

Death Of A Thousand Cuts Imposed On Japs By RAF

Air Power Has Been The Decisive Factor In Defeat Of Enemy In Burma—Ham- strings Foe And Helps Our Own Army

LONDON, April 7—A United Kingdom spokesman, recently discussing the Burma campaign, said: "The change in our fortunes in Burma is due to several causes—better training, better equipment for our armies and more experience in this kind of warfare. But the greatest single factor is the changed air situation and the use we have made of it. At one time we had to expect attacks on Calcutta, and on our forces all the way up from the south. But the arrival of better aircraft and more of them changed the balance. We have steadily gained the ascendancy, and now have air supremacy all over Burma and Thailand—opposition is seldom encountered. Against our 6-700 combat sorties a day the Japs are reduced to occasional small night attacks and a few fighter-bomber day attacks on airfields.

The Burma war is largely a war of communications. The Jap main means of transport are rail, water and road, the air transport being negligible. They are no longer able to use big ships, and we have forced their supplies increasingly to run the gauntlet of air attack:

- (1) By aircraft from China against shipping in the Formosa channel and southward (U.S.A.F.)
- (2) By strategic bombing, super-Fortress raids from Singapore to Kuala Lumpur (U.S.A.F.)
- (3) By heavy bombers against the Bangkok-Siam Railway (both).
- (4) By mine-laying off Sumatra (RAF).
- (5) By Liberator attacks on shipping off the Tenasserim coast (both).
- (6) By Beaufighters, Mosquitos and Mustangs in Central Burma attacking road, rail and river transport (RAF).
- (7) By fighter-bombers attacking dumps (RAF).

The RAF in these operations includes RAAF and also Canadian and Indian squadrons.

Thus, we are imposing "The Death of a Thousand Cuts" on the Japanese, but constant effort over such a vast area is necessary against the indefatigable Japanese repairers. However, the emaciated and diseased Japs who are falling into our hands, and the crumbling of the campaign testify to the effect.

Supply Vital

As for our own supply position, it is unpleasant to consider the results

upon us if the enemy had freedom in the air over our lines of communication. Air supremacy was the first essential in our offensive role. When the 6th Indian Division was cut off in Arakan in February, 1944, the supply aircraft kept it serviced until it broke out, and with other Indian divisions routed the Japanese killing 7,000. A few weeks later Wingate's famous expedition was flown into action by Air Commando gliders, and supplied by air for months. Almost at the same time Imphal and Kohima were enabled by air supply to withstand siege for weeks. A whole division (the British Second), and its equipment was flown in to their relief. The Japs, with their own communications smashed by our planes, saw the stream of carriers pouring in food, fuel, ordnance, ammunition, water.

Air transport is an essential factor in the campaign. We can use this great transport power just where we like, and our land commanders have the strategist's dream—freedom to fight and manoeuvre indefinitely, independent of lines of communication. We have always used sea-power in this way to put a force where we wished on an enemy's coastline, but our air supremacy and air transport system now make it possible to apply that strategic ace of trumps to the whole of a country—never before in history has any commander in the field possessed such an amazing asset. General Slim, 14th Army commander, has been able to think in terms of 50-mile advances because he knew that when the objective he had planned had been gained by his troops, the Dakotas would be overhead immediately, dropping supplies. His lines of communication have been drawn in the sky.

How It's Done

Here are some figures of work accomplished in 1944 by all types of Allied transport aircraft:

Total hours flown more than 300,000; total trips despatched, over 90,000; weight of the freight carried into combat zone, over 250,000 tons; number of casualties evacuated, over 60,000.

To-day we average over 1,200 transport sorties daily.

Nothing of this detracts from the magnificent work of the army, but we must not overlook the essential factor of air supremacy, without which the campaign could not have developed as it did."

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