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AIR OPERATIONS BY THE ALLIED EXPEDITIONARY AIR FORCE IN N.W. EUROPE FROM NOVEMBER 15TH, 1943 TO SEPTEMBER 30TH, 1944.

The following despatch by the late Air Chief Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory, K.C.B., D.S.O., Air Commander-in-Chief, Allied Expeditionary Air Force, was submitted to the Supreme Allied Commander in November, 1944.

On relinquishing my command of the Allied Expeditionary Air Force I have the honour to submit the following Despatch, covering its operations under my command during the period from 15th November, 1943 to 30th September, 1944.

Since this Despatch covers the air support of the assault of Europe and the subsequent land operations, it necessarily includes reference to the strategical operations of the United States Eighth Air Force and the Royal Air Force Bomber Command in addition to the operations of these two Air Forces and the Royal Air Force Coastal Command directed to the tactical support of the assault.

As the period covered by the Despatch extends over ten and a half months of the most heavy and concentrated air war in the history of the world, I have not attempted to deal with the events on a day-to-day basis. Rather I have taken the tasks undertaken in the preliminary and preparatory phases and in the assault and post-assault phase and have attempted to show how these tasks were fulfilled, as well as briefly indicating what I feel are some of the outstanding features of these air operations.

PART I.—COMMAND AND CONTROL

Formation of A.E.A.F.

By a Directive (reference COSSAC (43) 81) dated 16th November, 1943, issued by your

Chief of Staff, I was informed that the Combined Chiefs of Staff had appointed me Air Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Expeditionary Air Force under yourself as the Supreme Allied Commander, and that I was to exercise operational command of the British and American tactical air forces supporting the assault of Western Europe from the United Kingdom. I was also informed that a United States General would be appointed Deputy Air Commander-in-Chief, Allied Expeditionary Air Force. Major-General William O. Butler was the first General Officer to hold this post. He served in this capacity from 1st January, 1944, to 25th March, 1944, and was succeeded by Major-General Hoyt S. Vandenberg who occupied the position until 8th August, 1944. Major-General Ralph Royce then held this appointment until the disbandment of A.E.A.F. on 14th October, 1944.

Forces available

2. The forces under my command comprised the Royal Air Force Second Tactical Air Force, the United States Ninth Air Force and the forces of the Air Defence of Great Britain. The Royal Air Force Second Tactical Air Force and the formations of the Air Defence of Great Britain passed to my command on 15th November, 1943; the United States Ninth Air Force passed to my operational command on 15th December, 1943, but was not released from its commitment to assist the United States Strategic Air Forces in "Pointblank" operations until 10th March, 1944.

3. You will recall that a definition of the role of the strategic air forces was not covered in the original Directive to me, but was deferred to a later date. However, my plans were made on the assumption that I should be able to count on the full support of the strategic air forces when it was required.