

Men of the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces--"MAAF" for short--have served with what probably is the most international large-scale fighting team of this war. Although predominantly American and British, it has contained integral units of Greeks, Yugoslavs, Poles, Italian, Brazilian, South Africans and French. Ranging the vast Mediterranean skies side by side under a single, smooth-functioning combined command, these diverse air units helped drive the enemy out of Africa, out of the Mediterranean islands, out of southern France, out of Italy and penetrated into Europe and Germany itself to blast his air-fields, communications and industries.

On November 8, 1942, the day of the North African invasion, the principal air support came from the American 12th Air Force, which arrived with the landings in Algeria and Morocco. At the same time the predominantly RAF Tactical Air Force was harrying Rommel's retreat west from El Alamein. In February, 1943, after the fighting had reached Tunisia, the British and American air forces were combined into the Northwest African Air Forces, the predecessor of MAAF. In its final form MAAF itself was created in December, 1943, after the capture of the Foggia fields opened the way for strategic bombing of Europe from the south and necessitated organizational changes for the full utilization of that opportunity.

Airpower in the Mediterranean has had four primary tasks:

(1) Destruction of the enemy's industries by heavy bombardment, a job of the Strategic Air Force, composed of the American 15th Air Force and the 205th Group of the RAF.

(2) Tactical assistance to our ground forces, a job of the Tactical Air Force, the Allied Balkan Air Force and, on occasion, the Strategic Air Force. The American 12th and RAF Desert were part of the Tactical AF.

(3) Protection of our sea lanes, shipping, harbors and rear establishments from enemy air action, a job of the Coastal Air Force.

(4) Support of the Partisans in the Balkans and Northern Italy, the job of the Balkan Air Force, with the 12th AAF Troop Carrier and other units cooperation.

Milestones in the Mediterranean air war include: establishment of air superiority in North Africa in February, 1943; the closely coordinated air campaign which helped our armies drive the enemy out of Tunisia; the reduction of Pantelleria, history's first example of conquest by air power alone; the destruction of enemy air forces in Sicily; neutralization of enemy air opposition to our landings at Salerno, Anzio and southern France; the offensive against the Ploesti oil fields, which robbed the Germans of about thirty per cent of their entire fuel supply; Operation Strangle, the exemplary tactical campaign against enemy communications which weakened the enemy by cutting off his supplies and played a vital part in the fall of Rome; the relentless "Battle of the Brenner"--a follow up of "Strangle"--which maintained cuts in the vital Brenner Pass route into Northern Italy for months at a time; the attacks on the German aircraft industry, in which the 15th AAF cooperated with the British-based 8th Air Force; and the dropping of supplies to Partisans in Yugoslavia, France, Italy and Poland.

MAAF - Dropped more than 650,000 tons of bombs.

Shot down more than 8,700 enemy aircraft.

* Lost approximately 40,000 men killed, wounded, prisoner or missing.

Lost more than 9,000 airplanes.

American Components of MAAF (15th and 12th Air Forces)

Dropped approximately 500,000 tons of bombs.

Shot down more than 7,300 enemy aircraft.

* Lost approximately 34,000 men killed, wounded, prisoner or missing.

Lost approximately 6,000 airplanes.

* In both instances casualty totals are in excess of present combat strength.