

to the investigation of enemy radar by two specially equipped Liberators allotted to my Command. Twenty-six sorties were flown from Ceylon to the Andaman Islands, Car Nicobar, Simalur, and Northern Sumatra. Conclusive evidence was obtained on these flights that the enemy employ in this theatre beam-swept radar of the type found on Attu and Guadalcanal. At the end of April the aircraft were transferred from Ceylon to Bengal in order to operate along the Burma coastline and in the Bangkok area, but the results of their investigations have not been sufficiently conclusive to be included in this despatch.

132. Searches carried out by coastal aircraft during the period assisted in the location and rescue of a total of 535 survivors from torpedoed vessels in the waters around India.

133. The results of coastal activity are seldom tangible, and an account of the work of forces engaged on this work must of necessity draw attention to those occasions when the enemy's positive attacks overcame the efforts of negative reconnaissance. Such attacks in the area patrolled by India and Ceylon-based aircraft did not and could not meet with sufficient reaction to provide a continual deterrent to the enemy's intrusions, nor was the rate of destruction of submarines high enough to prove a serious obstacle to him, since the maximum forces available in India and Ceylon during the period consisted of ten long-range and three medium-range squadrons.

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VII.—PHOTOGRAPHIC RECONNAISSANCE

134. In November it was the intention that No. 681 and 684 P.R. Squadrons should eventually come under the control of Strategic Air Force. To this end No. 171 Wing, which had originally been formed as a Tactical Reconnaissance Wing, was moved from Southern India to take over administrative and operational control. The 9th P.R. Squadron, U.S.A.A.F., was still under the control of 10th U.S. Army Air Force.

135. No really long-range reconnaissance had been carried out by this time, since No. 684 Squadron had only recently received Mosquitoes, and there had not been time to explore the potentialities of this aircraft under tropical conditions. The radius of P.R. cover on the 1st December, excluding the Andaman Islands, was only 680 miles. On 15th December the first cover of Bangkok was obtained and provided much valuable information regarding Japanese dispositions and their use of lay-back airfields. Although Bangkok is now a routine target, the sortie was at that time an outstanding achievement, since the range of the Mosquito in this climate was still undetermined.

136. At this time the main rôle of the two squadrons was to provide airfield cover for aircraft counts, to photograph communications and areas indicated by the Army, and to cover potential target areas for attacks in Burma. Twice weekly sorties were flown to Port Blair in the Andamans to secure information on the enemy's anti-shiping activities. In January one of the few Mitchells (B.25) belonging to No. 684 Squadron photographed Mergui on the Tenasserim Coast for the first time, involving a journey of 1,600 miles. Survey photography was also begun during the month to

meet a long-felt need for accurate and up-to-date maps of Burma. By the end of May, not only immediate battle areas had been surveyed, but also approximately 57 per cent. of the whole of the country. The remainder of the effort was absorbed in assessing the extent to which communication facilities were being used and the damage inflicted upon them. The record number of eighty airfields were covered in one day, as was the greater part of the Burma railway system, allowing of an accurate aircraft count and a reliable estimate of the engines and rolling-stock in the country. Another valuable result of the large-scale airfield cover was the issue of target mosaics to long-range fighter squadrons, which proved of great assistance, especially when airfields were attacked.

137. Meanwhile, the American P.R. squadron equipped with Lightnings (F.5) was still working independently. This often resulted in duplication of effort, and closer co-ordination was clearly desirable. Thus on the 1st February, Photographic Reconnaissance Force was formed, incorporating No. 171 Wing Headquarters. This month and March were notable for many sorties to obtain airfield information and to assess the damage to communications by aircraft of Third Tactical Air Force and No. 1 Air Commando Force. Survey work was also carried out, together with regular flights to the Andamans and the vast area bounded by a line joining Kentung, Sittang, Mergui and Koh Si Chang Island (South-East of Bangkok).

138. Small country-craft were now being increasingly used by the enemy, and the waterways of the Arakan and Central Burma were also frequently photographed to assess the density of traffic and staging points. On 27th March the longest flight yet, of 1,860 miles, was achieved by a Mosquito of No. 684 Squadron when a large stretch of the Bangkok-Singapore railway was covered.

139. In April a substantial increase in the number of Army requests entailed numerous sorties over the battle and reinforcement areas. A Mosquito improved upon the record flight of the previous month by photographing many stretches of railway in the Malay Peninsula, flying 2,172 miles to do so.

140. The advent of the monsoon affected photographic reconnaissance work perhaps more than any. In May, instead of concentrating on the programmes laid down, it became a question of finding areas where the weather was best and photographing the highest priority targets in them.

141. The outstanding achievement of the month was the photography of islands in the Great Nicobar group. The flight was intended to discover if it were possible to reach these islands, but on arrival there was sufficient fuel remaining to take photographs before returning. Short-range squadrons during May obtained routine cover wherever possible and were also instructed to bring back as full a weather report as possible, which proved valuable in planning the next day's sorties. Only three of the twenty-three sorties flown on survey photography were wholly successful. An idea of the achievement in the field of survey photography before the bad weather is shown by the following figures, which represent the