

arrange supply dropping. Eventually the operations against the Mandalay-Lashio railway were abandoned, and it was decided to recross the Irrawaddy and return to India. An attempt to cross the Irrawaddy at Inywa (south of Katha) was discovered by the enemy, and failed. The order was therefore given for the force to break up into Dispersal Groups—a manoeuvre which had been practised during training—and to cross the river on a very wide front and return to India independently. This was successfully done, most Groups reached the Chindwin in the area occupied by the 23rd Division near Sittaung; one column crossed it as far north as Tamathli and went thence to Kohima; one marched due north and won out by Fort Hertz, one went east to Paoshan, was hospitably received by the Chinese Army and flown back to India by the Americans. The majority of the force had returned by the first week in June. The Brigade had spent four months inside territory occupied by the Japanese.

28. The enterprise had no strategic value, and about one-third of the force which entered Burma was lost. But the experience gained of operations of this type, in supply dropping from the air, and in jungle warfare and Japanese methods, was invaluable. The enemy was obviously surprised and at a loss, and found no effective means to counter the harassment of our columns. The operations showed the necessity for a very high standard of training and physical fitness in troops employed on such expeditions. In general, Brigadier Wingate's theories and leadership were fully vindicated. A detailed and frank account of the enterprise is given in his printed report of the operations. As soon as the expedition started, I had issued orders for the formation of another brigade (III Indian Infantry Brigade) on similar lines.

OPERATIONS IN N.-E. BURMA.

29. Early in 1942 the construction of a road from Ledo (in North-East Assam) towards Myitkyina in Upper Burma had been begun. Work had been interrupted by the evacuation of Burma and by the monsoon; but had been resumed in November. In December the Americans took over the construction, with the intention of eventually driving a supply route through to China. By June 20 roadhead had crossed the Paungsa Pass, 46 miles from Ledo. The nature of the country and the climate made the work extremely difficult. To protect the construction, the Americans employed a part of the Chinese troops who had been trained in India under American supervision (see paragraphs 15 and 16 of my Despatch on operations in the Easterly Theatre based in India, Mar.-Dec. 1942).*

30. I mentioned in my last Despatch* (paragraph 22) the reoccupation of Fort Hertz in the extreme north of Burma to support the operations of the Kachin Levies towards Myitkyina. These levies, under Lieut.-Colonel Gamble, did most valuable work in harassing the Japanese forces in the Myitkyina area during the early part of 1943; so much so that they stung the enemy into retaliation. Early in March a considerable Japanese force advanced on Sumprabum, temporarily dispersed the levies, and seemed to threaten Fort Hertz.

There was a moment when it was represented to me that only a brigade could save Fort Hertz. There was no brigade available; the only means of communication with Fort Hertz were by air; and very few transport aircraft were available. I had one additional company flown in to Fort Hertz. The Japanese did not advance beyond Sumprabum and the levies soon recovered their morale.

OPERATIONS OF R.I.N.

31. Apart from the assistance given by small craft in the Arakan operations (see paragraphs 6 and 20 above), there is little to record of the operations of the Royal Indian Navy, which carried on its normal escort and patrol duties. There was no enemy naval activity in the Indian theatre during the period.

AIR OPERATIONS.

32. During the period under review the R.A.F. continued to expand in numbers and began to receive more modern aeroplanes and equipment. In 1943 it can be said to have passed definitely from the defensive to the offensive. We were still, however, much below our requirements, and our aircraft were deficient in range and performance, and included many obsolete or obsolescent types. The operational strength of the R.A.F. by June 1943 was—

- 18 Fighter squadrons,
- 2 Squadrons long-range bombers,
- 2 Squadrons medium bombers,
- 11 Squadrons light bombers,
- 2 Squadrons torpedo bombers,
- 6 Squadrons Flying-boats,
- 2 Squadrons Transport aircraft,
- 2 General Recce. Squadrons,
- 1 Photographic Recce. Squadron,
- 1 Coastal Fighter Squadron,
- 1 Night Fighter Squadron.

The Fighter Squadrons were equipped with Hurricanes and Mohawks; the heavy bombers were Liberators, the medium bombers Wellingtons, and the light bombers Blenheims and Vengeances. The torpedo bombers were Beauforts, the flying-boats Catalinas, and the transport aircraft Hudsons and Dakotas. There were also a few Spitfires and Hurricanes used for photographic reconnaissance. The General Reconnaissance Squadrons were equipped with Hudsons whilst the Coastal Fighter Squadron and the Night Fighter Squadron were both equipped with Beaufighters.

The strength of the 10th American Air Force also increased and by June it had available approximately 60 fighters (Kittyhawks), 50 heavy bombers (Liberators) and 70 medium bombers (Mitchells). Working in close co-operation, the R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. together established air superiority over the Japanese air forces operating from Burma.

33. The objects of the Air Force operations during the period under review were:—

- (a) To establish and maintain air superiority in Burma;
- (b) To support the operations of the Army;
- (c) To disrupt enemy communications in Burma;
- (d) To defend India against air attack; and
- (e) To supply from the air, forces which could not be supplied by normal means.

The first object was attained by attacks by day and night on enemy-occupied airfields and air installations and bases and by taking every opportunity to engage the enemy in the air.

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