

Photographic Reconnaissance Force. Wing Commander S. G. Wise, R.A.F., was appointed Air Commander from the date of formation.

5. In exercising operational control of these forces, the integrity of U.S. Groups and R.A.F. Wings was retained and administrative control and responsibility remained with the respective American and British Commanders. The Chiefs of Staff agreed to the integration with the qualification that in view of American commitments to China, it might become necessary to transfer units from the 10th to the 14th U.S.A.A.F.

6. The chain of command and the conduct of operations by the merged forces almost without exception worked well, and mutual concessions and adjustments were made by each element. In ancillary services, examples of co-operation were most notable in the sphere of maintenance, signals and flying control. Major General G. E. Stratmeyer has said in his report on operations during this period—"The various obstacles which might be expected to arise as a result of combining U.S.A.A.F. and R.A.F. units have been overcome as a result of integration of staffs at Headquarters, Eastern Air Command, Strategic Air Force, Third Tactical Air Force, Troop Carrier Command and Photographic Reconnaissance Force. Such a revolutionary change in staff organisation might well have produced many difficulties and misunderstandings, but such has not been the case, and we have undoubtedly derived mutual benefit, not only on the staff side, but in the tactical operating of air forces". With these and other evidences of the working of integrated forces I have dealt in detail in the appropriate sections of the narrative.

THE TASKS TO BE ACCOMPLISHED.

7. The tasks which lay before the combined Air Forces were:—

(a) To conduct a strategic air offensive in conformity with the general plan to destroy enemy air forces and installations, selected rail, road and river communications, and depots and maintenance facilities.

(b) To ensure the air defence of the U.S. Air Transport Command airfields in North-East India and to provide for the defence against air attack of Calcutta and adjacent industrial areas.

(c) To provide support for the operations of Fourteenth Army.

(d) To provide support for the Chinese-American forces under command of General J. W. Stilwell which were operating from bases in the Ledo area.

(e) To support the operations of Long Range Penetration forces, and

(f) To conduct photographic reconnaissance and survey.

8. The prosecution of the first of these tasks was not only the best method of maintaining a favourable air situation, which was my principal charge, but would also force the enemy on the defensive and thus provide the best protection for the air route to China, for the Calcutta area and for sea communications in the northern Bay of Bengal.

9. Offensive fighter operations were to be undertaken to the greatest possible extent and it was proposed to use long range fighters in particular in the offensive against enemy airfields and air installations. Moreover, in order

to overcome the wide dispersal of my available fighter strength, it was necessary to maintain at the highest pitch of efficiency the early warning system.

10. I planned to employ the strategic bomber force against targets in the following order of priority: enemy occupied airfields and installations, shipping, railways, oil installations in Burma and suitable objectives in Bangkok. The course which the battle took, however, made a readjustment of these priorities necessary and a considerable proportion of the total bomber effort was directed to tactical targets in support of the Army and later, to carry supplies to the garrison at Imphal. Another task which assumed increasing importance during the period was the evacuation of casualties. Much had to be done to build up a successful organisation which could deal with the transshipment of sick and wounded from battle areas and casualty clearing stations to better equipped hospitals in the rear.

THE FORCES AVAILABLE.

11. To accomplish these tasks there was a total of forty-eight R.A.F. and seventeen U.S.A.A.F. squadrons deployed for operations. By May these totals had increased to sixty-four and twenty-eight respectively.

12. The disposition of tactical units in Bengal and Assam was designed to provide defence and support over the three main areas of land operations; in the Arakan, along the line from Tiddim to Homalin, and the Ledo Sector in Northern Burma; they were under the control of 224 Group, 221 Group and the U.S.A.A.F. Northern Air Sector Force respectively. Strategic units continued to be stationed further to the west since the marshy areas of the Sunderbunds and the poor lines of communication in that area made the construction of airfields east of the Brahmaputra up to heavy bomber standards a matter of extreme difficulty which neither the labour, transport nor supply position would allow me to undertake except as a relatively long term plan.

THE SITUATION IN NOVEMBER.

13. Facing the enemy from India there was a more modern, more powerful, and numerically stronger air force than had hitherto been available in this theatre. Moreover, during the monsoon much had been achieved to give the units comprising this force greater striking power. Communications, although overstrained were now better geared to carry war supplies than at any time since the outbreak of hostilities. Advanced landing grounds which had been constructed afforded short-range aircraft a greater radius of action, both offensive and defensive, during the dry weather that was to come and the warning system was now able to give ample notice of the approach of hostile aircraft.

14. The enemy for his part disposed of a force of approximately 250 aircraft concentrated in the airfield groups at Heho, Anisakan, Rangoon and Chiangmai with the remainder at lay-back bases in Siam and the Netherlands East Indies. His ground forces faced ours along a front of 700 miles. In Arakan he held the line from Maungdaw to Buthidaung and was opposed by XV Corps, thence north-west across the inhospitable Chin Hills to Kalemvo and northwards up the Kabaw Valley where