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AIR OPERATIONS IN SOUTH EAST ASIA FROM 1st JUNE, 1944, TO THE OCCUPATION OF RANGOON, 2nd MAY, 1945

NOTE.—A set of maps for this despatch is on separate sale at 1s. net. This set of maps also covers the operations described in the other Air and Army despatches of the Burma Campaign from the 16th November, 1943 to 12th September, 1945.

The following despatch was submitted to the Secretary of State for Air on 16th November, 1945, by AIR CHIEF MARSHAL SIR KEITH PARK, K.C.B., K.B.E., M.C., D.F.C., Allied Air Commander-in-Chief, Air Command, South East Asia.

(PART ONE.

FOREWORD.

1. This Despatch is a review primarily of air operations in Burma during the last year beginning in June, 1944. During this period a fanatical and over-confident enemy has been driven back from his foothold in India at Imphal over 800 miles, which included the complete rout of the enemy's field army in the open plains of Burma and culminated in the occupation of Rangoon by our forces on 3rd May, 1945.

2. The primary cause was the defeat of the Japanese Army. This achievement has been made possible by air power, which not merely took an intimate share in the ground attack, but also isolated the enemy's forces in the field. Confronted by overwhelming air power, the enemy's air forces withered away, and this same air power helped to undermine the stability of his land forces, so that after their decisive defeat at Imphal, although they made a tenacious stand on a number of occasions, they were no match for our well-equipped field army—well equipped in large measure by the unstinted effort of air supply to provide their daily needs. Though air supply did not and could not supplant all other means which

themselves involved a great effort to maintain, without it the campaign could not have been successfully fought. Regardless of weather, climate, and distance, the air supply line was maintained unhindered by enemy air opposition, which had been driven from the skies.

3. The Burma campaign should make its mark in the annals of history as a triumph of air power and air supply and as a feat of endurance of Allied land forces.

COMMAND.

4. In June, 1944, the Allied Air Forces in South East Asia were under the command of Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Peirse, K.C.B., D.S.O., A.F.C. Upon his relinquishment of the appointment on 26th November, temporary command was assumed by Air Marshal Sir Guy Garrod, K.C.B., O.B.E., M.C., D.F.C., until my arrival on 23rd February, 1945.

The Position in June, 1944.

5. Two events mark the beginning of the period. The major Japanese offensive against Imphal had been blunted and was in process of being broken by means of air supply on a hitherto unprecedented scale to the forces cut off from land communications with their base; and second, the south-west monsoon was reaching its full intensity over the operational areas. It remained to be seen whether air forces could materially influence the land battle in weather which had in preceding years prohibited their effective employment, and whether the enemy defeat in Manipur was to prove the turning-point in South East Asia strategy which would