command, while the Desert Air Force attacked the north-eastern frontier routes. In the less important Po Valley, XXIIInd T.A.C. operated against communications west of Vicenza, while D.A.F. concentrated on the Imola-Budrio-Medicina-Molinello area east of Bologna. The Strategic Air Force heavy bombers gave assistance with some 5,000 tons of bombs, most of which were dropped on marshalling yards, and of which some 3,000 tons were on the Brenner route.

193. This heavy effort showed immediate results. In January, the Brenner route was definitely blocked to through traffic for fifteen days, and probably for another five; in February, at no time was the route open to continuous through traffic. On the north-eastern frontier routes, through rail traffic was denied the Germans for the whole of January, and although it was possible on a few days during the early part of February, the state of interdiction during the latter half of the month was the most complete achieved up to that time.

194. This success quickly had the effect of obliging the enemy to lean more and more

upon the roads for his communications. Thus in January, heavy road movement at night was reported along the Adige Valley and down both sides of Lake Garda, and photographic reconnaissance and ground reports showed that there was little rail activity south of Trento. The transport of supplies and heavy equipment clearly presented a great problem to the enemy, though the movement of troops could still be accomplished, albeit with a great time lag. Petrol was by then a very scarce commodity indeed, and quite insufficient for large scale motor transport movement, quite apart from the continual hazards of Allied air attacks.

#### *Air Effort in March.*

##### *The Brenner route.*

195. March witnessed a still greater air effort against this vital line, in particular by the medium bombers of the 57th Wing, who dropped some 3,000 tons of bombs on it in the course of 1,600 sorties—some 60 per cent. of their total effort for the month. Bridges and diversions along almost the entire route remained the main objectives, with targets at Ora and San Michele, in the central Brenner zone, receiving the chief attention. Other targets heavily attacked were at Ala, San Ambrogio and San Margherita, on the lower Brenner line, and Campo di Trens on the upper Brenner line.

196. Simultaneously, XXIIInd T.A.C. maintained heavy pressure on the central and lower portions of the route by day, while night intruder aircraft did the same by night. In these attacks, not only were the blocks created by the medium bombers further enlarged, but additional bridges were destroyed, tracks cut, and traffic both bombed and strafed.

197. The M.A.S.A.F. bombers again co-operated by dropping some 1,300 tons of bombs on Verona marshalling yards. In addition their disruption of the Austrian railway system was having its effect on communications further south.

198. In spite of the enemy's desperate repair efforts, and of a spell of bad weather from 26th to 29th March, through traffic on the Brenner route was again impossible for the whole of the month. The interdiction, in fact, reached the highest level yet attained. Ten or twelve blocks on the route at one time was a common occurrence and on one occasion there were at least fifteen blocks on the stretch between Bolzano and Verona.

##### *The north-eastern routes.*

199. The main burden of the attacks on these lines again fell on the Desert Air Force, which concentrated chiefly on the Tarvisio-Udine line. In addition, the 57th Wing flew 364 sorties against bridges and diversions in the five river zones in the Venetian Plain, while XXIIInd T.A.C. fighter-bombers, and the night intruders, attacked targets primarily in the Casarsa area. M.A.S.A.F. aircraft co-operated by dropping 700 tons of bombs, with the Treviso and Padua marshalling yards as the main targets.

200. These attacks caused the three north-eastern frontier routes to be blocked for the whole of the month, and, moreover, little traffic was able to pass over the more southerly stretches of the lines across the Venetian Plain.