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MEDITERRANEAN ALLIED AIR FORCES

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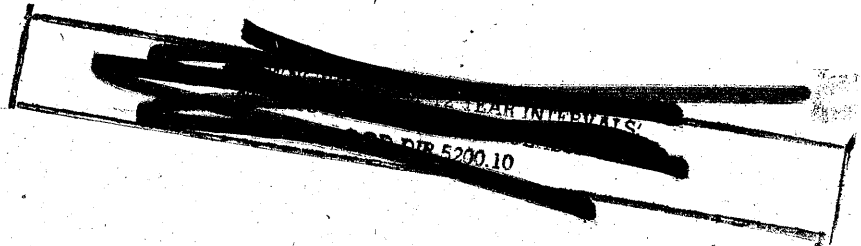
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# Foreword

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*The Foreword in the preceding number of the R.A.F. Mediterranean Review ended on a note of optimism ; a note indicating that possibly the end of the European war with Germany was in sight. With the passing of the year 1944 that end is not yet realised, but nevertheless it is still in sight. The events and trends of activity reviewed in this number show clearly, not only methods by which the Hun is being crushed and strangled in the air, on the ground, on the sea and under the sea, but also reveals the wider vision already at work within the Royal Air Force to ensure that Peace, when won, shall be retained, upheld and enjoyed by those trained to take their place and shoulder their responsibilities in civil life as thoroughly as they were trained to take them in war.*





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# THE EUROPEAN BATTLE AREAS

31ST DECEMBER, 1943 TO  
31ST DECEMBER, 1944

BATTLE LINES AT  
31ST DEC., 1943   
BATTLE LINES AT  
31ST DEC., 1944   
FRONTIERS   
RUSSO-GERMAN AGREEMENT LINE (1939) 



# Invasion Year

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## A Short Review of European Events in 1944

WE HAVE REACHED the Sixth War Christmas, and reached it through a year of accomplishment unparalleled in History. German industry has been disrupted and the German Armies defeated in the field. Our power to strike the enemy on land and sea and in the air has been demonstrated in its full might and to its full

purpose. We are inside the *Siegfried Line*.

In a recent speech to the German People, Hitler said that the fight now was no longer for victory or defeat, but for survival or annihilation. Although not distinguished for his intuition, who shall say that Corporal Schickelgruber is not right?

### P R O E M

**1933** *Hitler comes to power. Germany withdraws from the League of Nations.*

**1935** *Conscription is introduced into Germany.*

**1938** *Hitler, demanding that Sudeten Germans be restored to the Reich, masses Armies on Czech frontier.*

**Great Britain mobilizes her Navy and Mr. Chamberlain goes to Munich.**

*British Government persuades Czechoslovakia to agree to cede all territory with more than fifty per cent. Sudeten Germans, and in return guarantees with France the future boundaries of Czechoslovakia.*

*German troops march unopposed into Czechoslovakia.*

**1939** *Without warning and in defiance of Munich agreement, Nazi tanks enter Prague. Czechoslovakia is overrun.*

*British Government gives undertaking to Poland "... that in the event of any action which clearly threatens Poland ... His Majesty's Government would feel themselves bound at once to lend the Polish Government all support in their power."*

*Announced in the House of Commons that since 1933 Germany has spent a sum estimated at \$6,000,000,000 on war preparations.*

**Hitler invades Poland and Great Britain declares war.**

**1940** *German troops enter Norway and overrun the country in a week.*

*Headed by nine armoured divisions and immense air power, the German Army crashes through Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg to cross the Meuse into France. Allied forces are split and the enemy drives north to the Channel Ports.*

*South of the Somme, the French Army reinforced by two British divisions is opposed to 120 German divisions.*

**Dunkirk**—*250,000 British troops abandoning arms and equipment are evacuated; 30,000 do not return.*

**France capitulates.**

**Italy, declaring war on Great Britain, launches an offensive in Africa which in six months carries her troops into Egypt, the Sudan and Kenya. The Mediterranean is closed.**

**Battle of Britain.** *In three months a handful of R.A.F. squadrons oppose and defeat the full weight of the Luftwaffe, destroying 2,375 German aircraft.*

**Italy invades Greece.**

*Eighth Army attacks the Italians in the Western Desert and forces them to retire from Egypt in one week.*

**1941** *Italians driven out of Cyrenaica. Eighth Army offensive halts on the German menace to Greece.*

*Expeditionary Force from Middle East despatched to Greece.*

*Germans send the Afrika Korps to reinforce the Italians in Tripolitania. The Eighth Army is driven back through Cyrenaica into Egypt.*

**Germany invades Yugoslavia and Greece, and the British Expeditionary Force is withdrawn to Crete. Germans invade Crete by air and force the evacuation of British troops.**

*Coup d'état in Iraq threatens oil supplies. Position restored by British intervention. Prompt British action in Syria prevents Vichy France from surrendering to the Germans.*

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Germany at the zenith of her strength, unable to defeat the R.A.F. and invade Britain, decides to eliminate the Soviet Army before returning to the final struggle in the West. The invasion of Russia begins.

German Army 500 miles into Russia on a 1,000 mile front is halted at the gates of Moscow.

Reinforced Eighth Army opens second offensive in Western Desert.

Following Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, America declares war on the Axis.

1942 Russians counter-attack on 500 mile front and push the enemy back 80 miles.

Eighth Army, having advanced to El Aghella, prepares to meet German counter-attack.

New German offensive in Russia now forward 250 miles on a 1,200 mile front from Orel to the Caucasus.

As a result of the German counter-attack in Libya the Eighth Army is now back at Gazala.

Enemy launches abortive attack at Gazala; Eighth Army counter-attacks and is checked. Enemy opens offensive and forces Eighth Army back to El Alamein.

Germans make three abortive attempts to destroy the R.A.F. in Malta.

intense attacks on enemy supplies, ports and air bases, reinforced Eighth Army opens offensive at El Alamein. The German rout begins.

Strong British and American Forces land in French North Africa.

Russians open winter offensive and regain much of the lost ground.

1943 Germans, surrendering 248,000 prisoners, defeated and driven from North Africa at Tunis. Mediterranean re-opened to Allied shipping.

Following abortive German attack, Russians launch full-scale offensive on 1,000 mile front.

Allied Forces from North Africa capture Sicily in 38 days, inflicting 165,000 casualties on the enemy.

British and American troops land at Salerno, Italy capitulates.

Stated in Parliament that since September, 1939, the R.A.F. alone has made 1,147 attacks and dropped 283,000 tons of bombs on Germany, in addition to an ever increasing U.S.A.A.F. effort; that Allied aircraft production is now more than four times that of Germany; and that credit balance of new building over shipping losses has reached 6,000,000 tons per year.

At the Lord Mayor's Day Luncheon, 10th November, 1942, Mr. Winston Churchill said, "This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning."

The Prime Minister had been speaking of the Battle for Egypt. Rommel, conclusively defeated at Alamein, was on the run. Strong Allied forces had landed in French North Africa and the R.A.F. was already in action there against the enemy. In the East, the German drive had been held at Stalingrad and in the Caucasus, and the Russians were ready for their counter-attack.

October, 1942, marked the Turn of the Tide. Spring, 1943, saw the Germans expelled from Tunisia, and in the summer Sicily was captured and the Mediterranean, which had been closed to Allied shipping since March, 1941, was re-opened. On 9th September, British and American troops landed at Salerno and Italy capitulated. Three weeks later the Foggia airfields fell to the Eighth Army, and the Allied Air Forces stood at 500 miles range from Munich.

Far-reaching in effect, these successes were reflected in two events of outstanding importance. The first was that defeat in Africa delayed by three months the opening of the new German push in the East and permitted the Russians not only to check their thrust in one week but to counter-attack immediately on a 1,000 mile front. The second, which came later in the year, was of

even greater significance. On 28th December, an official statement from London announced the appointment of Allied Commanders for the Invasion of Europe. It was faithfully celebrated on New Year's Eve by a full-scale raid on Berlin to bring the total of bombs unloaded on the German capital to a round 10,000 tons.

#### Stalemate in Italy

Although for some weeks after the Salerno crisis the Allied Armies made good progress, they were slowed in October through difficulties of terrain and weather hampering air activity, and by the end of the year faced a position of stalemate on a line south of Cassino to the Sangro river.

This was an unsatisfactory situation. The full and continuous deployment of maximum German forces in Italy being vital to our Master Plan for the Invasion of France, it was essential that the initiative be regained forthwith and the enemy prevented from stabilizing his position. Supreme Command decided, therefore, that if the line was impregnable to frontal assault, a diversionary movement would have to be engineered from the side. Anzio was launched.

The object of this "leap-frog" was to accelerate the capture of Rome and establish a line north of the capital; this to be accomplished by occupation of the high ground around Colli Laziali from which the enemy's communications to the main front could be dominated. It was a

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hazardous move, for the Germans had thirteen divisions, with a further eight in reserve, to the Allies eleven and a half committed in the field.

*Anzio* did not achieve its object. The initial assault, on 22nd January, took the enemy by surprise, but he reacted swiftly and although persistent attacks failed to dislodge the invaders he succeeded in pinning them down and preventing any breakthrough. It became necessary for us to think again, and think quickly.

In an effort to breach the battle line and link up with the forward bridgehead, it was now decided to try an all-out air offensive against the stronghold of *Cassino*. On 15th March, 1,000 tons went down and in a matter of hours the fortress became a heap of rubble. Instead of achieving its object—the destruction of the garrison—excessive demolition provided numerous road blocks and strong points and turned the scale in favour of the defenders. Again the enemy line stood firm.

### The Cracking of the Nut

War is ever a matter of trial and error, and with two failures recorded the Allies dropped back on the lesson of *Alamein*—that of causing weakness and attrition to the enemy by cutting by air his lines of supply and communication, while at the same time assembling a force with which to hit him on the ground at a moment when he is unable to sustain a defensive effort.

On 19th March, the first stage of the plan went into effect, the main air offensive opening with the land offensive on the night 11/12th May. By 22nd June, 137,949 sorties had been flown and 84,603 tons of bombs dropped on marshalling yards, bridges, road transport and lines of communication. The effect was paralysing. Transport was forced from the railways to the roads where fighter-bombers made hay and compelled the enemy to restrict movement to the hours of darkness. Vehicles had to be withdrawn from the forward areas in order to maintain a skeleton supply line, and in consequence combat units were left with insufficient transport to continue the battle. At once it became a vicious and entirely destructive circle.

Before the operation had been completed the whole front broke open and British, Canadian, American, French and Polish troops surged forward. *Rome* fell on 4th June, and in six weeks the enemy, although not yet driven back to the *Pisa-Rimini* line, had lost 80,000 casualties and upward of 15,000 vehicles.

### Allied Bombing Policy

The essential need for the retention of the initiative in *Italy*, the reason for this, and its relative importance to the Master Invasion Plan have been mentioned. Before and during the period of the operations referred to above, forces in considerable strength were assembling in *Great Britain* and, in April, 1944, as a security

measure, all Foreign Diplomats and Couriers were stopped from leaving the country. These two aspects of pre-invasion activity rested on a third. No effective land campaign could succeed against *Germany* unless the enemy's essential war potential was rigorously restricted and unless the Allies could command the sky both during the landings and through the period of subsequent operations.

From the outset it was realized that the key to modern warfare lay in oil—a fact which, naturally, had not escaped the enemy eye. Twenty-four enormous synthetic oil plants had been built in *Germany* at the beginning of the war, and these provided about 40 per cent. of the country's needs. She had also the Rumanian supplies and several new fields on her own soil. From all sources the total annual yield was about 1,250,000 tons—just enough for *Germany's* immediate requirements. In 1942, aiming to increase supplies, she launched an offensive in the *Caucasus*. Fortunately, by a hair's breadth, it failed to achieve its object.

The problem facing the Allied Bomber Force was therefore twofold. Firstly to restrict production in the German aircraft industry and reduce activity in the *Luftwaffe* in order that invasion forces in *France* and bomber formations over the *Reich* could operate undisturbed by fighter interference, and secondly to carry out a concentrated air offensive against the enemy's entire oil resources.

### The Assault on the Fighter Factories

For nine months, from July, 1943, to March, 1944, the Eighth and Fifteenth United States Air Forces, tackling first-things first, went for the fighter assembly and aero-engine factories—a struggle which culminated in the last seven days of February when almost every one of these plants was bombed in a single week. The result showed itself on D-Day. Whereas in 1942 the G.A.F. had planned to increase production to 2,500/3,000 single-engined aircraft per month—an output which would not only have made possible effective protection of the *Reich* but would have seriously interfered with invasion—their first-line strength on all fronts in June was less than 1,500 aircraft, only half of which were serviceable.

Complementary to the effort against FW.190 and ME.109 output, systematic strikes were directed at plants producing *Germany's* latest and most cherished aircraft—the ME.262 jet-propelled fighter. Messerschmitt's parent factory at *Leipham* was smashed; the research stations at *Peenemunde* and *Rechlin*, along with numerous airfields used for experimental work, were attacked; and repeated raids were made on the jet-fuel plants at *Peenemunde* and *Holsriegelskreuth*. In spite of the faith pinned on this type of aircraft, the total number operating by the end of the year was not more than 150.

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### Offensive Against Oil

The offensive against oil opened in April and was still in progress when the year closed. It should perhaps be called the second offensive, because in 1940 and 1941 Bomber Command attempted the task and found it beyond their then-available power and capability. Two great American Air Forces, the Eighth and Fifteenth, now undertook the major share of the job, aircraft from *Britain* concentrating on the synthetic plants, principally those at *Leuna*, *Brux* and *Politz*, and the Mediterranean force tackling *Ploesti*. Night, and later day, attacks on the *Ruhr* fell to the R.A.F.

Figures tell the story more vividly than words. In May, 1944, a 20 per cent. reduction had been effected; in September the loss to the enemy was 77 per cent. and his supplies only 23 per cent. of their pre-attack level. By December, only thirteen out of *Germany's* 24 synthetic oil plants remained—five only of these within M.A.A.F. range. Fighters had been grounded, industry hampered, naval and U-boat activity reduced to impotence, and road transport and Panzer Divisions forced to a policy of strict fuel economy. A recovery programme had been given priority over everything including aircraft and U-boat production. That was the measure of success in December. While the final lap of the race between repair and attack remains yet to be decided, the value of the reduction which has been achieved is indisputable.

This concentration of effort against oil necessitated a let-up on the fighter-factory offensive and enabled the industry, in large part, to recover. That was inevitable. Nevertheless, although by dispersal and underground manufacture the G.A.F. had rebuilt their front-line single-engined fighter strength to about 2,300 by December, the recovery came too late. The fighters were needed over *France* to repel the landings and check the advance through the summer and autumn of 1944, and at that time they were not available. Now, their usefulness is but a fraction of what it could have been. The Allies have the bases and they have the aircraft. The roof over *Germany* is off.

### Confusion to Industry

Although the offensives against fighter factories and oil were the main and most effective air-strikes delivered at any one class-group in the German war machine in 1944, wide-scale attacks were undertaken on other industrial targets and against whole sections of the communications system.

Ball-bearing factories, ranking in importance next to oil, suffered continuously and were producing at the end of the year only 45 per cent. of their pre-attack output. Systematic raids were also carried out on plants manufacturing armour, motor transport and ordnance, this effort increasing in intensity in relation to land front

operations and reaching peak through September-October. Loss of output varied in most cases from a few weeks to several months.

Weather naturally proved a controlling factor and on occasions it was necessary to concentrate on an industrial area rather than on a specific target. *Berlin* became a favourite centre, but many other towns suffered recurring attacks.

### Interdiction of Traffic

While the offensive against communications was no less important than that directed at industrial targets, overall results have been more difficult to assess, and a full appreciation will probably not be possible until the Allies get well into *Germany*. At the beginning of 1944 the vast rail-network, strung out from *Brest* to the Russian border, was, in spite of repeated attack, not overtaxed. On D-Day, 6th June, however, as a result of pre-invasion strategical and tactical bombing, only half the normal quantity of locomotives and cars were available in *France*, coal was in 'six-days' supply, one-fifth of repair facilities were unserviceable, and 74 bridges and tunnels had been rendered impassable. By the attack on bridges alone, the area west of the *Seine* and north of the *Loire* was virtually isolated; later, prior to the invasion of *Southern France*, attacks on the *Rhone* bridges cut the German forces in half and at a critical time held German armour on the west bank out of the immediate battle area.

In the case of *Normandy*, the pre-occupation of the enemy's forces in land fighting coupled with the continuous bombing and fighter strafing allowed no recovery; he was forced to accept things as they were and make the best of it. In *Southern France*, the position, although slightly different, was equally hopeless; labour for repair work was just not available.

The effect of the traffic interdiction operation in *Italy* which made possible the breaching of the *Gustave Line*, has been indicated earlier. These operations go on. Some are concentrated in time and space and produce a quick result; others are long-term and less spectacular. All count.

### Over Two Million Tons of Bombs

While complete statistics are not available, an indication of the scale of air effort in 1944 is given in the records of Bomber Command, the Eighth U.S.A.A.F. and M.A.A.F.

During the year Bomber Command and the Eighth U.S.A.A.F. dropped 1,395,000 tons of bombs on German targets—more than twice the weight unloaded in the first four and a quarter years of the war. In addition, M.A.A.F. dropped 590,358 tons, mostly on oil installations and communications. Fighters and fighter-bombers from all three air forces, frequently beating their own records in numbers of sorties per day, destroyed some thousands of enemy locomotives, rolling stock and M.T. vehicles.

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### Opening of the Second Front

In spite of the wave of rising impatience which characterised a section of the British Press in the spring of 1944, stony silence reigned supreme within the Cabinet and no taunt extracted the one word needed to confirm or deny the significance of the large-scale exercises that had been going on for some time over the southern half of *England*.

Evaluation of the importance of that silence—it is difficult to overpraise the skill with which it was maintained—and the confusion which the surprise of the *Normandy* Invasion caused the German High Command, is now possible.

On 9th June, three days after the first landings, Rommel, Commanding Army Group B, after directing that *Cherbourg* be held at all cost, intimated to General Dollman of the Seventh Army that he could provide no reinforcements nor share the anxiety felt over the port, because the German Supreme Command fully expected a big landing to be attempted higher up the coast, and for this all available airborne forces would be committed. He explained furthermore, in reply to a request for immediate air support, that units of the Luftwaffe were "changing stations" and might not be available for several days.

Events that followed are now history. In *Berlin* on 20th July, an unsuccessful attempt was made to assassinate Hitler and effect a *coup d'état*. Gestapo intervention restored "order" and in due course eight Generals and a number of lesser fry paid with their lives. Evidence at the trial showed that the conspirators had planned to arrest all those directing food and armament production, open concentration camps, and make immediate contact with the Allies. Although the purge failed, it was refreshing to find such enlightened thinking within the Reichswehr.

### Meteoric Progress in Normandy

Allied progress through July and August, after the situation of stalemate on the *Caen-Tilly* front had been broken by an air attack that sent down 5,000 tons of bombs on the perimeter defences in 49 minutes, was meteoric. The pocket west of *Argentan* which the Germans allowed to be drawn round three flanks while they obstinately tried to drive west to *Avranches* was closed on 18th August by British, Dominion and American forces with loss to the enemy of 30,000 killed and 45,000 prisoners, and four days later a Maquis uprising in *Paris* overran the city and paved the way for its occupation by the Americans coming eastward from *Chartres* and *Dreux*.

The position for the enemy by mid-August had become critical. All the German Commanders in the north had disappeared. C-in-C West, Von Rundstedt, had been relieved; Rommel and Dollman killed. The Allies, with nearly 1,000,000 troops and more than 2,500,000 tons of stores in *Normandy*, had already taken over 450,000 prisoners. And that was not the total of the

calamity. American and French troops were ashore on *Southern France*.

### Invasion of the French Riviera

The conquest of *Southern France* by General Patch's forces and the link up of this Second Invasion Army with General Patton's troops at *Sombornon* and *Chatillon* took exactly 26 days—approximately one-half of the time scheduled. It yielded 80,000 prisoners to swell the total to 400,000 taken since the landings in *Normandy*.

Systematic pre-invasion bombing had followed the pattern of the June adventure, and security plus a carefully engineered deception programme effected the necessary degree of surprise. Only ten poor quality divisions met the landing; air opposition was virtually non-existent. Everywhere ahead of the advancing army Forces of the French Interior sabotaged communications and took command of territory. The German Nineteenth Army pulled back with considerable skill, and by the Devil's luck managed to evacuate most of its fighting troops before the *Belfort Gap* could be closed. But it was touch and go.

Broadly speaking, *France* was clear of Nazi occupation by the end of August. A few strongholds in the east, on the English Channel and the French Atlantic coast had not been overcome, but their value to the enemy and their effect on the main campaign was now negligible. That which had been accomplished in less than three months supplied a pertinent answer to the message sent by Hitler to all units in *Calvados* on the morning of 6th June—"The Fuehrer desires the annihilation of the Allies by the evening."

### Failure of the Secret Weapons

Although Mr. Chamberlain's famous "Missed the Bus" comment of 1940 proved almost immediately to be singularly inappropriate, no phrase could more fairly represent *Germany's* strategic position when, almost exactly four years later, the long promised retaliatory weapons, the flying bomb and long-range rocket, were launched against *England*.

The potential menace which the flying bomb offered was a real one and one that was recognised from the outset and not underrated. Reconnaissance had pin-pointed a considerable number of static ramp sites, and from this and other information a fair assessment of the danger had been calculated. It was far from inconsiderable—particularly in view of the forthcoming invasion.

By prompt action and unstinted pattern bombing, during which over 100,000 tons went down on some hundreds of launching sites and storage depots, and on communications, the quantitative potential of the flying bomb was decisively reduced and its debut postponed until the critical pre-invasion period had passed.

The first missile fell on *England* on 13th June, 1944—a week after the *Normandy* landings had

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been securely launched... the German fighter industry was too late to be effective. Of 1,800-odd launched over the 80 days main offensive against *Southern England*, only one-third reached the *Greater London* area. An indication of the peak efficiency of the combined defences is provided by the record of 28th August. On that day, of 101 flying bombs known to have been launched, 97 were destroyed.

Terror-weapon No. 2, the long-range rocket, came into the picture three months after its predecessor; since when, until the end of the year, approximately 350 incidents occurred in *England*, considerably more in *Belgium* and a few in *Northern France, Holland* and *Luxembourg*.

The sites, widely dispersed and at much greater range, have been more difficult to attack systematically, although good results are credited in an increasing number of cases. Fortunately, the rocket is an inaccurate and strictly limited weapon; so far it has proved its nuisance value but nothing more.

**The Russian Steam Roller**

The success which has attended Allied co-ordination of Eastern and Western theatre operations through the last year offers indisputable proof of the suicidal idiocy of Hitler's decision to attack *Russia* in 1941. Winter of the 1941-2 campaign cost the Germans in killed alone more than the whole of the four and a quarter years of the last war. It also probably cost them this war, for a victory in the *Caucasus* at that crucial time might well have proved catastrophic to the Allies.

Things, however, did not turn out that way. Over 165 Nazi Divisions were held and defeated by the Russian Army and the Russian Winter, and after a short offensive in November-March, 1942-3; and an abortive one-week counter-attack by the Germans in the following summer, the Soviets had the situation in complete control and were able to launch a full-scale drive in July, 1943, that by mid-May, 1944, brought the line forward into *Rumania* and *Poland* up to *Vitebsk* and the Estonian border.

The pattern then changed its shape. Movement ceased in *White Russia*, to flare up a few weeks later in the Finnish sector, where in 24 hours the Red Army breached the *Mannerheim Line*—a task that had taken them four months in 1940—and pushed on beyond the *Sistra* river; the thrust being accompanied by a complementary operation between *Lake Ladoga* and *Lake Onega*.

In spite of the pressure, however, *Finland* held out and the Russians did not achieve the quick victory on which they had banked. As it happened, this was relatively unimportant because a bigger opportunity now offered on the Central Front where, with our second front in *Normandy* well launched, it was unlikely the enemy could afford reinforcement.

**The Gates of Warsaw**

*Russia* struck, therefore, at the *Vitebsk* positions, and struck with such force that within a month the line moved westward 350 miles, liberating *Bialystok, Brest Litovsk, Deblin, Lublin, Jaroslavl* and *Przemysl* and bringing Soviet troops within shelling distance of *Warsaw*.

Here again the offensive rested to permit a re-grouping and allow the supply position time to catch up. Within *Warsaw* itself, the Polish Patriots had risen and there was intense fighting. Elsewhere the front became quiet—but only for a matter of hours.

On 19th August the Carpathian-Black Sea Front broke into life, and two days later the Russians had stormed the *Galatz Gap* and were fanning out towards *Bucharest*. On the 24th *Rumania* capitulated and on the 26th *Bulgaria* asked for an armistice. September brought the Red Army forward to *Belgrade* and the first week of November saw most of *Hungary* in Russian hands and *Budapest* under fire. By the time the year closed, the line had received further indents and ran from the East Prussian border to *Warsaw*, thence through *Czechoslovakia* to north-west of *Budapest*, and from *Lake Balaton* down across *Yugoslavia* to the Adriatic. It contained approximately 150 German divisions.

**Allies Reach the Siegfried Line.**

General Dittmar, Official Commentator of the *Berlin* Radio, spoke to the German People on Wednesday, 6th September, 1944. He said, "Four years ago we were the undisputed masters; we are now beaten by the methods we forged."

The General was right. The Canadian First and the British Second Armies had crossed the *Seine* and reached *Brussels* and the approaches of *Antwerp*, cutting off the whole of the *Pas de Calais* area in eight days. The American Third Army was across the *Marne* and *Meuse* and already had reconnaissance patrols forward on to German soil around *Saarbrücken*. Troops of General Patch's Seventh Army were hustling the German Nineteenth Army in its retreat for the *Belfort Gap*. It was clearly a matter of days before the whole of the West Wall from *Kleve* to the Swiss border would be under Allied assault.

*Germany* at this time, it was estimated, had probably 49 divisions in the line and another eighteen in reserve or re-fitting. Nineteen were disposed in *Holland* and north of *Düsseldorf*, ten in the *Cologne* sector, eleven between *Coblenz* and *Strasbourg*, and nine in the southern pocket from *Strasbourg* to the Swiss frontier. The *Siegfried Line*, which had been reached by the Allies at a number of points between *Kleve* and *Trier*, and stood only a mean 40-odd miles ahead of them on the southern length *Trier-Karlsruhe-Basle*, was at its strongest in the *Strasbourg-Trier* sector and around the shorter front *Aachen-München Gladbach*—that is, opposite the main industrial centres North of *München Gladbach*.

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its strength was largely an unknown quantity. Various reports, many of them propagandist, had alleged that fortifications existed in this district; air reconnaissance gave no confirmation.

Following the policy that the surest way to get through a strongly defended line is to go round it, plans were made for an airborne operation to secure the crossing of the great water barrier of the three branches of the Rhine and the floodings within their perimeter around Arnhem—beyond which there was barely a hill between the German border and Berlin. This operation, the biggest of its kind ever undertaken, was entrusted to the First Airborne Army and launched on Sunday, 17th September.

### The Glory of Arnhem

Nothing in this war will outmatch the bravery of the men of Arnhem. Six thousand five hundred of them were dropped or landed by glider at Eindhoven and Tilburg behind the Escaut Line, at Arnhem on the Lek, and at Nijmegen on the Waal. Only two thousand came back.

At Escaut, resistance vanished overnight and General Dempsey's tanks shot forward to occupy Nijmegen. Further north at Arnhem, opposition by picked S.S. battalions was at its fiercest, and although the paratroops dominated the vital Lek bridge for a short time they were unable to hold out against the weight of tanks, self-propelled guns, multiple mortars and flame throwers, and after nearly ten days and nights of almost ceaseless fighting had to retire across the Lek before the American Second Army—who, striving desperately to push on beyond Nijmegen, found the enemy at Elst, just five miles short of Arnhem, far stronger and better prepared than had been anticipated—could break through and join up.

The achievement at Arnhem, sadly overcast by the shadow of the losses involved and relatively disappointing in the immense possibilities complete fulfilment offered, was, nevertheless, of considerable importance. Nijmegen and the Waal crossing were secured. It remained now for the Canadians to eliminate opposition on Walcheren Island, and the Scheldt pocket dominating Antwerp's approaches to open the one port all-essential to any sustained offensive against the Siegfried positions.

### Breaching of the Dortmund-Ems Canal

Whatever satisfaction Germany derived from her local triumph at Arnhem, she can have found little comfort in two surprises R.A.F. Bomber Command provided in the closing months of 1944—the breaching of the Dortmund-Ems canal and the sinking of the "Tirpitz."

The attack on the Dortmund-Ems canal was made in September, at a time when all branches of enemy transport were struggling to meet urgent military and economic demands. It was entirely successful. Twelve-thousand

bombs smashed both channels of the embanked section near Ladbbergen, draining the canal for more than seven miles and completely disrupting water communications through the Ruhr and Rhineland, and between the industrial areas of Central and Eastern Germany and the North Sea ports.

The fact that the iron ore of Franco-Luxembourg, Spain and the Scandinavian countries had already been cut off made this new loss catastrophic. Before the attack, pig iron and steel outputs were down to nine and fourteen million tons respectively. The breaching of the Dortmund-Ems canal lowered the respective outputs, by direct and indirect causes, to four and eight million tons. Furthermore, it deprived the iron and steel works at Osnabruck, Peine and Salzgitter of coking coal from the Ruhr.

### Sinking of the "Tirpitz"

Hardly less serious was the second blow which came on Sunday, 12th November, when R.A.F. Lancasters attacked the battleship "Tirpitz" in Tromso Fjord.

Thirty-two aircraft flew on this operation and 29 made the strike. They used 12,000 pound bombs, and in spite of intense flak secured several direct hits. The "Tirpitz" was set on fire, capsized, and sank in a matter of minutes.

The destruction of this battleship removed a constant menace to convoys carrying war material through Alton Fjord to Russia, and set free a number of Allied capital ships for other duty. A vessel of 45,000 tons, completed as recently as 1941, she was the fourth of Germany's "battle wagons" to go to the bottom—her predecessors being the "Bismark," the "Scharnhorst" and the "Graf Spee." Only one Lancaster failed to return.

### The Greek Tragedy

The legend that Luck goes in Threes held good at this time. The Bulgarian volte face, the strides made by the Russians towards the west, and the constant harassing attacks on communications by Yugoslav Partisans and aircraft of B.A.F. were now rendering Greece and the Aegean untenable to the enemy. His supply position both overland and through the Adriatic was precarious and the strategic value of his occupation had shrunk to negligible proportion. In August, therefore, he began to pull out, leaving only a minimum of third-rate troops to guard the back door. By the beginning of November, Greece was free.

Happily, the tragedy of Greece through the last quarter of 1944 is now over. Possibly, with a people possessed of such innate individualism and subjected hitherto to a rule akin to dictatorship, it was inevitable. Time only will prove whether the country can establish a New Order and rebuild its constitution.

The story of the British occupation, beginning with the landings in the Peloponnese and the big

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airborne operation on *Megara*, and culminating in the bitter and drawn-out battle for law and order in *Athens*, has been told too often to need repeating. Subjected to criticism, the action taken has proved its worth. The visit of Mr. Churchill on Christmas Day marked a new turn in negotiations between the Government and the guerillas which the appointment of Archbishop Damaskinos as Regent has since stabilized.

## Rundstedt's Counter Offensive

By the first week of November, as a result of Commando landings on *Walcheren* Island, the battle of the *Scheldt* had finished and the port of *Antwerp* was free. It remained now to sweep the approaches and clear the demolitions and sunken ships for the Allies to have available a harbour within 65 miles of the front line.

The offensive which this success presaged opened in the middle of the month against the German pocket west of the river *Maas*, and followed a strong assault by American Third Army troops on the fortress of *Metz* and an attack by the First French Army east of *Belfort*. Resistance in all sectors was fierce, but by the beginning of December the British Second Army had eliminated the *Maas* bridgehead and occupied the suburbs of *Venlo*, the Americans had taken *Metz* and crossed the German border on the *Saar* front, and the French were beyond *Mulhouse* in the *Doubs* Valley.

Then came a set-back. On Sunday, 16th December, against a lightly held 75 mile front from *Aachen* to *Trier*, Rundstedt launched a full-scale counter-attack employing 150,000 infantry and paratroops supported by four Panzer divisions and the biggest air concentration assembled for some considerable time.

The first thrust drove a corridor through the American line between *St. Vith* and *Malmedy* and the second sent the Panzer Lehr Division into *Bastogne*, leaving an island of Allied troops cut off at *St. Vith*. These attacks were accompanied by determined fighter-bomber operations which in the first 36 hours cost the enemy 194 aircraft.

## A Sixty-Mile Penetration

By the end of December the break-through had been enlarged to include *Beauriving*, but the enemy had not succeeded in crossing the *Meuse*—one Panzer division at *Celles* was within four miles of the river—nor in outflanking *Liege*. He had, however, penetrated 60 miles west of the pre-attack front line.

The story of the elimination of the bulge and the complete defeat of Rundstedt's Army falls within January and February of the New Year. It was successfully accomplished by holding on the south, punching at the nose and cutting through the body of the salient from the north. Just as a German victory here would have seriously affected the speed of the Western Offensive, so their defeat and the loss it entailed will probably tell in favour of the Allies.

## War Against the U-Boats

Although by December, 1944, improved devices for sub-surface battery charging and air changing presaged a recrudescence of open-sea U-boat activity and the commencement of inshore attacks, the year had been the most successful of any for anti-submarine operations.

*Germany* began the war with approximately 100 U-boats; in 1944, in spite of the fact that we were then sinking some four U-boats a week, she had 400 in service and was in a position to put 150 to sea at any one time. That this weight of effort failed to make any decisive impression on Allied sea-traffic was due to two factors—the magnitude of American shipping output, which by mid-1943 had made secure the position for all time, and the magnitude and tactics of Coastal Command and the Royal Navy.

Through 1944, *Germany* was employing pre-fabrication for U-boats, enabling them to be built in about six weeks—as against eight months in earlier years; she was also developing the Schnorkel sub-surface replenishment apparatus which has been in action since the spring. The initiative, at the moment with the enemy, may not remain there for long. We have yet to be beaten in the counter-measure race.

## The Sixth Christmas

To have reached the Sixth War Christmas provokes sobering reflections, for after the German rout in *France* many prophesied there would be no Sixth War Christmas; that the Nazi Armies, once on the run, would fail to check the rush or extricate themselves in sufficient strength to provide a barrier; that weight of numbers and the cumulative bombing programme had achieved their respective purposes.

Time has shown the wish father to the thought. The German Army is still fighting resolutely and the German People, reduced to dull apathy, is still in the firm grip of the Gestapo. A recent statement indicated the Nazi Party's military policy for the future; it now remains to be seen with what degree of success this can be implemented or frustrated.

If the pointers are reliable, it would appear that Hitler is prepared, though not without bitter struggle, to sacrifice *Germany* above the southern pocket and to leave the last battle to the gates of *Munich*, where, with his flanks protected by the *Schwarzwald* and *Bohmerwald* and his base by the *Alps*, he will, it is reported, attempt to hold siege "until an Isolationist replaces Roosevelt—presumably at the 1948 elections—and withdraws the American Forces from *Germany*, leaving the British and Russian Armies of Occupation to wage a Third World War amongst themselves."

If true, this is the fanatical dream of a desperate gang which, doomed from the outset to failure in every military, political and economic aspect, foresees only for *Germany* nothing but National Suicide.

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# The Invasion of Italy

## Part V—Stalemate Again

1st October to 31st December, 1944

### I. INTRODUCTORY

BY THE END of September (as narrated in the last issue of the Review) the Allied Armies in *Italy*, backed by strong air support, had breached the Gothic Line along its entire length, except in the extreme west. As had happened several times before in the Italian campaign, however, the situation flattered to deceive. The development of this break-through into the occupation of the remaining areas of *Italy* still under Axis domination was to be the reverse of easy owing to the enemy's renewed stubborn resistance.

The general policy of Army Group "C"—the enemy forces holding northern *Italy*—for the period under review was believed to have been formulated by Hitler himself. Its purpose was simple—to hold the Apennine positions to the last and prevent the Allied Armies entering the agriculturally rich and industrially productive plains of *Lombardy*, *Piedmont* and *Veneto*. To carry out his directive, Marshal Kesselring was apparently allowed by the German High Command to retain all his troops—28 German and four Italian divisions (by no means at full-strength, however) and various security formations. The only proviso appeared to be the possible later necessity (which turned out to be the case) of withdrawing at least two divisions from *Italy* to meet the Russian advance in south-east *Europe*.

Kesselring was not without some good cards in his hand. His divisions in the line actually outnumbered those of the Allies; he still held strong mountain positions and was protected by river barriers; and, most important, General Winter was again at hand to help him with his defensive warfare. The Marshal's most serious disadvantage was his tenuous supply lines. There were four main railway routes entering *Italy* available to him—the *Brenner Pass* route from *Austria* and the three lines entering from the north-east. These frontier routes and the more southerly network of lines in the *Po* valley were wide-open to air attacks and it required constant labour, skill and ingenuity on the Germans' part to slip through sufficient supplies and equipment to their forces south of the *Po* to enable them to maintain their effort. The trumps

held by the Allied Supreme Commander, which were certain sooner or later to win him the game, were the superiority enjoyed by his ground forces in equipment and supplies and the ace of overwhelming air superiority. In respect of the latter, however, deteriorating weather was bound to prevent its full exploitation.

So far as military strategy was concerned, the Germans appreciated that the "schwerpunkt" of their defensive system lay south of *Bologna*, and in order to remain strong there some ground would have to be yielded on the Adriatic flank by gradually withdrawing behind successive water obstacles.

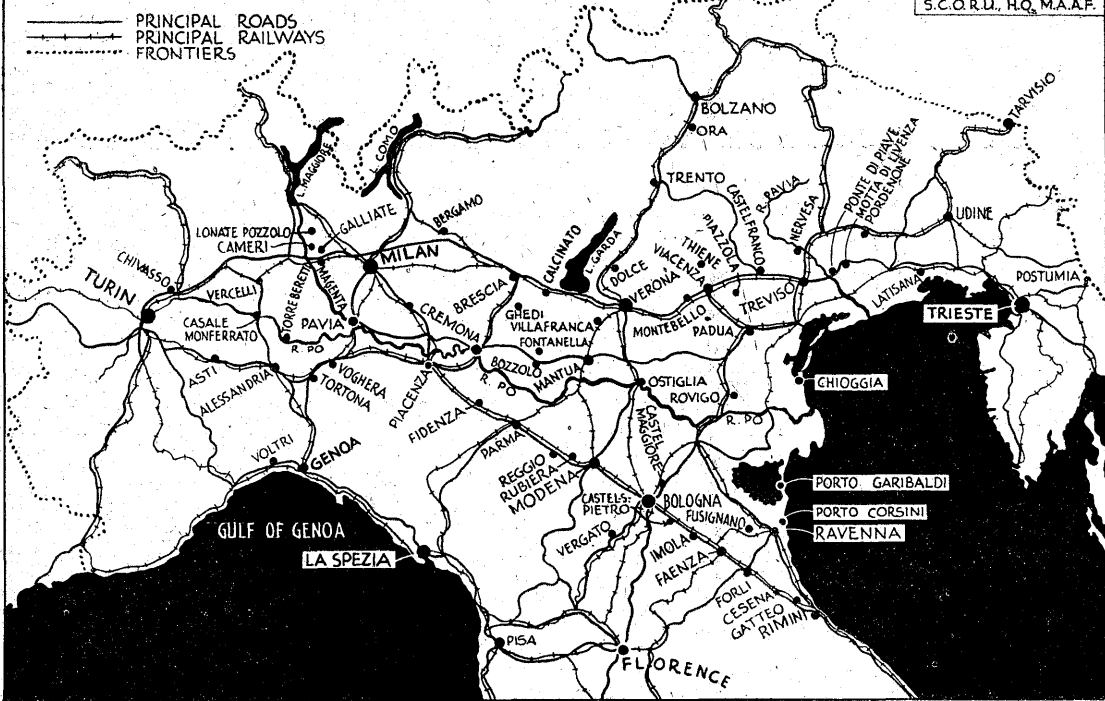
The general line held by the Allies in *Italy* at the beginning of the period, ran, in general terms, from the mouth of the *Fuminico* river on the Adriatic coast, south-westwards to the *Mercato* area, thence north-westwards to the area some 20 miles south of *Bologna*, thence south-westwards to north of *Pistoia* and south-westwards again to *Pietrasanta* on the west coast. At that time facing the Germans, from east to west were 1 Canadian, 5 and 10 Corps of the Eighth Army in the Adriatic sector, and the Fifth Army, comprising 13, 2 and 4 Corps, across the rest of the peninsula, with the heaviest concentrations south of *Bologna*. The Germans at the beginning of October had nineteen or twenty divisions in the battle area which were supplemented by another one or two by the middle of the month.

#### Allied Air Supremacy

Although the German Army was still a team to be reckoned with, the Luftwaffe could hardly be said to be fielding even a fourth eleven. The G.A.F., which at the beginning of the Italian campaign, after the immense losses incurred in *North Africa* and *Sicily*, could still boast a Mediterranean strength of well over 1,000 aircraft, was now represented in *Italy* by a niggardly 25 long-range and fifteen tactical reconnaissance aircraft and about 30 second-line night ground-attack Stukas. Other formations formerly based in *Italy*—that is, what M.A.A.F. had left of them—had some months since joined

## TACTICAL BOMBING EFFORT OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 1944

S.C.Q.R.U., H.Q. M.A.A.F.



**BOMB TONNAGE DROPPED BY M.A.T.A.F. (Supplemented by a few M.A.C.A.F. attacks)**

LINES OF COMMUNICATION	AIRFIELDS	ENEMY CONCENTRATIONS AND INSTALLATIONS	OIL INSTALLATIONS	PORTS	MISCELLANEOUS	TOTAL
17 854	52	9 400	77	281	1 264	28 928

Note: For M.A.C.A.F. bomb-tonnage see maps illustrating the Strategic effort elsewhere in the Review.

the main body of the Luftwaffe in the west to help with the Canute-like task of trying to stem the tides of the Anglo-American invasion and aerial offensive. Brief, infrequent and usually inglorious appearances were also being made in the Italian skies by the Italian Fascist Air Force, comprising a job-lot of about 50 single-engined fighters and 20 torpedo-bombers.

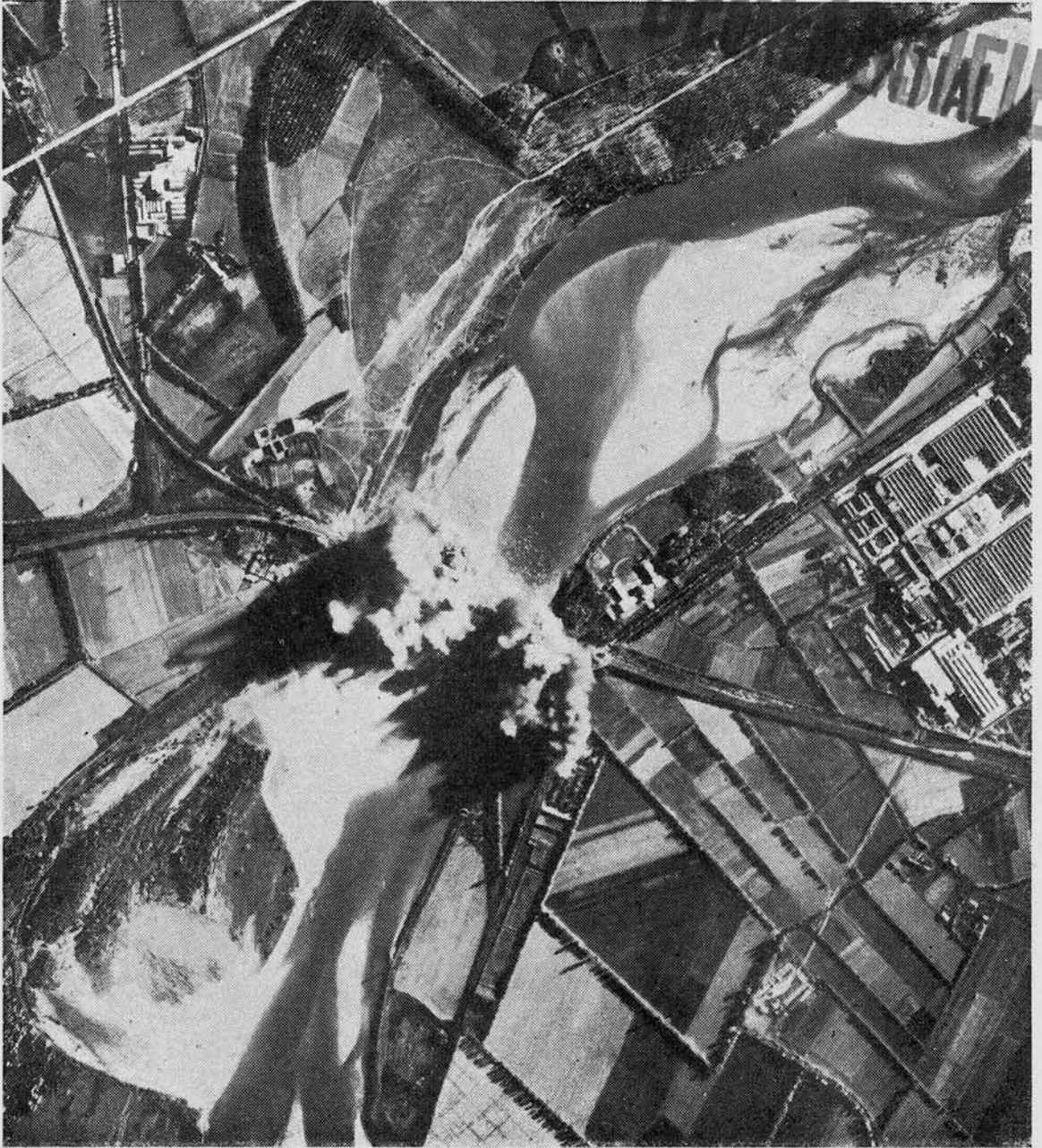
In contrast to the enemy's Lilliputian air power the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces in October mustered a strength of over 3,900 aircraft of operational type (that is, excluding the powerful force of transport aircraft) in *Italy*, *Corsica* and *Sardinia* and further forces were based along the North African seaboard, in *Southern France*, on *Malta* and on *Vis*. It is true that the Mediterranean Allied Strategic Air Force, which accounted for 48 per cent. of the above-mentioned strength in *Italy* and the adjacent western islands, was committed primarily to attacks on objectives

beyond the Italian frontiers, but its efforts could be switched to help the Mediterranean campaign whenever essential.

Offensive operations over *Italy* were, as previously, predominantly the Mediterranean Allied Tactical Air Force's concern. For the greater part of the period under review, the Force was composed of the Desert Air Force, the XXII Tactical Air Command (a new formation made up of the short-lived XII Fighter Command and further former XII T.A.C. units returned from *Southern France*), the 57th and 42nd U.S.A.A.F. medium bomber wings (the latter Wing left the Mediterranean theatre in mid-November) and the 51st Troop Carrier Wing.

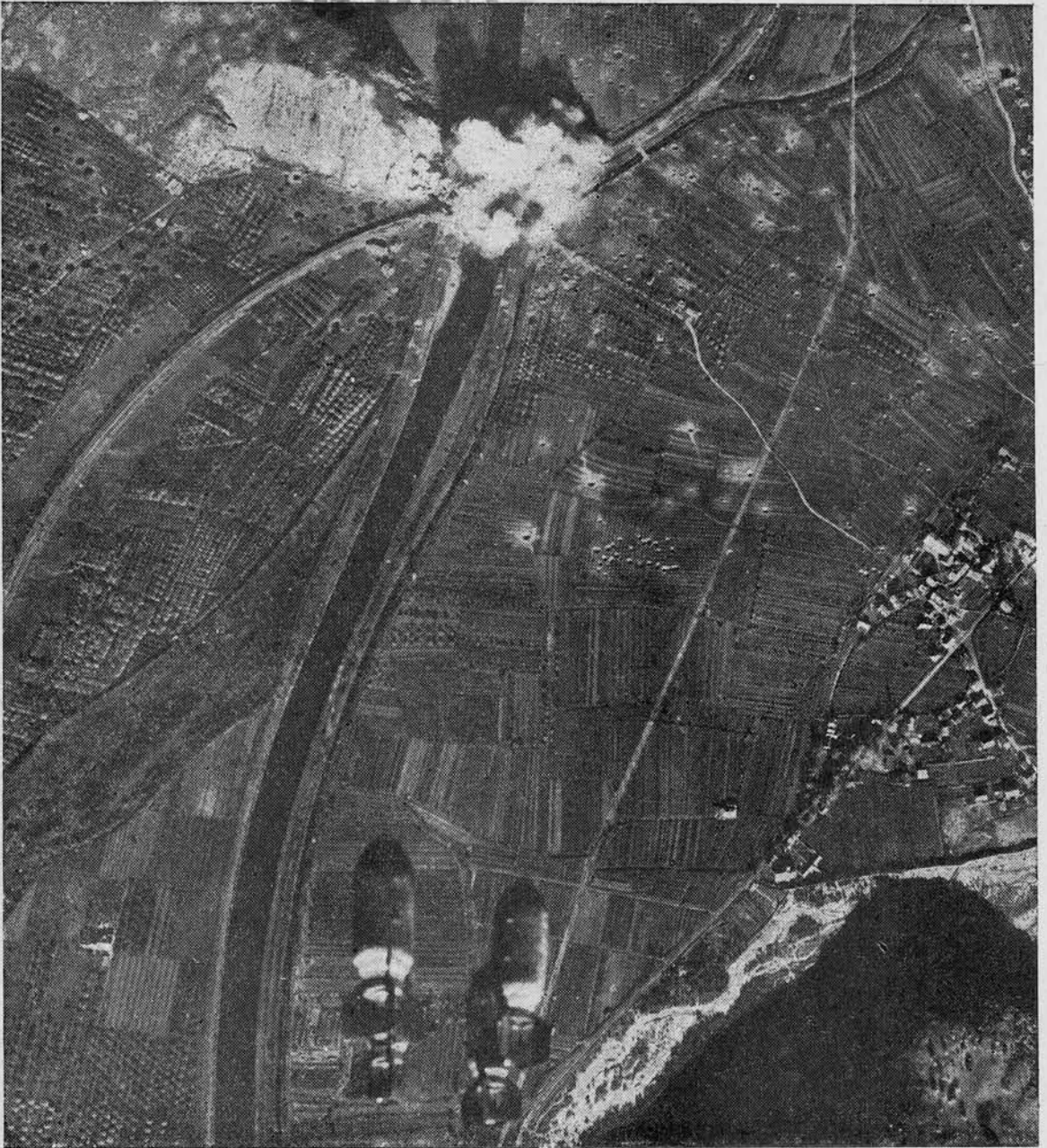
For the most part during the last quarter of 1944 D.A.F. operationally controlled three Spitfire wings, one Kittyhawk/Mustang (P.51) wing, one Spitfire reconnaissance wing, one U.S. Thunderbolt (P.47) group, two wings





*Vercelli road and railway bridge under attack on 4th November, 1944.*

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*Ora road and railway bridge under attack on 11th November, 1944.*

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of light bombers, and one Marauder (B. 26) medium bomber wing. In the above formations R.A.F. squadrons numbered 21, S.A.A.F. twelve, R.A.A.F. four, U.S.A.A.F. three and R.C.A.F. and Polish Air Force one each. The XXII T.A.C. was made up in general of four U.S.A.A.F. Thunderbolt groups (twelve squadrons), a S.A.A.F. wing of Spitfires and Kittyhawks (two S.A.A.F. and two R.A.F. squadrons), a U.S.A.A.F. light bomber group (four squadrons), two R.A.F. Spitfire tactical reconnaissance squadrons, two U.S.A.A.F. Beaufighter night-fighter squadrons, a Brazilian Air Force Thunderbolt squadron and a U.S.A.A.F. photographic squadron. The Tactical medium bomber force consisted for the first half of the period of twelve squadrons of U.S.A.A.F. Mitchells (B. 25s) and the same number of U.S.A.A.F. Marauders and later of sixteen squadrons of Mitchells only.

In numerical strength M.A.T.A.F. exceeded the 1,800 mark (excluding transport aircraft) for the greater part of the period, but was reduced by some 300 aircraft by the end of the year.

#### M.A.T.A.F.'s Commitments

The Tactical Air Force's basic commitments in *Italy* were (a) counter air force operations, (b) the provision of air protection over the forward areas, (c) affording close support to the ground forces, (d) attacks on enemy lines of communication, (e) the destruction of enemy supplies, and (f) reconnaissance duties.

To meet the first two commitments mentioned above—in earlier campaigns of paramount importance—a minimum effort sufficed owing to the Luftwaffe's impotence. M.A.T.A.F.'s major efforts were absorbed by tasks (c) and (d).

As had long been the tradition, the Desert Air Force continued to give intimate aid to the Eighth Army and the XXII Tactical Air Command was made responsible for supporting the Fifth Army's operations. When necessary some effort could

be drawn from the force to help in the other's support of the Fifth Army and the Tactical and/or Strategic commands could be called on to help with close-support.

The heaviest commitment, however, continued to be the pounding of the enemy's lines of communication—particularly railways—in order to restrict his build-up in the battle area. Shortly after the beginning of the period under review, the Desert Air Force was allotted the area east and north of the line *Verona-Ostiglia-Bologna* for attacks on communications and the XXII Tactical Air Command was responsible for attacks to the west of that area. Later in the period the area of the latter Command was extended further east. The medium bomber's function was to add weight to the attacks in the *Po* valley and strike at vulnerable points further north. From November onwards the Tactical Air Force extended its attacks on railways northwards, with special emphasis on the *Brenner Pass* line, as it became increasingly clear that the destruction of the bridges over the *Po* had not resulted in the expected Allied stranglehold on supplies reaching the German Army in the field. Less help was then required from the Strategic Air Force against the frontier routes.

The Coastal Air Force's commitments so far as the Italian campaign was concerned included the protection of the rear areas and convoys; anti-shipping activity in the *Gulf of Genoa* and the northern Adriatic; supplementary attacks on road transport and other targets, particularly in north-west *Italy*; and air-sea rescue missions.

It is not purposed in this account to give details of the Royal Navy's achievements. But it should be borne in mind that protective duties (albeit now restricted) remained a constant commitment, offensive action was taken against enemy shipping in the Ligurian and northern Adriatic seas, and bombardments were carried out of the *Genoa* area.

## II. RENEWAL OF ENEMY RESISTANCE

#### Fifth Army's "Minor Advances"

October opened with leading troops of the Fifth Army in the central sector sixteen miles south of *Bologna*—the key strong-point of the German defence line. It was immediately evident that not only a dogged defence but local counter-attacks could be expected, reminiscent of the palmiest days of the Gustav line resistance. To stiffen his divisions in the threatened central sector, Kesselring transferred not only piecemeal reinforcements from his Adriatic flank but more substantial formations from the quiet western sector and the *Genoa* area. The remark "Minor advances have been made against very stiff opposition and most difficult terrain," culled from a despatch of this time, could, accordingly, be applied to the whole of the Fifth Army's activity

during the first half of October. An attempted break-through to *Bologna*, aided by the air support considered in the following section, was found to be impracticable.

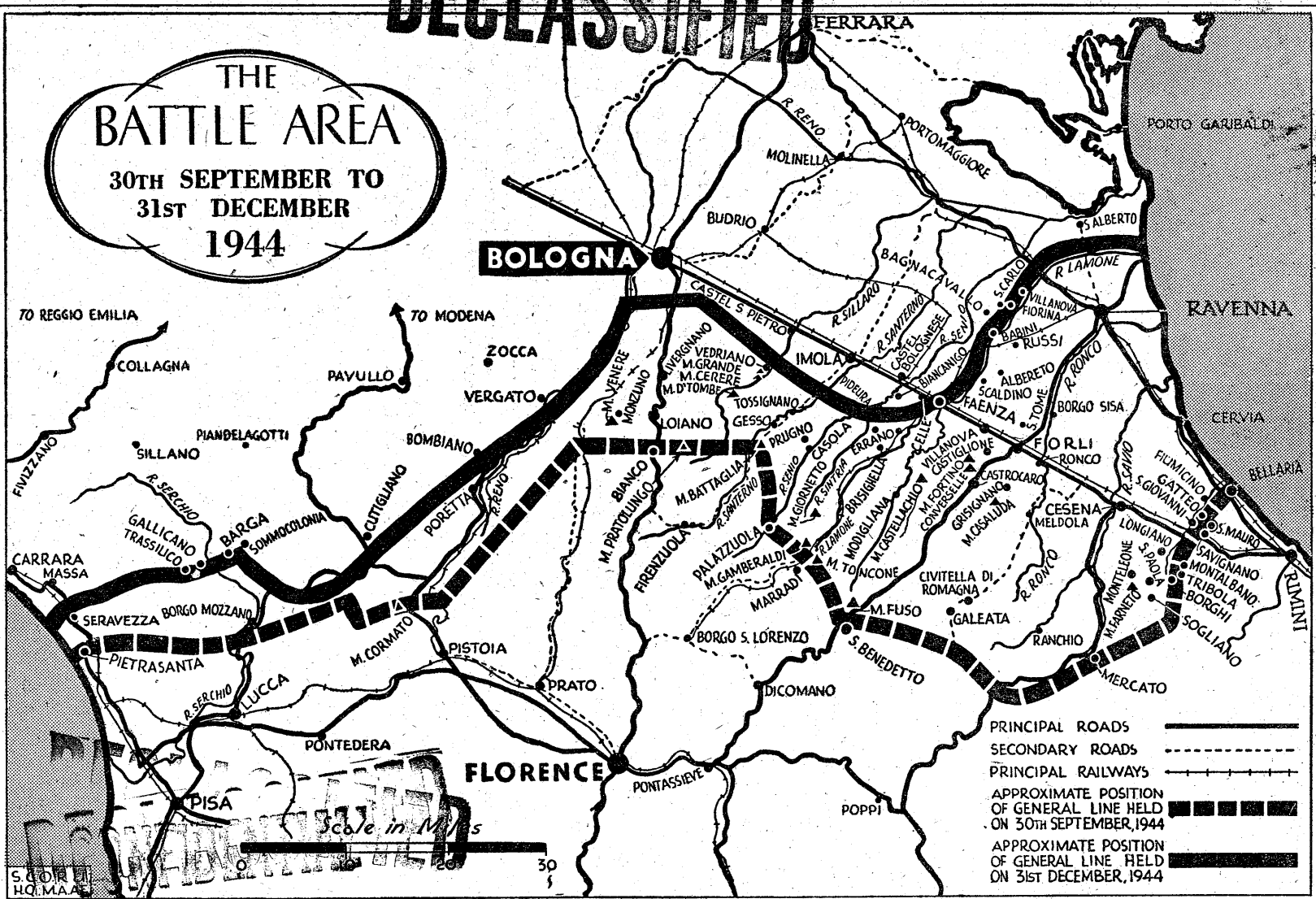
On 15th October 13 Corps was held up near *Bocconi* and seven miles or so north of *Palazuola*; 2 Corps, advancing along the *Firenzuola-Bologna* axis, after heavy fighting were in possession of *Livergnano* (three and a half miles north of *Loiano*); and 4 Corps troops, advancing on either side of Highway 64, were three miles south-east of *Vergato*, and further west in the *Serchio* valley had reached *Gatticano*. These limited advances—particularly in the central sector—were helped, and in some cases perhaps made possible, by the air support mentioned in the next section.

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THE BATTLE AREA  
30th SEPTEMBER TO  
31st DECEMBER  
1944

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**Operation "Pancake"**

Apart from a maximum effort on the first day of the month, when M.A.T.A.F.'s sorties on all duties exceeded the 1,200 mark, reports on Allied air activity up to 12th October usually began, "Bad weather continued to hamper operations." This bald statement when applied to Italian operations should conjure up a picture of landing grounds turned into quagmires as well as lowering winter skies inimical to tactical missions.

During the first eleven days of October aircraft under the operational control of XII Fighter Command (later in the month re-designated XXII T.A.C.) flew most of the 2,400 sorties carried out on battlefield operations; even so, strong close-support was practicable on five days only. U.S. Thunderbolts played the major part with attacks on enemy's positions, buildings, troop concentrations, guns, etc., mainly in the central sector and U.S. Bostons helped during the earlier part of October by bombing bivouac areas and dumps. On the first four days of the month, also, D.A.F. directed most of the effort of its Kittyhawks and Mustangs and a Spitbomber wing towards helping the thrust towards *Bologna*; in particular, four missions flown against *Loiano* on the 3rd (in the direct path of our troops) succeeded in virtually demolishing the northern part of that fortified town. These operations, however, only represented aerial skirmishing before the full-scale M.A.T.A.F.-cum-M.A.S.A.F. blitz of 12th October—the intensive phase of Operation "Pancake."

As its code-name suggests, the operation was designed to flatten enemy opposition—in this instance in the path of the Fifth Army troops pressing on towards *Bologna*. The more distant targets in the *Bologna* area were allotted to the Strategic heavy bombers and Tactical medium bombers, while the Tactical fighter-bombers ranged over the battlefield proper.

On 12th October the attacking heavies numbered 697 (over 100 more were thwarted by bad weather from reaching their objective); effective U.S. Mitchell sorties came to 141 (attacks by 72 more Mitchells were frustrated by cloud cover and the entire effort of the U.S. Marauder wing was also rendered abortive); and over 270 fighter-bombers took part. The total bomb-load dropped in this most concentrated attack by M.A.A.F. bombers up to that date amounted to 1,661 tons. The heavy bombers attacked seven "material" targets (vehicle workshops, stores and ammunition depôts) and two barracks and a bivouac area, and the mediums pounded two bivouac and stores area targets, a barracks and a fuel dump. Of the fourteen targets attacked by the Allied bombers photographic interpretation showed that five could be termed destroyed and eight damaged. The fighter-bombers, meanwhile, attacked 60 targets in the usual "close-support" category. On 13th and 15th October the fighter-bombers continued their close-support operations at maximum

pressure and on the latter day the medium bombers put up a full-scale effort against *Po* valley communications to hamper the supply of the central sector.

Apart from the material damage caused in the "Pancake" operations, reports from military units emphasised the tonic effect on the morale of our own troops and such immediate results as the decrease in enemy artillery fire. A report issued by G-2, Fifth Army, concluded by saying that "the air support... was eminently successful. Classified targets were attacked in a timely, accurate and most effective manner, thus aiding materially the advance of the Fifth Army in taking important terrain."

The Fifth Army's projected break-through to *Bologna* did not, however, as already mentioned, materialise. The German defence had again proved a nut which could not be cracked by a short, intensive effort—steady and prolonged Army-Air Force pressure was again required.

**Eighth Army Approaches Cesena**

In the Adriatic sector, meanwhile, the Eighth Army was pushing slowly forward. At the beginning of October the Canadians had reached the line of the *Fiumicino* river from the sea up to and including *Savignano*; on their left 5 Corps had advanced a little beyond *Tribola*; and 10 Corps troops had followed up the enemy's withdrawal along the remainder of the Eighth Army's front. Our forces had as aim an advance towards *Bologna* from the south-east and a simultaneous progress up the Adriatic coast. The Germans, in accordance with their general policy, were fighting a stubborn action and yielding ground only under extreme pressure, while exploiting terrain and weather conditions to the maximum extent.

In spite of atrocious weather which, inter alia, caused the water-logging of several eastern landing-grounds—that at *Iesi* with its concrete runway was a striking dry exception—D.A.F. rendered as far as possible its usual yeoman service to the Eighth Army.

For the first four days of the month D.A.F.'s main close-support, as mentioned previously, was given to the Fifth Army troops in the central sector; at the same time, however, the air offensive was continued against the bridges across the *Savio* river, which was clearly the enemy's next major defence line against the Eighth Army. Bad weather then prevented any appreciable close-support until the 7th when the majority of the 500 sorties flown helped Canadian troops in the *Gatteo* area; in addition, aircraft under advanced "Rover" control succeeded in dispersing a threatened enemy counter-attack near *Monte-Leone*. For the next eight days intermittent bad weather interfered with D.A.F.'s effort—total daily sorties on all duties varying from nil to 510. Nevertheless, accurate close-support, generally under "Rover" control, was afforded the Army whenever possible, particularly

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around *Cesena*; all the *Savio* road bridges were cut by 15th October; and, as mentioned later, a considerable toll was taken of rail and canal transport in the rear eastern areas.

By mid-October, helped and heartened by D.A.F.'s help, Canadian troops had crossed the *Fiumicino* river and the *Rigorsa*, further west; leading elements of 5 Corps were only three miles south of *Cesena*, and advanced troops of 10 Corps had reached *Ranchio*.

### Fifth Army's Advance Stemmed

During the third week of October Kesselring switched further crack units from the Adriatic front westwards to pack the approach to *Bologna* from the south-east. There were then eleven German divisions astride the main axis of the Fifth Army as compared with seven opposing the Eighth Army's advance and two in the quiet western area. In the latter sector, also, were elements of an Italian Republican Division sandwiched between more reliable German troops in the old Western Desert style.

Until 26th October the Fifth Army continued to make a little progress, but then a deterioration in the weather greatly added the enemy's defence. As one of the Supreme Commander's reports at this time put it: "Heavy rains have made the Italian battle area a sea of mud. All rivers were at flood stage throughout most of the period (26th to 29th October). Bridges were washed out, many roads were flooded, and in some areas supplies could be moved only by mules or manhandling." Thus by the end of the month the enemy had the situation south of *Bologna* reasonably well in hand and, in particular, had screened the vital areas between Route 65 and *Castel San Pietro* with his three best divisions, which had previously operated in the Adriatic sector.

The unfavourable weather inevitably restricted the air support which could be afforded the Fifth Army. During the first half of October, as already pointed out, XXII T.A.C. directed its main effort against close-support targets. During the last sixteen days of October XXII T.A.C.'s effort—2,294 sorties on all duties—was almost equally divided between battlefield commitments and attacks on rear communications, as in view of the slowing up of ground operations and bad weather over the forward areas the communications attacks, which are considered later, now paid better dividends.

On only half of the days in the latter part of October was an appreciable effort over the Fifth Army's battle area practicable; weather conditions from 25th to 30th October, in particular, almost prevented air operations entirely. The U.S. Thunderbolt activity against guns and enemy positions—particularly against the concentrations south of *Faenza*, *Imola* and *Bologna*—was strongest and most successful on the 16th, 19th, 20th, 24th and 31st. On a few occasions, also, Tactical medium bombers added more weight to

the attacks by bombing storage depôts at *Castel San Pietro* and *Imola* and communications in the former area. The U.S. Mustangs operated in force only once against troop concentrations in the central sector, but, in addition, in a limited armed reconnaissance effort on a few nights covered the *Bologna* area as well as the territory westwards to the coast.

### Fall of Cesena

Further east, in the meantime, the Eighth Army's continued pressure on the weakened German forces on the Adriatic front forced them to yield more ground.

The Canadians, advancing on their *Rimini - Cesena* axis, crossed yet another river obstacle and by the beginning of the fourth week in October, having taken *Cervia* in their stride, were along the line of the *Savio*, with leading elements across the river some two miles north of *Cesena*. The latter town, on the main *Rimini - Bologna* route, had fallen, meanwhile, to 5 Corps' right flank in conjunction with Canadian troops, and a bridgehead across the *Savio* to the west of the town had been established. To the south-west, 2 Polish Corps (who had taken over from 10 Corps) had made a general advance of five miles or so, capturing *Galatea* and *Civitella di Romagna*. By the end of the month 1 Canadian Corps troops in the coastal sector were within seven miles of *Ravenna* and other elements had reached the *Ronco* river east of *Forlì*; 5 Corps had crossed the *Ronco* and forward units were three to four miles south of *Forlì*; and the Poles on the left flank had also kept pace with the general advance.

Thus the Eighth Army in its drive towards *Bologna* from the *Rimini* area had progressed a third to a half of the way and in the coastal sector well over three-quarters of the way to *Ravenna*.

D.A.F.'s close support to our forces on the Adriatic front was inevitably patchy, due to the adverse weather and, particularly, the "sea of mud" already mentioned. On five of the last sixteen days in October sorties fell below 100, including three blank or virtually blank days; nevertheless, by taking advantage of a few spells of good weather D.A.F.'s total effort topped the 3,300 sorties mark.

The areas covered by the close-support operations (which accounted for about half of the total effort) reflected the course of the Eighth Army's advance, changing from below *Cesena* to west of that town and south of *Forlì*. High-lights of the D.A.F. battlefield attacks were the harassing of the enemy's movement across the *Savio* river on 20th October; help for our ground forces in their enlargement of their *Savio* bridgehead on the 24th; harassing the enemy's retreat to the *Ronco* river line on the 25th; and support for operations in the *Meldola-Forlì* area on the last day of the month. After a spell of inactivity due to unserviceable landing grounds, the *Baltimore*s again did good work, particularly

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against a fortified village six miles west of *Cesena*, but the Marauder squadrons were still, unfortunately, bogged down.

#### Attacks on Enemy Communications

An Allied Force Headquarters' Operation Memorandum issued in the spring of 1944 stated that "the main function of all classes of bomber aircraft in a land campaign is to interfere with movement of enemy forces and their supplies." This dictum had certainly been acted upon in *Italy*, reaching its apotheosis of achievement two months prior to and during the "Diadem" offensive (begun 12th May, 1944), when the intensive air attacks on the enemy's communications rendered his build-up in central *Italy* insufficient to meet the demands of sustained heavy fighting. For a time then in the early summer of 1944 it looked as if the Allied armies were all set for a drive to the extreme north of the peninsula and the air offensive against lines of communications was therefore somewhat relaxed. In July, however, it was evident this rapid advance was not going to materialise immediately and the paramount need was to restrict the enemy's build-up south of the *Po*. The bombing of the *Po* bridges was begun accordingly on 12th July and attacks on communications, particularly railways, traversing the entire *Po* valley became M.A.T.A.F.'s main commitment. The Strategic bombers, meanwhile, attended to the disruption of the frontier routes at their more distant points and rear marshalling yards as previously. This division of labour between the two Forces still obtained during October, the month under immediate review.

So far as M.A.T.A.F.'s attacks on communications were concerned, the areas covered by the three main formations in October were as follows. The Desert Air Force operated to the east of the *Verona-Ostiglia-Bologna* railway; XXII T.A.C. covered the more extensive territory to the west of that line; and the medium bombers (ranging over both these areas) concentrated on cutting bridges north of the *Po* and across the river itself.

Many of D.A.F.'s communications attacks—particularly the destruction of the *Savio* river bridges—were bound up with the advance of the Eighth Army and have already been mentioned. Further north, cuts inflicted on railways were most prevalent on the *Verona-Modena* and *Ravenna-Bologna* stretches. On a number of days, also, armed reconnaissances—particularly by Mustangs—over the rear north-eastern areas imposed a considerable toll on rail traffic—outstanding achievements being the destruction of seventeen locomotives on 12th October, 30 on the 21st and ten on the 30th. Equally striking results were obtained against canal traffic, a total of 52 boats and barges being destroyed and 166 damaged.

Meanwhile, XXII T.A.C., whose effort against communications was more pronounced in the latter half of the month, despite the limiting factor of bad weather maintained the interdiction

of communications in the *Po* valley, the *Bren* eastwards. The Command's most intensive effort against military traffic occurred in the *Cremona - Mantua* area (the results achieved are included in the totals given later); numerous rail cuts were affected on the *Faenza-Bologna* line and in the *Milan* and *Genoa* areas; and roads were cratered most extensively between *Ferrara* and *Parma* and the bomb-line.

The U.S. medium bombers' effort during October was whittled down by unfavourable weather to an even greater extent than that of the light and fighter-bombers, their total effective sorties for the month on all duties amounting to 1,947—just over half of their September total. During the eleven days when operations were practicable, the medium bombers carried out 85 attacks on bridges, destroying sixteen and damaging 27. Most of the missions were flown north of the *Po*, particular attention being paid to lines running south to *Milan* and *Padua*. Routes to the north and west of *Milan* were cut as the result of the attacks on the railway bridge at *Ponte San Pietro*, and bridges at *Lonate Pozzolo* and *Galliate* and combined road-rail bridges at *Cameri* and *Magenta*. The routes running into the *Po* valley from the north-east were blocked by the bombing of the railway bridges at *Nervesa*, *Piazzola* and *Padua*. Lateral lines running through *Mantua* and *Verona* were disrupted at various points, and four *Po* bridges, which had not previously been permanently disabled, were attacked.

The combined M.A.T.A.F. results of the attacks on communications in October were:—44 bridges destroyed and 83 damaged; 240 cuts on railway tracks; one tunnel destroyed and two damaged; 280 locomotives destroyed and 76 damaged; 645 railway carriages and wagons destroyed and 1,384 damaged; 423 military vehicles destroyed and 290 damaged; and 58 ships and boats sunk and 174 damaged. A further limiting of enemy supplies was achieved by the destruction of 23 dumps.

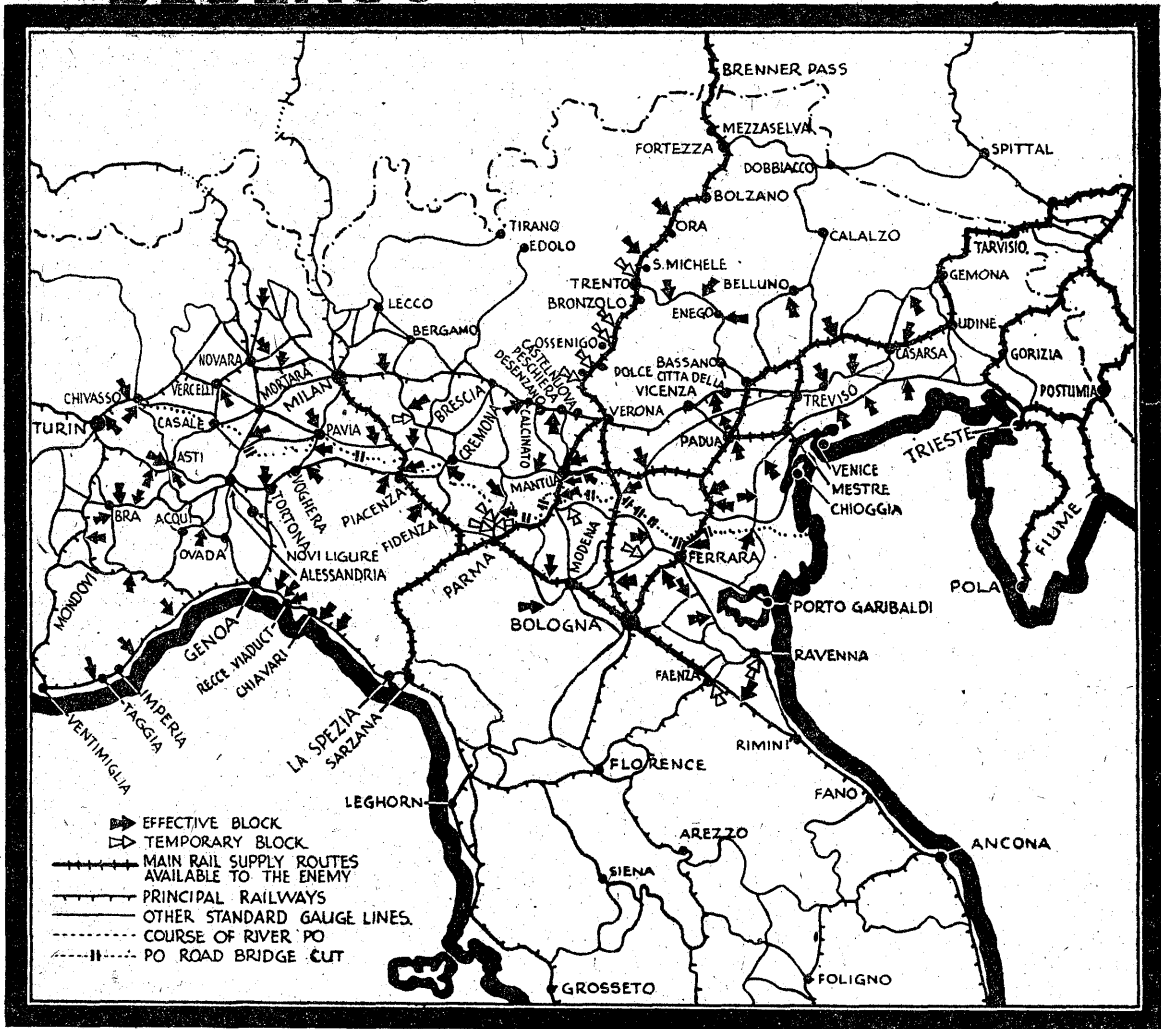
Meanwhile, the Strategic Air Force in the course of operations against communications on three days and seven nights dropped a total bomb-load of 2,500 tons, mainly on the enemy's more northern communications, concentrating particularly on the important *Brenner Pass* route. Bad weather, however, prevented the continuous effort necessary to achieve a serious interdiction on the frontier routes.

The Coastal Air Force's quota to the offensive against enemy communications during October included the sinking of two merchant vessels and the damaging of twelve more, nine smaller craft sunk and 52 damaged, and one bridge destroyed and one damaged.

#### Failure to Stem Enemy's Supplies

The M.A.T.A.F. operations mentioned in the preceding section represented the final phase of nearly four months concentrated effort in the *Po* valley and the establishing of a line of

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Points of Interdiction by Air at 13th November, 1944.

interdiction along the *Po*, *Piave* and *Ticino* rivers—an air offensive which had as twin objectives the limiting of the enemy's build-up south of the *Po* and the hampering of an expected withdrawal of the German armies to the Alps. Considering the limiting factor of bad weather in October, the M.A.T.A.F. effort during the month achieved a general success, particularly in continuing to stop virtually all transportation across the *Po* to the battle area during the hours of daylight.

In view of the success of the above-mentioned sustained interdiction offensive and M.A.S.A.F.'s intermittent cutting of the frontier routes, the question naturally arises, "How did the enemy maintain a sufficient flow of supplies to his troops to withstand full-scale attacks by both the Fifth and Eighth Armies?" The answer is, "By an intensive repair programme and a number of ingenious improvisations." These are considered in more detail elsewhere in the Review, but it is pertinent here to emphasise some of the

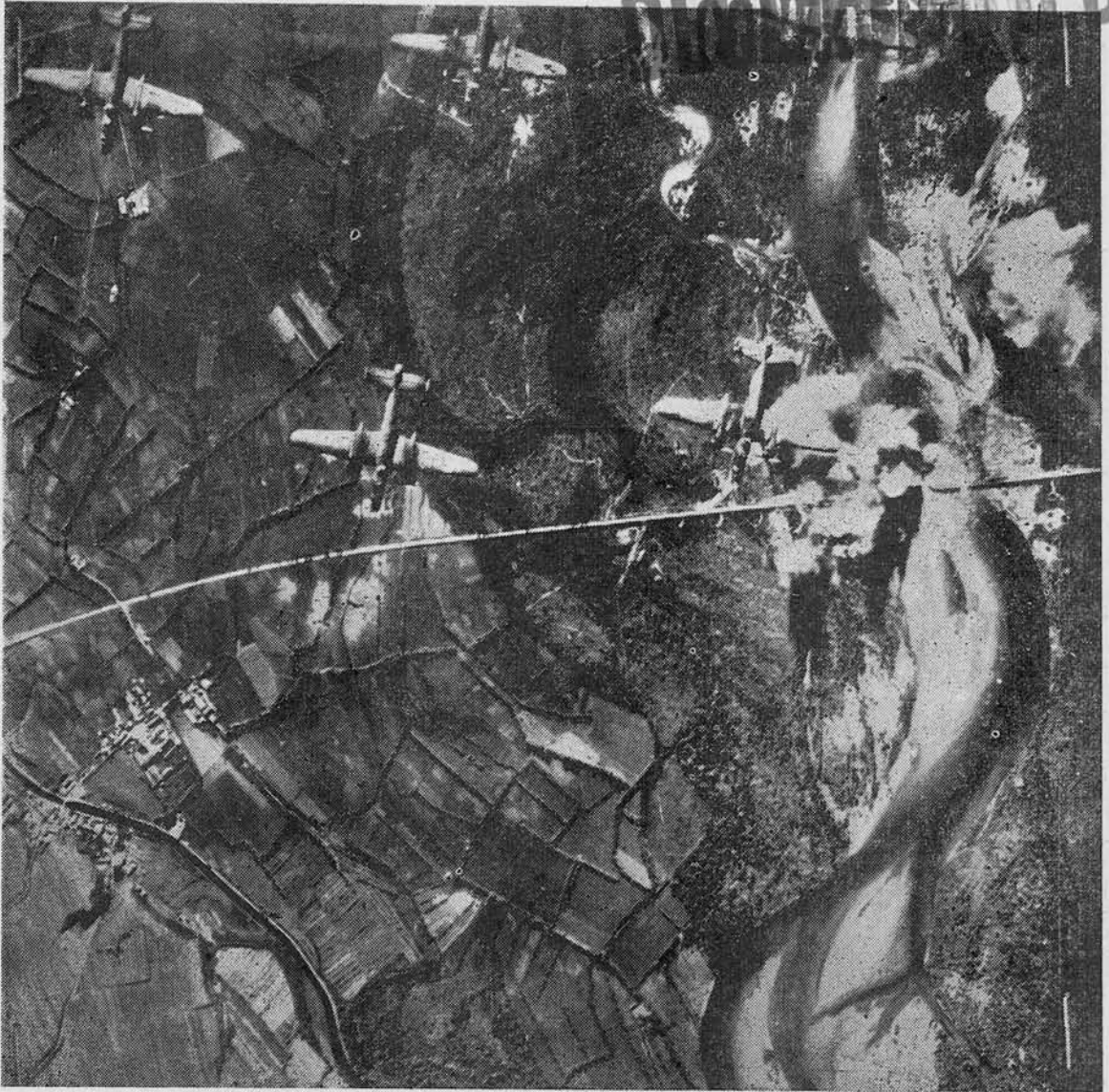
schemes at this period. So far as the actual entry of supplies into *Italy* was concerned, the Germans countered to a great extent the effect of the air attacks on the frontier routes by skilled and speedy repairs (rendered more easy by the accumulation of bridging materials near target sites) and the construction of rail diversions around vulnerable points. For the passage of supplies over the rivers further south, particularly over the *Po*, the enemy's repair programme could not keep pace with the damage inflicted; consequently the use of pontoon bridges at night only, crossings by ferries (also principally at night), the construction of pipe lines and other methods were brought into play.

Attempts were made by both Strategic and Tactical night bombers to interfere with the enemy's nocturnal supply activities, but, in general, these achieved little success owing to the difficulties of locating the targets (the locations of the pontoon bridges were constantly changed,

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*Aircraft over the target at Magenta road bridge, two spans of which were cut.*

for instance), the poor visibility usually prevailing, and insufficient forces available for a sustained effort.

Thus, in spite of the Allied air attacks the Germans continued to supply their forward troops with their estimated needs of approximately 2,000 tons daily. It must be emphasised, however, that the enemy's accumulation of supplies was kept down to a level sufficient only for defensive warfare and was quite inadequate for any sustained major offensive action.

**Features of M.A.T.A.F's October Effort**

In certain respects October ended a phase of M.A.T.A.F. activity. In particular, in the following month the Force's zone of operations

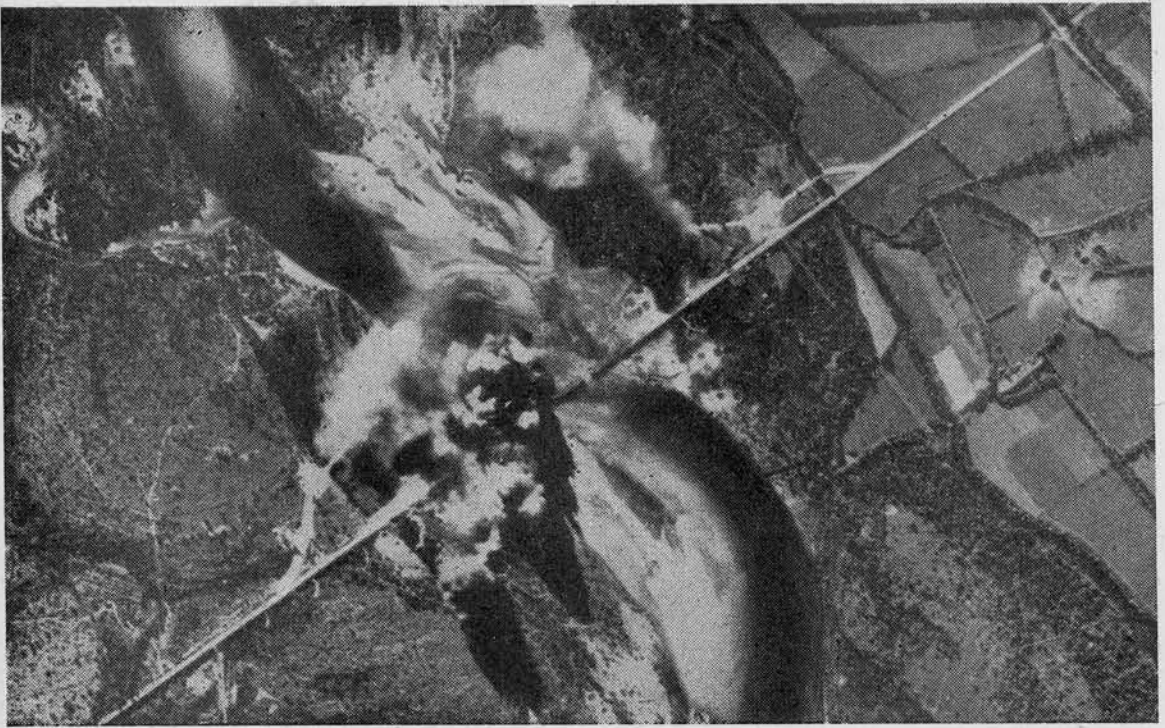
was to be significantly extended in Italy and its aid was once more to be required in Yugoslavia.

The dominant feature of the month was the limiting factor of bad weather. M.A.T.A.F's effective operational sorties (excluding transport aircraft missions) came to 13,554 — nearly 10,000 short of the September figure; and the total bomb-load dropped just exceeded the 8,000 tons mark, or a little over half of the previous month's tonnage. Nearly 4,500 tons were dropped on lines of communication and just over 3,300 tons on enemy concentrations. Details of the results achieved have already been given.

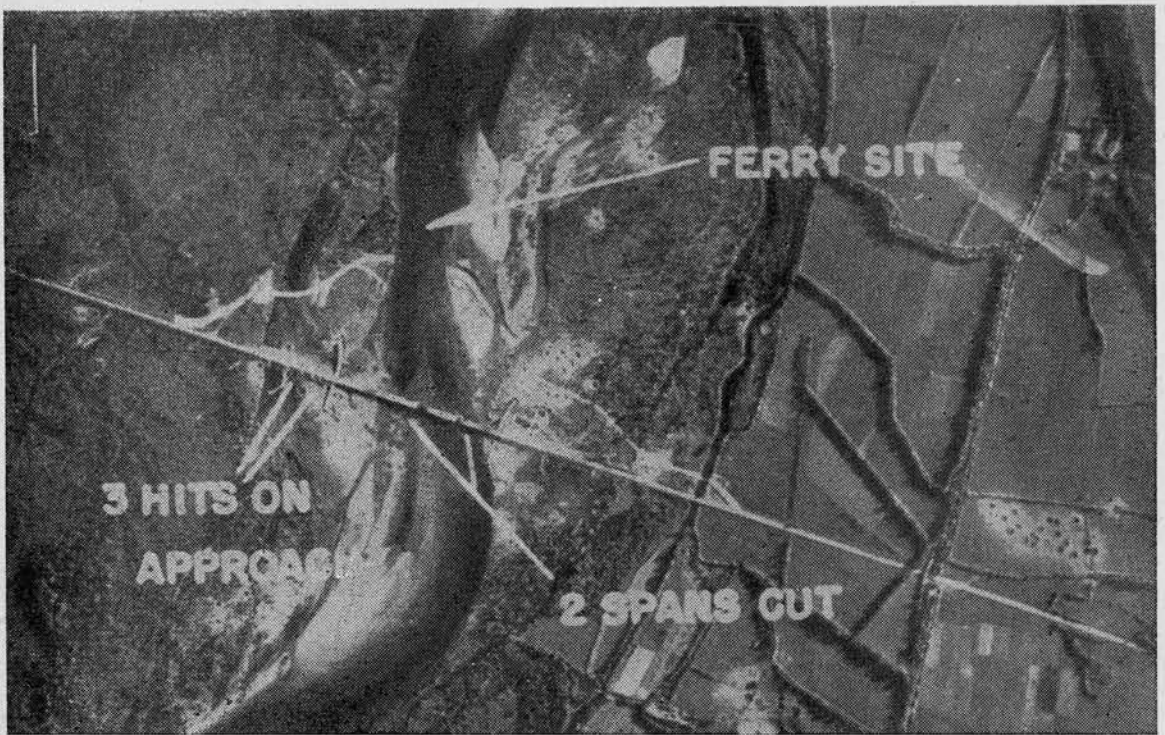
Help with the important work of destroying the enemy's morale was provided by five missions flown by a total of 36 U.S. Mitchells on "nickel"

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*Bombs exploding on the Magenta road bridge.*



*Results of the attack on the Magenta road bridge.*

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(leaflet) dropping over the areas of *Bologna*, *Imola* and *Forlì*.

The enemy's air force was still conspicuous by its absence. M.A.T.A.F.'s combat victories, accordingly, amounted to a mere eight enemy aircraft destroyed and seven "probables." A few more (including reconnaissance aircraft) were destroyed on the ground, particularly by XXII T.A.C. Thunderbolts. M.A.T.A.F.'s operational losses were 20 bombers and 77 fighters (including reconnaissance aircraft); two of these losses only were traced definitely to enemy air action, the rest being due to flak and other causes.

### III. M.A.T.A.F.'s INCREASED COMMITMENTS

#### Capture of Forlì

The Allied Armies' limited gains during the early part of November—and, as it turned out, for the whole of the month—were made almost entirely by Eighth Army troops on the Adriatic front. As previously, the Germans defended stubbornly and exploited the river barriers to the fullest extent, and once again such statements as, "Rain and mud continue to hamper operations" introduced many of the Allied Commander's communiques.

During the first few days of the month a halt was called to the advance of the Canadians' right flank up the east coast, but 5 Corps continued to press on towards *Forlì*—over half the way to *Faenza* from *Cesena* on the *Rimini-Bologna* axis. Polish troops on the left flank, meanwhile, continued to make progress further south.

Beginning on 1st November the Tactical Air Force again assumed commitments in the Balkans, the formations affected being the Desert Air Force and the Tactical medium bomber wings. This additional activity—which is considered elsewhere in the Review—inevitably implied a reduction in D.A.F.'s effort on close-support for the Eighth Army, certain wings, in effect, being held for employment against Balkan targets on a first priority basis. In the event, however, the decrease in D.A.F.'s Italian effort was not so great as anticipated as the weather in *Yugoslavia* was often worse than in *Italy*, permitting Tactical operations on only half the days of the month.

The Desert Air Force's small effort during the first four days of November was mainly directed across the Adriatic, but on the 5th began a spell of four days good flying weather in *Italy* which coincided with the critical phase of the battle for *Forlì*. On the opening day of this good weather spell D.A.F. flew approximately half of its 400 sorties in support of our troops approaching *Forlì* and on the following day a still greater effort was practicable, while ahead of the Canadians bridges over the *Ronco* river south of *Ravenna* were also successfully attacked. On the

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New weapons—so far as M.A.T.A.F. was concerned—were tried out during the month—the rocket and the fuselage incendiary bomb. Evidence as to their worth was not conclusive by the end of October, but their later use proved that they were very definitely worth their salt.

Features of 51st Troop Carrier Wing's effort, apart from the routine work of ferrying personnel and equipment, included the evacuation of nearly 1,500 patients from the forward areas; the ferrying of several thousands of reinforcement troops from *France* to *Italy*; and help with Balkan operations.

7th, as the battle raged in the vicinity of the *Forlì* airfield, some two miles from the town, the close-support effort was further stepped-up; in addition to over 300 D.A.F. sorties against particular close-support targets 92 Tactical U.S. Marauders added weight to the air assault by "fragging" the areas of the enemy's troop concentrations. The next day 90 per cent. of D.A.F.'s 526 sorties were flown in attacks ahead of the advancing 5 Corps, who captured *Forlì* on the 9th.

The best indication of the success achieved by the air support is given by citing typical passages from the messages of thanks and congratulations addressed to the Desert Air Force. The Brigadier commanding a British infantry division engaged in the fighting wrote to the A.O.C., D.A.F., "In my experience air support has never been closer or more accurate, and all my chaps were tremendously stimulated by it. Such co-operation sends their tails right over their heads." On a still higher level the G.O.C., 5 Corps, stated that, "The speed of answering calls, the accuracy of bombing and strafing and the way in which all attacks were pressed home at low level was admired and appreciated by all ranks. The destructive and moral effect on the enemy was the greatest contribution to the success of to-day's operations."

#### The Approach to Faenza

After *Forlì* had fallen the next main item on the Eighth Army's programme was an advance to *Faenza*, still further along Highway 9 in the direction of the eventual goal of *Bologna*.

By 20th November, 5 Corps in their progress towards *Faenza* had established positions along the east bank of the *Montone* river, seven miles north of *Forlì*, and were holding a line along the *Cosina* river, south of Highway 9. Further south still the Poles, after a temporary set-back, were pushing forward in the area north-west of *Castrocaro*, while in the coastal sector advanced Canadian units were only two miles south of *Ravenna*.

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From 10th to 20th November, of the 3,700 sorties flown by the Desert Air Force about two-thirds was devoted to close-support work. The light bombers were again able to add weight to the fighter-bomber attacks, but the Marauders were still non-participants due to unserviceable landing grounds. The main part of the close-support effort was directed to helping the drive on *Faenza* and good immediate results were reported by the forward "Rover" controls. An example of the more general results achieved was the 2,000 yards advance along Highway 9, achieved by a British division on 12th November after the way had been cleared by an intensive air blitz.

In addition to attacks on the usual battlefield targets a sustained offensive (including help from the Tactical U.S. Mitchells) was kept up against the enemy's three bridges at *Faenza*. Until the 18th the bridges were all serviceable—"apparently having charmed lives," as the compiler of the D.A.F. War Diary put it; in the course of the next three days operations, however, all were blocked or damaged.

#### Operation "Harry"

The Eighth Army was now poised for a direct assault on *Faenza*. The plan was to make the main thrust along the axis of Highway 9, the attack on a four division scale to open on 21st November. The first necessity was for 5 Corps to establish a bridgehead over the *Cosina* prior to a further advance to the *Lamone* river. As it was desired to launch a daylight assault, considerable bomber support was necessary.

To aid the establishment of the *Cosina* river bridgehead and the subsequent advance a maximum close-support programme was laid on, bearing the code-name of Operation "Harry." Apart from a further stepping-up of D.A.F.'s effort, the main feature was the calling in of the Tactical U.S. Mitchell wings. In the course of operations on 21st, 22nd and 24th November, the American medium bombers flew a total of 321 sorties against enemy concentrations, particularly nebelwerfers, mortars, field guns and semi-portable guns, in the general *Faenza* area, in order to prevent their use against 5 Corps troops crossing the *Cosina* river. Meanwhile, of the Desert Air Force's total of 1,500 sorties flown from 21st to 24th November, inclusive, about 1,200 were on close-support missions. Both pre-arranged and "Rover" control targets were attacked by the fighter-bombers, a special feature of the assaults being the success achieved by rocket-firing U.S. Thunderbolts. At long last, also, the D.A.F. Marauders resumed operations and they, together with the Baltimore, effectively pounded defended areas, particularly to the south of *Faenza* in the Polish troops' sphere of influence.

In all the "Harry" attacks small bombs were used as it was essential to avoid creating road blocks in the path of our attacking troops.

According to Army sources the operation was largely responsible for preventing the enemy using his reserve forces in the *Faenza* sector.

By 24th November, also, D.A.F. had succeeded in destroying two of the bridges over the *Lamone* at *Faenza* and seriously damaging the third.

During the last six days of November, however, bad weather caused a virtual cessation of the air activity over the Adriatic sector. The only point of interest was the shooting down of two Stuka nuisance-raiders—one by a Beaufighter and one by anti-aircraft fire—on the evening of the 28th over the *Forli-Ravenna* area.

Although swollen streams had now slowed up the advance of our ground troops, by the end of November 5 Corps and 2 Polish Corps held a line along the *Lamone* river from a point four miles north-east of *Faenza* to some nine miles south-west of the town and were preparing for a renewed attack.

#### Negligible Change on the Fifth Army's Front

An indication of the difficulties of the terrain and weather confronting the Allied armies in *Italy* is given by the fact that the November advance of the Eighth Army from the *Ronco* to the *Lamone* river, considered in the preceding sub-sections, was a mere eleven miles (at the nearest points) as the plane flies. And yet this progress could be termed considerable compared with the progress of the Fifth Army against the formidable defence screening the approaches to *Bologna* and in the more lightly-held areas to the west.

It was clear that if a break-through to *Bologna* could not be effected in October there was far less hope of its accomplishment in November, when weather conditions had further deteriorated, the impetus of our assault had been lost and the Germans had further stabilised their lines of defence.

In 2 Corps' sector, therefore, there was virtually no change in our positions during November and the opportunity was taken of regrouping and bringing up reliefs. On the Fifth Army's right flank, however, Indian troops of 13 Corps made limited advances in the *Modigliana* area, beat off a number of counter-attacks and made contact with elements of 2 Polish Corps of the Eighth Army. In the western battle area minor advances were made by 4 Corps in areas to the south-west of *Vergato*—not without local counter-attacks by the enemy; two or three miles progress was made up the *Serchio* valley; and a slight amelioration of our positions occurred on the Ligurian flank.

In view of the largely static military situation, the general bad weather over the forward areas, and the more lucrative targets available in the shape of communications and dumps (considered later), intimate support of the Fifth Army in November by XXII T.A.C. was a minor activity, accounting for less than a third of its total effort. Army targets most consistently

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attacked by the U.S. Thunderbolts and, in the latter part of the month, also by the 8th S.A.A.F. Wing Spitbombers (transferred from D.A.F.), were guns, occupied buildings, strong-points, command posts and headquarters in the central sector at the vulnerable approaches to *Bologna* from the south-east and south; there was also a lesser effort against the defended areas somewhat more to the west in the general *Vergato* area.

#### Blockade of the Frontier Routes

Simultaneously with the direct assistance afforded the Eighth and Fifth Armies, mentioned in the preceding pages, the Tactical Air Force was, as previously, continually engaged in cutting the enemy's Italian lines of communication.

This activity absorbed the greater part of M.A.T.A.F.'s November effort. Expressed in terms of bombs dropped, attacks on Italian communications accounted for 65 per cent. of M.A.T.A.F.'s total of 10,671 tons for the month; in addition, there was an extensive strafing effort (including the employment of rockets).

November witnessed a distinct change of policy in M.A.T.A.F.'s offensive against communications. As indicated on pages 22 and 23, M.A.T.A.F.'s interdiction of communications in the *Po* valley and the cutting of bridges over the *Piave* and *Ticino* rivers, combined with M.A.S.A.F.'s bombing of the more distant vulnerable points on the frontier routes, narrowed but failed to dam up the stream of enemy supplies reaching the German forces in the field. A new tack was clearly necessary and it was decided that M.A.T.A.F. should now concentrate primarily on actually preventing enemy railway traffic entering *Italy* by the north-central and north-eastern frontier routes—the *Brenner Pass* line, the by-pass line from *Trento* to *Cismon* and the routes through north-eastern *Italy*, where they crossed the *Brenta*, *Piave* and *Tagliamento* rivers. M.A.S.A.F. bombers were also available from time to time, as previously, to add weight to the bombing of the frontier routes. A supplementary advantage of the new policy was the fact that the enemy's export of food and industrial equipment from *Italy* to the Reich would also inevitably be handicapped.

On the above-mentioned frontier routes the Tactical medium bombers dropped 44 per cent. of their total November bomb-load of a little over 5,500 tons and M.A.S.A.F. unloaded a further 1,000 tons.

The medium bombers' offensive against the *Brenner Pass* route—the enemy's most vital supply line—began on 4th November and was maintained almost daily until the 19th. For the first week their sphere of operations extended only to *Trento*, while the Strategic heavy bombers covered the more northerly section of the route; later M.A.T.A.F. undertook to attack the entire route. The medium bombers delivered 56 attacks of which four-fifths were against the primary line.

In addition to the few bridges on the route, rail fills were repeatedly bombed and other targets included stretches of track and corniches. The Strategic bombers for their part hit several vulnerable points, including the *Ora* and *Albes* bridges and two marshalling yards, and tore up many portions of line. In addition, a successful M.A.T.A.F. effort was directed against transformer stations on the southern half of the route in order to force the enemy to substitute steam for electric power, with a resultant reduction in traffic capacity. This activity—Operation "Bingo"—is considered separately elsewhere in the Review.

The interdiction of the *Brenner* route was somewhat weakened after 19th November due to adverse weather and the switching of the medium bomber effort against targets at *Faenza* in support of the Eighth Army (mentioned on the preceding page). The XXII T.A.C. fighter-bombers then lent a hand in helping to maintain the *Brenner* cuts—their most outstanding achievements being the blowing up of an ammunition train and a great stretch of track on the by-pass line near *Ospedaletto* on 21st November and the widespread devastation of track on the lower section of the main route a week later.

As a result of the Tactical-cum-Strategic offensive, all evidence indicated that the *Brenner* route was not open to through-traffic for more than 48 hours from 4th November to the end of the month. This aerial blockade was accomplished, moreover, in spite of very heavy flak defences and smoke screens.

Meanwhile, the north-eastern frontier routes were also being attended to. Against these the medium bombers delivered 35 attacks (570 sorties). In particular, ten attacks were made on the railway bridges at *Padua*; other targets attacked were in the territory further north and east as far as the *Tomba* bridge and to the west to *Montebello* on the *Vicenza-Verona* line. The Strategic bombers helped by attacking the three principal bridges over the *Tagliamento* river with a further 236 tons. At the end of November one railway bridge only—that at *Nervesa*—was serviceable over the four main rivers between *Udine* and *Padua*.

As in the case of the *Brenner* route, the M.A.T.A.F. - M.A.S.A.F. attacks rendered through-traffic on the three north-eastern frontier railway routes virtually impracticable from 4th November to the end of the month.

#### Interdiction in Po Valley Continued

In addition to blocking the entrances into *Italy*, it was still necessary to maintain the interdiction of routes across the *Po* valley, in order to isolate the German forces in the line as far as possible from their more forward supply points. It should be noted, however, that north of the *Po* the previous line of interdiction along the *Ticino* river

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—which aimed, inter alia, at preventing the Germans reinforcing north-west Italy—was now switched eastwards to the river *Adda*, as Italians were replacing German troops in the north-west, and this move could be accomplished by short road journeys. Attacks on the *Adda* bridges, in particular, prevented the rail movement of supplies from *Milan* and *Turin* to the battle area and to the east.

The main burden of the *Po* valley communication attacks in November fell on the Tactical fighter-bombers. Their primary area was the territory stretching from the bomb-line to the *Po* river, from the east coast westwards to *Piacenza*; of secondary importance was the area north of the river up to *Verona*. The XXII T.A.C.'s sphere of responsibility indicated on page 21—in view of D.A.F.'s extra Balkan commitments—was extended eastwards to the line *Verona* along the river *Adige* to *Legnano* and then southwards to the *Po*.

Most of XXII T.A.C.'s November effort of over 4,000 sorties against communications targets were flown in the *Po* valley. D.A.F.'s effort against communications was far less owing to its intensive close-support activity, but most of its assaults on bridges and tracks also occurred in the *Po* valley, as well as a quarter of its effort against railway traffic—the remainder being directed across the Adriatic. The XXII T.A.C. destroyed or damaged 98 bridges and its toll of railway carriages and wagons put out of action on five particular days exceeded the 1,000 mark; most damage to railway tracks was done on the line running west from *Verona* and that between *Bologna* and *Piacenza*. The Desert Air Force, for its part, gave regular attention to the *Padua - Ferrara* line and carried out armed reconnaissance on seven days over the railways in the area *Ferrara-Faenza-Ravenna*—all supply lines for the enemy forces facing the Eighth Army. Both XXII T.A.C.'s and D.A.F.'s best results against roads and vehicles were achieved in the course of missions primarily against railway targets.

The medium bombers' activity against the *Po* valley bridges was directed mainly against those in the west-central sector: in addition, ten attacks were made on repaired bridges over the *Po* itself, particularly on the one at *Casale Monferrato*. The Strategic bombers also helped by attacking the heavily-defended *Ferrara* bridge by day and a pontoon bridge at *Ficarolo* by night.

Other attempts to defeat the enemy's transportation of supplies across the *Po* included U.S. Boston and U.S. Thunderbolt attacks on pontoon bridges and ferry sites, on stores of pontoons hidden by day along the banks in readiness for their night use, on river-craft, and on the newly-laid oil pipe-lines.

#### Combined Results

The accepted claims of M.A.T.A.F.'s pilots against communication targets during November (including attacks in *Yugoslavia*) were as follows:—74 bridges destroyed and 14 damaged;

631 cuts on railway tracks; 665 locomotives destroyed or damaged (including a high proportion in *Yugoslavia*); 2,797 units of rolling stock destroyed or damaged; 1,060 vehicles destroyed or damaged; and 28 small craft sunk and 63 damaged.

The Coastal Air Force co-operated by sinking three merchant vessels and damaging another three and sinking seventeen smaller craft and damaging 45 more; putting out of action three bridges and hitting another nine; and destroying or damaging 38 vehicles and 26 units of rolling stock.

M.A.S.A.F.'s effort and general achievements against the enemy's Italian communications have already been indicated.

#### Enemy Supply Situation Still Uncritical

Complementary to the air offensive over the enemy's lines of communication was M.A.T.A.F.'s effort against the German stores already accumulated. In all, about 50 dumps or stores depôts were attacked during November, chiefly during the third week of the month.

Most attention was paid to ammunition and fuel dumps, with a lesser effort against food stores. The best results against fuel dumps, which were now mainly located north of the *Po*, were achieved in the area between the river and the *Brescia-Verona* railway line. The main attacks on ammunition dumps, on the other hand, were delivered against those just behind the front in the *Bologna, Imola* and *Faenza* areas. In all, 44 dumps were destroyed (eighteen fuel, ten ammunition and sixteen other dumps) and, in addition, three factories were put out of action and eleven damaged.

Nevertheless, this destruction of the enemy's supplies and the continued cutting of his communications were still insufficient to prevent Kesselring maintaining a sufficient build-up south of the *Po* for defensive warfare. The enemy's ingenious improvisations for maintaining a restricted stream of supplies and reinforcements to the front, were still successful in denying to the Allied Air Forces the ultimate and logical result of their sustained offensive.

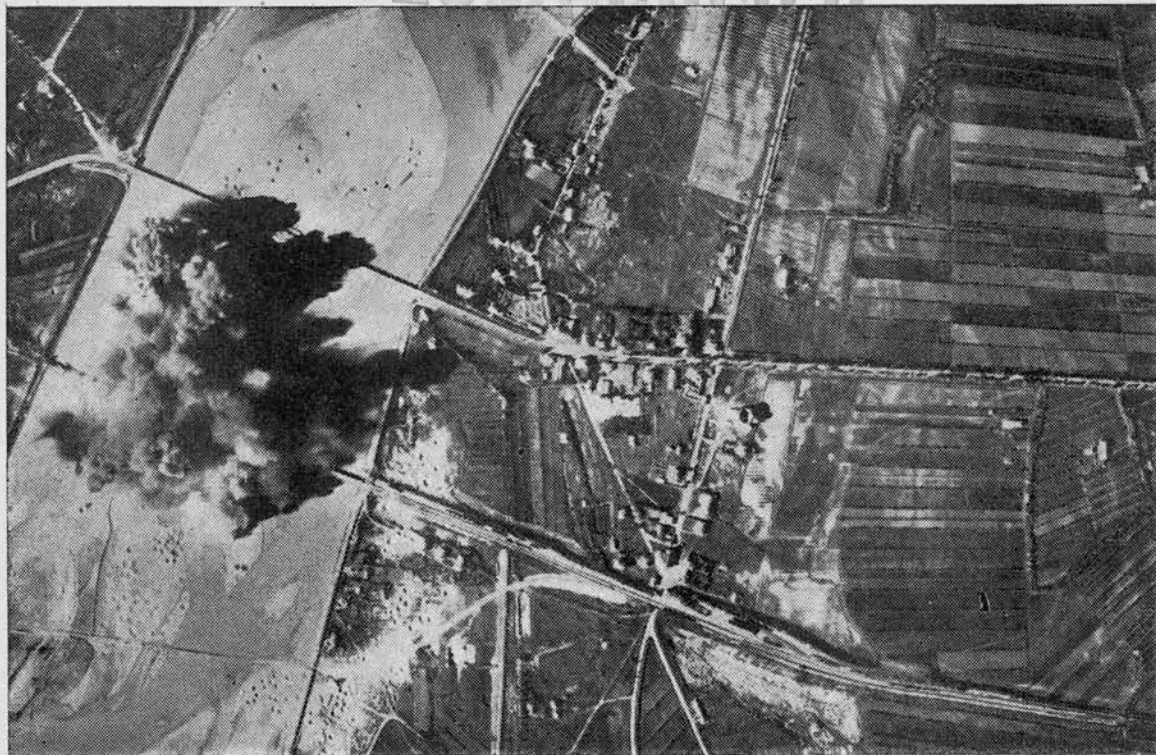
#### Counter Air Force Operations

For the first time for some months an appreciable effort in November was again directed against the enemy's Italian airfields. In view of the disparity in strengths between the opposing air forces, the M.A.A.F. attacks savoured something of a Goliath belabouring Tom Thumb. Yet Tom Thumb—in the shape of the Italian Fascist Republican Air Force, flying mainly ME.109s with German markings—had merited the chastisement for the revived interference, albeit usually token, with Allied medium and heavy bomber missions, particularly over the *Brenner Pass* route.

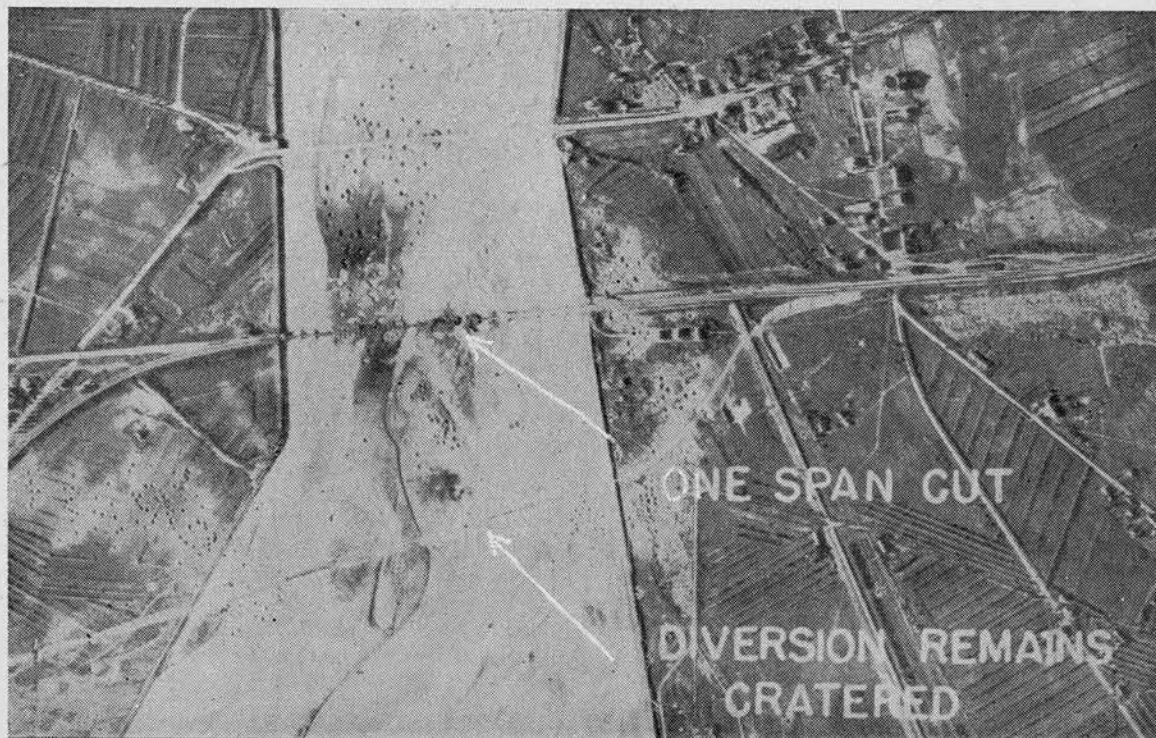
The enemy fighters' main victory was scored on the 5th when three U.S. Marauders were shot down. The loss of five aircraft in achieving this

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*Nervesa R.R. bridge during attack.*



*Nervesa R.R. bridge after attack.*

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success, however, appeared to have dampened the Fascist flyers' ardour as the 30 to 35 fighters observed on the next day studiously avoided combat.

The renewed sporadic activity of enemy fighters meant that the Tactical medium bombers had once again to be given fighter escort; it constituted a threat to the success of our air operations against the frontier routes, small it is true, but best stamped out at the outset; and provided enemy propagandists with the opportunity of puffing up this vest-pocket effort to formidable proportions for use as a morale builder.

Photographic reconnaissance revealed that the Italian fighters, like those of the few remaining German units, were dispersed on several airfields. In particular, the Italian fighters were based mainly at *Villafranca*, *Vicenza*, *Aviano* and *Udine*; the night-harassing Stukas at *Villafranca* and *Vicenza*; the Tac/R ME.109s at *Udine*; and the long-range reconnaissance aircraft at *Bergamo* and *Ghedi*.

On the night of the 17/18th, accordingly, No. 205 Group medium and heavy bombers began counter air force operations again by dropping 212 tons of bombs on the *Udine* and *Vicenza* airfields; on the morrow American heavy bombers continued the good work by covering the same fields and those at *Villafranca* and *Aviano* with a 952-ton bomb-load. The M.A.S.A.F. attacks rendered the *Udine*, *Vicenza* and *Villafranca* airfields temporarily unserviceable and left 50 to 60 enemy aircraft destroyed or damaged on the ground. Meanwhile, the Tactical fighter-bombers had also begun an offensive against the airfield at *Ghedi* and this, together with attacks on the *Bergamo* and *Villafranca* landing grounds, was continued intermittently for the next twelve days, while U.S. Bostons included these targets in their programme of night intruder attacks.

The M.A.S.A.F.-M.A.T.A.F. attacks put paid to any effective activity by the Fascist flyers for the rest of the year and further limited the small G.A.F. effort.

#### Unusual Missions

On several occasions in November M.A.T.A.F. carried out special attacks which were outside the usual run of operations.

Pride of place must be given to a laudable attempt by four U.S. Thunderbolts on 4th November to write finis to Adolf Hitler's career by bombing a *Milan* hotel which the Fuehrer was reported to be gracing with his presence. Unfortunately (for the world) Hitler had left prior to the attack.

Two less bizarre attacks were carried out towards the end of the month. Medium bombers hit a block-ship at *Spezia* which the enemy was trying to manoeuvre into place in the harbour in preparation for a later evacuation; and

Spitbombers unpleasantly interrupted the curriculum of a school for budding swimming saboteurs on an island near *Venice*.

#### Help for Italian Partisans

The Partisan movement in northern *Italy* was now growing fast and it was evident that it needed more help if its sabotage effort in the Germans' rear was to be really effective.

For some time Tactical U.S. Bostons had been flying occasional supply-dropping missions at night over areas at the northern limits of the *Apennines*, and from 12th October No. 205 Group supply-dropping aircraft had included north *Italy* in the areas catered for; dropping during November, in particular, 1,316 containers (151 tons of supplies). Area fighter cover for the latter day supply-dropping was provided by XXII T.A.C.

To help the Partisans operating nearer the actual scene of hostilities, however, M.A.T.A.F. towards the middle of the month assumed responsibility for supply-dropping south of the *Po*. A start with this new commitment was made by escorted Tactical C.47 transports towards the end of the month, when ammunition was dropped to Partisans less than ten miles from the front. In all, 27 tons of vital supplies were dropped—the prelude to a really intensive effort in the following month.

#### M.A.T.A.F.'s Increased Effort in November

During November M.A.T.A.F.'s effective operational sorties (excluding transport aircraft missions) were stepped-up to well over the 17,000 mark. The total bomb-load dropped—10,671 tons—also showed a gratifying increase over the previous month's figure. Some 65 per cent. of the tonnage was expended on Italian lines of communications and about 30 per cent. on close-support missions: the remainder was divided among other targets in *Italy* and objectives in the Balkans. The main results of the offensive operations in connection with the Italian campaign have already been indicated.

Continuing the effort begun in October twelve U.S. Mitchells were made available each week for leaflet dropping. In the latter half of the month these aircraft switched their effort from the central and eastern battle areas to north-west *Italy*, in order to work on the already poor morale of the Fascist Republican divisions. No. 205 Group aircraft also continued to help with "nickelling" over north *Italy*, flying one special sortie and also dropping leaflets in the course of bombing and supply-dropping missions.

A special feature of the air reconnaissance activity was the provision each day of aircraft for artillery reconnaissance over the front for the purpose of directing Allied fire.

M.A.T.A.F.'s combat victories were still few owing to the paucity of the enemy's air activity, nine being destroyed and three probably destroyed. Of the 122 Tactical aircraft (excluding

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transport aircraft) which failed to return from operational missions 25 were bombers and the remainder fighters (including reconnaissance aircraft); as usual, flak caused the majority of the casualties.

The Tactical transport aircraft's main activity, as previously, consisted of the ferrying of personnel and equipment, etc; in particular,

replacement troops were flown up to the Fifth Army. A secondary effort was devoted to the vital activity of evacuating the sick and wounded from the forward zones, 4,783 patients being flown back to base, mainly from hospitals in the *Florence* area. The promising start made with the new drive to supply the Italian Partisans has already been mentioned.

## IV. ENEMY COUNTER ATTACKS

### Capture of Ravenna

As mentioned on page 26 the end of November found the Eighth Army forming up to the *Lamone* river, which had already been crossed well to the south of *Faenza*. The first week of December was to witness the renewal of our offensive in the eastern sector.

The Eighth Army's first attack was launched on 2nd December by the Canadians on the right flank northwards against the enemy positions between the *Montone* and *Lamone* rivers in the direction of *Russi*, with the capture of *Ravenna* as its first main objective.

The initial assault, which achieved immediate success, was aided by a D.A.F. close-support effort of some 400 sorties against targets mainly ahead of the Canadians in the *Russi* area. As usual the Spitbombers played the major part, but considerable help was also given by Baltimores and U.S. rocket-firing Thunderbolts. Forward controls spoke highly of many of the missions flown.

The Canadians, after capturing *Albereto*, by-passed *Russi* and then invested *Ravenna* on the 4th by a pincer movement. The 114 Jaeger Division (the formation so soundly drubbed at *Anzio*) did not wait upon the order of their going but went at once. The Canadians were soon able to report that practically all the remaining ground east of the *Lamone* was free of the enemy.

Meanwhile, on the same day that *Ravenna* was gathered into the bag a strong air effort was directed against the enemy's defences on the north bank of the *Lamone* in the area south-west of *Faenza*, as part of the softening-up process for the crossing of a British division of 5 Corps on the next day. In addition to the greater part of the 590 close-support sorties flown by D.A.F. during the day—the Spitbombers receiving valuable assistance from Kittyhawks, Thunderbolts, Marauders and Baltimores—nearly 50 Tactical medium bombers lent a hand with this pre-offensive blitz by "fragging" selected defended areas.

The 5 Corps troops crossed the *Lamone* three miles south-west of *Faenza* according to plan on the 5th, thus establishing a bridgehead much nearer the town than that already effected by the Poles on the Eighth Army's left flank. The

enemy quickly realised the gravity of this move, however, and immediately switched a fresh mobile formation from his *Bologna* reserve to help to check it. For several days attack after attack was made against the bridgehead and our advance was halted. During this period of conflict, that is from 5th to 9th December, bad weather prevented D.A.F. affording close-support except on the last-mentioned day.

### The Canadians Strike Again

While the attention of the enemy's Tenth Army was rivetted south-west of *Faenza* the Canadians' flanking movement which had engulfed *Ravenna* turned westwards on 10th December to cross the *Lamone* at two points north-east of *Faenza*. The Tenth Army had clearly been caught on the wrong foot and the Canadians' two bridgeheads, at *Villanova* and south-east of *Bagnacavallo*, were swiftly merged and an advance was made to the *Canale Naviglio* by the 12th and a crossing effected the following day.

During the first two days of the Canadians' assault most of D.A.F.'s close-support effort of over 1,000 sorties was directed against quelling opposition, particularly guns and mortars in the path of our advancing troops.

Meanwhile, the enemy had hurriedly switched infantry reinforcements from the Fifth Army front to the *Bagnacavallo* area and these backed up by tanks began a series of counter-attacks. The support of the Desert Air Force, however, helped the Canadians to get supporting weapons across the water and all efforts to dislodge them from their position failed. D.A.F.'s effort on 12th and 13th was rendered abortive by bad weather, but on the following day in spite of continued unpropitious conditions a number of successful fighter-bomber missions were flown immediately ahead of our hard-pressed troops. The Commander of the 12th Canadian Brigade expressed his appreciation of this help under difficulties in the following message: "Air support provided under very unfavourable conditions to-day was of great assistance to us in our operations on the *Canale Naviglio*. Effort this morning succeeded in reducing enemy shelling and mortaring to a minimum."

On the following day, 15th December, the weather became kind again and the Canadians

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received their due share of D.A.F.'s total of 544 close-support sorties.

The D.A.F. Spitbombers deserve special mention for their aid to the Canadians from 10th to 15th December. According to ground reports they did excellent work particularly in straffing slit trenches along the banks of the *Naviglio* canal, in helping to repel tank attacks, and greatly limiting the enemy's shelling and mortaring which were impeding our bridging operations.

#### Fall of Faenza

While the Canadians were making their advance and withstanding enemy counter-attacks north-east of *Faenza* 5 Corps was still repelling attacks to the south-west of the town. As the attacks against the Canadians were petering out our former offensive was resumed on the 14th, New Zealand troops having then taken over from the British division which had secured the bridgehead and defeated all attempts to eliminate it. With the capture of *Celle* by the New Zealanders the enemy was obliged to pull out from *Faenza*, a process which was accelerated by a ground-air assault. Most of the town was in our hands on the 15th but it took several more days to clear all enemy elements from the northern outskirts. South of the town Indian and Polish troops continued to follow up the enemy's withdrawal.

From 15th to 17th December a very considerable part of D.A.F.'s total of 1,000 sorties on close-support missions was directed towards helping the ground forces to invest *Faenza*, particularly by the elimination of gun and mortar positions.

Meanwhile, an air offensive had already been initiated—in so far as weather conditions and other commitments permitted it—against the next junction along the highway to *Bologna*, *Castel Bolognese*. In particular, on 10th December nearly 100 medium bombers, aided by a strong fighter-bomber effort, hit the town and its approaches, and on the 15th the area received 30 air attacks.

The capture of *Faenza* and the progress made beyond the town did not, however, augur an Eighth Army break-through. Already by 17th December the German forces had practically stabilised their position along the *Senio* river and the wearisome task now confronted the Eighth Army of clearing the eastern bank of determined troops in strong positions.

#### Little Change on Fifth Army's Front

During the period of the Eighth Army's thrusts considered in the preceding sub-sections there was little change in positions on the remainder of the front. South of *Bologna* patrolling only was the order of the day and little activity except heavy shelling of the American forces on the Ligurian flank was reported in the western battle area. In 13 Corps' sector only, on the Fifth Army's right flank, was there any appreciable offensive

action, the Corps' drive towards *Imola* along the axis of the *Santerno* river meeting strong effective resistance at *Tossignano*. Further east the Corps had already made contact with Polish troops of the Eighth Army west of *Brisighella*.

During this largely quiescent period on the Fifth Army's front the harrying of communications (considered later) yielded better dividends than air attacks on Army targets, and consequently absorbed the greater part of XXII T.A.C.'s total effort of over 5,000 sorties during the first three weeks of December. Nevertheless, an adequate close-support programme was carried out in spite of intermittent bad weather.

A constant commitment, as previously, was the softening-up of the enemy's fortified positions at the approaches to *Bologna* from the south and south-east and attacks were made on headquarters and dumps (including attacks by medium bombers) in the vicinity. The success achieved against targets in the latter category during the month is indicated on page 36.

From 9th December, onwards, also, considerable close-support was given to 13 Corps in their drive towards *Imola*, when stiff opposition was encountered at *Tossignano*. In particular, during the three days 14th to 16th December most of XXII T.A.C.'s close-support sorties were flown against the enemy's forces counter-attacking in that area.

In the western battle area, meanwhile, the most striking commitment—undertaken with the twin objects of helping the operations of our naval forces and to atone for our shortage of artillery on the Ligurian flank—was the pounding of coastal guns south of *Spezia* by U.S. Thunderbolts. This activity began on the 9th, was continued on the 13th and carried out every day during the third week of the month.

#### Counter-Offensive in Serchio Valley

In the fourth week of December the western end of the Fifth Army's front—previously best known as an area in which press-ganged Italians readily sought admission to the Allied prisoner-of-war cages—again flared into activity.

An intensive repair activity on roads and bridges was noted by the Allies with interest and when a fairly formidable build-up became apparent in the *Serchio* valley XXII T.A.C. at once turned its attention to that area, U.S. Thunderbolts on 22nd December, in particular, hitting targets at *Poggio*, *Piazza*, *Castelnuovo* and *Camporgiano*.

The expected enemy counter-attack materialised on Boxing Day with German forces pressing southwards down the *Serchio* valley. Some easy gains were at once made by the enemy—including the capture of *Barga*, *Galiciano* and *Sommocolonia*—but this was due to our planned withdrawal rather than enemy pressure. By the end of the year, however, 4 Corps (with Indian troops particularly distinguishing themselves

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against the German 148 Infantry Division) had already practically restored the *status quo*, the enemy yielding ground fairly readily.

The XXII T.A.C. during the period of the enemy's curious abortive counter-attack turned practically its entire close-support effort against *Serchio* valley targets. In particular, from 27th to 30th December (when the majority of XXII T.A.C.'s 2,000 plus sorties was devoted to helping the Fifth Army's left flank) nearly 300 buildings in enemy occupied towns and villages were destroyed or damaged. The fighter-bomber attacks on troop concentrations, meanwhile, were helped by a medium bomber assault on troops at *Aulla*. Simultaneously, a full scale effort was also made to cut the enemy's road supply lines to *Spezia* and the north; in particular, during the four days mentioned above U.S. Thunderbolts destroyed or damaged fifteen road bridges on the supply routes and the Tactical medium hit another.

Writing two months after the event it is still difficult to see the point of the enemy's marching up and down the *Serchio* valley à la Duke of York. It is probable that the offensive was originally intended to have a greater scope and certainly the enemy troops in the area had been reinforced—a fresh German regiment had been put into the line, and two independent Alpine battalions and the "Italia" Division were also ready for the fray. Marshal Graziani was reported to have been a keen advocate for the move, but once it was realised that there was no chance of tactical surprise and strong Allied counter-measures had been prepared it is safe to assume that his exhortations received scant notice from Kesselring. While the counter-attack was in progress there was a natural inclination—particularly by German propagandists—to compare the *Serchio* valley effort with Von Rundstedt's offensive on the Western Front. This was rather in the same category as a comparison between a Lancaster and the "Flying Flea." While Von Rundstedt on the Western board of battle was planning to effect at least a temporary "check" Kesselring's Italian move turned out to be nothing but the manoeuvring of a few pawns.

**Enemy Withdraws Across the Senio**

Meanwhile, in the eastern battle area after the fall of *Faenza* the Eighth Army inexorably pushed the enemy rearguards back to their next delaying line along the west bank of the *Senio* river. Actually, this process was not completed by the end of the year, the Germans still continuing to keep one bridgehead over the river. In general, with fresh divisions shielding a further advance along the axis of Highway 9 the Germans' position on the Eighth Army front was stronger at the end of the month than at the beginning.

From 18th December onwards in view of the more static nature of the ground operations increased emphasis was laid by the Desert Air Force on road and railway interdiction—in the

north-eastern Italian areas and the Balkans. Moreover, on six days of the last fortnight of the year bad weather stopped or virtually stopped D.A.F.'s activity altogether.

The main close-support efforts were carried out on 22nd, 26th and 27th, over 900 sorties being flown on missions to help the Eighth Army, mainly by Spit-bombers. The D.A.F. fighter-bombers kept up consistent attacks on the enemy's *Senio* positions from *Alfonsine* to the Fifth Army's sphere of influence. In particular, the offensive was continued against *Castel Bolognese*, gun positions were hit around *Imola*, further up Highway 9, and a considerable effort was directed against resisting enemy troops in the *Lugo* area, north of *Faenza*.

**"Isolation of Italy" Continued**

In spite of the intermittent calls for strong close-support efforts, attacks on the enemy's lines of communication in *Italy* during December still remained M.A.T.A.F.'s most outstanding commitment. In terms of bombs dropped, in particular, this activity absorbed about 62 per cent. of the Forces's total load of 10,105 tons.

As in the preceding month the Tactical Air Force's most ambitious task, the isolation of *Italy* by the aerial blockade of the frontier routes, again headed the list of priorities for the medium bombers—which since the middle of November comprised only one wing of U.S. Mitchells (sixteen squadrons).

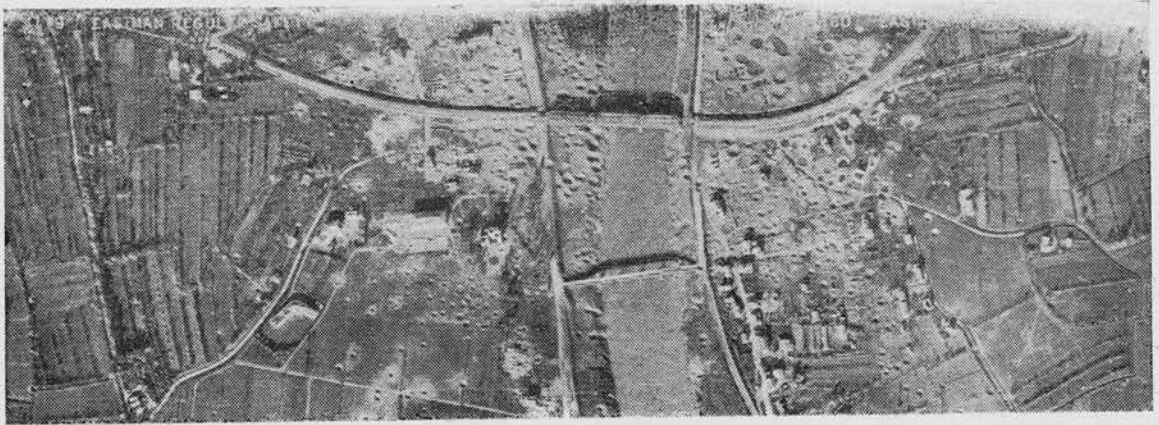
For the greater part of December, however—until Boxing Day, in fact—bad weather screened the frontier routes to a considerable degree and the enemy's repair and improvisation programmes were greatly intensified in order to take full advantage of this temporary protection. In particular, for a fifteen day spell during the middle of the month the mediums were unable to penetrate the overcast over the *Brenner Pass* line and XXII T.A.C.'s fighter-bombers were called upon to cause as much interference as the circumstances permitted.

To a certain extent, however, the equipping of a U.S. Mitchell group with special equipment for "blind bombing" and the use of instruments for bombing in certain cases by the fighter-bombers helped to lessen the limiting effect of bad visibility.

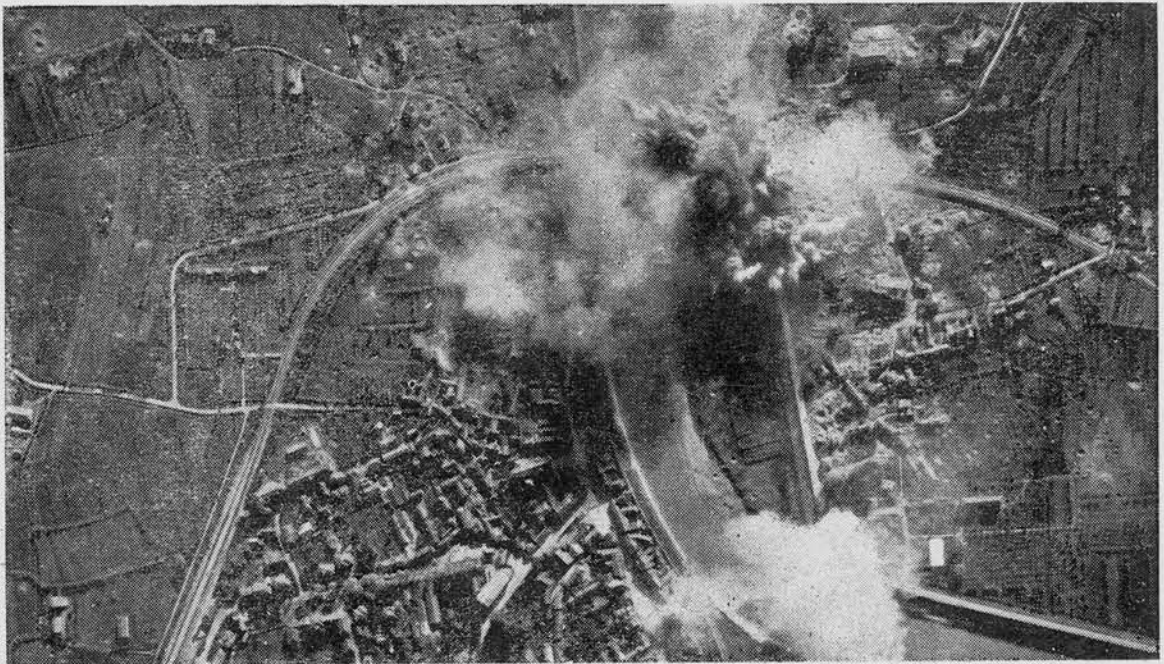
The *Brenner* line again received most attention. The medium bombers carried out 31 attacks on a dozen targets from *San Michele* to *San Ambrogio*; in addition to the bombing of the bridges, fills and diversions, landslides across the opening of the *San Ambrogio* tunnel were caused by the bombing of the cliff above it. The medium bombers most intensive effort occurred during the fine weather spell 26th to 31st December, when a high proportion of the 1,000 plus effective sorties flown were directed against *Brenner* targets. During the same fine period M.A.S.A.F. U.S. heavy bombers lent a hand by dropping 1,000 tons

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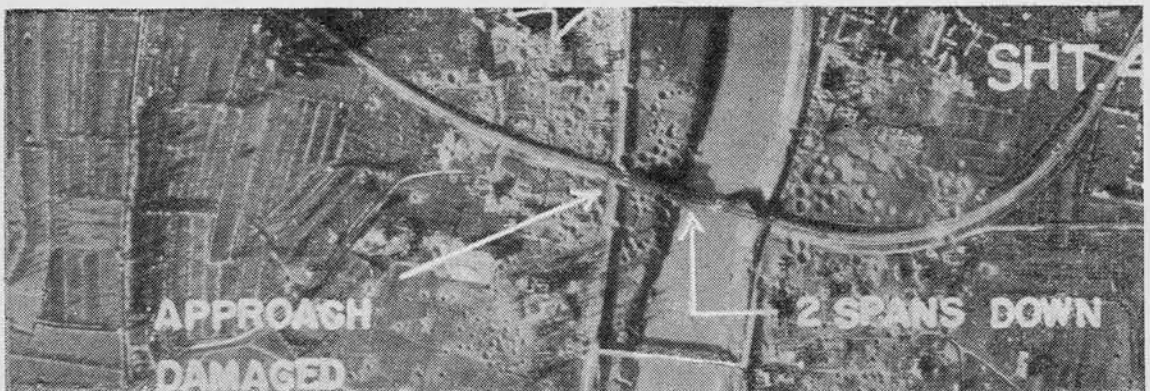
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*Latisana rail bridge before the attack on 11th November, 1944.*



*The attack in progress and, below, the result.*



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on five bridges, the Verona marshalling yards and vulnerable stretches of line.

Tactical U.S. Thunderbolts in their consistent supplementary effort carried out nearly 80 missions against Brenner line tracks and marshalling yards during the month, achieving, in particular, 149 cuts.

By night, meanwhile, Tactical light bombers regularly covered the route, concentrating particularly on harassing the road convoys necessitated by the reduced railway traffic.

From 1st to 28th December, inclusive, the interdiction achieved on the Brenner route was fairly short-lived, the enemy's repair programme coping successfully with the damage inflicted: for the remainder of the month, however, the stepped-up M.A.T.A.F.-M.A.S.A.F. offensive again rendered the route (including the alternate lines via Cison and Belluno) impassable.

The frontier routes from the north-east to Padua received somewhat less attention from the medium bombers than the Brenner line. For the greater part of December M.A.T.A.F.'s primary object, as before, was to cut the bridges over the four main rivers (the Brenta, Piave, Livenza and Tagliamento) and attack other targets in their vicinity, the mediums and fighter-bombers playing equal parts. So far as the latter were concerned those controlled by D.A.F. made nearly 20 attacks on railway targets between the Piave and Livenza rivers, while the XXII T.A.F. fighter-bombers (having extended its sphere of responsibility east of the Adige river in order to relieve D.A.F., which was devoting a considerable effort to helping the Eighth Army) delivered twelve attacks, in particular, on the Brenta river crossings. Meanwhile, tracks were constantly cut over a wide area. In addition, D.A.F. Marauders and Baltimores, reverting to the tactics of the previous spring, strengthened the interdiction by flying just under 500 sorties against the Treviso, Castelfranco and Udine marshalling yards and other junctions during the last eleven days of the year. Towards the end of the month, also, Strategic U.S. heavy bombers hit locomotive depôts in the same areas.

From 5th to 25th December, inclusive, photographic interpretation indicated that on most days through-traffic was possible on two of the north-eastern routes (not the more southerly one on which the repair effort was meagre) up to the Brenna river. Interdiction along the Brenta was easier to achieve than at the rivers to the north-east as the bridges were longer and thus easier to hit and more difficult to repair. Moreover, rail diversions had been laid across the Piave and Livenza river beds, when the water-levels had fallen, and this made interdiction by air attack still more difficult to achieve.

During the fine weather spell at the end of the year, however, the medium bombers extended their attacks northwards against all the most

vulnerable bridges and viaducts across the rivers near Postumia, Piedicolle and Tarvisio. The Strategic bombers also helped by attacking (both by day and night) four targets in the same areas. At the close of December the three north-eastern routes were accordingly cut at their furthest points. In addition, the mediums and fighter-bombers strengthened the interdiction by a series of blocks at the river Livenza, further south.

Thus, at the end of 1944 through-traffic to and from Germany and its south-eastern occupied territory was again impossible.

Po Valley Attacks

Simultaneously with the blockade of the frontier routes the interdiction of communications across the Po valley was maintained as previously.

In particular, continuing the policy of the previous month, lines of communication and movement both north-south and laterally were constantly attacked from the line of the river Adda eastwards. This area received priority in the Po valley offensive. One hundred and fifty attacks were made on open stretches of track in the area between the Adda and Adige rivers and this, combined with the bombing of bridges, particularly across the Oglio, resulted in the cutting of north-south railway communications between Lake Garda and the Po for the greater part of the month. Transportation by day across the Po itself was as previously rendered generally impossible. On the lateral railway in the northern Po valley from Milan eastwards to Verona, meanwhile, XXII T.A.C. took a considerable toll of rolling stock and caused numerous cuts. The Desert Air Force, operating further east, achieved a similar success (particularly in the latter half of the month) on the north-south Padua-Ferrara route.

Attacks on communications in the less important western area of the Po valley had as aim the cutting of the routes to Genoa and Turin, and consisted mainly of U.S. Mitchell attacks on the bridges at Torreberetti, Chivasso, Asti, Voghera and Pontetidone. Rail traffic from Piacenza eastwards south of the Po was largely impracticable owing to XXII T.A.C.'s offensive on railway bridges in this area, which accounted for approximately half of the Command's railway bridge-breaking effort.

The month saw a determined effort to harass the enemy's night transportation activity, particularly across the Po to his forward areas. U.S. Bostons played a great part by regularly bombing ferry points and pontoon bridges, and Beaufighters and R.A.F. Bostons also intruded successfully on enemy night movement both in the southern Po valley and further north. A feature of the night bombers' effort was the flying of over 160 sorties, mainly against targets on routes south of Bologna, under radar control from ground stations.

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The state of interdiction achieved on the enemy's routes in north *Italy* at the close of 1944 is indicated on the map on page 39.

## Combined Results

During December M.A.T.A.F.'s claims against communications targets (all in northern *Italy* except for some results achieved in a small 358 sorties effort over the Balkans) were as follows:—87 road and railway bridges destroyed and 129 more damaged: 711 road blocks and railway cuts: six tunnels damaged: 792 vehicles destroyed and 589 damaged: 141 locomotives destroyed and 328 damaged: 2,675 units of rolling stock destroyed or damaged: and six small vessels sunk and 47 damaged.

The Coastal Air Force in its offensive missions sank a gun-boat and sixteen barges and small craft and damaged 43 other vessels (mainly barges). In attacks on ground targets in *Italy* 60 vehicles were destroyed and 20 damaged; damage was done to 35 units of rolling stock; and one bridge was hit.

The help afforded by M.A.S.A.F. has already been indicated and is also dealt with elsewhere in the Review.

## Increased Effort Against Dumps

A greater bombing effort was directed against the enemy's accumulated supplies in December than during either of the two previous months, more than 600 sorties being flown in the course of over 60 missions. In particular, dumps were often bombed as alternative targets (particularly by the mediums) when low cloud screened the briefed communication targets. Fuel dumps were still No. 1 priority in the stores category, followed by ammunition and general stores depôts, which received particular attention from the fighter-bombers.

The majority of the dumps attacked were in the forward areas, especially around *Bologna*, *Imola* and *Spezia*. In addition, an appreciable effort was directed against dumps in the western end of the *Po* valley, where visibility was normally much better than in the east. The main weakness in the dump striking programme was the scant attention paid to the lucrative stores targets around *Verona* and *Venice*; in these areas, however, the primary need was to disrupt the enemy's communications.

On a number of occasions mediums specially equipped for "blind-bombing" hit cloud-obscured stores targets and on at least one occasion U.S. Thunderbolts also bombed by the use of instruments. The outstanding success of the whole series of attacks, in fact, was achieved by specially-equipped U.S. Mitchells towards the end of the year, when terrific explosions and flames half a mile high were caused as the result of an attack on a munitions depot near *Bologna*.

As a result of the M.A.T.A.F. bomber and fighter-bomber attacks in December 30 dumps (eleven fuel, seven ammunition and twelve other

supply dumps) were destroyed and 27 factories destroyed or damaged.

## Attacks on Enemy Airfields

The enemy's air effort during December remained at a low ebb and counter air force activity was accordingly still a minor commitment.

Most of the airfield attacks were carried out by the 350th Fighter Group (U.S. Thunderbolts) controlled by XXII Tactical Air Command. In the course of the month the group destroyed or damaged 65 aircraft on the ground. The main successes were achieved at *Milan/Bresso* airfield on the 23rd (a mixed bag of twelve aircraft), at *Thiene* on the 24th (fifteen Fascist fighters destroyed and two damaged), and at *Lonate* on Boxing Day (22 Italian torpedo-bombers and other types disabled).

By night, also, Tactical light bombers in the course of their armed reconnaissances regularly covered the dispersal areas and runways of all principal landing grounds in use by the enemy.

## Increased Help for Italian Partisans

Towards the end of November it was decided that the Italian Partisans needed at least 550 tons of supplies monthly in order to maintain their sabotaging and harassing activities. As already mentioned the supply of the Partisans by air was now a M.A.T.A.F. commitment.

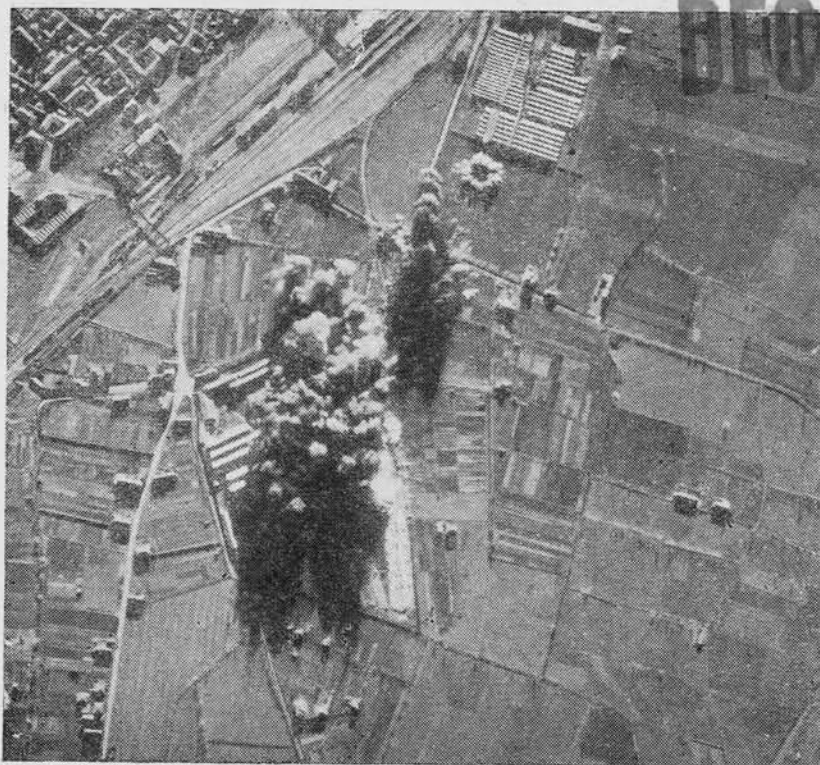
The December weather was the reverse of favourable for supply-dropping missions and on only half the days during the month could the activity be successfully carried out. The Tactical transport aircraft's total sorties on supply-dropping for December came to 360, but nearly 100 of these were abortive owing to bad weather. Three hundred and sixty-five tons of stores, ammunition, etc., were dropped to the Partisans and Special Forces—that is, two-thirds of the amount promised by all Allied means. M.A.T.A.F.'s C.47 effort was supplemented on occasion by Strategic heavy bombers, and towards the end of the year D.A.F. fighter-bombers did some good work in supplying special equipment which needed precision-dropping.

Supply-dropping unless performed accurately is, of course, worse than useless as it is apt to provide windfalls for the enemy. It needs to be emphasised, therefore, that M.A.T.A.F.'s effort, in spite of bad weather, a few failures to receive ground signals and the presence occasionally of enemy fighters, was extremely successful, about 90 per cent. of the supplies dropped apparently being recovered.

On a number of occasions, also, close-support was afforded to the Italian Partisans. These missions included attacks on German positions in the north-western coastal sector to aid a Partisan assault; attacks on enemy security troops at various points which had concentrated to eliminate resistance groups; and, on at least one occasion,

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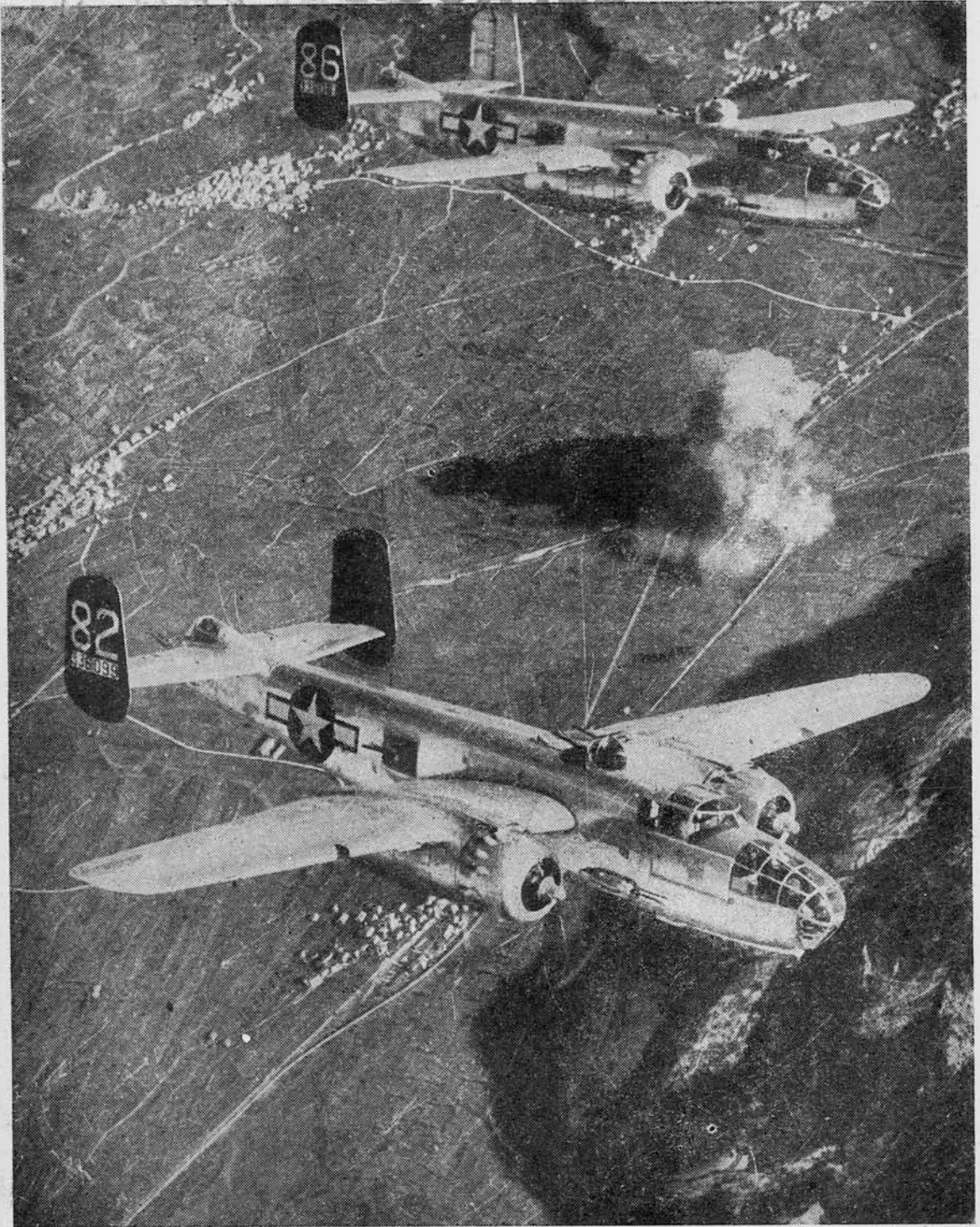


*Excellent coverage caused many fires and explosions in this attack on Tortona ammunition storage, 14th December, 1944.*



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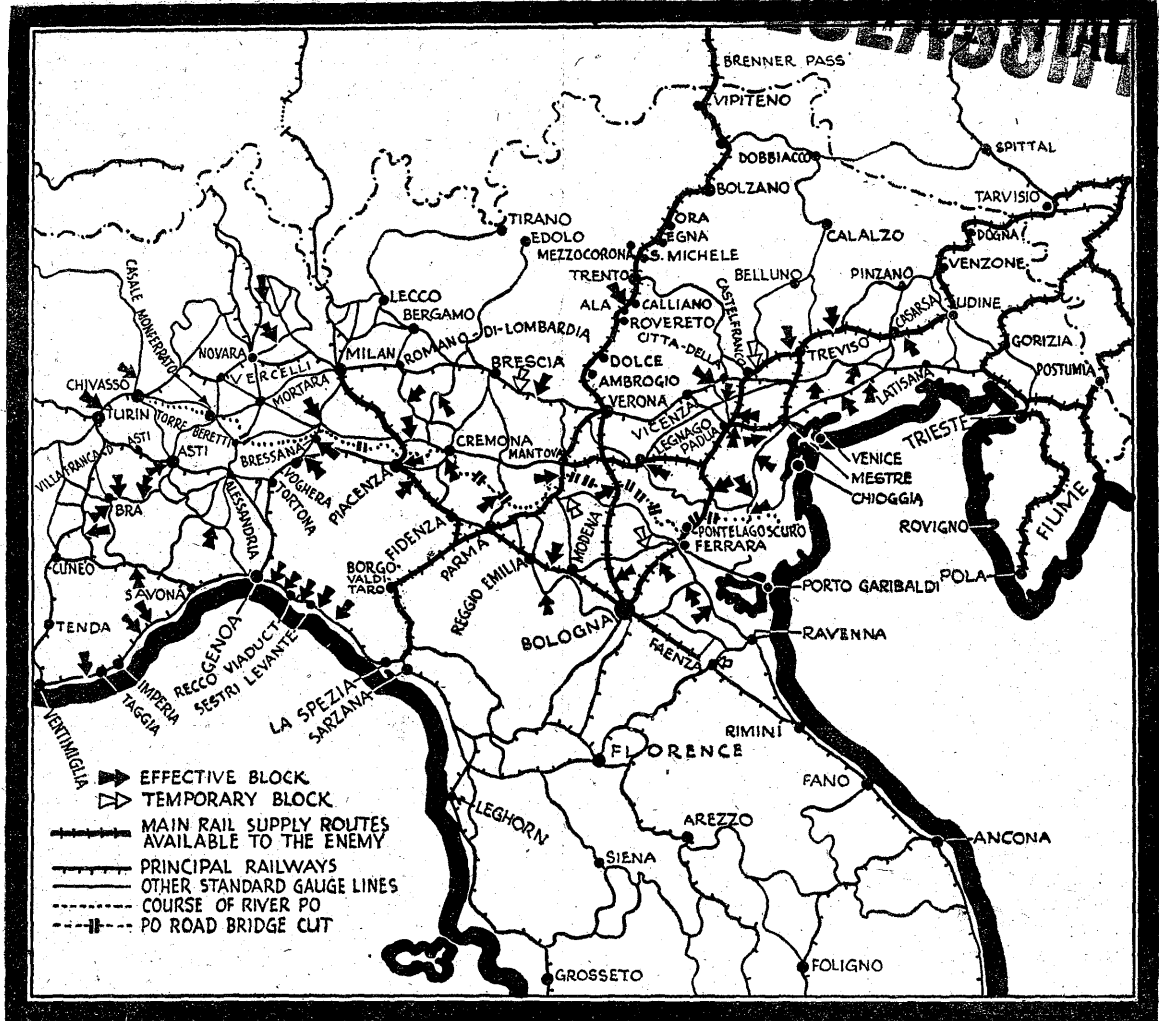
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*In this attack on Castelnuovo R.R. bridge on 16th November, 1944, the decking of the bridge was torn up and the east end knocked off the abutment.*

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Points of Interdiction by Air at 2nd January, 1945.

the deliberate prolonging of a night air raid warning before bombing in order to provide cover for Partisan sabotage activity.

**M.A.T.A.F.'s Sustained Effort in December**

During December M.A.T.A.F.'s effective operational sorties (excluding transport aircraft missions) in spite of bad weather exceeded the 19,000 mark, and the total bomb-load dropped—10,671 tons—fell little short of the November figure.

Approximately 62 per cent. of this tonnage was dropped on lines of communication in north Italy, about 30 per cent. in the course of close-support operations, and the remainder on targets in Italy and in the Balkans. The results of the offensive missions over Italy have already been mentioned.

The usual allotment of U.S. Mitchells for "nickelling" was continued, and "Frontpost," in particular, was delivered to refitting and assembly areas and headquarters behind the

front. In addition, night intruder aircraft also helped with pamphlet-dropping. No. 205 Group aircraft aided the Tactical effort by flying three special "nickelling" missions over northern Italy, dropping one-and-a-half million leaflets and many more were dropped in the course of their bombing missions.

Reconnaissance commitments continued to be extensive. Of M.A.T.A.F.'s total effort of some 1,570 sorties on these duties approximately 48 per cent. was absorbed by photographic commitments, 24 per cent. by tactical reconnaissance, fifteen per cent. by weather missions, and thirteen per cent. by artillery reconnaissances.

M.A.T.A.F.'s combat victories in December, strangely enough, totaled the same as in the previous month—five destroyed and three "probables." Night fighters, in particular, shot down three raiders and probably destroyed another. The toll taken of grounded aircraft is mentioned on page 36. One hundred and twenty-four Tactical aircraft were lost on operational

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missions in all areas—24 bombers and the remainder fighters (including reconnaissance aircraft). Flak and bad weather accounted for practically all these casualties.

M.A.T.A.F.'s air transport wing continued its ferrying of troops, equipment and supplies in *Italy* and to and from *Italy*, *Corsica* and *France*. In addition, over 5,000 sick and wounded were evacuated from the forward areas. The increased help afforded by the C.47s to the Italian Partisans has already been considered: a less agreeable but urgent duty, dealt with elsewhere in the Review, was the flying of troops and ammunition into *Greece* in early December to help counter the E.L.A.S. uprising.

#### Situation at End of 1944

During the last quarter of 1944 there was no fundamental change in the strategic position in *Italy*. In particular, the previous rupture of the Gothic Line had not precipitated the enemy's withdrawal across the *Po* as expected.

On the other main European battle fronts at the close of the year the foreboding lull preceding the Russians' cyclonic drive extended along the greater part of the Eastern Front, while in the west Von Rundstedt's counter offensive—one of the last desperate throws of a High Command turned gamblers—was already showing signs of petering out. The Southern Front in *Italy* alone presented the picture of a strong line tenaciously held. This successful defence was not "all done by mirrors," as the saying of the moment has it. Apart from the enemy's skilful exploitation of difficult terrain and bad weather (which has been stressed in general and particular terms in this and previous issues of the Review) it must be emphasised that reinforcements arrived without break to Kesselring's forces and continued to exceed losses. It is astounding—and clearly proves the importance attached by the Germans to holding out in *Italy*—that towards the end of the year, when Von Rundstedt was making his supreme effort, reinforcements from *Norway*

were allowed to pass undiverted behind the entire Western Front to their Italian destination.

At the close of 1944 Marshal Kesselring had at his disposal 26 German divisions (including one Panzer, three Panzer-Grenadier and two Paratroop divisions), one Cossack cavalry division, four Italian divisions and various security formations. There were then sixteen German and one Italian divisions in the line and four German and one Italian divisions in reserve. Other formations had guard commitments in the rear, the Italian Fascist forces, in particular, now bearing the sole responsibility for protecting the Ligurian coast.

The overwhelming air superiority enjoyed by the Allies could not be brought fully to bear on the enemy owing to adverse weather. Nevertheless, during the last three months of 1944 the Mediterranean Allied Tactical Air Force flew over 50,000 effective sorties (excluding transport aircraft missions) and dropped more than 29,560 tons of bombs, almost entirely in Italian operations. In addition, the Strategic and Coastal Air Forces also rendered their own specialised help. Such advances as were made by our ground forces were aided and in certain cases rendered possible by accurate close-support missions, and the air offensive on the enemy's lines of communication, although not succeeding in damming-up his stream of supplies entirely, at any rate ensured that Kesselring lacked the means to initiate any major offensive move.

The general situation in *Italy* at the end of 1944 bore a marked resemblance to the stalemate prevailing at the close of the preceding year. Then Kesselring's forces stood on a line covering *Cassino* and it was not until the "Diadem" offensive began in the following May that they were driven northwards. Similarly, it now appeared unlikely that the enemy would be budged from his positions covering *Bologna* until the return of fine weather again made practicable an Allied ground-air offensive on a grand scale.

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# The Mediterranean Allied Strategic Air Force

(Trends of Activity October to December, 1944)

THE WRITING OF AN ACCOUNT of activities by an air force over a limited period presents a far more difficult problem than covering the activities of land or sea forces. They, at least, have definite objectives which they either gain or lose, but aircraft visit the same objectives time after time, and their results are often neither spectacular (in the strategical sense) nor even, at times, individually assessable. Air operations for three months can thus make extremely dull reading, unless they can be handled and written as part of an overall assault plan or plans. A vista of time is really required, however, to fit the varying pieces of the puzzle together in their relative importance, but in the following survey of the work of the Mediterranean Allied Strategic Air Force during the last quarter of 1944 an attempt has been made to present the story in the most comprehensible way. The account is divided into four parts; Part I gives the Strength and Composition of M.A.S.A.F.; Part II covers the Function and Scale of Effort, including limiting factors; Part III shows the Direction of Effort broken into sub-sections by aircraft employment and type of target; Part IV is a short Conclusion.

## PART I.

### STRENGTH AND COMPOSITION

The strength and composition of the Mediterranean Allied Strategic Air Force during the last three months of 1944 remained approximately the same as in the preceding quarter. The U.S.A.A.F. elements comprised the Fifteenth Air Force, and the R.A.F. and Dominion elements No. 205 Group. The Fifteenth Air Force, under the command of Major-General N. F. Twining, U.S.A.A.F., with headquarters at Bari, consisted of four bomber wings of U.S. Liberators (B.24s) comprising fifteen groups of four squadrons each, and one U.S. Flying Fortress (B.17) bomber wing, made up of six groups also of four squadrons each. The Fifteenth Air Force fighter squadrons were now organized as follows: the XVth Fighter Command, under Major-General ... formation, formed into two fighter wings for three groups of U.S. Lightnings (P.38s) and three groups of U.S. Mustangs (P.51s). Other operational formations included a photo-

graphic reconnaissance group and a weather reconnaissance squadron.

No. 205 Group, commanded by Brigadier J. T. Durrant, S.A.A.F., continued its conversion from a medium to a heavy bomber group. Its R.A.F. strength comprised three Wellington, one Wellington/Liberator, one Liberator and one Halifax/Liberator squadrons; its Dominion element consisted of two S.A.A.F. Liberator squadrons.

Although the Fifteenth Air Force and No. 205 Group remained predominantly day and night striking forces respectively, they changed roles periodically during the quarter under review—the American heavy bombers carried out a number of night raids, and aircraft of No. 205 Group made a considerable day effort in bombing and supply-dropping missions, plus the transportation of troops and supplies to our land forces in Greece in December.

## PART II

### FUNCTION AND SCALE OF EFFORT

The function of the Strategic Air Force remained the same. Primarily, it continued to attack strategic targets in the southern part of the Reich and in the few remaining south-east Europe occupied or satellite states, thus maintaining, together with the Anglo-American air offensive launched from bases north and west of the enemy, the two-way bombing of the German war resources and lines of communication. Subsidiarily, the Force aided the Allies' campaign in Italy, the Russian offensive in the southern sectors of the Eastern front, the Yugoslav Partisan activity and the Allied operations in Greece.

The total bomb load dropped during the quarter, 50,000 tons, was, however, only a little more than thirty per cent. of the tonnage dropped by the Force in the preceding three months.

#### Factors Limiting the Effort

Factors limiting the effort were the weather, which deteriorated more and more as winter advanced, and the limitation and loss of targets for Italian based aircraft as vast stretches of territory in south and south-eastern Europe fell

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into Allied hands under advances by the Russians, and the German evacuation of Greece and withdrawals in Yugoslavia.

### Blind Bombing

Restriction by bad weather would have been greater but for the increasing use of the Pathfinder technique for blind bombing through 10/10ths cloud or smoke overcast, which ensured that when the use of major forces was prohibitive the aerial offensive could be maintained by small numbers of specially equipped aircraft. Sufficient success was achieved to inspire a signal from the Commanding General of the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces in December commending the Fifteenth Air Force as "the leading exponent in the world today of blind bombing" and continuing, "as a result of its December attacks on oil and the amazing results accomplished, it has easily taken that front rank position."

### Fifteenth Air Force Completes First Year of Operations

On 31st October, 1944, the Fifteenth Air Force completed its first year of operations under M.A.S.A.F., during which it flew 142,787 sorties, dropped 192,000 tons of bombs, shot down 3,594 enemy aircraft in combat and destroyed 2,000 on the ground, for a total loss of 2,200 aircraft. A creditable twelve months effort which not only caused the enemy considerable damage and loss, but which proved the value of the *Foggia* airfields.

### Analysis of Effort for the Quarter

The following monthly analysis of the scale of effort for the whole Strategic Air Force reveals the consistency of that effort, when the shortage of daylight hours and general deterioration in the weather with the progress of winter is remembered.

#### Effective Sorties

	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Total
15th Air Force ...	5,849	6,895	7,132	19,876
205 Group ...	924	1,556	1,164	3,644
15th A.F. Fighters	4,230	4,735	6,166	15,131
<b>Totals</b> ...	<b>11,003</b>	<b>13,186</b>	<b>14,462</b>	<b>38,651</b>

#### Bomb Tonnage Dropped

15th Air Force ...	13,206	14,898	15,843	43,947
205 Group (incl. mines) ...	1,870	2,554	1,236	5,660
15th A.F. F/Bs ...	19	263	93	375
<b>Totals</b> ...	<b>15,095</b>	<b>17,715</b>	<b>17,172</b>	<b>49,982</b>

#### Supplies and Leaflets Dropped

205 Group				
Supplies (in tons)	210	712	482	1,404
<b>Leaflets</b> (thousands) ...	<b>19,573</b>	<b>26,500</b>	<b>10,247</b>	<b>56,320</b>

### Main Targets Represented by Bomb Tonnage

	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Total
R/Rs and M/Ys ...	7,675	8,141	7,153	22,969
Oil Inst. ...	3,146	4,836	7,664	15,646
Enemy Concent. ...	1,418	1,632	173	3,223
Other Industrial Targets ...	2,183	346	888	3,417
Airfields ...	422	1,360	21	1,803
Dumps ...	100	750	305	1,155
Enemy movement ...	—	324	788	1,112
Highways ...	59	256	122	437

### Percentage Employment of Fighter Aircraft

	per cent.	per cent.	per cent.
Escort Duty ...	76	65	88
Fighter Sweeps and Ground Strafing ...	16	15	3
Recce ...	6	8	7
F/Bomber ...	2	7	1
Misc. ...	—	5	1

### Counter Air

E/ac Destroyed in Combat ...	48	36	83	167
E/ac Prob. Destroyed in Combat ...	3	7	21	31
E/ac Destroyed on Ground ...	268	30+	17	315

### M.A.S.A.F. Aircraft Lost or Missing as F/B Casualties

15th A.F. ...	139	128	199	466
205 Group ...	27	24	7	58
15th A.F. Fighters	63	70	60	193
<b>Totals</b> ...	<b>229</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>717</b>

### M.A.S.A.F. Aircraft Lost or Missing (F/B) as a Percentage Against Effective Sorties

15th A.F. Bombers—			
139	128	199	
$\frac{139}{5,849} = 2.37\%$	$\frac{128}{7,895} = 1.62\%$	$\frac{199}{7,132} = 2.78\%$	
<b>Average</b> $\frac{466}{20,876} = 2.23\%$			

Fighters—			
63	70	60	
$\frac{63}{4,230} = 1.46\%$	$\frac{70}{4,735} = 1.47\%$	$\frac{60}{6,166} = .97\%$	
<b>Average</b> $\frac{193}{15,131} = 1.27\%$			

205 Group—			
27	24	7	
$\frac{27}{924} = 2.92\%$	$\frac{24}{1,556} = 1.54\%$	$\frac{7}{1,164} = .60\%$	
<b>Average</b> $\frac{58}{3,644} = 1.59\%$			

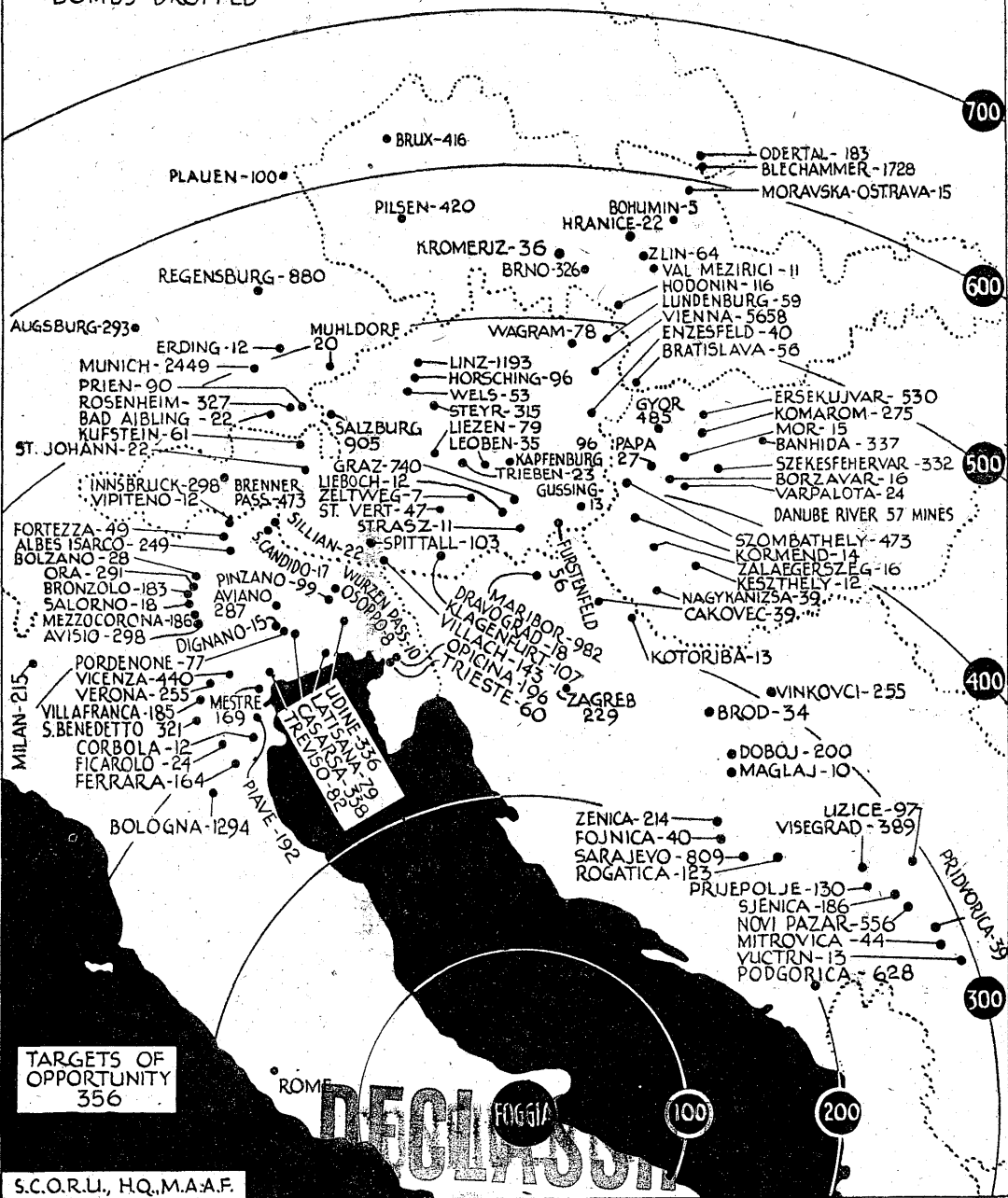
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# STRATEGIC BOMBING EFFORT

OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER, 1944

FIGURES AFTER NAME OF PLACE INDICATE TONS OF BOMBS DROPPED

ARCS INDICATE DISTANCES IN MILES FROM FOGGIA



## PART III

## THE DIRECTION OF EFFORT

## Oil Targets

During the six months period April to September, 1944 the dominant commitment of the Mediterranean Allied Strategic Air Force was the curtailment—in co-ordination with the operations of Bomber Command and the Eighth U.S. Air Force operating from *Great Britain*—of the enemy's oil production. This offensive had met with such success that in September, owing to the combined effects of bombing and the loss (particularly in *Roumania*) of oil production and storage centres through capture by the Allies, the enemy's monthly total output of all finished products was estimated at 314,000 metric tons, representing only slightly more than 23 per cent. of the pre-attack level; the September petroleum output, in particular, was put at 106,000 metric tons or only 20 per cent. of normal production. There is no doubt that the decline in production and the drain on strategic reserves seriously hampered the German armies and the Luftwaffe at a most critical point in the war; moreover, inevitable drastic reductions in allocations to industry prevented the necessary stepping-up of war production generally to meet the increased demands of intensified operations.

Although the last statement is in actual fact true, it may well be challenged in view of Von Rundstedt's offensive launched in December, especially when captured documents revealed that some, at least, of the infantry divisions were better supplied with fuel than they had been for months.

The answer is threefold. In the first place the enemy had conducted a vigorous and thorough fuel saving campaign during the late summer and autumn, forcing down the use of motor transport by 40-50 per cent., substituting rail transport in its place even right into the forward areas, and then using horse drawn vehicles to complete supply. Not the least important factor aiding these conditions was the static nature of operations during this period, and it is doubtful whether, without this prime factor, even with the drastic fuel economies he effected, the enemy would have been able to reduce his fuel needs to the low level of his "saving" allocations.

In the second place it should be remembered that oil installations are extremely difficult targets to bomb, owing to the large number of small units which comprise them, and the area over which they are spread. *Blechhammer* south synthetic refinery for example sprawls over an area of 450 acres, and although during 1944 it was attacked fifteen times and sustained the weight of 3,500 tons of bombs, mainly 500-lb. long-fused to allow penetration, it was never put out of action completely. In fact it can be confidently asserted that it is almost an impossibility to bring all activities of an oil

installation to a standstill for any appreciable period by bombing alone.

The third portion of the answer to the above problem, which is really a corollary of the second, lies in the first class repair arrangements initiated by the Germans, in which dumps of material were placed ready to hand, so that repair gangs were at work almost before the last bomber had departed. The thoroughness of these counter-measures are typical of German ingenuity in counteracting our attacks, not only on sources of production, but also on lines of communication.

## Progressive Attacks

In October, out of a total of 3,146 tons of bombs dropped in six days operations on oil installations by the Fifteenth Air Force, the largest weight (1,175 tons involving 480 heavy bomber sorties) fell on the two synthetic oil plants at *Blechhammer* in *German Silesia*. The southern plant was attacked twice, chiefly by synchronous Pathfinder technique, but bad weather prevented results commensurate with the effort. In the northern plant, however, most of the installations to the north and west were hit and oil fires started.

Other main attacks included the *Odertal* petroleum refinery (estimated original monthly output of 7,000 tons refined products) where a power house, transformer station and control house were damaged and a gas holder destroyed; *Bruw* synthetic oil plant in *Czechoslovakia*, where two attacks were hampered by cloud overcast; *Lobau* oil refinery in the *Vienna* area (estimated monthly output 17,000 tons of refined products); the *Vienna/Winterhafen* oil storage installations and adjoining marshalling yards, where considerable devastation was caused by 245 U.S. Liberators dropping 558 tons of bombs. Other targets included a few oil refineries in *Austria* and *South Germany*, and the oil storage depots at *Regensburg* in *Germany* proper.

The Eighth U.S. Air Force and Bomber Command, operating from *Great Britain*, attacked the oil installations at *Hamburg*, *Wesseling*, *Bottrop*, *Buer*, *Sterkrade/Holtzen* and *Wanne/Eikel*. Heaviest load in one raid was 1,656 tons dropped on *Hamburg* by American heavies.

In spite of these operations, however, the enemy's total output of all oil production for October was believed to show an increase of 122,000 metric tons over the previous month, petroleum products in particular showing an increase of eleven per cent.

This upward trend clearly called for a bigger Allied air effort to stop it, and in November, aided by improvement in the use of blind bombing technique, the Fifteenth Air Force was able to step up its effort on oil installations by 1,690 tons to a total of 4,836. The main weight (over 3,000 tons) was sustained by six oil refineries and an oil depot in the general *Vienna* area, which, owing to the continued constriction of *Greater Germany*, were now of increased importance and



*The road and railway bridge at Maribor under attack on 14th October, 1944.*

had, consequently, undergone considerable repairs. *Florisdorf* refinery was bombed on four days, the attack on 5th November by 368 U.S. Liberators and 132 U.S. Fortresses representing the largest M.A.S.A.F. force up to that time to bomb a single target. But at *Florisdorf*, as at *Korneuburg*, *Schwechat*, *Vosendorf*, *Lobau*, and *Winterhafen* in the same area, and also at *Regensburg*, cloud cover generally prevented assessment of results. Uncertain results were also experienced at *Linz*, although five attempts (including two at night)

were made by a total force of 268 aircraft. The *Moosebierbaum* refinery, fifteen miles north-west of *Vienna*, was hit on three occasions (once with a 450 tons bomb load) and severe damage was believed to have been inflicted.

Better luck was experienced at *Blechhammer* south, the plant being rendered temporarily inactive as the result of three attacks involving a total bomb load of 548 tons.

Air operations from *Great Britain* were sustained against the same targets as in October,

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plus the oil installations at *Gelsenkirchen, Merseburg, Homberg, Castrop-Rauxel, Dortmund* and *Misburg*.

It was evident that the Germans placed greater value on the targets selected by Bomber Command and the Eighth U.S. Air Force, for whereas they offered little opposition other than flak to the Fifteenth Air Force, over the targets in *Germany* large formations of fighters attempted to intercept our aircraft. During three days of intense activity (2nd, 26th and 27th November), however, the Eighth U.S. Air Force discouraged this fighter activity by shooting down 386 enemy aircraft.

An assessment of the enemy's oil output for November put the figure at 34 per cent. of normal pre-attack production, an increase of two per cent. on October, indicating that although our attacks were keeping production down to approximately one-third of normal output, they were not succeeding in forcing it lower.

By 5th December there were thirteen synthetic oil plants known to be in action in Axis-controlled territory, but apart from several widely scattered refineries and those in the *Vienna* area, the enemy's entire oil output now within the Fifteenth Air Force sphere of operations was represented by the five synthetic oil installations at *Blechhammer North and South* and *Odertal* in *German Silesia*, *Oswiecim* in *Polish Silesia*, and *Brux* in *Czechoslovakia*.

In consequence these five targets received 61 per cent. of M.A.S.A.F.'s total bomb load of 7,664 tons dropped on oil installations during December. Individual bomb loads on plants were—2,112 tons on the *Blechhammer* plants, 1,158 tons on *Brux*, 1,138 tons on *Odertal*, and 279 tons on *Oswiecim*. The most intensive period of operations covered the five days, 16th to 20th December, over 1,300 effective heavy sorties being flown on these missions, in addition to a strong effort against oil targets other than those indicated above, 900 tons being dropped during the month in the *Vienna* area and 600 tons on *Regensburg*.

Most of the bombing was done by Pathfinder technique through cloud and smoke overcast with such success that it was considered that production in the areas subjected to attack was temporarily reduced to only ten per cent. of their potential capacity, a result which earned the commendation previously quoted.

In general during this month, as throughout the quarter, enemy air opposition over the Fifteenth Air Force's oil targets was slight, the strongest interception encountered being that on 17th December by 100 ME. 109s and FW. 190s between *Brno* and *Odertal*, of which the strategic bombers claimed 26 destroyed and two probables, and their fighter escort 22 destroyed and three probables. U.S. losses were fifteen Liberators, four Lightnings and two Mustangs.

The air offensive from the United Kingdom against oil did not reach the scale of the

November effort, the overriding commitments during this period being the pounding of communications to dislocate the enemy's supply of the Western battle area and to impede Von Rundstedt's attack.

It can be said with some truth, however, that by the end of 1944 the cumulative effect of repeated air attacks on the German oil industry was becoming more and more apparent and the rising trend, especially in synthetic production, had been checked.

#### Attacks on Other Industrial Targets

The tonnage of bombs dropped by M.A.S.A.F. aircraft during the quarter on other industrial objectives was 2,183 during October, 346 in November, and 888 during December. The offensive on these targets would have been greater and more effective but for the restriction by bad weather. As it was, the main effort was directed against the most important war production centres within M.A.S.A.F.'s sphere of responsibility—those in *Austria*. The industrial areas in *Vienna* generally, and in particular ordnance depots, the *Ostereichische* motor works and A.F.V. diesel engine works received most attention. On many occasions cloud cover completely obscured the target, and, especially in October before the improvement in synchronous Pathfinder technique, results were disappointing. Post raid reconnaissance photographs of the assembly plant and aero engine works at *Steyr*, for example, revealed no damage; results were also meagre on the aircraft factory at *Klagenfurt*, on a large ordnance depot south of *Vienna*, in *Germany* proper at the *Munich-Allach* plant (engaged in the production of B.M.W. 801 aero-engines) and on a factory at *Augsburg* producing diesel engines for armoured vehicles. At the *Skoda* works at *Pilsen* in *Czechoslovakia*, likewise, at that time the largest undamaged enemy armament plant turning out heavy guns, tanks etc., results usually could not be assessed after attacks. Considerable damage was inflicted, however, on the *Graz Neudorf* aircraft factory, the tank works at *St. Valentin*, ordnance depots and the *Herman Goering* works at *Linz* and, nearer at hand, the three works at *Milan* believed to be manufacturing road vehicles and armaments and executing ordnance repair for the German armies in *Italy*.

#### Attacks on Lines of Communication

The term "Lines of Communication" becomes elastic when applied to attacks by the Strategic Air Force, for targets under this nomenclature ranged from bombing the *Brenner Pass* route in *Northern Italy* to marshalling yards in *Munich*, from bombing marshalling yards in *Hungary* to mining the *Danube*. (A full account of the last activity is given on page 131). There is also difficulty in the separation and classification of the effort, for on some occasions marshalling yards were bombed in conjunction with attacks

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on oil depots and industrial targets, partly due to spillage experienced in the Pathfinder method of bombing.

#### In Southern Germany and Austria

As already indicated oil was target No. 1 throughout the quarter, and in general therefore the bombing of railway centres in *Austria* and *Bavaria* represented attacks on alternative or opportunist targets by parts of large bomber formations which were unable to carry through their briefed attacks owing to bad weather. In October such attacks occurred on an average of one day in every three, Austrian targets including the marshalling yards at *Graz*, *Innsbruck* and *Spittal*, and Bavarian targets including *Munich* west marshalling yards (a primary target on the night 28/29th October and the following day), *Rosenheim* and *Salzburg*.

The west, and to a lesser degree the east, marshalling yards at *Munich* were also heavily attacked in November, 1,471 tons of bombs being dropped on this key communication centre during four days and two nights. Smaller scale attacks were also made on *Augsburg*, *Regensburg* and again on *Salzburg* and *Rosenheim*. Attacks were reported on the Austrian railway targets already enumerated, in addition to the marshalling yards at *Villach*, *Klagenfurt*, *Gussing* and *Linz*, the latter being a bottle-neck through which all east-west traffic in the *Danube* basin must pass. Industrial targets attacked at the same times included an ordnance depot at *Graz*, a tank factory at *Kapfenburg*, an aircraft factory at *Klagenfurt* and the Herman Goering works at *Linz*.

In December even greater emphasis was laid on the above railway targets in *Austria* and *Southern Germany*, the lateral railway communications system being considerably dislocated, for example, by further attacks on *Linz*; on *Innsbruck* and *Salzburg* on the two main lines from *Vienna* to *Western Germany* and junction points of secondary lines carrying east-west traffic; on *Rosenheim*, the main marshalling yard on the electrified line between *Salzburg* and *Munich*, and a junction point with the electrified line to *Innsbruck* and the *Brenner Pass* line; on the marshalling and goods yards in *Vienna* itself, and again on these at *Villach*, *Graz*, *Regensburg*, *Klagenfurt* and *Wels*, plus lesser attacks on twelve similar targets. In all, 5,000 tons of bombs were unloaded on these targets during December.

#### Attacks on Italian Railways

Fifteenth Air Force aircraft by day, and No. 205 Group aircraft by night, continued to play their part in the air interdiction of the enemy's communications system in northern *Italy*. As described elsewhere in this number of the Review, bridges and viaducts on the frontier routes running into *Italy* from *Austria* and *Germany*, especially the *Brenner* line from *Innsbruck* to *Verona*, were the principal targets. A new feature of our policy, first implemented in October, was

of the line in addition to specific targets. Enemy counter measures for the quick repair of bridges and track diversions, etc., are considered on page 160. Bad weather during October, however, prevented the regularity of attacks necessary to achieve appreciable interdiction, although during the month some 650 U.S. heavy bombers by day, and some 340 No. 205 Group aircraft by night, dropped 1,620 and 860 tons of bombs respectively on communication targets, including some on road traffic.

During November nearly 2,500 tons, and during December 2,000 tons, were the bomb loads dropped to supplement the Tactical Air Force's effort to block the entry of military supplies into *Italy*, or, as was reported from time to time, attempts to move important machinery and plants from *Italy* to *Germany*. An account is given on page 123 of the operations in November which aimed, by the destruction of power stations combined with cuts at numerous points, to force the Germans to substitute steam for electric traction on the *Brenner* route, thereby greatly reducing its capacity. The small scale American attacks on 6th November on the converter stations at *Salorno*, *Ora* and *Bolzano* were not, however, particularly successful when compared with M.A.T.A.F.'s attacks on transformer stations further south. But amendment came the next day, when 470 tons of bombs dropped by Strategic aircraft achieved the object of creating numerous blocks on the line, destroying rolling stock, and severely damaging the bridges at *Albes* and *Ora*. Attacks on vulnerable points were repeated later with the consequence that, as a result of the Tactical and Strategic Air Forces' attacks the *Brenner* railway supply route was reported to have been out of action from the 4th almost to the end of November. A spell of bad weather in December permitted the enemy to re-open the *Brenner Pass* route but, operating on the four days, 26th to 29th December, M.A.S.A.F. aircraft dropped well over 1,000 tons of bombs on the route, in addition to the heavy attacks, already mentioned, on *Innsbruck*. Main targets were the *Bressanone* bridge, the *Avisio* viaduct, marshalling yards at *Verona*, and vulnerable stretches of line. Less successful attacks were made on the bridges at *Ora*, *Mezzocorona* and *Vipiteno*. By the end of the year the *Brenner* route was once again blocked, as were also the three alternative routes entering north-east *Italy*, following attacks among others in November and December, on the bridges at *Casarsa*, *Latisana*, *Pinzano*, *Piave/Susegana*, the *Venezone* viaduct and the locomotive depots at *Udine* and *Castelfranco Veneto*. The satisfactory conclusion to 1944 already mentioned was the result of the combined employment of the Tactical and Strategic Air Forces, and not of the efforts of the latter alone. The results are detailed in one overall plan, and in addition to operations recounted, there were attacks by M.A.S.A.F. aircraft cutting communications across the *Po* such as, for

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*Attack on Banhida marshalling yards on 13th October, 1944.*

example, a day attack on *Ferrara* railway bridge, and a night attack by No. 205 Group on the pontoon bridge at *Ficarolo*, the last being one of the enemy's answers to our interdiction efforts, a pontoon bridge furtively assembled at dusk and dismantled at dawn.

#### **Communications in Hungary and Yugoslavia**

Valuable assistance was rendered to the Russian forces driving forward into *Hungary* and *Yugoslavia*, and to the Yugoslav National Army

of Liberation and Land Forces Adriatic, by M.A.S.A.F. aircraft in their attacks on rail and road communications in the zones connected with the above forces. The main targets in *Hungary* were the marshalling yards at *Ersekadjvar*, *Banhida*, *Komarom*, *Gyor*, *Szekesfehervar*, and *Szombathely*. At the first four mentioned yards, which were chock-full of wagons in October in use for the supply of the German forces, the Allied bombers destroyed hundreds of units of rolling stock; widespread damage was inflicted at all

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the marshalling yards attacked, and through lines cut at *Szombathely*, *Szekesfehervar* and *Komarom*. Strategic fighters and fighter-bombers inflicted destruction on rail and road routes throughout the quarter; on the 12th and 13th October for example their tally included some 80 locomotives and a "bag" of rolling stock, road vehicles and barges on the vital *Budapest-Gyor-Vienna* routes, and on the 20th the destruction of 22 locomotives and damage to over 400 units of rolling stock on the railway line from *Sajo Szentpeter* to *Ipolyszög* in northern *Hungary*. Another outstanding day's work took place a month later, when on 19th November 126 U.S. Thunderbolts attacked targets in the *Esztergom-Veszporen-Vienna* area, claims including the destruction of 65 locomotives. A tactical development of note in November was the high level bombing of pin-pointed targets by formations of fighter-bombers led by U.S. Lightning "droopsnoots" carrying bombardiers and precision bombsights in their modified nose sections.

The dominant features of the military situation of this period were the Soviet forces' siege of *Budapest*, and the withdrawal of German forces in *Yugoslavia* northwards to *Bosnia*, enforced by the loss of *Greece* and the generally deteriorating conditions in the *Balkans*.

During October and November the average bomb tonnage dropped in *Yugoslavia* and *Hungary* by M.A.S.A.F. aircraft lending weight to the Balkan and Tactical Air Forces assaults was in the region of 3,500 tons, of which by far the larger portion was delivered by aircraft of No. 205 Group. This figure was, however, reduced to less than half in December due to bad weather and a thinning out of targets caused by the enemy's continued withdrawal.

Hungarian targets definitely declined in value in November, the main targets during that month being two key marshalling yards west of *Budapest*, *Gyor* and *Szombathely*, and in December at *Hegyeshalom* on the main double track south of the *Danube* leading to *Budapest*, and the east marshalling yards at *Sopron* on the main lateral communications line to the Hungarian front and the supply route to *Zagreb*, in north-west *Yugoslavia*.

Railway targets in *Yugoslavia* throughout the quarter were the marshalling yards and bridge at *Maribor*, the marshalling yards at *Zagreb* and *Sarajevo*, the bridge at *Zenica* and the bridges on the German escape route—hit by No. 205 Group—at *Bioce*, *Matesevo* and *Mojkovac*.

Enemy concentrations, vehicles and withdrawing columns were constantly pounded in the regions of *Podgorica*, *Novi Pazar*, *Visegrad*, *Stenica*, *Prijepolje*, *Rogitica*, *Metrovica*, *Mojkovac* and *Matesevo*. Considerable losses in men and vehicles were inflicted on hostile forces; the enemy's withdrawal programme was seriously upset and a number of his key communications centres were devastated. Many roads were

blocked by landslides caused by bombing the hills above. An idea of the destruction caused by bombing and strafing is given by the fact that in December the enemy lost no fewer than 1,000 vehicles between *Podgorica* and *Kolasin* due to attacks by Balkan Air Force (whose operations are considered separately elsewhere) and No. 205 Group.

Colonel Olberg, the German Military Commentator, naively described the enemy's harassed retreat as "advance from the *Balkans* in full battle strength to take part in the fighting in the area south of *Budapest*."

### Tactical Support

In addition to the attacks on enemy communications and retreating forces in *Yugoslavia* M.A.S.A.F. combined with M.A.T.A.F. on 12th October to produce the most concentrated assault carried out by the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces up to that date, in an effort to help the Fifth Army's approach to *Bologna*. The Fifteenth Air Force's share in these operations numbered 700 escorted U.S. Liberators and Fortresses which dropped more than 1,200 tons of bombs on bivouacs, barracks, dumps and depots of various kinds. A further hundred heavy bombers were prevented from fulfilling their missions by the bad weather. The Strategic Air Force's losses were four heavy bombers and one fighter; a small price to pay for the result achieved in assisting the Fifth Army's advance towards *Bologna*, which was, however, limited by other factors.

### Counter Air

Counter air force operations during October were confined principally to the four days, 11th to 14th, and a fifth on the 21st, when the enemy airfields to the west of *Budapest*, particularly at *Seregelyes*, *Tapolca*, *Szombathely*, *Szekesfehervar*, *Gyor* and *Esztergom* were attacked. Claims were 200 hostile aircraft destroyed on the ground and approximately 20 in combat for the loss of ten Fifteenth Air Force fighters. It should be recorded that Mustangs were outstandingly successful in these operations, as they were also in an attack on the *Prostejor* airfield in *Czechoslovakia*, when ten aircraft were destroyed on the ground. Attacks on *Gyor* were designed to disrupt the resumption of assembling M.E. 109s there.

Also during October, in order to speed or perhaps to "God-speed" the parting German guest, Strategic fighters strafed transport aircraft landing grounds in the *Athens* and *Salonika* areas, destroying 30 plus aircraft on the ground. These fighter attacks were also supplemented by small scale night attacks on the three main Athenian airfields.

Before passing to further consideration of counter air operations during the quarter, it should be recorded that, owing to the paucity of enemy fighter opposition encountered during

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October, for the first time in their thirteen months operations, Strategic bombers scored no combat victories.

Early in November, however, Allied aircraft operating against the southern stretch of the Brenner line were interrupted on a few occasions by small formations of enemy fighters, presumably flown by personnel of the Italian Fascist Air Force. Air reconnaissance ascertained the location of the enemy's air bases, and the Allied air forces set to the task of reducing the hostile air forces in Italy to their former impotence. From 18th to 29th November Tactical fighter-bombers kept up an offensive on the airfields at Bergamo, Ghedi and Villefranca; the Strategic Air Force ably supported these counter air activities in an intensive 24-hour period of operations, dropping 952 tons of bombs by day and 212 tons by night on the airfields at Udine, Vicenza, Villefranca and Aviano, rendering the first three temporarily unserviceable and destroying or damaging 50 to 60 aircraft. As anticipated, these operations somewhat damped the ardour of the Fascist flyers.

On the whole the enemy's fighter opposition continued to be slender during the whole of November; American fighters shot down 32 hostile aircraft and probably destroyed four; American heavy bombers claimed three destroyed and two probably so; 205 Group destroyed one and probably destroyed three. With reference to the claims by the R.A.F. and Dominion aircraft of No. 205 Group, it is worthy of note that the various interceptions took place on the night of 22/23rd November over Szombathely marshalling yards, our aircraft making 20 plus sightings and sustaining fourteen encounters. G.A.F. tactics included the employment of ground track indicator lights, flares, searchlight indicator tracks, fighter co-operation, plus controlled fighters with a light in the nose. One report of an engagement stated that the gunner was unable to bring his guns to bear in time, but when the aircraft broke away "below and behind" he fired a short burst over the tail turret to "scare the fighter." But, to quote No. 205 Group's comment, "he probably scared the Tail Gunner."

Victories over enemy aircraft in December were the highest for the quarter, 49 being destroyed and seventeen probably destroyed by the American bombers and 34 destroyed plus four probably destroyed by U.S. fighters. Another seventeen hostile aircraft were destroyed on the ground.

M.A.S.A.F. losses for the period are detailed on page 42. Of those a very small percentage were due to encounters with enemy aircraft, the highest figure being seven per cent. in December. The greater portion of casualties was due to flak.

#### Supply Dropping

The dropping of supplies, now a regular and important commitment of No. 205 Group, gradually extended in effort and scope

progressively through the quarter. In addition to supplying Marshal Tito's forces in Yugoslavia, henceforth to be known as the Yugoslav National Army of Liberation, supplies were dropped to Partisan forces operating in Northern Italy behind the German lines. In October 237 sorties were flown on these missions dropping a total of 1,748 containers of an average weight of 240 lb. net each, including six sorties with twelve containers for Warsaw. In November sorties rose to 768, a record for the Group being established on the two days 4th and 5th November, when 358 sorties were flown and 351 tons of supplies were dropped. In all during the month 151 tons were dropped in Northern Italy and 555 tons in Yugoslavia. An appreciable amount of material enabling and encouraging serious interference with the enemy.

The sphere of these operations was enlarged further in December to include Troop and Supply Transport missions to reinforce our land forces fighting against the insurgents in Athens. In seven missions covering the 12th to 21st of the month 277 sorties were made, conveying 2,043 troops with equipment and over 400 tons of supplies. In addition 494 sorties were flown to Yugoslavia and 2,923 containers (482 tons) successfully dropped. Not the least interesting feature of these activities was the fact that many of the sorties were made in daylight, a new departure for aircrews specifically trained to fly by night. On some days, in fact, supplies were dropped when 10/10ths cloud forced bomber aircraft to return to base with their missions unfulfilled, a performance all the more creditable when the difficulties and hazards of flying in such mountainous terrain—with its tricky and variable wind currents—is remembered. The following signal was received by the Group from Marshal Tito's forces—"Please thank pilots of four Liberators and six Wellingtons for fine performance in coming down through 10/10ths cloud over "X" today to drop in bad visibility. All stores will be recovered."

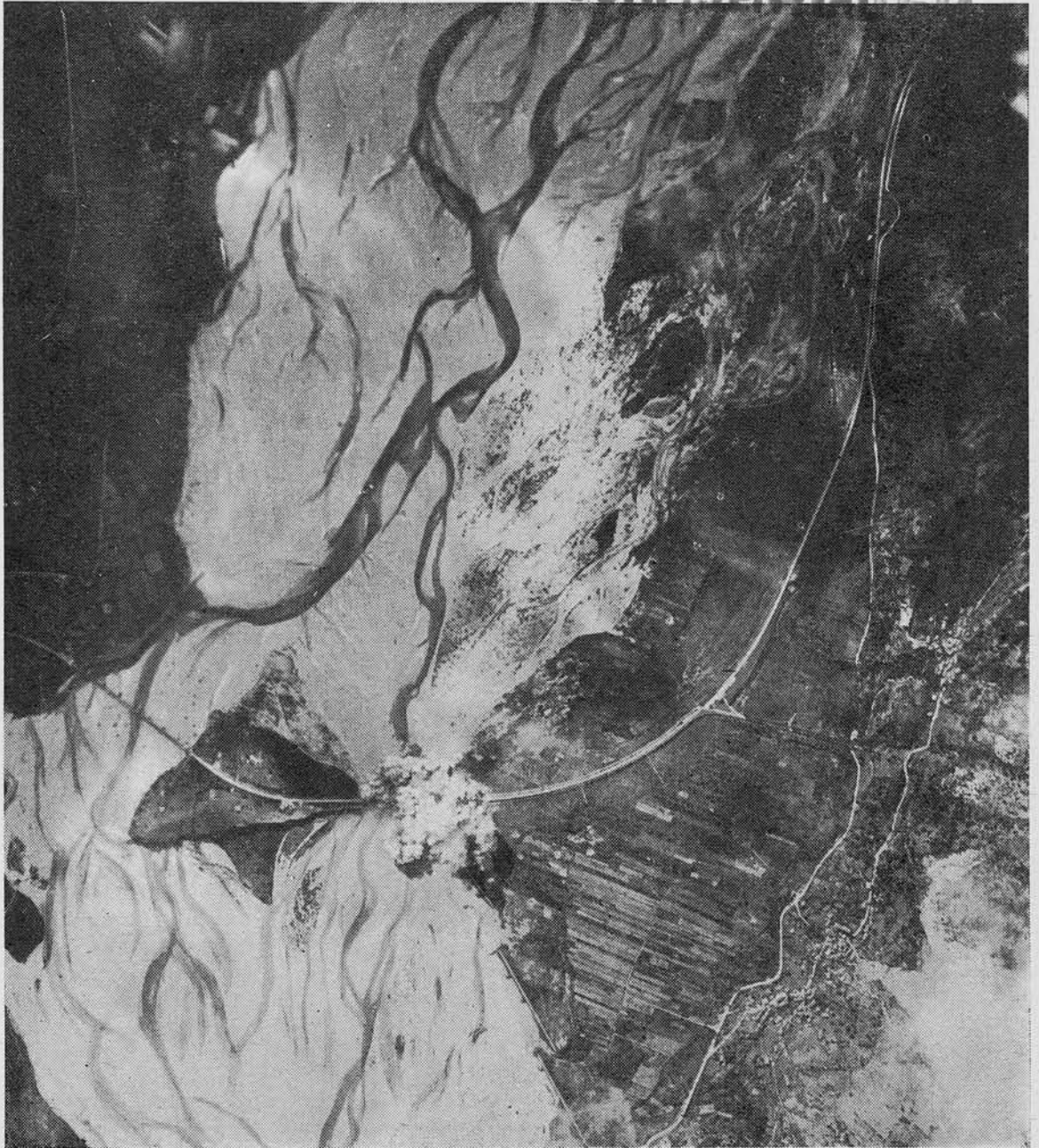
#### PART IV

#### CONCLUSION

The foregoing account provides sufficient evidence of the trends of activity and illustrates the varied employment of the Mediterranean Allied Strategic Air Force in the concluding months of 1944. As the quarter progressed it became clear that bad weather alone could not screen the enemy from effective aerial attack. Experience gained in blind bombing technique by the valuable method of trial and error in operations led to an improvement in results exceeding anticipations. In five days in November, 16th to 20th, the average number of Strategic aircraft airborne each day for attacks in Austria, Bavaria and Polish Silesia was 400 fighters and 700 bombers. On each of nine days in December also 400 to 599 bomber aircraft were despatched and on another five days 600 to 799. No. 205 Group

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*Bombs exploding on Pinzano road and railway bridge on 4th October.*

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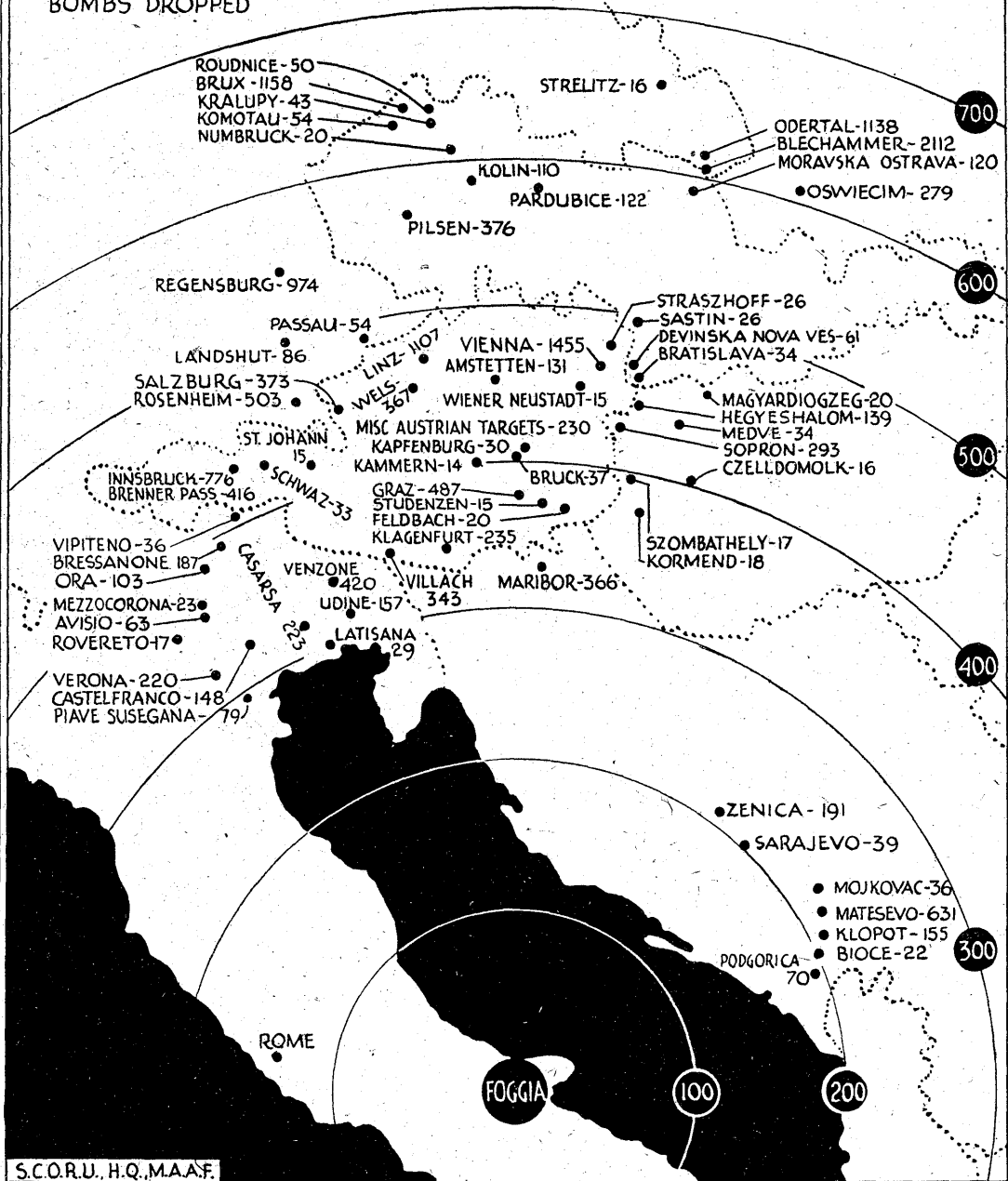
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## STRATEGIC BOMBING EFFORT

DECEMBER, 1944

FIGURES AFTER NAME OF PLACE INDICATE TONS OF BOMBS DROPPED

ARCS INDICATE DISTANCES IN MILES FROM FOGGIA



S.C.O.R.U. H.Q. M.A.F.

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flew 1,630 sorties in November, constituting its highest monthly total for four years. In fact the 1944 figures for the Group make interesting reading, especially in view of its conversion from a Medium to a Heavy Bomber Group which continued in gradual transition from March onwards. The totals for the year are :—

Number of sorties ...	14,272
Bombs & Mines dropped	24,454 tons.
Leaflets dropped ...	184½ million.
Troops transported ...	2,043
Supplies dropped ...	2,237 tons gross.

#### Aircraft Casualties.

Total Loss ...	332
Damaged ...	222

#### Personnel Casualties.

Killed ...	184
Injured ...	119
Missing ...	1,153

It is estimated that 33 per cent. of the missing personnel have subsequently been accounted for.

Another 205 Group record was established in November when bomb loads carried solely by bomber aircraft averaged 3.44 tons per aircraft, and by type of aircraft—Wellington 2.75 tons, Halifax 3.95, Liberator 4.38 tons.

The success of the Group's activities by day has already been mentioned, but the success in support of the National Army of Liberation by harassing the Hur in Yugoslavia deserves special record, motor transport, enemy troops and bridges being the general run of target rendered more difficult than usual by the continual change in target altitude along the mountainous roads and the tricky nature of the local winds.

Pride of place, however, in an overall review of the quarter's work by M.A.S.A.F. must be given to the Fifteenth Air Force's continual offensive against the enemy's oil installations, which, by the end of the year, whittled down production to one tenth of its potential within the bombing range of Italian based aircraft.

So far as the attacks on marshalling yards and railways were concerned, experience of the Germans' skill and ingenuity in repair work and rapid improvisation has proved the unwisdom of expecting startling break-downs for any length of time in their supply system as a result of bombing. Attacks must be heavy, constant and delivered simultaneously on alternative routes to achieve an appreciable interdiction. The effect of constant bombing is, however, accumulative; each successful attack inevitably places more hindrances in the path of efficient transportation while the communication goes through the stages of being (a) inconvenienced (b) dislocated and (c) out of action. It is certain that the M.A.S.A.F. attacks on railways in Austria and Southern Germany had caused the system to pass beyond the stage of (a) by the end of 1944, and it seemed well over the threshold of the ominous "dislocation" stage.

Apart from the one large scale effort in October to help the Fifth Army and a limited supply dropping in Italy, the tactical missions in aid of the Allied ground forces were all associated with operations in the Balkans.

Counter air force operations—once the main preoccupation of our air forces in the Mediterranean theatre—absorbed an extremely small effort owing to the Luftwaffe's continued impotence.

The Fifteenth Air Force fighters, in addition to meeting their main commitment of providing bomber escort, caused widespread havoc on the ground by bombing and strafing, particularly in Hungary and Austria. In this instance a fuller appreciation of the fighters' achievements can be gained by extending the period under review to include September. During the last four months of 1944 the M.A.S.A.F. fighters destroyed 445 grounded aircraft, 526 locomotives, 539 railway carriages and wagons, 537 military vehicles and 28 stationary installations.

Although the M.A.S.A.F. operations reviewed constituted little more than three-fifths of the effort put out in the preceding quarter, they were, nevertheless, a powerful contribution towards the enemy's total discomfort.

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Mediterranean Sea



# The Balkan Theatre

## Greece and Yugoslavia

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IN A SUMMARY of Balkan Air Force operations through July-September, 1944, given in the last issue of the R.A.F. Mediterranean Review, mention was made of British landings in the *Peloponnese*—one by a seaborne Commando force put ashore on *Kythera* island on 16th September, and another by a small party of paratroops dropped over *Araxos* airfield on the afternoon of the 23rd. Some account was also given of the reconnaissance activities of these forces during September, and of their progress in clearing the greater part of the peninsula as a stage preparatory to a more ambitious operation.

This main operation, planned jointly by Middle East and Balkan Air Force, had a triple objective—the occupation of *Athens* immediately following German withdrawal; the establishment of the Greek Government in *Athens*; the introduction at the earliest moment of measures for relief of the civilian population.

Instructions for implementation of the plan were given on 10th October, 1944, Commander in the Field Land Forces Adriatic having reported *Megara*, an airfield 20 miles west of the capital, securely in British hands. The following day convoys mounted from *Italy* and Middle East put to sea, and on the 12th the first detachment of 2nd Ind. Para. Brigade with essential stores and equipment dropped on *Megara* airfield. By the afternoon of the 14th British troops of the original *Kythera* force, crossing to *Piraeus* from their advanced base at *Poros*, had moved into *Athens*.

As, following recent disturbances, certain adverse comments have been heard concerning British "intervention" in *Greece* subsequent to the expulsion of the Germans, it may not be out of place to mention, as preface to an account of these operations, that an E.L.A.S plot to seize power in *Athens* by armed force was already in motion before the British landings began. That this plan would have succeeded but for prompt and decided British action is unquestionable. Fortunately, details of E.L.A.S intention were within the knowledge of the Cabinet in *London*. It is sufficient to say here—some notes on the political and internal situation are given later—that the sole aim of H.M. Government, as the Prime Minister told the House of Commons on 8th December, was to avoid a *coup d'état*, preserve peace in the City of the Violet Crown and allow the Greek people a fair chance to set

their house in order in circumstances more favourable. That this ambition, pursued not without cost, is at long-last in sight of fulfilment may be perhaps a sufficient answer to those critics who sought to expose an honourable endeavour as a mischievous political move in support of reactionary policy.

### Airborne Descent on *Megara*.

The rapid progress made by the forward parties in the *Peloponnese*, and the desirability of capitalising this and exploiting straight on to *Athens* with a minimum of delay, decided A.F.H.Q. to amend the original idea for an *en masse* paratroop drop and launch at once a smaller mission allowing the balance of airborne forces to be brought up on subsequent days.

Following this plan, fourteen C.47s with paratroops and nine Halifaxes loaded with supply containers flew to *Megara* under heavy fighter escort on the 12th. Although spasmodic shelling of the airfield did not interfere with operations, a strong ground-wind caused casualties to personnel on landing and resulted in serious loss of valuable stores.

This ground-wind persisted and forced the abandonment of paratroop missions planned for the 13th. Nine gliders, however, landed airfield construction equipment—the runway having been blown by the enemy before evacuation—and further stores were successfully dropped by Halifaxes. On the morning of the 14th conditions had improved and although 20 aircraft towing gliders were compelled to turn back, 68 C.47s made the journey and dropped over 1,000 personnel and 130 containers—the policy being to complete the mission on the following day, subject to weather.

This proviso was wise, for the night of the 14th brought torrential rain which caused subsidence of the repaired runway craters and necessitated serious curtailment of plans for the 15th—the only sorties flown on that day being by fourteen C.47s on re-supply. Fortunately the delay, though emphasising the importance of the weather-factor in combined operations, was not critical. As mentioned earlier, the *Kythera* force had entered *Athens* on the afternoon of the 14th, and later in that day sections of the 2nd Para. Brigade, boarding caiques at *Pavko* and disembarking at *Skaramanga*, had also reached the city.

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On the day weather having cleared, the final missions were completed, conveying paratroops, 24 days supplies and 20 gliders landing equipment—the total airborne troops released over this airfield for the period 12th-16th October being approximately 126 officers and 1,820 other ranks. By the morning of the 17th, *Kalamaki*, five miles south of *Athens*, had been made serviceable, and from that day onwards this base was used for re-supply and for the landing of follow-up personnel.

In addition to the hold-up of air operations by adverse weather, delay was caused and casualties suffered by the sea convoy through mines encountered off the island of *Aiyina*, east of the *Gulf of Saronikos*. Although this convoy did not commence disembarkation at *Piraeus* until late on the 16th—24 hours after the planned arrival time—efforts of the shore party brought unloading up to schedule by mid-day on 18th October.

#### A Thousand Sorties by B.A.F.

Over the period 23rd September-21st October, 1944, aircraft of Balkan Air Force and squadrons attached flew approximately 1,000 sorties in direct and indirect support of the landings in *Greece*. Of these about one third were in the preliminary stage covering *Araxos*, and the balance during the main operations at *Megara* and *Kalamaki*. Approximately 400 of the sorties were by gliders and transport aircraft conveying paratroops and supplies.

Venturas from *Brindisi* made one nickelling raid, two attacks on *Volos* harbour (sinking four ships, one of 4,300 tons, and damaging fifteen) and one on road-transport concentrations at *Phlorina*. Spitfires, Beaufighters and Hurricanes based on *Araxos* carried out over 150 sorties on escort duty and reconnaissance, and on strafing missions mostly in the *Gulf of Corinth*, while other fighters from *Italy* made repeated attacks on road and rail communications around *Lamina*, *Larissa*, *Volos* and *Salonika*. Intruder operations in the Aegean undertaken on fifteen nights, resulted in the destruction of one JU.88 and one H.E.111.

#### The Liberation of Athens

The welcome which greeted the arrival of British forces left no doubt as to the feelings of the majority of the Greeks in *Athens*. At *Megara* where some hours before the landings a growing throng had assembled around the airfield, troops dazed on the ground and enveloped in their parachutes found themselves surrounded by women pressing bunches of herbs in their faces, overcome by emotion and delirious with joy. Accounts brought back by crews who flew over the capital at the time of the march in, describe a scene of the wildest enthusiasm, with crowds cheering and processions of citizens parading along streets decked in flowers and bunting.

On 11th October the Germans had declared *Athens* an open city, and when British forces

entered three days later they found little damage apart from the dock area and power station. The *Marathon Dam* on which the capital's water supply depends remained intact, and while a food shortage was evident, provisions for housing and clothing appeared adequate. After the wild enthusiasm of the people had spent its first wind, the city was reported quiet and the population orderly and in control. On 18th October, M. Papandreou and his Government made a ceremonial entry, their arrival being greeted in generous mood by a large demonstration including some 15,000 members of E.A.M.—this party at that time showing itself in open support of the Government and the Allies.

#### A Country in Turmoil

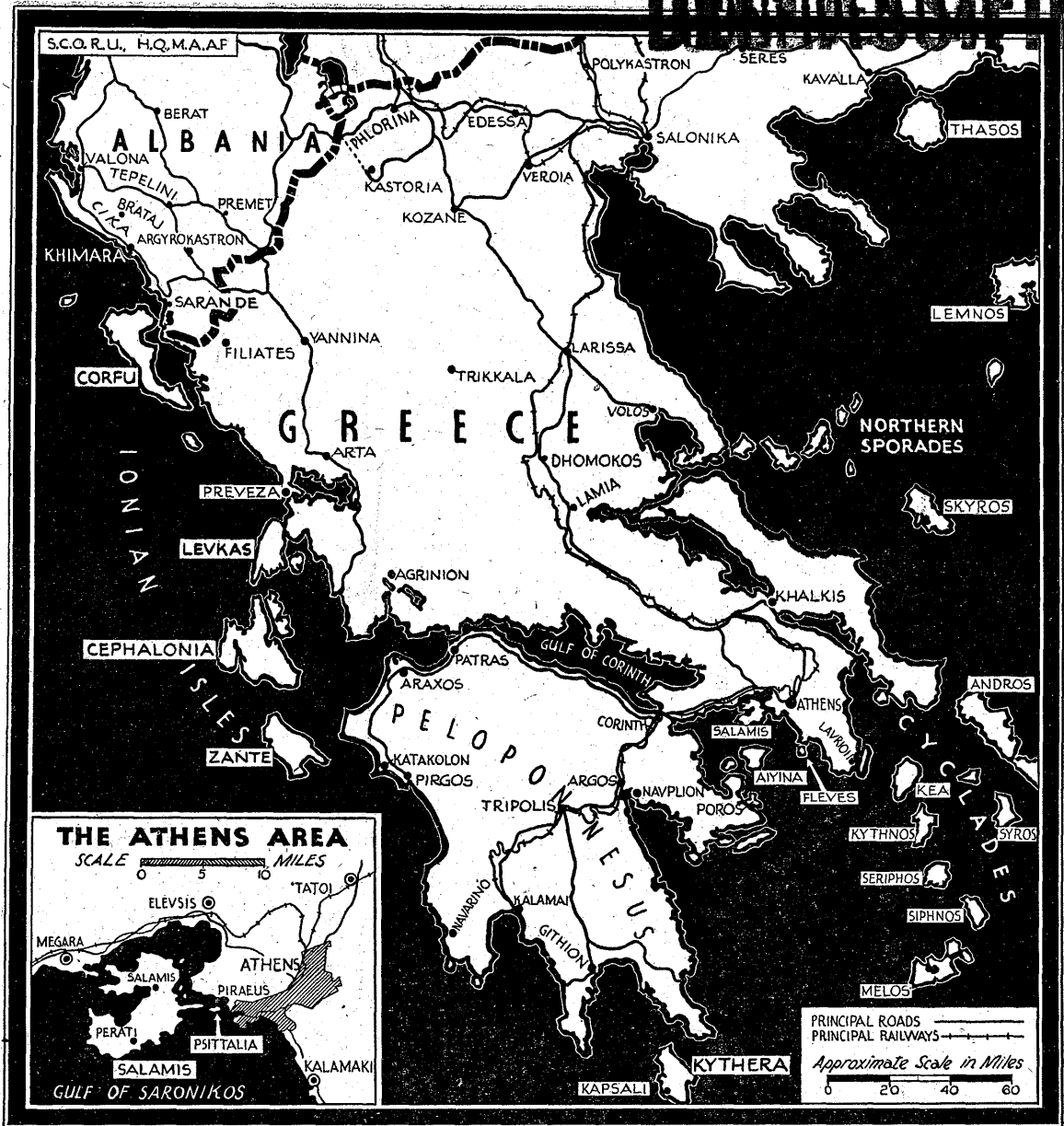
To trace the course of events which led to the recent disturbances in *Greece*, it is necessary to go back to October, 1943, when after two years of luke-warm militant resistance to German occupation, Greek guerrillas (E.L.A.S.) suspended activity against the enemy and transferred attention to disarming their more conservative rivals, the members of the Democratic National League (E.D.E.S.).

Excuses offered in justification of this change of front were various. It may be that dissatisfaction over Allied policy in *Italy* coupled with our reverses in the Aegean played a minor part, although it appears more likely—perhaps unquestionable in the light of subsequent happenings—that these factors provided merely a convenient opportunity for E.L.A.S. to desert the cause of national liberation and resolve the issue into one of vicious and premeditated political war.

Whatever the seed of its origin, this deep enmity between the rival bands of Left and Right—both bearing arms provided by the Allies—soon developed into a barbaric conflict which, varying in intensity and punctuated by occasional inconsequential clashes with the forces of occupation, saw culmination a year later in pitched battle for *Athens*. From time to time exhaustion and enemy reprisals—for the Germans were not slow to capitalise the situation—tempered the internecine quarrels of the guerrillas and offered hope that some measure of unity might be reached. Many conferences took place—and are still taking place—between the parties and the émigré Government, and on more than one occasion terms for a truce survived all but the last and vital round. Although outside the period of this review, it is satisfactory to note that up to the time of writing the latest agreement for a "cease fire" at midnight on 14th January, 1945, has been observed.

While history has shown the Balkans as soil fertile for the fostering of secret societies, these movements have been less popular in *Greece* than in countries further north—partly because *Greece* was freed earlier than others from the Ottoman yoke, but largely because the people are possessed of a more innate individualism. Unfortunately,

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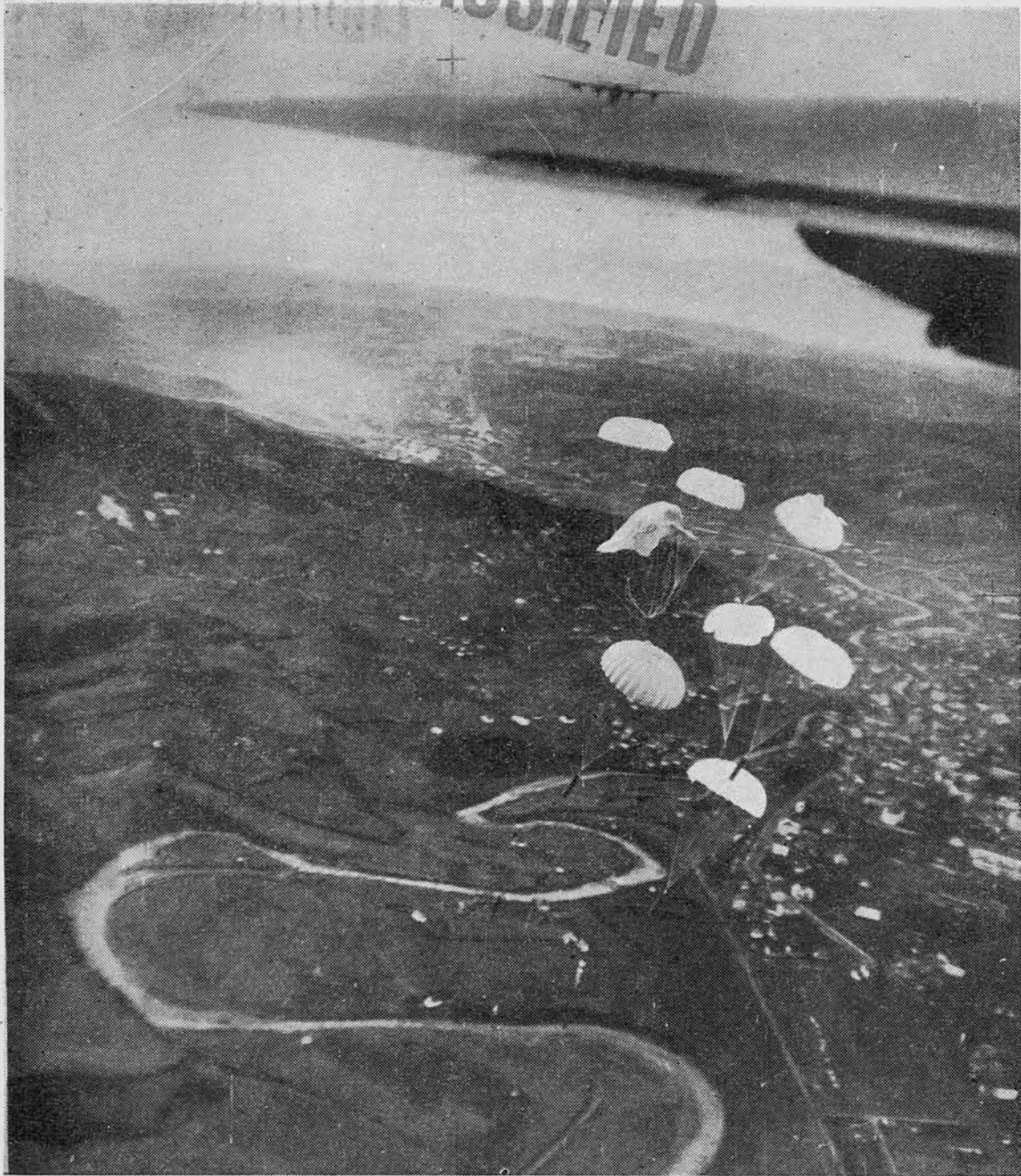
this individualism has proved a two-edged sword, infusing the various factions with a whole-hearted enthusiasm but denying them the co-operation essential to the achievement of their ideals.

**The Rival Political Parties**

Politically, the country has two main parties, E.A.M. and E.D.E.S., and many others of lesser importance—each with a welter of slogans and a policy as ineffective as its title is hollow. E.A.M. (the National Liberty Party) and E.L.A.S. is the military instrument, controlled by the Communist element, is the most powerful organisation in Greece and has to date exercised a dictatorship not only in the main towns but in the countless villages and settlements in the

mountains. E.L.A.S. comprises about two-thirds of the effective guerrilla population, and during the period of occupation controlled most of *Free Greece*. It would be unfair to say that this party did not on occasion join battle with the Germans; but equally unwise not to discern the deeper political significance of many of its operations. Other less important organisations, E.K.K.A. (National and Social Liberation) has the same aims as E.D.E.S. but stands aloof through a personal opposition to Colonel Zervas, Commander of the latter party. P.A.O., an all-Greek Resistance Organisation, is a Right Wing republican group in Salonika, conspicuous in the past for its active preference of German to E.L.A.S. rule, while E.L.O. the only other party of an importance

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*Supplies being dropped by aircraft to Partisans in Yugoslavia.*

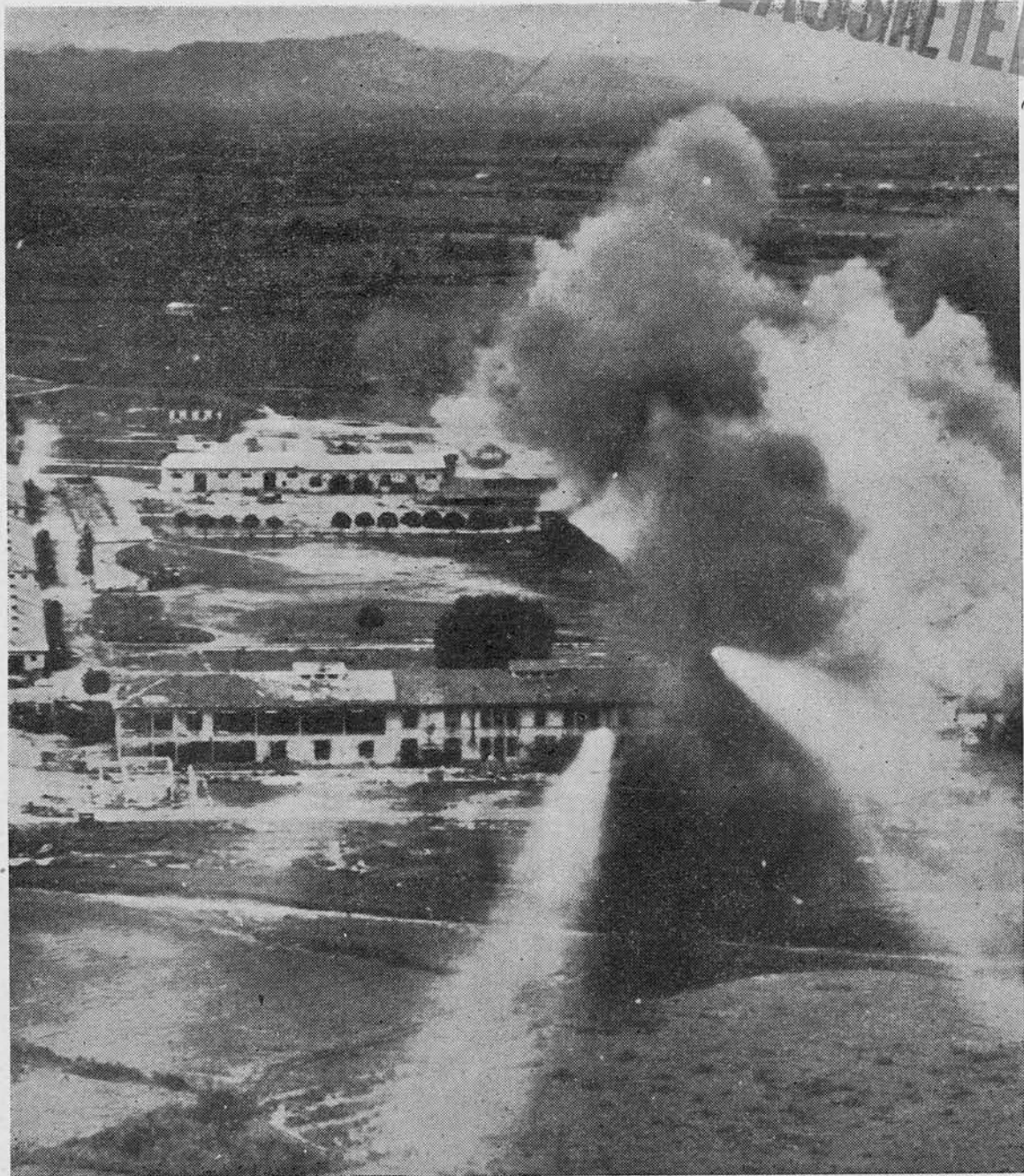
worthy of notice, comprises a Greek Officers' Organisation founded in the *Peloponnese* during the summer of 1943 and since subjected to periodical attack by E.L.A.S. with varying degrees of success.

The career of the émigré Government in *Cairo* has been barely less settled than those of the various parties within the country itself. At the beginning of April, 1944, under an accusation of

failure to co-ordinate the policies of the fighting forces and guerrillas, M. Tsouderos tendered his resignation to King George of the Hellenes, and a fortnight later M. Venizelos, son of the former Prime Minister, attempted to form a new Cabinet. He lasted only until the 23rd, when M. Papandreou, leader of the Socialist Democratic Party, took over and founded the government which up to the end of the year, although

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*Rockets from a S.A.A.F. Beaufighter of the Balkan Air Force streaking towards a German barracks at Tirana, capital of Albania, a few days before the town was liberated.*

it suffered many changes, represented the constitutional Government of Greece.

#### **M. Papandreou's Programme**

On 27th April, 1944, under the watchwords "One Fatherland, One Government, One Army," M. Papandreou declared his programme :—

- (1) The reformation and good discipline of the Greek Armed Forces in the Middle East under the banner of our Hellenic Fatherland.
- (2) The unification under the orders of the United Government of all the guerrilla bodies of *Free Greece*, and the mobilisation, when the hour comes, of

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*This merchant vessel, attacked with cannon by Beaufighters as it approached Alexandrovo Harbour (Krk Island), on 20th October, 1944, was left circling helplessly and on fire.*

- (3) The cessation of the reign of terror in the rural districts of *Greece*, and the assurance of personal security and political freedom for the people when and wherever the invader withdraws.
- (4) Continuous endeavours for the sufficient despatch of food and medical supplies to enslaved *Greece*.
- (5) The securing at the time of the forthcoming liberation of our country, of Order and the Freedom of the Greek people in such a manner that, freed from

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physical and moral compulsion, they may decide with full sovereignty the Constitution, the Social Order and the Government of their choice.

- (6) The imposition of severe sanctions both against the betrayers of their country and those who have exploited the misery of our people.
- (7) Forethought for the immediate satisfaction, after liberation, of the material needs of the Greek people.
- (8) The full satisfaction of our national rights. Our complete national restoration and the securing of our new frontiers are the demand of the whole nation.

**No Agreement Reached**

Events over the period from the issue of this programme to the time of the British occupation of Athens again emphasise the determination of E.A.M./E.L.A.S. to pursue their extremist policy. At Koutsaina on 6th May, 1944, E.L.A.S. and E.D.E.S. held a conference, the subject of which was the adjustment of the spheres of influence of the two guerrilla groups. As with all earlier discussions it broke down on the usual issue—the inability of the parties to sink their political aspirations. In the Lebanon on 10th May, a meeting took place between the Papandreou Cabinet and the leaders of all parties in Greece, including E.A.M., at which provisional agreement was reached to establish a joint government to take over power in Athens when, with or without Allied aid, the city was freed from the Germans.

The effect of this agreement was negligible. Fighting continued between E.L.A.S. and E.D.E.S., and between E.L.A.S. and the Rallis Security Battalions—these Greek guerrillas, armed by the Germans and declaring their policy as the suppression of Communism, being at that time more than twice as strong as the forces of E.D.E.S.

On 27th July, 1944, E.A.M. placed new terms before the Greek Government in exile. They were rejected as unacceptable by M. Papandreou—a move which E.A.M. countered with an offer to join the government if the Prime Minister resigned. This proviso was later withdrawn, and at the end of August five members of P.E.E.A. (Political Committee of National Liberation) arrived in Cairo for discussions. On 7th September, with British plans formulated for a landing in the Peloponnese, the émigré Government was transferred from Cairo to Caserta. As stated earlier, it made a formal entry into Athens on 18th October.

**The Russian Advance into South-East Europe**

While the surge forward of the Soviet Armies in South-East Europe, recognised both in its local importance and in the significance of its possibilities, has received note in earlier accounts of the war in the Balkans, it has been impracticable to include details of the offensive in a survey limited to operations in Yugoslavia and the Aegean.

Happily the march of events now affords an enlargement of the canvas. On 28th September, 1944, Moscow Radio announced an agreement with the Partisan National Committee whereby Russian troops were to be allowed occupation of territory in Yugoslavia, conditional only upon its vacation on completion of operations and on the civilian administration remaining in Partisan hands. A few days later, Soviet forces joined with those of Marshal Tito, and by the middle of October Belgrade was free of German rule. Without diminishing the importance of this progress, it was now plain that a situation had been reached of the highest strategic potentiality to both ourselves and the enemy—the Russian offensive, begun on 19th August, 1944, with the break through at Galatz, was within an ace of achieving its main objective, the establishment of a joint and continuous front from southern Hungary to the Adriatic Sea.

The effect of this drive into Yugoslavia from the east, coupled with the Partisan backing in the west and the movement northward of strong British forces from the Athens area, created a position of increasing danger for the seven remaining divisions of German Army Group E. then in process of extricating themselves from Corfu, north-west Greece and the Aegean.

By the week ending 15th October, all rail communications were severed south of Belgrade, leaving the enemy only the Partisan-infested mountain roads across Bosnia or the limited alternative of air transport as means of escape. On the Adriatic coast the tightening of the pincers saw the transfer of two German divisions, 118 Jaeger and 264 Infantry, from Dalmatia to the Zagreb-Brod railway area and a step-up in the shuttle-service of small craft from Dalmatian ports to the main reception centre at Fiume. Although Corfu surrendered on 8th October and the evacuation of the coastline from Peljesac to Gruda was finally completed around the same time, further south both Kotor and the Montenegrin coast were still firmly held—these districts being vital to preservation of the only escape routes.

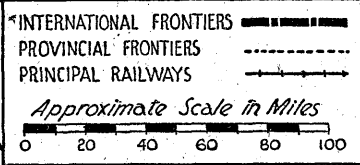
In Hungary, the prospect of the arrival of the Russians at Budapest, brought a radio proclamation from the Regent, Admiral Horthy, on 15th October, to the effect that he was opening negotiations for an armistice. To this the Germans reacted swiftly. Arrow Cross troops carried out a successful coup d'état in the afternoon, seized the radio station and established Szalaski as master of the city. On the evening of the 16th, Radio Budapest declared that Horthy had retracted his order, and an hour later announced his alleged abdication.

**Operations in Yugoslavia and Albania**

The last instalment of the narrative of operations in Yugoslavia and Albania (R.A.F. Mediterranean Review No. 8) closed at the British Commando assault north of Sarande. The present chapter opens with the capture of this town and

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hills beyond, and the hoisting of the white flag by the German garrison on *Corfu*.

With two firm Allied salients established south of *Belgrade*, one *Ripanj-Topolo-Lapovo-Petrovac-Zagubica* and the other *Leskovac-Nis-Pirot*, controlling the main communications *Belgrade-Sofia* on the east side, the enemy pulled back in *Albania* to *Durazzo-Elbasan-Podradec-Kastoria*, and *Valona* and the *Berat* oilfields returned to Partisan hands.

Further north in withdrawal from the Dalmatian coast, *Split* and certain small ports including *Trogir* were evacuated by the third week of October, and before the month closed Partisans, supported by Russian artillery, had made slight advances east of the line *Novi Sad-Mitrovica* and were moving on to the main German defences through *Sid* to the *Bosut* and *Drina* junctions with the *Sava*.

At the end of this month troop movements in *Montenegro* gave indication of the enemy's intention to attempt at all cost the reopening of the five withdrawal routes through the mountains of *Zetska*. These routes were (i) *Kraljevo-Sarajevo*, (ii) *Mitrovica-Sarajevo* and (iii) *Prioren-Sarajevo* in the centre area, and (iv) *Scutari-Niksic-Trebinje-Mostar* and (v) *Scutari-Bar-Kotor-Cavtat-Dubrovnic-Mostar* in the west coastal zone. Apart from passes and other sections of the roads then under Partisan surveillance, the following towns were in Yugoslav hands—*Prijepolje* and *Priboj* on route (ii), *Berane* and *Pljevlja* on route (iii), *Niksic* and *Trebinje* on route (iv), and *Cavtat* and *Dubrovnic* on route (v).

#### Successes by Naval Forces

Naval forces in the month of October sank a schooner and damaged two others in convoy on the 8/9th, destroyed four E-boats, four F-boats and three L-boats in another convoy off *Zara* on the 11/12th, and sank two I-boats and captured two others off *Dugi* on the 21st. Inconclusive actions were fought between Partisan patrol boats and enemy M.T.Bs off *Vir* on the 22nd/23rd, and between British naval units and a German destroyer on the 23rd/24th and similar forces and an escorted merchantman on the 28/29th. On the night of 1st November, H.M.S. "Avon Vale" and H.M.S. "Wheatland" intercepted and sank west of *Pag* Island the torpedo-boat "Audace" and its two escort vessels screening the enemy's evacuation of *Zara-Sibenik*.

Although weather interfered with air operations in the first and third weeks, Balkan Air Force flew over 3,000 sorties during October. Principal targets for the first seven days were German gun positions harassing our ground forces in southern *Albania*, the *Mostar* marshalling yards and, in support of Partisan operations, the enemy centre of *Benkovac*, east of *Zara*. In the second week, effort was focussed on the German withdrawal from *Greece* with strikes against communications, shipping, motor transport and rolling stock.

Attention was also given to *Ston* (*Peljesac* peninsula) and *Kriz* (near *Zagreb*), and to enemy troop concentrations at *Derska* (north of *Sibenik*).

Attacks against communications continued during the second half of the period, and by the end of the month the sum total of transport claims amounted to 39 locomotives, 20 wagons, 129 M/T vehicles, 36 ships and twelve aircraft destroyed, with 43 locomotives, 113 wagons, 226 M/T vehicles and 22 ships damaged. B.A.F. lost 44 aircraft with a further 46 damaged.

#### The Value of Greece to Germany

With the final withdrawal of German forces from the soil of *Greece* on 3rd November, 1944, it is interesting to pause a moment first on the effect of this loss to the enemy, and then on the problems facing the Government of the country.

Although in so far as her economic contribution is concerned, *Greece* may be considered as having been denied to *Germany* since Allied bombing and Partisan activities completed dislocation of the northern railway routes through *Yugoslavia* and *Bulgaria* in early September, her value hitherto, particularly in chrome after the cessation of Turkish deliveries in April, 1944, had been considerable.

In the short period April-September, 1944, *Greece* provided approximately 4,000 tons a month, or 25-30 per cent of *Germany's* total chrome supplies. This was her only substantial contribution. The production of pyrites, 250,000 tons per annum before the occupation, was down to 25,000 tons; her bauxite mines, delivering 4,000 tons a month in 1942, gave only 200 tons a month in 1944; and her output of metal ore, which previously had been in the neighbourhood of 1,000 tons per annum, was at a standstill. Of the remaining industries, those of cotton, wool and textiles offered a restricted stock of clothing material, while the small shipbuilding yards gave limited facilities for the construction of cement barges and the upkeep of caiques and coastal vessels.

So much for the position of *Greece* vis-à-vis *Germany*: if the loss of certain commodities was serious to the enemy, the economic resultant of the occupation was no whit less critical for the Greek population.

#### Problems Facing the Government

Three main problems faced the Government—the stabilisation of currency, which through malicious German planning was in a state of hopeless inflation; the disarmament of E.L.A.S. and the reformation of the Regular Army; the reconciliation of central political control with the *de facto* administration of E.A.M.

On 24th October, M. Papandreou made a start with a Government re-shuffle in favour of Venizelists (Liberal element), followed by the annulment of laws and decrees promulgated by P.E.E.A. and by measures for the restoration of property sold during the occupation period. Two

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days later came a decree calling up the 1936-39 classes for military service and a statement to effect that the army of the Middle East and the guerrilla forces including E.L.A.S. and E.D.E.S. were to be disbanded and reconstructed into Regular Army units. A subsequent announcement, arising from the arrests made by unauthorised persons during the Anniversary Celebrations (Italian attack on Greece in 1940), ordered the dissolution of the National Civil Guard—an organisation founded by E.L.A.S. for the maintenance of order in territory controlled by E.A.M.

Early in November, policy having been declared for the stabilisation of the drachma at 600 to the £1, the Government began to tackle the question of disarming the irregulars—fixing the date for dissolution of E.L.A.S. and E.D.E.S. at 10th December. On 11th November, the new drachma (referred to as the English drachma) came into circulation and was well received. Prices stabilised quickly at a lower level, and with imports of Allied supplies and stocks from the Peloponnese the food situation became easier. Unemployment, however, remained serious, the chief difficulty being in the re-organisation of industry and the shortage of raw materials.

The Government had now to implement its declared programme for disarming the guerrillas. On 8th November, the E.A.M. press urged the dissolution of 3 Mountain Brigade and the Greek Sacred Regiment (both formed in Egypt in April, 1943, following the mutinies when the majority of the Greek Army and Navy, calling for a Republic, were interned by the Allies) as a condition precedent, and on 9th November, 3 Mountain Brigade marched ceremonially through Athens to a welcome greater if anything than that which had been accorded M. Papandreou on 18th October.

That the proposition put forward by E.A.M. was likely to cause a crisis became evident in the last week of November. Meetings between the Prime Minister and members of the Communist Party, at which the latter called not only for the dissolution of the forces mentioned above but for an immediate plebiscite on the constitutional issue, were freely reported as making no headway, and while all remained outwardly calm in Athens, in areas beyond the capital the Government retained little more than nominal control. On 19th November, with permission of the Cabinet, a demonstration of 20,000 people took place in Constitution Square. Arms were not carried and there were no incidents. It was but the lull before the storm.

### The Gates of Budapest

Before recounting the next chapter in the Greek political crisis, it is expedient to turn to the encouraging progress of events on the Soviet southern front and in Yugoslavia.

Most outstanding development in the Hungarian sector through the fortnight 21st October-

7th November was (a) the considerable Russian progress to the south-west along the Carpathian passes into Slovakia—enabling troops in southern Poland to join with those in Transylvania, permitting forces in Hungary to be supplied by railways of the main Polish network and releasing thereby the roundabout route through Rumania for use of the Southern Armies, and (b) the significant advance northward of Marshal Tolbukhin's Army from the Szeged area between the Danube and the Tisa to the suburbs of Budapest.

These movements were so important that at one moment the fall of the Hungarian capital appeared imminent. A combination of wet weather, stubborn defence and sharp counter-attacks, however, brought the Russians to a standstill on the flanks and caused them to fall back slightly from the immediate approaches. The setback was temporary, but it held the assault in check until the middle of December. Then, with a wedge driven first north-west beyond Eszhergom and finally west and down to the south-east, Soviet forces surged forward to surround the city.

### The German Withdrawal Plan

The encirclement and siege of Budapest is referred to later. Before it developed the Germans retreating through Macedonia had reached Skoplje, and further north in the Sandjak, where the Sjenica road was described as black with traffic, troops were reported at Plevlja. Following these withdrawals, the Partisans re-occupied Kumanovo, Stip, Veles, Bitolj, Prilep and Negotin, all in the Iber Valley, while other forces in Dalmatia took Drnis and invested Knin, cutting the town off from its lines of communication with the enemy centre at Bihac.

Movements in Yugoslavia now showed clearly the pattern of the withdrawal plan of German Army Group E. The evacuation of Pec and Prizeren had effectively severed the last remaining land-link between 21 Mountain Corps and the bulk of its parent formation, leaving the greater part still in the Iber Valley, with its most northerly elements at Kraljevo and its rearguards just clear of Pristina. This force, committed irretrievably to the two routes Sjenica-Visegrad and Kraljevo-Uzice, had to meet Partisan ambushes and Allied air attacks along the roads and Bulgarian pressure in its rear, while the smaller force to the south-west, concentrated around Scutari-Podgorica-Kotor, could call on no reinforcements and was handicapped further by the recent Partisan occupation of Cetinje on the Podgorica-Kotor road. With weather conditions in Montenegro worsening every day, it now seemed highly probable that considerable equipment would have to be abandoned and that when Army Group E. eventually reached Bosnia, it would arrive as a much weakened formation—an unfortunate predicament for an enemy relying on these six divisions and assorted supporting troops as his main strategic reserve in the south.

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*A bridge near Gorica under attack by S.A.A.F. Beaufighters. Note damage from preceding aircraft.*

Much that was anticipated came to pass. By the end of November, although the last phase of the withdrawal into *Bosnia* had been completed with comparative success, many of the enemy's troops were unable to fight their way out, and even those who succeeded paid dearly in the process.

In the most northerly sector, 7 SS. and 104 Jaeger were blocked in the area of *Zvornik*,

Twenty miles to the south, forces in *Vlasenica* were equally tied down, while those in *Sarajevo* could only filter through on the *Zenica* road with great difficulty. North-west of *Sjenica* the position showed no improvement to the enemy, further withdrawal having been halted by the necessity of detaching units for protection of a column moving up the *Lim Valley*, and for the assistance of 21 Mountain Corps attempting to

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*Rolling stock being attacked with rockets at Novska by Beaufighters on 20th November, 1944.*

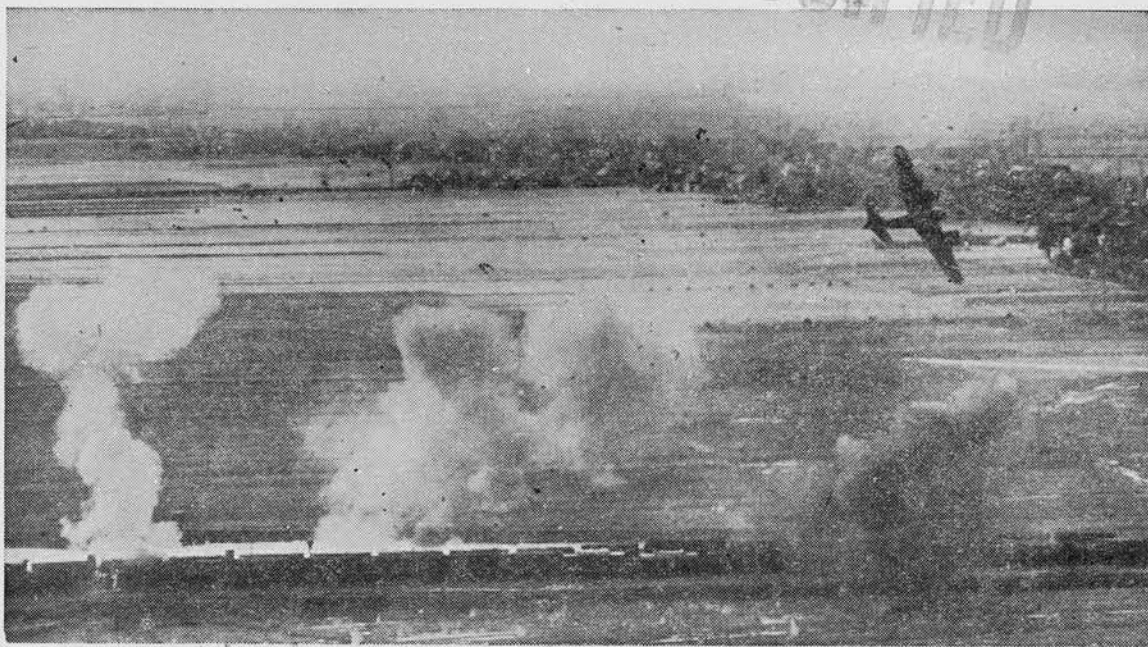
extricate itself from the *Danilovgrad-Podgorica* pocket. It was now clear that all efforts to open the *Niksic* route were to be abandoned; it had been an abortive operation, especially to 181 Division, which suffered considerable casualties.

Perhaps the most important strategical contribution made by the Partisans at this time was the final capture of *Knin*—a key town which,

with *Mostar* 100 miles to the south-east, blocked the two main entrances from the Dalmatian coast to central *Yugoslavia*. *Knin* was heavily garrisoned, and in its loss the Germans took a hard knock. They also provided themselves with an uncomfortable problem—for to counter-attack would mean the denuding of other areas for reinforcements.

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*Rolling stock under attack by S.A.A.F. Beaufighters at Katina on 22nd November, 1944.*

#### November Air Operations

Operations by Balkan Air Force during November showed a marked increase on those of the preceding month, over 4,600 sorties being flown at cost of only 38 aircraft lost and 57 damaged—a casualty rate of less than six per cent above the October losses, in spite of an increase of fifty per cent. in sorties; 4,096 of the sorties were by aircraft based in *Italy* and the balance by A.H.Q. *Greece*.

This total was the highest attained by B.A.F. since it began operations in July, 1944. Fighters and fighter-bombers (including Italian Air Force) flew approximately 2,650 sorties; bombers and G.R. aircraft 206 sorties; and aircraft (including No. 205 Group, U.S.A.A.F. and Russian Air Group) on supply-dropping and special duties, 1,662 sorties. In addition to the above T.A.F., D.A.F. and S.A.F. carried out considerable Balkan operations during the month; the former two attacking communications targets in northern *Yugoslavia* and shipping in the *Gulf of Fiume*, and the latter marshalling yards and troop concentrations mostly in the *Sarajevo-Maribor* areas.

B.A.F. fighters and fighter-bombers, concentrating against transport and rolling stock moving eastwards, destroyed in November 283 M/T vehicles, 21 locomotives and fourteen wagons, and damaged 312 M/T vehicles, twelve locomotives and seven wagons. They also attacked with success two railway stations and sundry ammunition dumps.

D.A.F. on four days of the first week, shot up over 100 locomotives on the *Sarajevo-Brod* and *Zagreb-Maribor* lines, destroyed three JU.52s on the ground at *Brezice*, and sank a Siebel ferry, a corvette and a merchant vessel outside *Fiume*; following this with 64 locomotives and 55 trucks attacked in the second week. T.A.F. claimed a 200-ton merchantman in flames, damage to bridges and rolling stock on the *Sarajevo-Brod*, *Brod-Zagreb* and *Zagreb-Maribor* railways, and approximately 50 locomotives destroyed.

M.A.S.A.F. bombed troop concentrations at *Podgorica*, *Mitrovica*, *Sjenica*, *Prijepolje*, *Novi Pazar* and *Visegrad*, and the marshalling yards at *Sarajevo*, *Brod*, *Maribor* and *Sarajevo West*—some targets on more than one occasion. They also strafed roads between *Sarajevo* and *Novi Pazar*, railway bridges at *Doboj*, *Vrbastica* and *Kukavica*, and numerous lengths of track. Aircraft of No 205 Group attacked many of the same targets as the Fifteenth Air Force (especially *Visegrad*) and in addition, with No. 334 Wing, dropped supplies in *Yugoslavia*.

Although in the first week of the month 20-30 FW. 190s were reported in the *Skoplje* area, enemy activity was confined to limited reconnaissance by ME.109s, probably based on *Sarajevo*, and air transport (JU.52s and HE.111s) operating over the country *Vienna-Sarajevo-Kraljevo*.

#### Yugoslav Political Front

With the liberation of *Belgrade* in the middle of October, life in *Yugoslavia* began a new era.

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*Attack on Fiume by Baltimores in progress in November, 1944.*

Showing commendable moderation towards the Serbs,\* especially on the question of the Monarchy, the Partisans greatly reduced the danger of civil disturbances, consolidated their position and laid down the essential foundations for the restoration of administrative control. By this foresight, they also won over to their cause a number of prominent Serbs including two

\* Although it was the Serbs of the *Sumadije* who undoubtedly gave the initial impetus to the Partisan Movement, the Mihajlovic (reactionary) influence in *Serbia* has always provided a serious barrier between the Serbs and the Partisans of Marshal Tito.

generals, the son and daughter of General Mihajlovic, and the Chief of Police and Gendarmerie of *Nis*.

On 21st October, the B.B.C. broadcast a statement that *Great Britain* and the Soviet Union had agreed to pursue a joint policy towards *Yugoslavia* and had recognised the unalienable right of the Yugoslavs to settle their own constitutional questions after the war. On the 23rd, the Free Yugoslav News Agency announced that Dr. Subasic, Premier of the Royal Yugoslav Government (see last issue of the *R.A.F. Mediterranean Review*), and Marshal Tito had begun discussions on liberated territory, and

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on 2nd November the Free Yugoslav Radio stated that these discussions had resulted in an agreement between the Yugoslav Premier and Marshal Tito for the formation as soon as possible of a United Yugoslav Government.

Evidence of the determination of the Partisans to get their country back on a level keel came from all sides. In *Belgrade*, the functions of the former Municipality were taken over by a National Liberation Committee, with sub-committees for food and the reorganisation of railways and other communications in liberated *Serbia*. There was also indication of modification in the recent somewhat uncompromising attitude shown towards the Western Allies—this possibly a result of over-vigorous pro-Russian propaganda, realisation of the need for further supplies, and appreciation of the part played by the Allies in the liberation of *France* and in aid to *Greece*.

On 7th November, at a celebration in *Belgrade* of the Soviet October Revolution, the principal speaker, General Džilas of the Communist Party, claimed that the Yugoslav people had earned the right to decide their own internal organisation in harmony with the *Moscow* and *Teheran* Conferences; that the defeat of Mihajlovic was a serious blow to reactionary circles abroad; and that the Partisans' object in making the Tito-Subasic agreement was to demonstrate their desire to collaborate with all those wishing for the liberation of *Yugoslavia*.

Following this meeting Dr. Subasic, with Partisan representatives, left for *Moscow* for discussions with M. Molotov. A report issued shortly after their arrival announced that the Premier had expressed his satisfaction at finding there the same understanding of *Yugoslavia's* problems as existed in *Great Britain* and the *United States*: another report by the *Moscow* Radio stated that the Soviet Government welcomed the efforts of Marshal Tito and Dr. Subasic to unite all national forces in the creation of a democratic and federative *Yugoslavia*.

### Open Warfare in Greece

The December diary of events in *Greece* makes sorry reading. With the internal position deteriorating and the atmosphere tense on the issue of disarmament of the guerrillas, General Scobie, British Military Commander, on 1st December, broadcast over the *Athens* Radio a declaration promising protection for the Greek Government and people against acts of unjustified violence or attempted *coup d'état*. On the same day, leaflets were dropped by British aircraft reiterating that by a decree of the Greek Government the guerrillas would be disbanded during the period 10-20th December, and that the forces of the E.A.M. Civil Guard would be taken over forthwith by the National Militia. In spite of appeals by M. Papandreou, however, Left-Wing members refused to endorse this decree and on the same day as General Scobie made his

announcement the six ministers of E.A.M./K.K.E. withdrew from the Government.

Seventy-two hours after this incident the balloon burst. There had been fighting in the *Drama* area for some days, but owing to E.L.A.S. holding a ring against outside intervention few details had filtered through. On the morning of the 3rd a general strike began in *Athens*, and as a result permission granted by the Cabinet for a political demonstration was withdrawn. Eye-witness accounts of what followed are not entirely conclusive. The Government ban was openly ignored, and as the various processions converged on Constitution Square shots were exchanged between the demonstrators and the police. Which side fired first has not been finally established, but ten civilians and one policeman were killed.

Although no further rioting or shooting took place this day, E.L.A.S. forces were infiltrating quickly, and on the 4th hostile activity began in many districts, including the centre of the city. British troops with tanks, on the morning of the 6th, stormed and occupied E.A.M. Headquarters in Koral Square and then secured K.K.E. (Communist) Headquarters in Constitution Square. Along the Piraeus Road and in the area around the Acropolis fighting was heavy and continuous, British aircraft flying low to machine-gun E.L.A.S. positions. One among many disgraceful features of the situation was the conduct of certain members of Right-Wing elements, such as the notorious "X" organisation, who, with Union Jacks pinned to their garments and in the guise of helping the British, began looting and paying-off old scores. Another such instance was the general conduct of the Athenian police, many of whom spent the days sitting on roof-tops machine-gunning anything and everything.

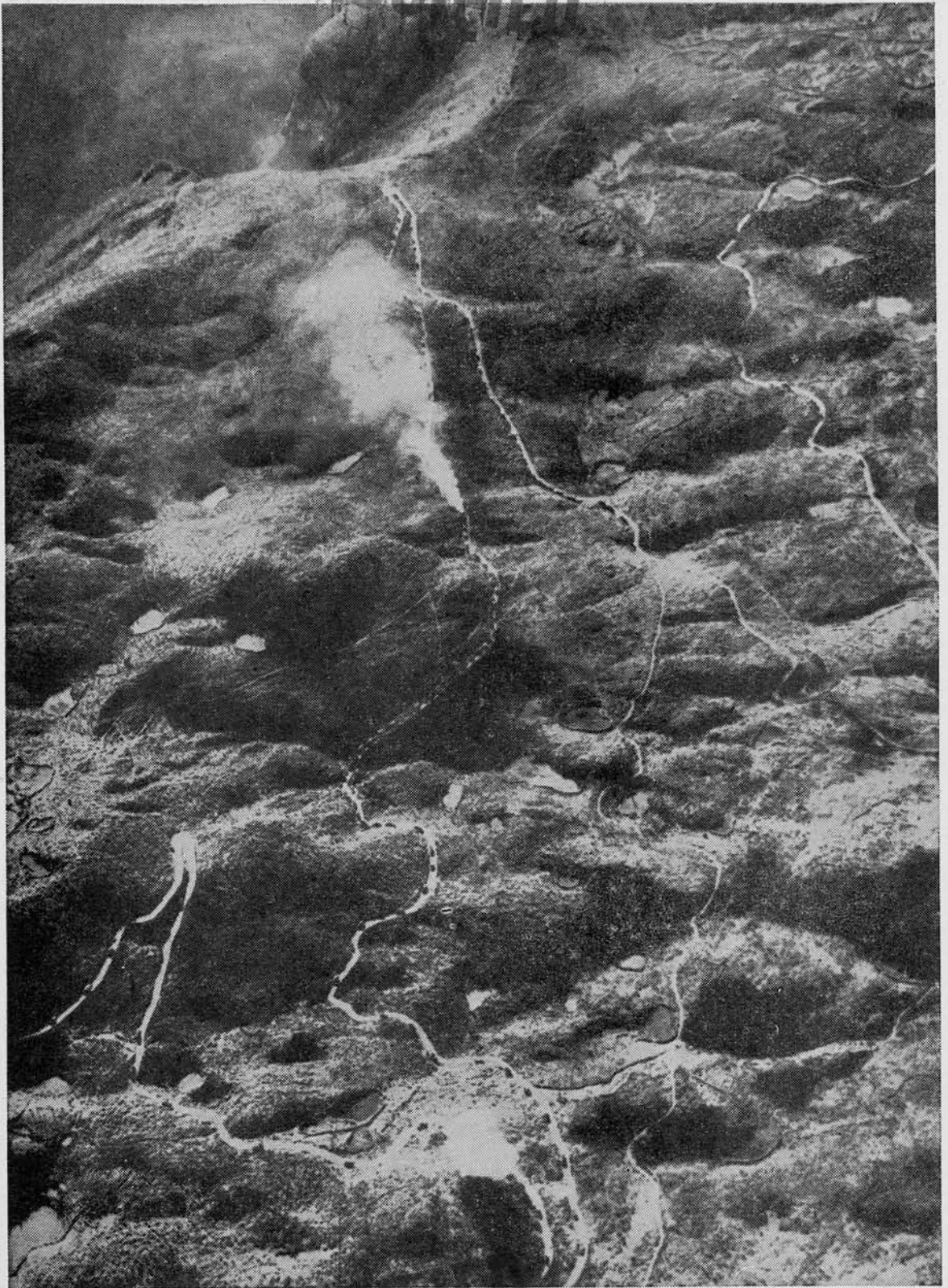
On 14th December, the curfew fixed at 19.00 hours was extended over the whole twenty-four except for the period 12.00-14.00 hours. Bitter fighting continued, and although negotiations were still taking place no terms to include the surrender of arms could be obtained from E.A.M. On the 19th, after all ammunition had been expended and four hours before a relief column arrived, A.H.Q. *Greece* (*Kifisia*) fell to the guerrillas, and on the morning of the following day General Scobie issued a warning by leaflets dropped by aircraft that E.L.A.S. guns firing at 09.00 hours on the 21st would be attacked with all the forces at his command. While this warning was effective in quelling fighting in the centre of the city, British troops working round the *Piraeus* area found opposition as strong as ever.

### A Regent Appointed

Although political negotiations were still producing no solution, a proposal to appoint as Regent Archbishop Damaskinos, a man widely acknowledged in *Greece* as above the intrigues of politics both by virtue of his office and through his own personality, was now provoking

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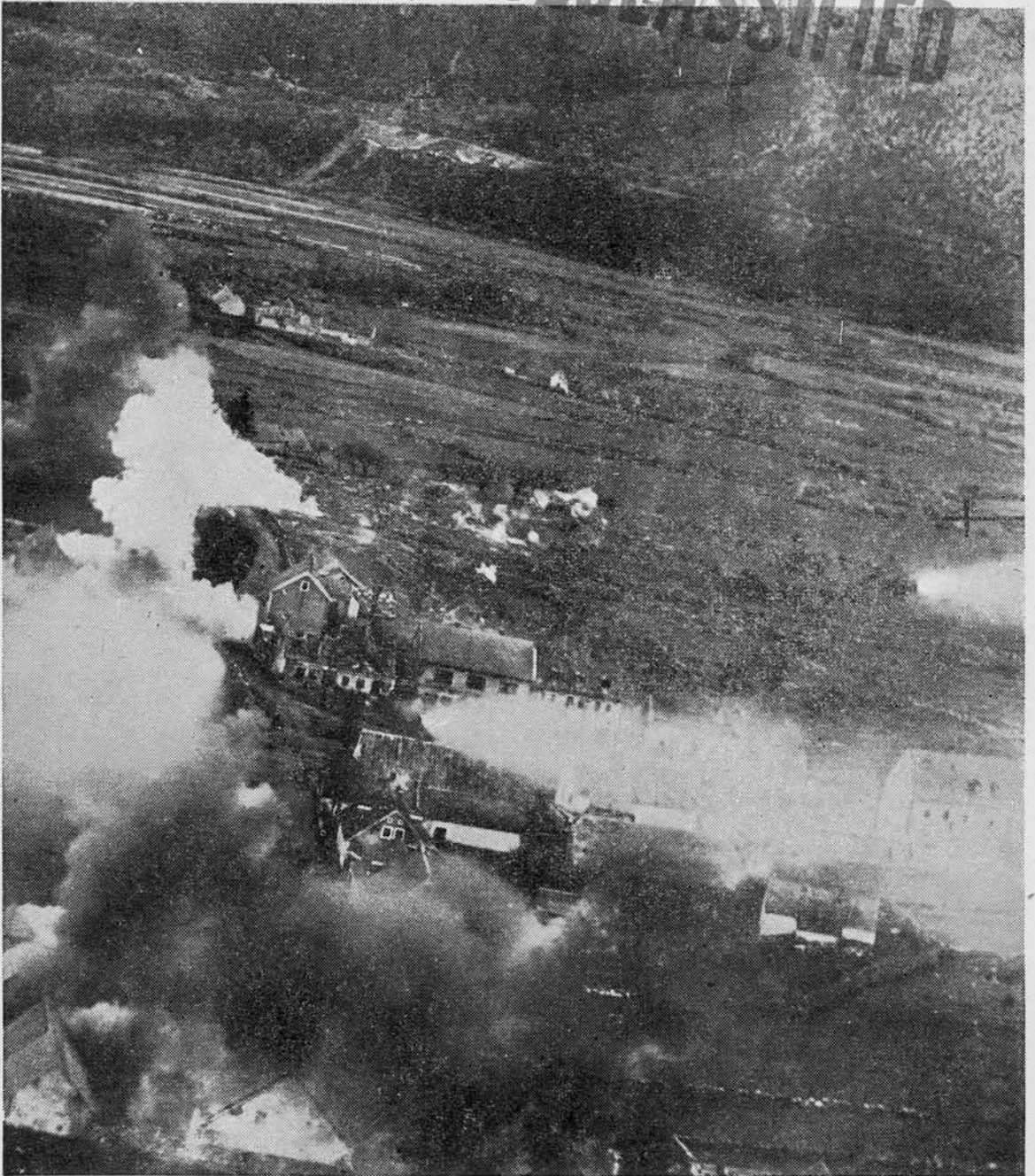


*German M.T. on the escape road to Matesevo, being attacked by aircraft as it descends a mountain road near Biocce, Yugoslavia.*

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*Rocket projectile attack by Beaufighters of No. 19 Squadron, S.A.A.F., against the village of Gracac on 4th December, 1944.*

discussion. On Christmas Day, Mr. Churchill and Mr. Eden arrived in *Athens*, and on the 26th a conference was held at which all parties were represented. This conference continued for three days. While it terminated with no agreement reached on the disarmament issue, it disclosed a majority-vote in favour of a Regency.

The original proposal for this change in constitution had been placed before King George of the Hellenes and rejected. On 30th December, reports from *London* stated that the King had withdrawn his objection and also given an undertaking not to return to *Greece* unless his return war first sanctioned by a plebiscite. Archbishop

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Damaskinos was elected to office the day following this announcement.

By the end of the first week of December, fighting had spread outside *Athens* and E.L.A.S. were pressing hard in a number of districts including the *Epirus*. The general strike, which had embraced *Patras*, *Salonika* and *Volos*, was over in these towns, but at all Greek ports of importance H.M. ships were standing-by, and on or about the 15th orders were given to evacuate E.D.E.S. troops and civilians from *Kavallo*, *Volos*, *Kalamai*, *Preveza*, the *Ionian Islands* and places on the north shore of the *Gulf of Corinth*. Naval vessels remained and in most ports the situation continued tense.

#### Noblesse Oblige

While no inclusive figures are available for December, it is known that British casualties in *Greece*, between the third of that month and 6th January, 1945, amounted to 2,101, including 237 killed.

During the period preceding that in which these casualties were inflicted, British ships and aircraft were importing approximately 20,000 tons of food per week to the *Piraeus* and another 20,000 tons to other Greek towns. They were also bringing footwear and clothing at a rate of nearly 90,000 tons a week. That it was impossible to continue these deliveries needs no comment. The cessation of essential food supplies, occurring as it did before stocks had been accumulated, produced at once the most acute hardship over the whole country, and in *Athens* alone, on one typical day in December, British troops served no fewer than 112,000 free meals to a starving population.

#### Air Support to Ground Operations

Squadrons of A.H.Q. *Greece* (B.A.F.), in support of ground troops repelling E.L.A.S. forces, flew 1,092 sorties in December, 932 of which were by fighters and fighter-bombers and 160 by G.R. aircraft. Primary duty of the fighters and fighter-bombers was armed reconnaissance mainly in the *Athens-Piraeus-Corinth* area, where continuous attacks were made against gun positions, M.T., road blocks and fuel dumps. At the same time R.P. Beaufighters, which flew 352 sorties, strafed seven E.L.A.S. Headquarters buildings, damaged the W/T station at *Piraeus* and blew up a number of ammunition dumps. Transport claims included 99 motor vehicles destroyed or damaged.

General Reconnaissance aircraft bombed the railway station north-west of *Eleusis*, strafed railway stock in the town itself, and dropped leaflets and supplies. Only three B.A.F. aircraft were reported missing and four damaged.

#### Enemy Withdrawal through Yugoslavia

At the beginning of December the enemy escape route to the north-west was threatened by the bridgeheads, one formed by a Russian force based on *Bar* and the other by a Russian force based on *Vukovar*.

the area of *Virovitica-Slatina* and the other by an all Russian concentration at *Vukovar*. An advancing joint Russian-Bulgarian-Partisan column moving across the *Srem*, already in possession of *Tovarnik*, *Sid Martinici* and a rail block on the *Vinkovci-Brcko* line, also increased the threat.

West of these positions the Germans continued to hold tenaciously to the *Okucani-Brod-Vinkovci* sector of the main railway, the security of which remained vital to Army Group E. (including the Corps which had made its way up the *Drina* to *Bijeljina*, only to find the *Vinkovci-Brcko* railway cut.) Army Group E. withdrawing from *Serbia* to *Montenegro* and *Bosnia* was as yet still south of the *Sava* and east of a general line *Brod-Sarajevo-Mostar*.

It is interesting to note here that the enemy was again in the precarious position in which he had found himself a few weeks earlier—and for the same reason. In his refusal to cut losses, a decision imposed no doubt by the manpower shortage, he had left retirement dangerously late and stood in grave risk of losing possession of the one essential railway west of *Brod*, and being forced to fight to *Zagreb* along the Partisan-controlled roads of central *Bosnia*.

The cause of this delay in the German withdrawal was the joint actions in November that, following the evacuation of *Pec* and *Prizren*, had split Army Group E., leaving the greater part in the *Iber Valley* and 21 Mountain Corps in the area *Scutari-Podgorica-Kotor* (see page 64). 21 Mountain Corps, under constant air and Partisan attack, was now a few miles south of *Matesevo*, while the relief column coming to its aid from the north had reached *Mojkocac*. These forces joined during the third week of December, and as a result northward movement of the beleaguered Corps was speeded up. Bad flying weather, which restricted air operations in the last week of the month, gave further assistance to the withdrawal, and by the 28th, with the *Visegrad-Sarajevo* section of the route still strongly held by the enemy, the head of the column was through *Sarajevo* and able to move at its own pace.

#### Further German Forces Brought Up

Notwithstanding the pull-out of 21 Mountain Corps and supporting troops, the Germans continued to hold tight to the *Mostar* area, while further up the coast the introduction of new guns on *Rab* gave indication of the importance attached to the Northern Islands.

In the west *Slavonia* sector, which as the neck of the bottle was the most vital area of all, additional German forces were brought up in mid-December and an attack launched to increase the depth of defence forward of the main line *Zagreb to Nagykanisza*. This operation cleared the Partisans from *Novigrad* and *Durdovac*, and during its progress the enemy made another thrust in the *Drava-Sava* pocket which eliminated the Russian bridgehead at *Vukovar*, and at the

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*A merchant ship left by the Germans as a block to the entrance to the Corinth Canal at the Aegean Sea end.*

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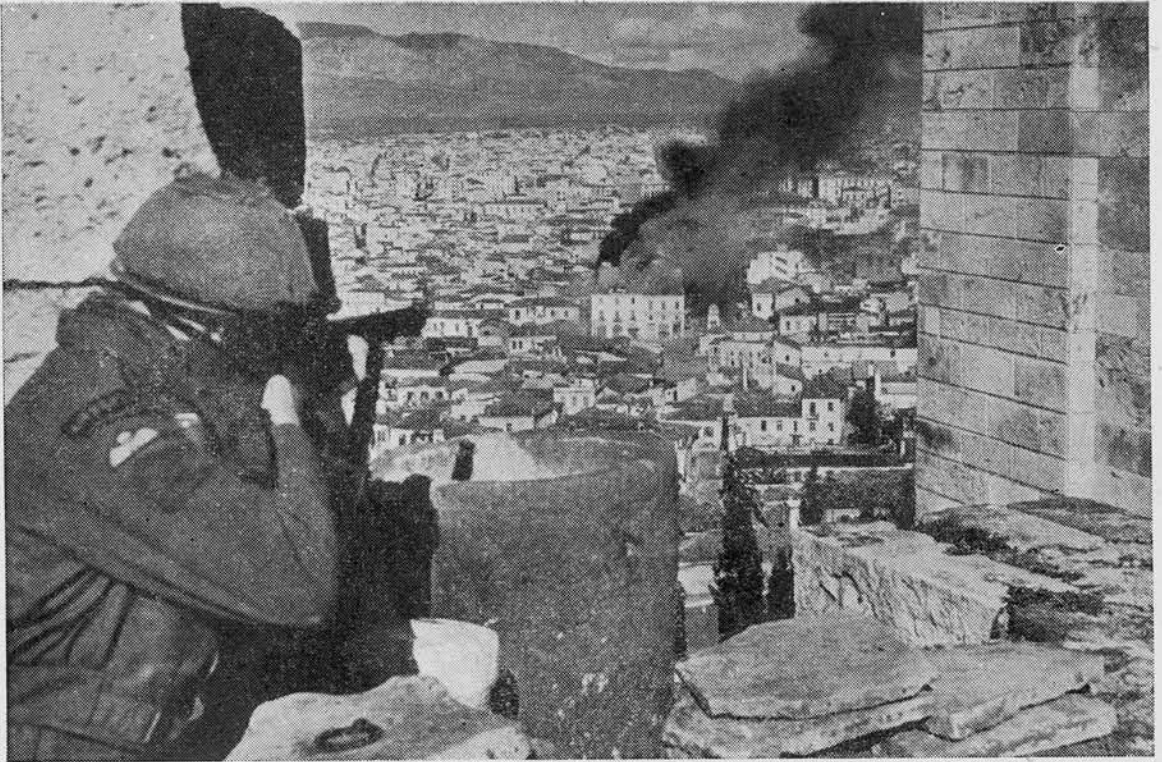
*British troops going ashore from landing craft at Salonika on 9th November, 1944.*



*A Greek policeman goes to the assistance of a civilian paralysed by fear as he is caught between two lines of fire in Athens.*

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*A British paratrooper waiting to snipe E.L.A.S. troops as they leave a burning building in Athens.*



*Paratroopers and Greek policemen advancing under sniping fire in Athens.*

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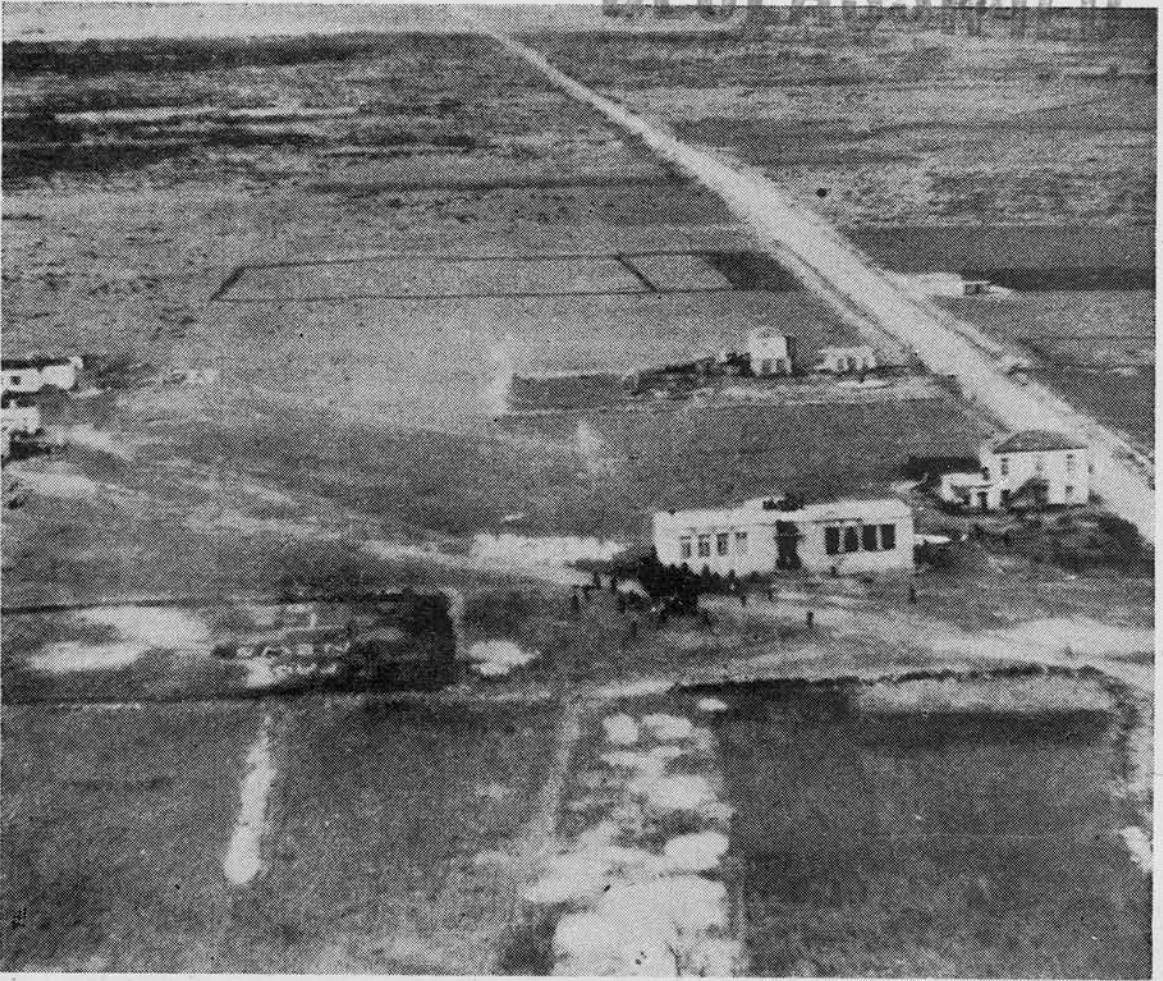


*British paratroopers await a chance to cross a street in Athens.*



*British paratroopers making a dash for it in Athens under covering fire from a tank.*

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*Supplies were dropped by aircraft to British prisoners of E.L.A.S in Greece. The scene at Kifisikhori, where prisoners had made the words "FAGS, NEWS" in stones on the ground above a white "T". The crew of the Wellington taking the photograph dropped all the cigarettes they had with the latest B.B.C. Bulletin written out by the Wireless Operator. As the aircraft left, the word "Thanks" was being marked out in reply.*

same time opened a counter-attack in an attempt to clear the *Vinkovci-Brcko* railway.

At this stage the most northerly of the withdrawing forces of Army Group E. had evacuated *Pozega* and *Uzice* and its main body was in the area of *Osijek-Vinkovci*. Although units of 118 Jaeger Division had been abandoned in *Dalmatia*, the bulk of Army Group E., now protected north and south by the *Drava-Danube* and the *Sava* and reinforced by the presence of considerable G.A.F. personnel in the *Osijek* area, could be said to be out of the wood. After penetrating to *Otok*, Allied forces were forced to give ground, leaving the position fluid in *Sid* and *Tovarnik*, while around the *Barcs* bridgehead (*Zagreb-Nagykanisza* line) the attack that had opened tentatively in mid-December increased its

pressure in the *Bjelovar* region (east of *Zagreb*) and drove the Partisans north and east back to *Pitomaca*.

#### December Air Operations—Yugoslavia

While the December total of 4,653 sorties beat the previous record of 4,604 flown in November, bad weather on many days curtailed air operations and only 1,706 fighter and fighter-bomber sorties were carried out over Yugoslavia against 2,258 for the preceding four weeks. (N.B. The figure of 2,650 quoted on page 67 includes fighter sorties by A.H.Q. Greece).

Effort was directed mainly against the evacuation route of 21 Mountain Corps, the principal sectors being the *Mostar-Sarajevo-Brod* railway and the general troop concentration area

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*A Beaufighter patrolling over the Acropolis, the key position of one flank of the British forces in Athens.*

*Bioce-Matsevo-Kotasin.* Claims for transport and rolling stock exceeded November, no fewer than 319 M.T. vehicles, thirteen locomotives and 27 wagons being destroyed, and 553 vehicles, seventeen locomotives and 63 wagons damaged. Other targets included barracks and marshalling yards at *Bjelovak*, motor transport at *Podgorica*, bridges north of *Scuturi*, and a power station and gun sites on *Lussino Island*.

Attacks on the German garrison at *Gracac* by R.P. Beaufighters, Baltimores and Venturas were followed by the capture of the town by the Partisans on 9th December, 500 of the enemy being killed and 800 taken prisoner. Booty included 30 tons of ammunition, 1,500 rifles and 120 machine-guns. Another target, the first important one at sea for two months, was a 400-ton schooner carrying ammunition through the *Podgorski Channel*. It was attacked by R.P. Beaufighters, which claimed 25 hits and saw the vessel blow up.

Fifteenth Air Force and No. 205 Group, T.A.F. and D.A.F., and No. 334 Wing operated with Balkan Air Force as in previous months.

Fifteenth Air Force attacked the marshalling yards at *Maribor* and the railway bridge at *Zenica*; No. 205 Group bombed *Bioce*, the *Podgorica-Klopot* and *Bioce-Matsevo* roads, bridges at *Opasanica*, *Matsevo*, *Babljac* and *Mojkovac*, and dropped many tons of supplies; Baltimores, Marauders and fighters of T.A.F. and D.A.F. struck at the barracks and marshalling yards at *Bjelovar*, bridges and rolling stock on the *Zagreb-Kriz*, *Brod-Sarajevo* and *Zagreb-Maribor* lines, destroying in particular two ammunition trains. They also bombed the viaduct at *Orovnic* and the bridge at *Litija* on the principal railway from north *Italy* to *Yugoslavia*. No. 334 Wing was restricted by weather, but its aircraft dropped and landed supplies in *Yugoslavia* and *Albania*, including provisions for a Victory Celebration in *Tirana*.

Of the 4,653 sorties flown, 3,561 were by aircraft based in *Italy* and 1,092 by A.H.Q. *Greece* (see page 77). Single-engined fighters and fighter-bombers from *Italy* flew 1,382 sorties, R.P. Beaufighters 324 and bombers 462. Sorties by Special Duties aircraft, including No. 205

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*A.H.Q., Greece (Kifisia), captured on 19th December, 1944, after all ammunition had been expended and four hours before a relief column arrived.*

Group, U.S.A.A.F., Russian Air Group and Italian Air Force (SM. 82s and C. 1007s) totalled 1,393. Only 25 B.A.F. aircraft were lost and seventeen damaged.

#### **Budapest under Siege**

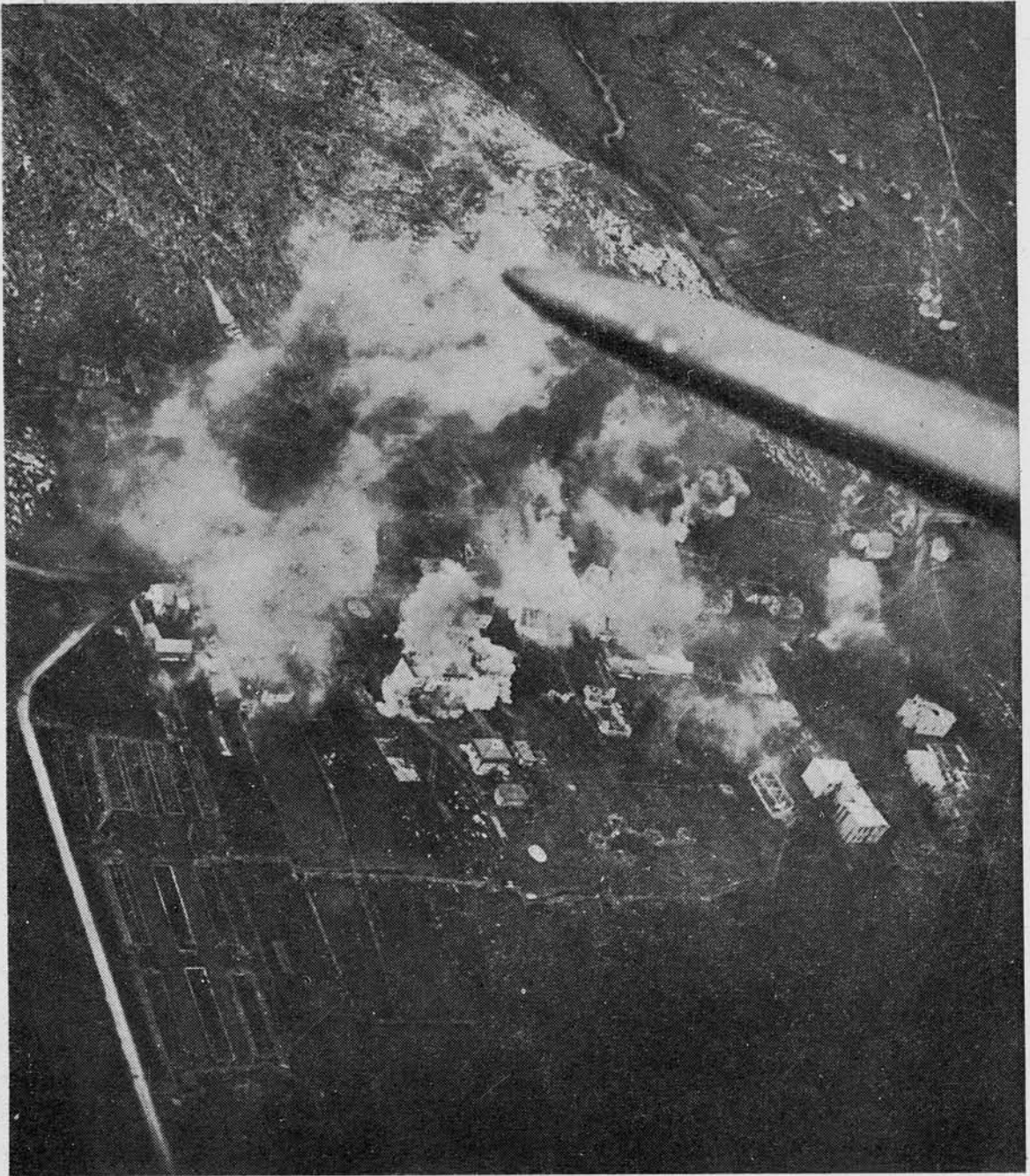
By the end of the first week of December, the forces of Marshal Tolbukhin, after taking *Csepel* Island (site of the Manfred Weiss Works, Hungary's largest industrial undertaking, and the Tokol Aircraft Factory), had surged forward to the eastern bank of Lake *Balaton*, the scale of the attack diverting the enemy's attention from the sector north of *Budapest* and enabling the Russians to effect a considerable penetration embracing *Vac* on the *Danube* bend and *Ipoly* on the Slovak frontier. Although south-east of the city the Germans were now able to contain Marshal Tolbukhin's assault and make some local gains, they were unsuccessful in preventing Soviet forces from capitalising their break through in the north and establishing by the middle of the month a substantial bridgehead across the *Ipoly*.

This bridgehead the Russians at once developed by fanning-out east and northward into *Czechoslovakia*, accompanying this movement with a thrust on the front south-east of the capital that took first the key town of *Szekejfehervar* and then went on apace to the north, cutting the main *Budapest-Vienna* railway, capturing *Bisceke* and *Esztergom*, and linking up with Marshal Malinovsky's forces to complete the encirclement of *Budapest*.

On 23rd December, 1944, *Moscow* Radio announced that a National Assembly had been constituted at *Debrechen*, and on the same day Radio *Kossuth*, stating that an armistice would be concluded with *Russia* and other countries at war with *Hungary*, gave the programme of this party as including a complete purge of Fascist and reactionary influences, an Agrarian revolution, and a policy of friendship towards the United Nations and the neighbours of *Hungary*. Two days later, *Moscow* announced the formation of a Provisional Government of Liberation, with General Miklos (hitherto Commander of the Hungarian First Army) as Prime Minister and

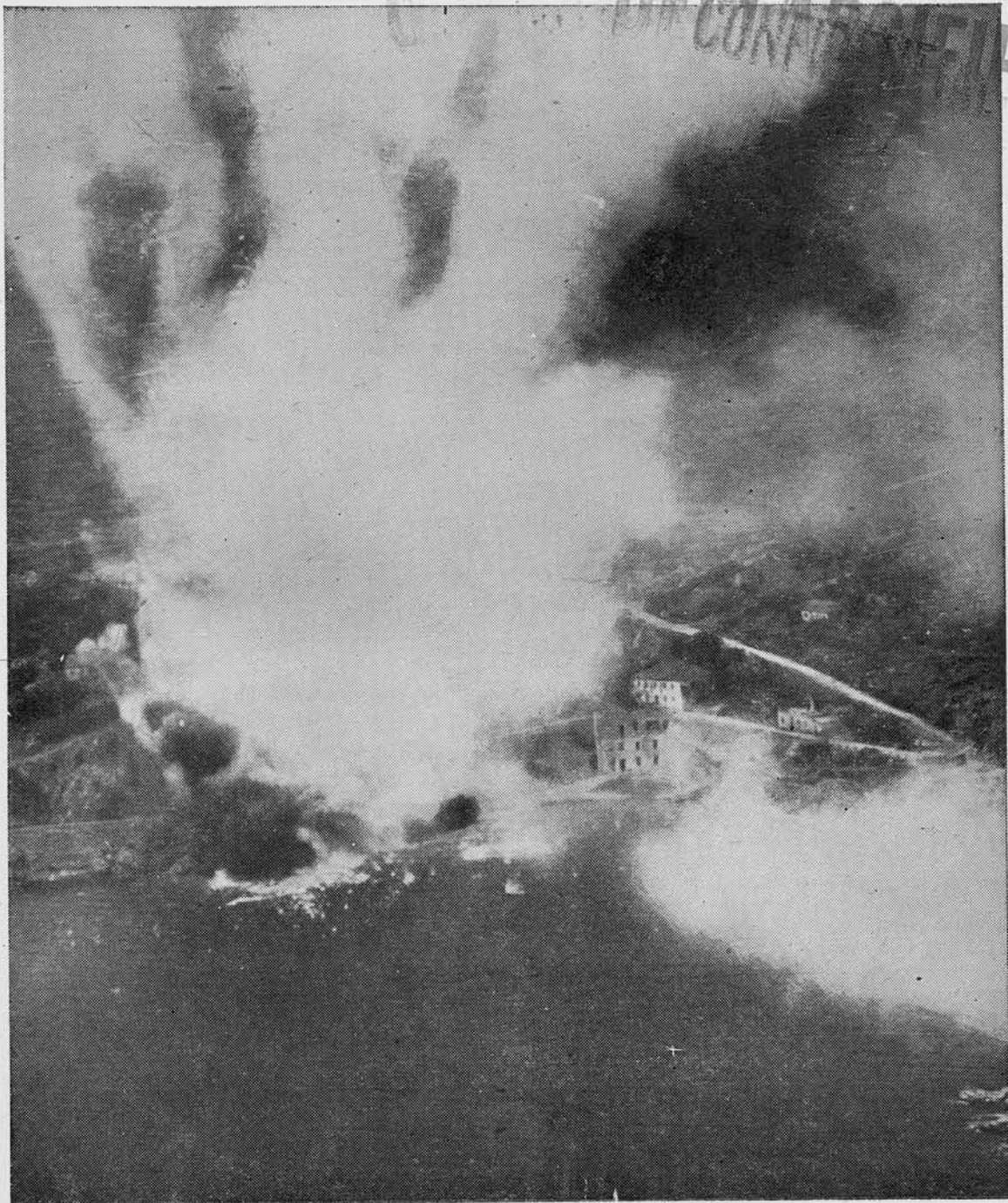
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*Another view of the Beaufighter attack on the village of Gracac on  
4th December, 1944.*

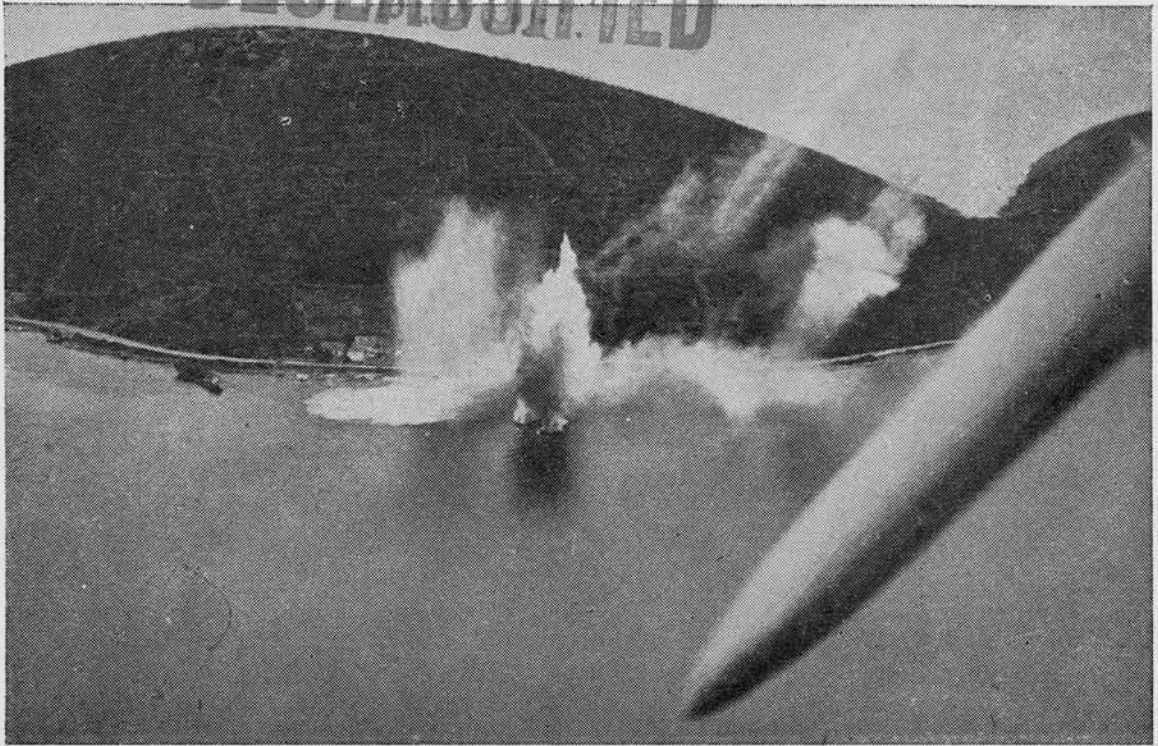
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*This photograph shows a 400-ton schooner at Karlobag exploding after sustaining 25 direct R.P. hits on 18th December, 1944.*

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*Ten direct and eight probable R.P. hits were scored in this attack on the Power House at Lussin Piccolo on 17th December, 1944. At the request of the Navy, the harbour was also strafed with cannon fire.*

General Voeroes (Chief of Staff to General Horthy) as Minister for National Defence.

Six or seven enemy divisions, including three Hungarian formations, defended *Budapest*, the garrison being split into two pockets one in the bend of the *Danube* to the north and the other within the city itself. On 26th December, after the divisions in the bend had failed to break out to the north-west, and with Russian troops occupying *Ujpest, Alag, Budaors, Csepic* and *Matyasfold* slowly working through the outer defences, the German Commander declared a state of siege. While outside the period of this review, it is interesting to note that although by the middle of January the enemy relief columns attempting to drive corridors along the two *Budapest-Vienna* highways had made some ground east of *Komarno* and retaken *Esztergom*, two-thirds of the city of *Budapest* was in Russian hands.

#### Honourable Mention

On 31st December, 1944, Balkan Air Force completed its first six months of operations,

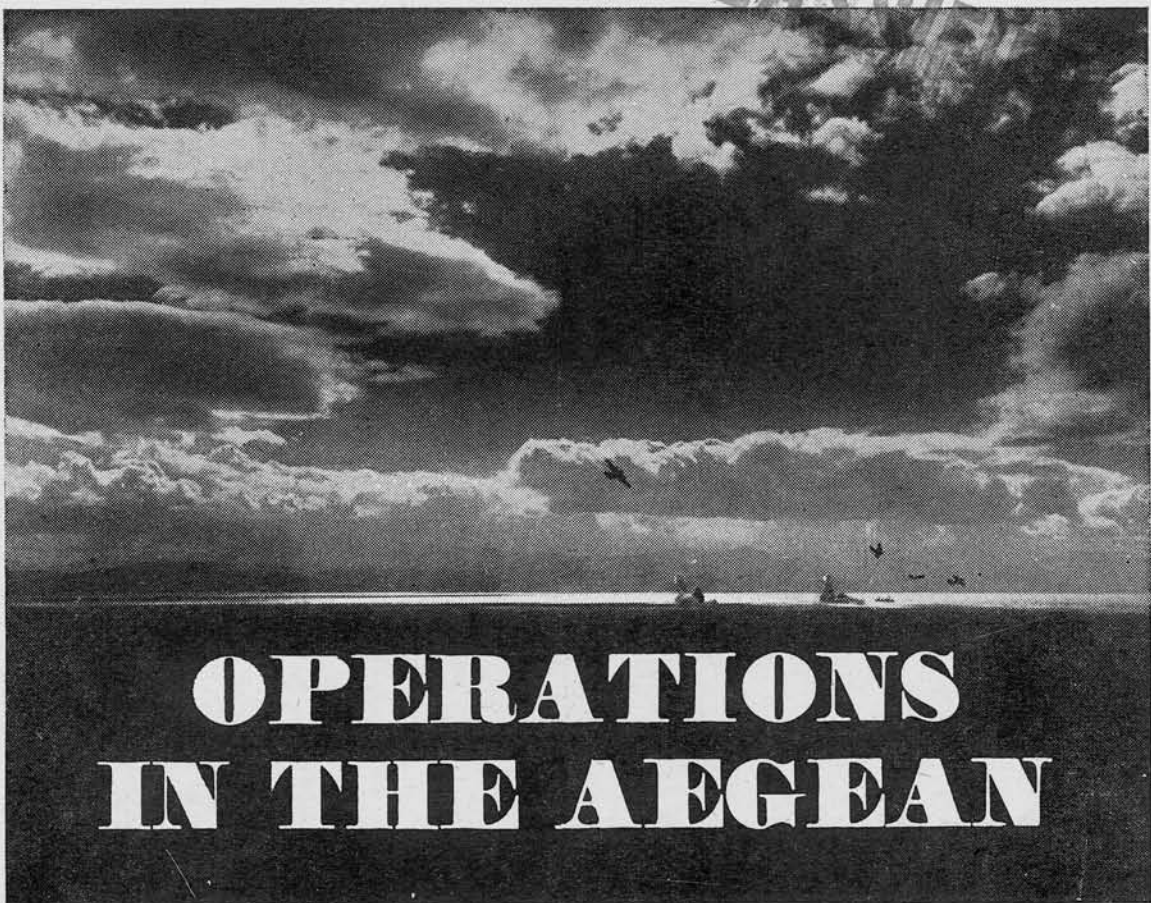
during which, in spite of much bad weather, the Command with squadrons attached flew 22,317 sorties, involving 63,170 flying hours. Sorties carried out by single-engined fighters and fighter-bombers (including Italian Air Force) totalled 9,565; by twin-engined fighters 1,959; and by bombers (including No. 205 Group) 1,957. Special Duties aircraft flew 8,836 sorties and over 34,000 hours. Only slightly over one per cent. of aircraft failed to return.

Established claims were as follows. Destroyed—1,334 M.T. vehicles, 280 locomotives, 608 wagons, 116 ships, 65 aircraft and 129 miscellaneous; damaged—1,937 vehicles, 503 locomotives, 1,141 wagons, 125 ships, 43 aircraft and 311 miscellaneous. Twenty-three Headquarters buildings and nine bridges were wrecked, and 100 and 62, respectively, seriously damaged.

These figures in some cases exceed those given earlier in the Balkan Commentary. They include sorties for which details had not been received at time of going to press and may now be considered comprehensive and complete.

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# OPERATIONS IN THE AEGEAN

## OCTOBER TO DECEMBER, 1944

AT THE END of the previous quarter it must have been painfully clear even to the troops concerned that the German garrisons in the outer Aegean islands had been left to their fate. Almost all the larger vessels had gone to the bottom and those that remained were busy on the evacuation route between *Piraeus* and *Salonika*; such air transport as had survived the devastating M.A.S.A.F. raids on the *Athens* airfields in September and the attentions of intruder Beaufighters were mainly flying on the escape route north from *Salonika* to *Skoplje*; the absence of G.A.F. fighters had let our Naval patrols in among the Aegean islands to carry out bombardments or make landings where they liked; and British troops were already established on *Kythera* island, just off the south coast of the *Peloponnese*, paving the way for the capture of the port of *Patras* and, eventually, the liberation of *Athens* itself.

The quarter now under review was to bring no crumb of comfort to the isolated garrisons. On the contrary, their outlook grew steadily blacker as week succeeded week and as the

operations described fully in the article on page 55, freed the whole of *Greece*.

### The Enemy Position in October

When October came, the general situation as it affected the Aegean garrisons was, briefly, as follows. The whole of southern *Greece*—the *Peloponnese*—had been evacuated by the Germans and they were now preparing to pull out from the *Athens* area. The *Corinth Canal* was about to be closed by blockships at either end, by landslides in the middle and by cutting the bridges across it, while other blockships and demolition charges were prepared at *Piraeus*. Everything that could be moved was being shipped northwards—either direct or via *Volos*—to *Salonika*, which had become the chief evacuation base both for shipping and for transport aircraft.

For carrying out the sea evacuation the Germans could at the beginning of the month call on S.S. "Bourgas" (2,900 tons), the mine-layer "Zeus" (2,400 tons), S.S. "Tsar Ferdinand" (2,000 tons), the tanker "Berthe" (1,800 tons), S.S. "Lola" (1,200 tons), the coaster

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"Silva" (490 tons) and four destroyers—three of which had just slipped round from the Adriatic—in addition to such smaller craft as had eluded the Allied air and naval net in the past months. As may be imagined, this was by no means an adequate escape fleet. Any hope of general evacuation by air was similarly slim, for all available transport aircraft were reserved for bringing out key personnel and specialists from the major island outposts.

As for the rank and file, it was pretty obvious by then that, barring miracles, they had, as the saying is, had it. The number of these troops left in Crete, Rhodes, Lesbos, and other islands was small. The total number of troops on the islands was approximately 18,000 to 19,000.

tionist Italians. The majority were on Crete—some 13,000 Germans concentrated mainly in the north-west corner of the island—and very few were other than low category troops of mixed nationalities and doubtful fighting value.

The food supply position, however, was on the whole thought to be fairly good—enough for four to six months—but lack of shipping naturally made satisfactory distribution between the islands a constant headache.

**Forces at Our Disposal**

This, then, was how the enemy was placed in the Aegean in early October. For our part, the Navy had both surface and submarine patrols operating among the islands; there were, until

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mid-November, the carrier-borne aircraft of No. 4 Naval Fighter Wing, whose activities are fully described in an article on page 152; A.H.Q., Eastern Mediterranean, although many of its squadrons had been transferred to *Italy* (and others were to be lost before the end of the quarter), still had the services of one Wellington squadron, one R.A.A.F. Baltimore squadron, three Beaufighter squadrons and one S.A.A.F. Spitfire squadron for operational use in the Aegean; and, as already indicated, the combined operations aimed at the capture of *Athens* were under way when *Kythera* was occupied.

All services—as well as Greek patriots—were united in the common task of making the German evacuation of *Greece* and the Aegean as hazardous and costly as possible. Conditions for air operations, which had previously been the major factor in the Aegean, were by no means ideal as enemy shipping activity shifted northwards, but there was no letting-up of effort, while the Navy, free to move about in the absence of enemy aircraft, went from strength to strength.

#### Early Success Against Shipping

First blows against the enemy fell early in October. On the 1st "Tsar Ferdinand" and the tanker "Berthe," loaded with troops, stores and equipment, sailed north from *Piraeus*. On the night of the 2nd/3rd submarines intercepted them in the *Gulf of Salonika* and sank them both.

Next day, off the island of *Makronesi* in the *Cyclades* group, a formation of fourteen Beaufighters came upon a convoy consisting of three armed caiques and a 200-ton barge, protected by an escort vessel of 250 tons. All five were damaged by R.P. or cannon fire, the barge being left on fire and abandoned by its crew.

These early successes were augmented in the ensuing few days when naval surface forces sank one of the destroyers that had come round from the Adriatic, accounted for five out of seven landing craft caught leaving the island of *Piscopi* (*Tilos*) and probably sank a coaster and a lighter off *Leros*, while carrier-borne aircraft got "Silva" en route from *Lemnos* to *Salonika*.

#### Hampering the Enemy's Retreat

Meanwhile, the enemy was being harried in other ways apart from shipping attacks. On the Greek mainland British patrols entered *Patras* on the 4th and on the same day—exactly a year after the Germans had wrested *Cos* from us—we were back in the island of *Samos*, which we had also occupied at that time. The fall of *Samos*, as will be seen, was soon to be followed by that of almost all the other islands.

Spitfires carried out small-scale sweeps over *Crete*, on the look-out for M.T. and other targets, and Beaufighters went on with their intruder operations, although they could no longer match the striking success they had achieved between 26/27th September and 3rd/4th October when, co-operating with seaborne G.C.I., they accounted for nineteen transport aircraft shot down, one

probably destroyed and five more damaged. The chief reason for this falling off was scarcity of targets, the enemy, as already mentioned, now using most of his transports on the escape route from *Salonika*.

This transport traffic to the north was, however, dealt a blow on 4th October when 39 M.A.S.A.F. long-range Mustangs attacked the *Athens* airfield of *Kalamaki*, *Eleusis* and *Tatoi*, destroying nine aircraft on the ground and damaging another twenty-one. A return visit was paid to these airfields two days later by 55 more M.A.S.A.F. Mustangs, which added five aircraft destroyed and ten damaged, while 35 Lightnings attended to the *Salonika* airfields, claiming a further thirteen destroyed and eight damaged. The final attack on *Eleusis*, *Kalamaki* and *Tatoi* came on the night of the 9/10th, when nineteen M.A.S.A.F. Wellingtons dropped some 44 tons of bombs, scoring hits on hangars, runways and dispersal areas.

#### The Occupation of Athens

By the time this last raid took place, it was obvious that the Germans were pulling the last of their troops out of *Attica* and on the 11th the local German commanding officer declared *Athens* an open city. Three days later part of the small British force, which had established itself on the island of *Poros*, at the entrance to the *Gulf of Athens*, drove in to the city. On the previous day a R.A.A.F. Baltimore had dropped a package containing important information required by our force on *Poros* before launching an assault on *Aegina*, an island further up the Gulf.

After quitting *Piraeus*—which was blocked with three large vessels, along with two floating docks and a number of smaller craft—the Germans concentrated a considerable volume of shipping in *Volos*, at the head of the Gulf of that name. On the morning of the 13th over 70 active vessels were present, including "Lola," one of the last surviving merchantmen, and two destroyers.

Unfortunately, these three major vessels had departed for *Salonika* by the time that nine S.A.A.F. Venturas of Balkan Air Force launched an attack in the afternoon. The attack was, nonetheless, a successful one, the largest victim being S.S. "Adriana" (4,350 tons), which had only recently been made serviceable and which was still on fire on the 16th, being presumed a total loss. Other vessels claimed as sunk or badly damaged in *Volos* were the corvette "Brigitta" (400 tons), a 250-ton coaster and sixteen or seventeen miscellaneous craft.

The two destroyers did not escape for long. One failed to reach *Salonika* with "Lola" (she had been damaged previously and probably sank), while the other, having left the harbour again on the 15th, was disposed of by our naval forces in the *Gulf of Salonika* while on a southerly course. This was the last of the Adriatic destroyers, leaving only one other destroyer to be sunk by the Navy off the *Sporades* on the night of the 19/20th.



*The German garrison in the Town Hall at Naxia, Naxos, was attacked by Beaufighters on 15th October, 1944.*

### **The Fall of the Islands**

As the Germans fell back on *Salonika*, the Allies not only followed them up the mainland, but took over the more strategically-placed islands. *Syros* (in the middle of the *Cyclades*) had fallen on 13th October and was followed by the capture of *Naxos* (also in the *Cyclades*) and *Lemnos* (commanding the approach to the *Dardanelles*) on the 15th, by that of *Scarpanto* (between *Crete* and *Rhodes*) on the 17th and by that of *Santorin* or *Thera* (at the base of the *Cyclades*) on the 18th.

Normally naval landing parties were sufficient to effect the surrender of the islands, but in the case of *Naxos* the R.A.F. had to be called in. Here a building that was the headquarters of the garrison was reported to be held in strength by the Germans.

Four Beaufighters were briefed to deal with it and, on arrival at *Naxos*, the target was indicated with marker shells by naval vessels lying off the harbour. The building—a large white

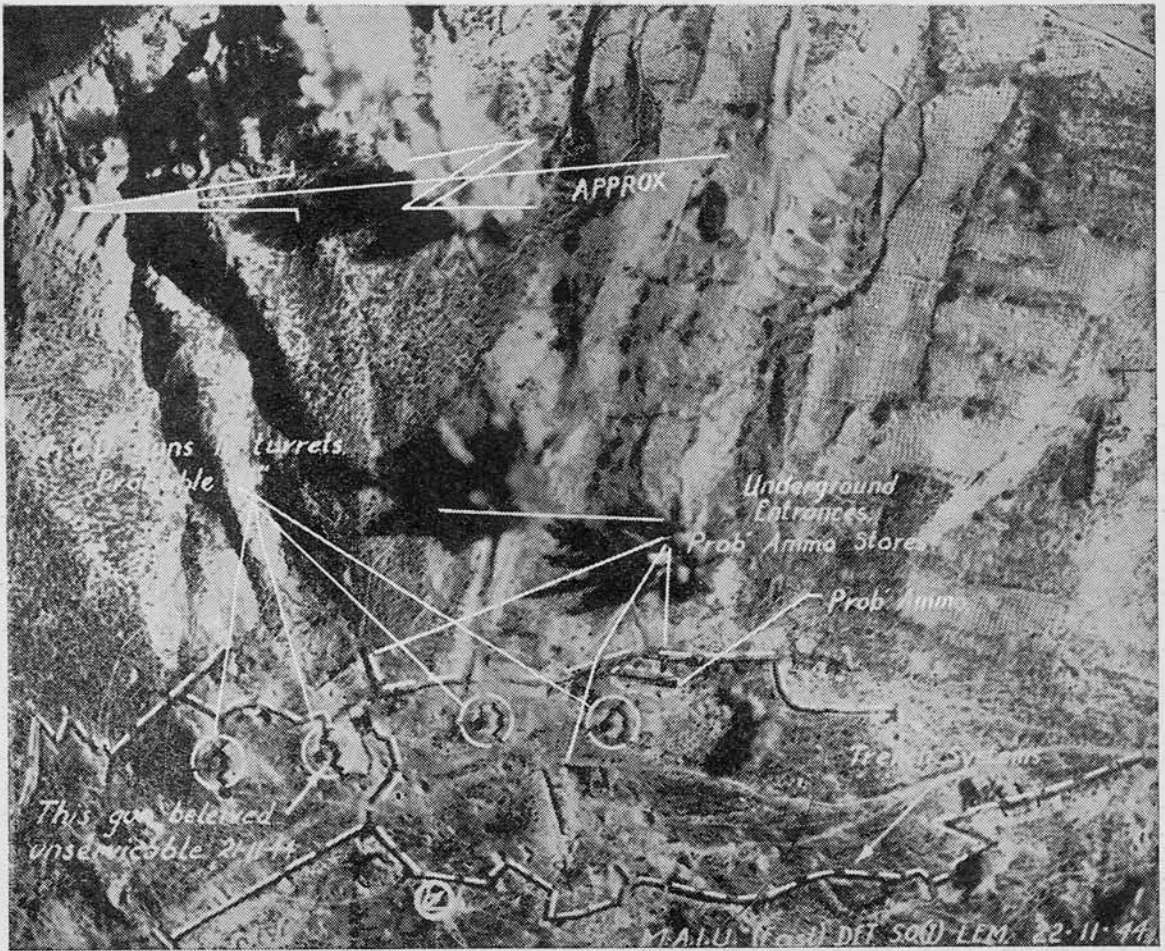
affair with two or three storeys and a red roof—was easily distinguished and at least nine R.P. hits were registered as well as many cannon strikes.

The roof and walls were damaged, but accurate assessment of final results was impossible owing to the smoke, dust and debris flying about. All crews, however, felt sure that few of the garrison would have survived the attack unless they had gone to ground in the cellars.

### **Attacks on Land Targets**

Although shipping reconnaissance was steadily maintained, worth-while targets were usually out of range and, consequently, A.H.Q., Eastern Mediterranean's aircraft could turn their attention to land objectives. On most days in mid-October *Baltimores* bombed the airfield at *Maleme* (*Crete*) to hinder possible evacuation attempts by air, and attacks were similarly made on *Calato* airfield, *Rhodes*. Both instantaneous and delayed-action bombs were used.





*A Coastal Battery at Lakidha Point photographed by a R.A.A.F. Baltimore during the bombing attack on Melos Island on 21st November, 1944.*

On the 24th another German-occupied building was attacked—this time on *Calino*, the island lying between *Cos* and *Leros*. Five Beaufighters (a sixth returning early) located the building—a former hospital now used for billets—and attacked in line astern. Thirty-two 60-lb. R.P. hits were claimed, apart from hundreds of cannon strikes, and when the Beaufighters left the target area clouds of smoke and dust were rolling up the valley and there was a 30-ft. wide hole in the face of the building.

S.A.A.F. Spitfires continued to fly their sweeps over *Crete*, but found little to interest them in the target line. They did, however, corroborate the reports that the German garrison was withdrawing more and more into the north-west corner of the island.

**Series of Attacks on Melos**

After the fall of *Naxos* and *Santorin*, the only Cycladean island that the Germans still controlled was *Melos*. This they were apparently determined to hold on to at all costs, in spite of

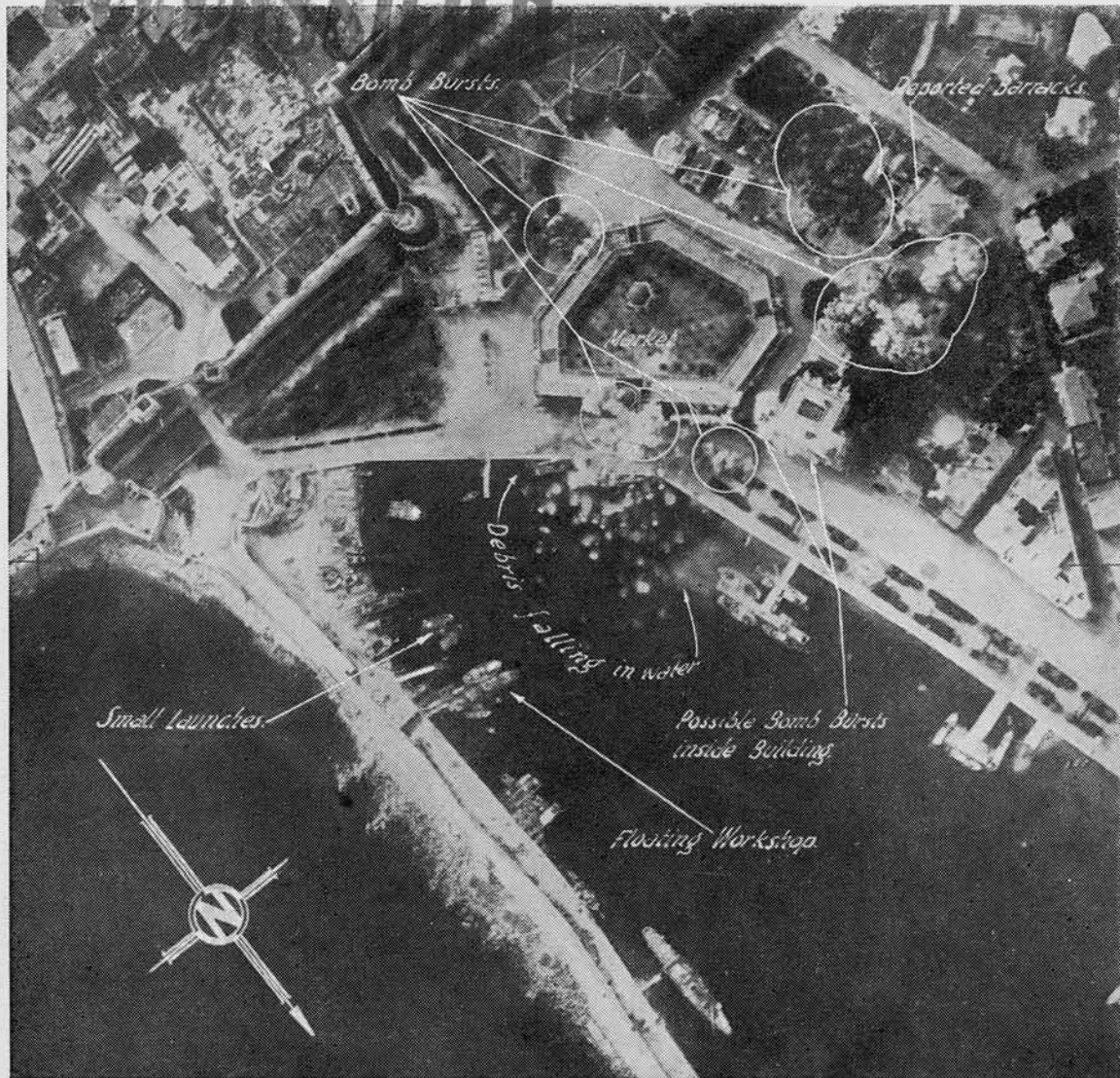
naval bombardments, which were augmented, from 25th October onwards, by attacks from the air.

Coastal defence batteries were the primary targets and altogether, between 25th October and 2nd November, seven attacks were made by R.A.A.F. Baltimores and one by Beaufighters. The Baltimores operated in formations of between six and eight aircraft and, for the most part, released their bombs from between 6,000 and 8,000 ft.

The guns were well sited and difficult to tackle, but in spite of the spirited defence put up by the gunners no aircraft was lost. Results were impossible to assess accurately, although in the attack on 31st October black smoke arose from the area of the target, which may have been a fuel or ammunition dump.

A feature of the mission by eight Beaufighters on the 29th was that eight Hellcats of No. 4 Naval Fighter Wing acted as anti-flak cover for them. The Hellcats led the formation, indicated the target and made a well-timed and effective

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*Attack in progress on Rhodes Harbour, 27th November, 1944, photographed by a Baltimore in the first wave.*

anti-flak attack. The result of the Beaufighters' R.P. fire could not, however, be observed.

After the attack on 2nd November, *Melos* was temporarily unmolested from the air but, as will be seen later, the garrison was not given much peace.

**The Evacuation of Salonika**

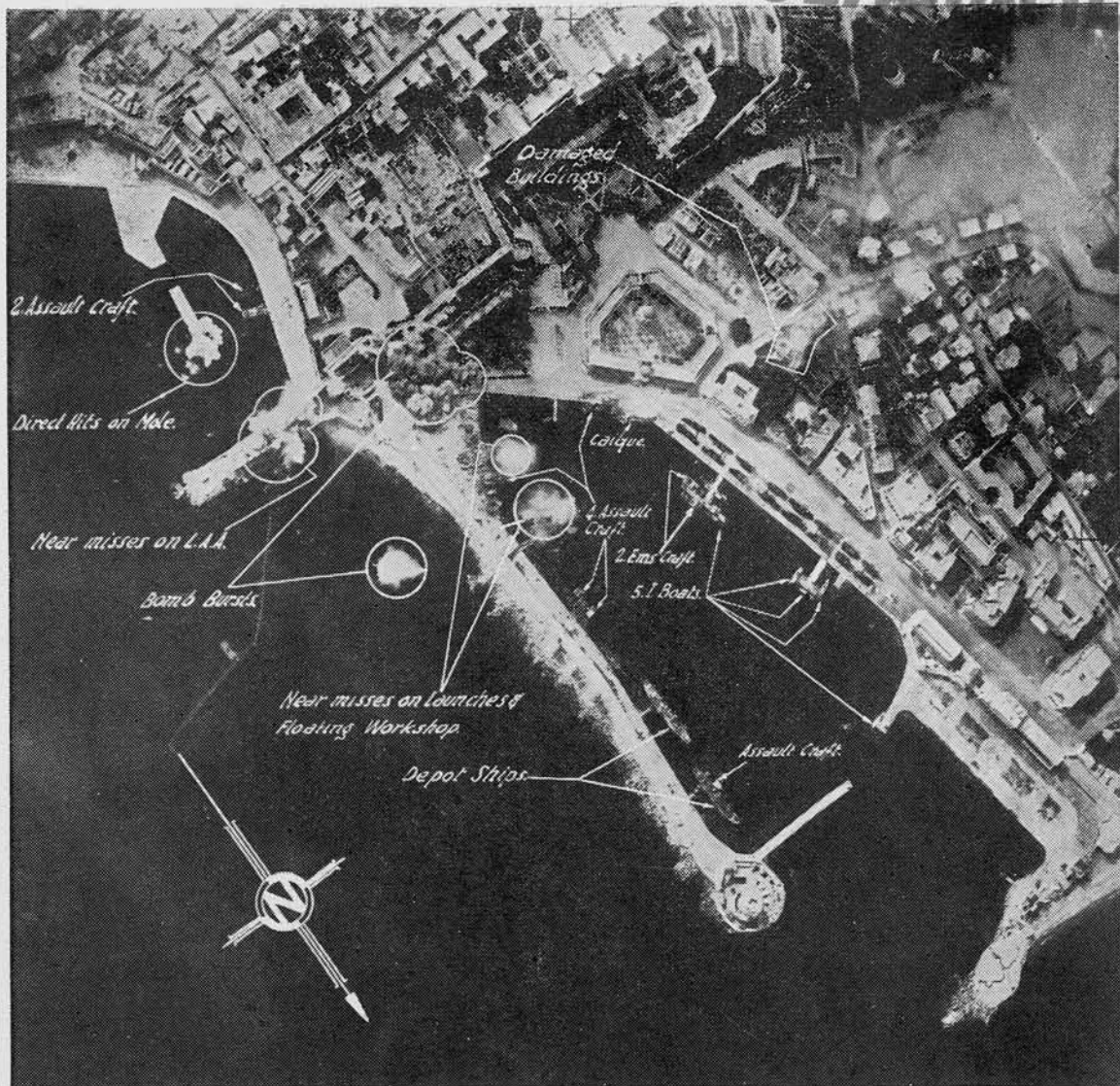
While this series of attacks was being launched against *Melos*, it was evident that the garrisons there and elsewhere in the Aegean islands that were still occupied would be finally and irrevocably sealed off by the German evacuation of *Salonika*.

On 28th October—the anniversary of Mussolini's invasion of *Greece* four years ago—photographic reconnaissance revealed that all the *Salonika*

airfields had been cratered and the administrative buildings destroyed. For some time obvious preparations had been made for destroying the harbour facilities and by the time that the first British patrol entered on the afternoon of the 30th the dock area had been isolated by the demolition of three bridges and, as anticipated, "Lola" and "Zeus" had been sunk as blockships at the south-east entrance to the main harbour. All guns had been dismantled and the enemy was streaming northwards towards *Skoplje*. *Belgrade* had fallen to the Russians on the 20th and the Germans were not going to risk their main forces being cut off if they could possibly help it.

As for the island garrisons on *Crete*, *Rhodes*, *Leros*, *Cos*, *Melos* and the one or two minor out-

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Photograph of the attack on Rhodes Harbour, 27th November, 1944, taken by a Baltimore in the second wave.

posts remaining, they had no option but to stay where they were, whether they liked it or not. Their's was Hobson's choice. Such shipping as remained to them was suitable only for inter-island traffic and even if they eluded the naval blockade there was no escape port that they could make for. The only aircraft that could now fly in to Crete or Rhodes would have to come from the Vienna area and, although bringing the consolation of mail from home, would not be able to fly out more than a handful of personnel at a time from the islands.

#### The Garrisons Still Hold Out

The garrisons—still estimated at over 22,000 Germans and Italians—were not yet, however, down and out. The Crete garrison was well

equipped with artillery and had eased its defence position by consolidating all available forces into one area. The Rhodes C.O. was said to be a fanatical Nazi determined to resist any attempted landing. From Leros reports stated that the Fuehrer himself had ordered a fight to the finish. The Melos garrison, although only about 600 strong, showed no signs of surrender and a new commander there was said to have been raising morale by terrorist methods.

The Germans, indeed, hit back when they had the chance. A raid by one of our landing parties on the island of Piscopi, between Rhodes and Cos, brought an immediate reaction, some 200 troops being rushed across from Rhodes. The islet of Archangelo, to the north of Leros, was also occupied.

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*Photograph of Poros taken by a R.A.A.F. Baltimore before it dropped a package containing instructions for our advanced forces to proceed with the occupation of Aegina (see page 85).*

Small ships moved cautiously between the islands, dodging our naval patrols and reconnaissance Beaufighters. They were not always lucky and on the night of 4/5th November a destroyer sank a coaster as it was attempting to reach Rhodes from Leros.

On several occasions in November aircraft co-operated with the Navy in the search for enemy shipping, Beaufighters locating targets for surface units, which sank a lighter off Alimnia island on the 12th and two similar craft in Liwadia Bay, Piscopi, on the 14th.

#### **German Raids from Leros**

As indicated above, the Germans did not take all their punishment lying down. On Leros a Special Assault Unit was formed, for carrying

out reconnaissances on moonless nights and raiding islands where Allied supplies were being received.

The first objective of this unit, on the night of the 12/13th, was Lisso, to the north of Leros, and four nights later they visited Levita, to the south-west. Here the raiders amused themselves by burning the Union Jack and replacing it by the German naval ensign.

For our part, attacks were resumed on Melos. On the 14th it was bombarded by naval units, and on the 21st eight Baltimores bombed coastal gun positions. A landing by a small naval party was also made, following which the garrison commander thought it advisable to concentrate most of his forces in the eastern part of the island.

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*Beaufighter attack in progress against the German Headquarters at Calino in November, 1944.*

Shipping reconnaissance by Beaufighters still continued to be rather like looking for a needle in a haystack, although naval units with which they co-operated had better luck, sinking two assault craft north-east of *Alimnia* on the 21st and a launch near *Calchi* two days later. Results were unobserved, however, when eight R.A.A.F. Baltimores bombed a concentration of small craft in *Cos* harbour on the 23rd and again on the 27th when another formation of seven Baltimores went for shipping at *Port Mandracchio, Rhodes*.

#### **Bad Weather Hampers Operations**

A patch of bad weather that set in towards the end of November hampered air operations. Of seven Baltimores briefed to attack shipping at *Mandracchio* on the 29th, only three found the target area through a gap in 9/10th cloud and, on 4th December, hopeless weather conditions forced back ten Baltimores when they were airborne to bomb a coastal battery in support of a naval bombardment of *Mandracchio*.

Three days earlier, however, a reconnaissance Baltimore had been contacted over the R/T by naval units and had successfully spotted

while gun positions on *Alimnia* were bombarded.

The weather also interfered with the fighter sweeps over *Crete*, although on 4th December S.A.A.F. Spitfires straffed a number of transport vehicles in the *Suda Bay* area and found a few more targets again on the 11th.

The Baltimores often had to be content with dropping propaganda leaflets over the occupied islands.

#### **The Melos C.O. Ambushed**

Raid and counter-raid still went on among the islands, sometimes one side taking the initiative, sometimes the other. The most notable of these cat-and-mouse operations occurred on 5th December when an Allied patrol on *Melos* ambushed a car and wrote-off all the occupants, among them being the commander of the garrison.

The enemy for his part showed signs of having designs on *Simi* and a small force of landing craft was intercepted near there on the 11th by the Navy, one being sunk and the remainder turning back to *Rhodes*. There were also rumours that a raiding party had landed on

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*Patmos*, but these proved to be without foundation. What seemed to be true, on the other hand, was a report that commando training was being carried out on *Cos*.

On the 16th naval units came upon two more vessels attempting to reach *Rhodes* from *Leros*, sinking one and capturing the other. On the same day two Beaufighters attacked a caique south-west of *Lipsos*; they drove it on to the rocks and it was considered probably destroyed.

Baltimorees at this time made another series of attacks on shipping in *Mandracchio* harbour, *Rhodes*, on the 9th, 13th, 14th, 19th, 20th and 28th. Formations varied between ten and eight aircraft and bombs were normally released from between 7,000 and 8,000 ft. The target area was well covered on most occasions, but results were difficult to gauge with any degree of accuracy.

Pairs of Beaufighters maintained their shipping reconnaissance every day that weather permitted, but still found little to interest them.

### Decline in Enemy Morale

When the end of the year came, there was a temporary and uneasy lull on the Aegean front. The Germans kept their grip on *Crete*, *Rhodes*, *Leros*, *Cos* and *Melos* and, on the last day of the year, the commanders of the first four islands held a conference on *Leros*.

Although the contents of the agenda are not known, it is fairly certain that among the subjects discussed was that of discipline among the remaining troops, which was by no means all it should have been.

Back in November a prisoner-of-war reported that in a *Crete* corporals' mess a portrait of the Fuehrer was often used for target practice; on 30th November some 80 German soldiers were said to have been recaptured while trying to escape from *Crete* to *Turkey*; in December an

anti-Hitler movement in *Rhodes* was reported to have 2,000 members and to be spreading; and from *Leros* came the news that 500 Germans had laid down their arms and refused to fight any more.

Propaganda leaflets dropped by the Baltimorees were thought to be having the desired effect in driving home the hopelessness of *Germany's* position—so much so that the *Rhodes* C.O. ordered the destruction of all leaflets found and warned his men not to touch them because they were contaminated.

### Outposts No Longer of Value

It may be said, then, that the Aegean outposts were now more of a liability than an asset to the German High Command. The only real reason for them—to provide bases for countering any thrust aimed at the Greek mainland—had vanished when the German troops fell back on *Salonika*. Retention of them might possibly be excused on grounds of prestige and propaganda, but it could be argued that loss of face is better than loss of manpower when every soldier is needed to defend the Reich. The 18,000 or so German troops bottled up in the islands, the handful of small craft left to them and the G.A.F. contribution of a couple of Fieseler Storch aircraft could hardly be regarded as a serious threat to our position in the Eastern Mediterranean.

They were certainly not sufficient to tie down a large air force in anticipation of potential trouble brewing, for most of the R.A.F., S.A.A.F. and R.A.A.F. units formerly employed in the Aegean had even before the end of the year been transferred to more active spheres of operation.

For those that remained this quarter had not been a particularly exciting one, but the scarcity of headline-making incidents was not due to lack of trying but to lack of opportunity.

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## POSTSCRIPT TO "ASSISTANCE FOR WARSAW"

*In view of subsequent information that has come to hand, it is felt that more emphasis might have been given in the short article in No. 8 of the Review to the part played by No. 148 Squadron in the attempts made in August, 1944, to supply Polish patriots in Warsaw with arms and ammunition.*

*This squadron's Halifaxes had been engaged in supply-dropping in Poland and north Italy since early April. Losses had mounted steadily, and on 5th August strength was reduced to only one officer pilot and one effective crew. Nevertheless, when the call came a week later to assist the Warsaw patriots, the squadron managed to get six aircraft into the air.*

*Between the nights of 12/13th and 18/19th August the Halifaxes put up their maximum effort over Warsaw as well as maintaining the normal supply of stores to the Italian partisans. By the last day of August only two serviceable aircraft remained, seven crews and twelve Halifaxes having been lost during the month.*

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