

CHAPTER 28

PROBLEMS OF COMMAND

FROM the moment he learned of his appointment as Commanding General, Allied Air Forces, South-West Pacific Area, General Kenney must have had few illusions about his new task. He was wished good luck at Washington with the comment that "from reports coming out of that theatre" he would need it. From General Arnold and General Marshall his only instructions were, "Simply report to General MacArthur." Of this meeting with his two chiefs he has written, "I was told that there were about 600 aircraft out there and that should be enough to fight a pretty good war with. Anyhow, while they would do what they could to help me out, they just had to build up the European show first."¹ On the day that he left the United States for Australia the Japanese established their Gona-Buna beach-head. He learned of this at Hickam Field, Hawaii.

Kenney flew to Brisbane where General Headquarters, S.W.P.A., and Allied Air Forces Headquarters had now been established, having moved from Melbourne on 20th July and thus sited themselves 800 miles nearer the scene of actual operations.² Here he found first that, to use his own crisp phraseology, "Brett certainly was in wrong. Nothing that he did was right." This he heard from MacArthur's chief of staff, General Sutherland, whom he described as "a brilliant, hard-working officer [who] had always rubbed people the wrong way", adding, "He was egotistic, like most people, but an unfortunate bit of arrogance combined with his egotism had made him almost universally disliked." According to Sutherland ". . . none of Brett's staff or senior commanders was any good, the pilots couldn't hit anything, and knew nothing about proper maintenance of their equipment or how to handle their supplies. He also thought there was some question about the kids having much stomach for fighting. He thought the Australians were about as undisciplined, untrained, over-advertised and generally useless as the Air Force." To this diatribe Kenney added his own comment, "In fact I heard just about everyone hauled over the coals except Douglas MacArthur and Richard K. Sutherland."

From MacArthur himself Kenney also heard all about the shortcomings of the air force "until finally there was nothing left but an inefficient rabble of boulevard shock troops whose contribution to the war effort was practically nil. . . . He had no use for anyone in the whole organisation from Brett down to and including the rank of colonel. . . . Finally he expressed the opinion that the air personnel had gone beyond just being antagonistic to his headquarters, to the point of disloyalty."

¹ G. C. Kenney, *General Kenney Reports* (1949), p. 11. This memoir is the source also for the subsequent quotations describing his reactions on taking over his new command.

² A rear echelon of AAFHQ had been left in Melbourne with responsibility for personnel and supply. Another change at this time had been the disbanding of USAFIA for which United States Army Services of Supply (USASOS) was substituted,

From his own account of the interview it seems that Kenney made no attempt to counter this demonstration of how the old and bitter Service rivalry could lead to such intense prejudices. He had the psychological advantage of succeeding an officer who in MacArthur's eyes had completely lost face; almost any newcomer would probably have offered welcome relief to the Supreme Commander. Himself an egotist, Kenney was content with a clear-cut statement in which the first person singular received heavy emphasis.

I told him (he has written) that as long as he had had enough confidence in me to ask for me to be sent out here to run his air show for him, I intended to do that very thing. I knew how to run an air force as well or better than anyone else and, while there was undoubtedly a lot of things wrong with his show, I intended to correct them and do a real job . . . the Air Force . . . from now on . . . would produce results.⁸

Stockily built, dynamic and decisive, Kenney had the robust confidence of a man thoroughly trained in his profession, and a habit of assessing both people and situations quickly—sometimes too quickly. To him hard-working officers with imagination were not only good officers, they were friends, though discipline was not forgotten. Nova Scotia-born, he had enlisted as a flying cadet in the war of 1914-18, gained the rank of lieutenant, flown 75 missions, shot down two German aircraft and been shot down once himself. Between the two world wars he had displayed a passion and a capacity for aeronautical development in the military field. He invented the parachute fragmentation bomb and, as long ago as 1922, had initiated the installation of machine-guns in the wings of an aircraft.⁹ Between 1939 and 1942 he had been successively an Air Corps observer with the American Navy in the Caribbean, an air attaché at the American embassy in Paris, commanding officer of the Air Corps experimental division and engineering school, and, most recently, commanding officer of the Fourth Air Force. At the age of 52 he was now at the peak of his career. He was eager and quite unafraid of the difficulties that faced him.

Despite MacArthur's pessimism about the quality of the Allied Air Forces staff officers, Kenney found some excellent material to draw on. Notable newcomers were two brigadier-generals, Ennis C. Whitehead and Kenneth Walker, both of whom he knew to be highly competent. Brett had sent both these officers to Darwin to become familiar with the situation there before paying a similar visit to New Guinea.

Kenney's first contact with the R.A.A.F.'s senior staff was with Air Vice-Marshal Bostock, Brett's chief of staff. The two men had much the same keen operational competence, the same quality of thrust, the same effectively blunt way of approaching their objectives. Kenney wrote, "He looked gruff and tough and was very anti-G.H.Q. like all the air crowd I'd talked to so far, but he impressed me as being honest and I

⁸ Kenney, p. 29.

⁹ Just before leaving the United States for Australia Kenney had learned that 3,000 parachute fragmentation bombs were in war reserve. "No one else wanted them," he has written, "so they were ordered shipped to Australia on the next boat."—Kenney, p. 12.

believed that, if he would work with me at all, he would be loyal to me."¹ Bostock proved that he was ready to do both.

Soon after this Kenney met Group Captain Garing who impressed him as an officer who was "active, intelligent, knew the theatre and had ideas about how to fight the Japs".² He questioned Garing about possible sites for landing fields on the north coast of New Guinea and was deeply interested when Garing told him of a good natural landing field at Wanigela Mission about midway between Milne Bay and Buna. The site had been found by the crew of a R.A.A.F. reconnaissance Hudson who had made a forced landing there on 15th June. After natives had cut a runway in the tall kunai grass a second Hudson had flown in and, when the first aircraft had been repaired, both successfully took off and flew back to Port Moresby. This greatly interested Kenney as a "possibility for the future".

Within two days of his arrival the new commander was in New Guinea. Accompanied by Brigadier-General Scanlon, then commanding the air force elements on the islands, and Whitehead, he made a searching inspection of the units there. Whitehead, an experienced fighter commander, a wiry man of few words but with a prodigious capacity for work, he promptly chose as successor to Scanlon, whom he respected but judged to be miscast as an operational commander. Walker, keen, experienced, an expert in bombardment operations, was his logical choice as leader of the bomber command, the formation of which Kenney was contemplating.

While this inspection of the command scene was going on, a new air organisation pattern for the S.W.P.A. was being worked out in Washington. Kenney had been briefed on this before he left and knew that the Operations Division of the War Department's general staff was preparing the organisation for a distinct American air force that "would be largely free from the immediate defence of Australia, in order to concentrate on the support of a rapidly moving offensive to the north".³ This optimistic planning signified the intention to end the Allied Air Forces organisation, a course in keeping with the weight and prestige of the U.S.A.A.F. and one that would dispose of the somewhat irritating situation caused by the R.A.A.F. having over-much say in American operations and administration. This planning also bore some relation to the origin of what later became known in Australia as the "Brisbane Line" controversy. The phrase "a rapidly moving offensive to the north" supports a misconception of the time that from the day of his arrival, MacArthur had sought to dispose his forces for the conduct of an offensive campaign. This suggestion the Supreme Commander himself developed later in a retrospective survey, the gist of which was made public. In doing this MacArthur stimulated a quite unjust implication that when he arrived in Australia he found that the Australian General Staff had a "largely defeated concep-

¹ Kenney, p. 33.

² Kenney, p. 41.

³ Craven and Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, Vol IV, p. 98.

tion" in that they had accepted as inevitable the conclusion that northern Queensland and the Darwin area would be overrun by the Japanese and accordingly had drawn up a plan for a defence line approximating to the Tropic of Capricorn, later captiously known as "the Brisbane Line". The role of the Port Moresby garrison was said to have been merely "to hold the enemy to enable mainland defences to be brought into action".⁴ Thus it was clearly implied that MacArthur had refused to subscribe to any such "largely defeatist conception" and had immediately changed this to a defensive plan. The relevant operations instructions of the time disclose without question that while the Australian General Staff's plan was inevitably a defensive one because of the weakness of the forces at their disposal, MacArthur, on arrival, had adopted virtually the same plan. This was indicated by his first relevant directive.⁵ This ordered that the

Allied Land Forces S.W.P.A. will prevent any landing on the north-east coast of Australia or on the south-western coast of New Guinea. . . . Allied Air Forces will hold available a striking force of bombardment aviation in north-east Australia, centered in the general area of Townsville, to attack targets of opportunity with especial emphasis on the interception of carriers which might be directed against the north-east coast or troop convoys directed towards Port Moresby. . . . The Allied Land Commander responsible for the areas in the vicinity of Port Moresby and along the north-east coast of Australia to include Brisbane will immediately perfect plans for the co-ordination of all the defensive forces in their respective areas.⁶

This constituted an entirely defensive role. But there was no question that it was MacArthur's clear intention to take the offensive as soon as the reorganisation and replenishment of his forces would allow. With the air force planning taking place in Washington in August he was in full sympathy. On 7th August, only three days after Kenney's arrival, he communicated with Washington requesting authority for the formation of an American air force which, he suggested, should be designated the Fifth Air Force in honour of the fighter and bomber commands that had served him in the Philippines.

Kenney soon found cause for concern in operational procedures; as he expressed it, "the set-up was chaotic". Heavy-bomber strikes were assigned from Brisbane, relayed to Townsville, the orders passed on to No. 19 Group who were by this time based at Mareeba, about 250 miles farther north, and who sent what combat-worthy aircraft they had to Port Moresby where the crews got their final briefing. There seemed to be no formation leader, and the aircraft might or might not get together

⁴ This implication received wide publicity as a consequence of a press interview given by MacArthur on 18th March 1943, the anniversary of his arrival in Australia. The newspaper references took the form of a third person statement, one rendering of which began: "So much has changed in the intervening 12 months that it can now be revealed that this time a year ago, when General MacArthur first came to Australia, the defence plan for the safety of this continent involved north Australia being taken by the enemy. . . ."

⁵ GHQ SWPA Operations Instruction No. 2 of 25th April 1942.

⁶ Additionally AAF was to maintain a close reconnaissance of seven areas, extending from Cape Valsch in west New Guinea to the New Hebrides and New Caledonia in the east, with special surveillance of the east New Guinea-New Britain-Solomons area. The Allied Naval Forces were also to maintain reconnaissance, both aerial and surface, cooperate with naval forces in SPA and make submarine attacks on enemy forces in the areas of Port Moresby, Samarai, Rabaul and the Louisiade Archipelago.

on the way to the target. Usually 7 to 9 bombers came from Mareeba, 6 might get off on the raid and from one to 3 usually arrived at the target. If enemy aircraft were encountered all bombs and auxiliary fuel were jettisoned and the mission abandoned. "The crews," Kenney wrote, were "obsessed with the idea that a single bullet would detonate the bombs and blow up the whole works." No one had explained to "the kids" that the bombs were not as sensitive as that. At a briefing at the Seven-Mile aerodrome—always done by Australian officers—he had to relieve the apprehension of some of the aircrew who were worrying because they had no de-icing equipment on their aircraft. The Australian "weather man", he said, had referred to "rine clouds" and he had to explain that in the Australian accent "rain" became "rine". The pilots thought the reference had been to "rime clouds". The general found, too, that the fighter group at Port Moresby "sat around waiting for the Japs to come over", seldom getting off in time to intercept because the warning they received was rarely more than five minutes.⁸

Having inspected the key operational area Kenney examined the heavy bombers' mainland base at Mareeba and the supply organisation (or lack of it) that lay immediately behind it. He found No. 19 Group's situation "appalling". So many Fortresses were out of commission for lack of engines and tail wheels that, had he then called for immediate action, the group could not have put more than four aircraft into the air. Requisitions for supplies and spare parts went from the group to Royce's headquarters at Townsville, then to an advance air depot at Charters Towers, then to Melbourne and from there on to the main air force depot at Tocumwal, over 100 miles north of Melbourne. On an average about a month passed before the requisition was returned to the group, generally with the notation "Not available" or "Improperly filled out". The commander called for a statement of aircraft strength. When this was brought to him several days later by Group Captain Walters, Director of Operations at A.A.F. H.Q., it appeared reasonably encouraging at first sight, but when the qualifications set against the strength in each type were applied, it became a statement of weakness not strength, as the accompanying table shows.

OPERATIONAL AIRCRAFT, U.S.A.A.F.

<i>On Strength</i>	<i>Serviceable</i>
245 fighters—170 for overhaul or salvage	75
53 light bombers—none ready for combat	—
70 medium bombers—37 unserviceable or lacking equipment	33
62 heavy bombers—19 under overhaul or rebuilding	43
51 miscellaneous—none fit for combat	—
481 (a)	151

(a) Total excludes 36 transport aircraft of 19 different types, fewer than half of which were in commission.

⁸ Kenney, p. 36.

		R.A.A.F. ⁹				
<i>On Strength</i>						<i>Serviceable</i>
	73 Hudsons	—	21 unserviceable	.	.	52
	15 Beauforts	—	6 unserviceable	.	.	9
(x)	27 Beaufighters	—	9 unserviceable	.	.	18
	69 Kittyhawks	—	11 unserviceable	.	.	58
(x)	17 Bostons	—	10 unserviceable	.	.	7
	7 Airacobras	—	6 unserviceable	.	.	1
	7 Catalinas	—	3 unserviceable	.	.	4
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	215					149
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(x) Just coming into operation.

To MacArthur, Kenney reported that he wanted to make it his primary purpose to “own” the air over New Guinea. But he had another and even more immediate, though related, task, one for which he needed the heaviest bomber strength he could command. With typical directness he set about countering as best he could the poor state of his bomber squadrons and the even poorer state of the maintenance and overhaul organisation behind them. He instructed Colonel Carmichael, commander of No. 19 Group, to cancel all flying and get every Flying Fortress possible into commission for a maximum effort a week later. He obtained MacArthur’s authority to send back to the United States any officer he regarded as “dead wood” and he acted on it promptly. He ordered officers in charge of servicing facilities to forget the “paper work” and get the equipment and spares moving. He forbade the breaking-up of damaged aircraft; they were to be rebuilt even if there was “nothing left but a tail wheel to start with”. On all sides he emphasised the time factor.

The more immediate task in which MacArthur and Kenney were pre-occupied related, of course, to the three-phase campaign outlined in the Joint Chiefs of Staff directive of 2nd July. This plan had been amended because the Japanese had, as noted, begun the construction of an airfield on Guadalcanal. From this airfield Japanese air units would gravely threaten the Allied bases in the New Hebrides and New Caledonia. Phase 1 of the Washington directive was therefore changed and Admiral Ghormley was ordered to capture Guadalcanal and Tulagi instead of occupying Tulagi and Santa Cruz. The task was to be undertaken by the 1st Marine Division and, as in the earlier plan, MacArthur’s command was to lend what air and naval support it could. His aircraft would reconnoitre and if necessary attack in the area west of 158th degree of longitude and make an attack on Rabaul on D-day in sufficient strength, it was hoped, to “put down” and “keep down” the main Japanese air striking force. To

⁹ As at 10 August 1942. Additionally 6 Mitchells were assigned to No. 18 NEI Sqn recently formed at Canberra. The aircraft state record for this date includes 62 Wirraways (33 unserviceable) and 7 transport aircraft—3 Empire flying-boats (1 unserviceable), and 4 DC-2s (1 unserviceable)—plus a variety of light aircraft for communications etc. There were also the OTU and SFTS aircraft listed as “second line” operational aircraft—Ansons, Fairey Battles etc. These had very limited, if any, combat value except for the Wirraways which were later to be given an important army cooperation role. General Kenney records of the RAAF’s combat aircraft that “two fighter squadrons in New Guinea had a total of 40 planes and four reconnaissance squadrons had a total of 30 aircraft.”—Kenney, p. 61.

this end Kenney worked, and since the date set for the Guadalcanal landing was 7th August there was no time to lose; he wanted the maximum number of Flying Fortresses over Vunakanau aerodrome at the critical time. The Mitchells and Marauders would concentrate their bombs on Lae and Salamaua. All other suitable aircraft would be used to support the Australian force fighting on the Kokoda Trail. To this MacArthur said "Go ahead!" adding that if Kenney could carry out his plan to put 16 or 18 Fortresses over Rabaul in one strike it would be the heaviest single Allied air attack in the Pacific war to date. An air reconnaissance over Rabaul on the 4th had shown a concentration of about 150 Japanese aircraft on Vunakanau—an increase of almost 100 in the last two days. The thought this prompted was that the Japanese might have some foreknowledge of the Allied plan to land on Guadalcanal. However that might be the increased air strength made the Allied need to strike them on the ground the more imperative.

About this time Kenney, with characteristic directness, clarified his relationship with Sutherland. G.H.Q.'s orders for the S.W.P.A. share in the Guadalcanal operation included a page and a half of air operations details—the numbers and types of aircraft to be dispatched, the designation of units, even the times for take-off and the size of the bombs. Kenney promptly demanded that they be rescinded. He has recorded that, as Sutherland "seemed to be getting a little antagonistic", he suggested that they see MacArthur, saying "I want to find out who is supposed to run this Air Force." The orders were rescinded without any appeal to the Supreme Commander.¹ D-day for the Guadalcanal offensive was at hand and if, as was true, Allied Air Forces S.W.P.A. fell far short of what MacArthur needed for a truly "offensive" part in that campaign and the fighting that must follow it, at least there was evidence of drive and initiative in his new air commander's approach to the task.

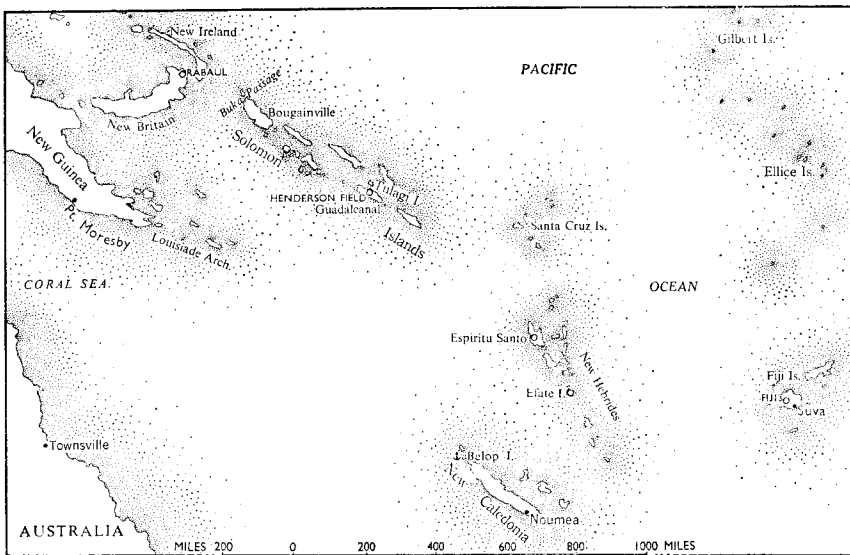
In April and May Vice-Admiral Ghormley's forces in the South Pacific Area had been gradually developing. In March the force which eventually became the Americal Division began to arrive in New Caledonia; the 37th Division began to arrive in Fiji in June. Rear-Admiral John S. McCain took command of Ghormley's air forces on 20th May with the title COMAIRSOPAC. By comparison even with the S.W.P.A. air forces McCain's command was a slender one. Forward at Efate in the New Hebrides he had a half-squadron of reconnaissance aircraft. On New Caledonia there were one Army bomber squadron; two fighter squadrons (one of the Army Air Force and one Marine); and a squadron and a half of Catalinas. To the east were one Army fighter squadron on Fiji, and one on Tonga, and a Marine fighter squadron and a squadron of bombers on Samoa.

Nearly 1,000 miles separated Efate, the northernmost American airfield, from Rabaul, the main Japanese base for operations along the island

¹ Kenney, pp. 52-3.

chain, and on 28th May a small body of American troops was moved to Espiritu Santo to prepare the way for an airfield construction group which was to come later.

In support of Ghormley's forces was a carrier squadron comprising *Saratoga*, flying the flag of Vice-Admiral Frank J. Fletcher, *Wasp* and *Enterprise*, with a strong force of other warships. The attack on Guadalcanal was to be primarily a naval operation but Army Air Forces in the Pacific were to give support. In addition to the contribution by No. 19



Group, No. 11 Heavy Bombardment Group in Hawaii was to be ready to give support in the South Pacific. On 30th July the first Fortress of No. 11 Group landed on the new strip on Espiritu Santo. From 31st July until D-day No. 11 made 56 bombing sorties against the Lunga Point area on Guadalcanal, while 10 Liberators of the U.S.A.A.F. and 6 Hudsons of the New Zealand Air Force conducted searches north-west from New Caledonia.

Thus there were now four, perhaps five, individual air forces employed in support of this first counter-offensive against the Japanese: the U.S. Naval Air Arm, the U.S. Marine Air Force, the U.S. Army Air Force, the New Zealand Air Force, and indirectly the Australian Air Force. As between the American Army and Navy this produced problems of command. Major-General Millard F. Harmon, who arrived at Noumea on 28th July to command the U.S. Army Forces in the South Pacific Area (USAFISPA) was to "supervise normal and routine employment of his air units, whereas operational control would rest with COMAIRSOPAC,

who normally would issue orders and instructions directly to defense commanders, task groups, or operational units as circumstances might dictate. For each base in the South Pacific, Admiral McCain prescribed a basic air organization encompassing all Allied air units in the area. . . . Control and coordination of these units was vested in the island defense commander . . . and he in turn, exercised his command function through the air officer who controlled the local units."²

Harmon saw his needs clearly. He faced the certain prospect of a bitter struggle with an enemy who could be expected to strain every resource available to him to hold the Solomon Islands. He therefore pressed hard, with strong support from both Ghormley and Nimitz, for the immediate dispatch of three Lightning fighter squadrons to New Caledonia, replacements for No. 11 Group's losses in Flying Fortresses, a medium bomber squadron for Guadalcanal, two Fortress squadrons, one for New Caledonia and the other for Fiji, and three dive-bomber squadrons (the Douglas Dauntless aircraft, discredited in S.W.P.A.), one each for Guadalcanal, New Caledonia and Fiji.

Troops of the 1st Marine Division commanded by Major-General Alexander A. Vandegrift began landing at Tulagi at 8 a.m. on 7th August and at Lunga Point an hour later. About 11,000 marines were ashore on Guadalcanal by nightfall, the Japanese, 2,000 strong and mainly labour troops, offering little resistance. At Tulagi there was sterner opposition but the base was secured by the afternoon of the 8th.

The contribution to this operation by MacArthur's air forces was valuable, though impossible to determine in any precise detail. Thirteen of Carmichael's formation of sixteen Fortresses that had staged through Port Moresby, reached the target area over Rabaul to drop 46,000 pounds of bombs and destroy a number of aircraft on Vunakanau aerodrome. One of the Fortresses was shot down by enemy fighters but the American crews claimed to have shot down seven Japanese aircraft. Not the least value of the attack was the sense of achievement it gave to the men of No. 19 Group and Kenney further encouraged them by awarding a number of decorations. R.A.A.F. Catalina crews followed up with attacks made on several successive nights in which they remained over the target for several hours at a time. The secondary support given by successive attacks on Lae and Salamaua was also effective. Between 6th and 8th August 56 sorties—38 by Marauders, 13 by Mitchells, 3 by Catalinas and 2 by Flying Fortresses—resulted in the dropping of almost 150,000 pounds of bombs on the two aerodromes and their environs. The combined efforts of all these raids did not, however, keep the Japanese air units at Rabaul grounded for long. Although the marines' initial landings were made without air attack, the unloading of the ships of the expeditionary force was seriously delayed by two formations of enemy bombers which attacked with an interval of about an hour between them on the afternoon

² Craven and Cate, Vol IV, p. 31.

of the 7th. No serious damage was done to the ships themselves, though two destroyers were damaged and one of them which left for Noumea was never seen again.

For the next six months, while the tide of battle flowed back through the mountains of Papua and then forward again to the beaches of Buna and Sanananda, the Americans round Henderson Field on Guadalcanal held out against and finally defeated persistent Japanese attempts to drive them off the island, and a series of crucial naval and air-sea battles were fought in the seas round the Solomons. It is not one of the tasks of this volume to record in detail this long campaign. But the air, like the sea, has no boundaries. For the air forces the operations in the Solomons and those in Australian New Guinea constantly influenced each other.

The Japanese reacted promptly to the American landings and a force including seven cruisers hastened south from Rabaul. That evening the carriers withdrew. Rear-Admiral Richmond K. Turner, commanding the amphibious forces, thereupon decided that in the absence of air cover his transports must depart at daylight on the 9th, whether unloaded or not. That night the Japanese attacked, sinking the Australian cruiser *Canberra* and sinking or mortally damaging the American cruisers *Quincy*, *Vincennes* and *Astoria*. Fortunately the Japanese admiral then retired without attacking the transports. One of his cruisers was sunk by an American submarine on the way back to Rabaul.

The next heavy clash came on 24th August, when transports carrying 1,500 Japanese troops, covered by a strong fleet including three carriers and two battleships, arrived in the eastern Solomons. The American carrier groups took up the challenge and in an indecisive battle the Japanese carrier *Ryujo* was sunk.

On 20th August Henderson Field had been able to receive its first squadrons: one of fighters and one of dive bombers, both belonging to the Marine Corps. On the 22nd a first detachment of an Army fighter squadron arrived. The airfield was still in poor condition, however. It was unusable by bombers for the first five weeks, and after heavy rain the fighters were grounded. In this period the Fortresses were operating from Espiritu Santo, 640 miles away, but occasionally staged at Henderson Field.

The foothold on Guadalcanal was still precarious. Enemy warships regularly bombarded the beach-head at night and enemy aircraft bombed it by day. In early September the perimeter round Henderson Field was only 7,000 yards wide by 4,000 deep and no additional combat troops had reached the island.

On 31st August the carrier *Saratoga* was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine 260 miles south of Guadalcanal. Her aircraft were flown off to Henderson Field and she steamed to Pearl Harbour for repairs. On 15th September *Wasp* was torpedoed by another submarine and sunk. This left only one carrier, *Hornet*, in the South Pacific, until *Enterprise*, under repair at Pearl Harbour, rejoined in mid-October.

On the night of the 11th-12th October an American task force intercepted a Japanese squadron making the regular nightly run to Guadalcanal to land troops and bombard the beach-head, and sank a cruiser and two destroyers. Despite this, the Japanese sent two battleships to bombard Henderson Field on the 14th while transports landed 4,500 troops, making their force on the island about 29,000 strong. On the 13th the defenders had also received a large reinforcement—the 164th Regiment—from the Americal Division on New Caledonia.

On 20th October, before the battle opened, Admiral William F. Halsey had replaced Admiral Ghormley. He promptly ordered the construction of a second bomber strip well to the west of Henderson Field.

The Japanese attack which followed from 23rd to 26th October failed to make any deep impression on the perimeter. The Marines estimated that 2,200 Japanese had been killed in the costly frontal attacks. On the 26th—the day on which the land battle ended—the Japanese sent down the strongest naval force yet launched against the Americans in the Solomon Sea. It included four aircraft carriers—*Shokaku*, *Zuikaku*, *Zuiho* and *Junyo*. In the carrier-plane battle that followed the *Shokaku* and *Zuiho* were severely damaged and the *Hornet* sunk. Again the Americans had only one carrier, *Enterprise*, in the South Pacific, and she had been damaged.

Despite their failures in October the Japanese continued to attack by sea, land and air. Reinforcements were put ashore almost nightly. The Americans too sent in reinforcements: a regiment of marines on 4th November and a second Army regiment on 11th-12th November. On the 12th-13th there was a confused night battle between the supporting naval forces in which the Japanese lost the battleship *Hiyei* and two destroyers and the Americans two cruisers and four destroyers. In the next two days American aircraft destroyed all the eleven transports in the Japanese convoy. On the night of the 13th-14th the battle was renewed. This time the American force included two battleships and *Enterprise*, and the Japanese had one battleship, *Kirishima*, and four cruisers. The *Kirishima* and a destroyer were sunk, the Americans losing three destroyers.

This struggle to hold a few square miles of territory on a remote Pacific island soon began to exert a big influence on Allied strategy. Inevitably American forces were attracted to the only point at which American land forces were in action. President Roosevelt had urged in October that "every possible weapon" should be sent to hold Guadalcanal.³

The 2nd Marine Division was on its way to the Solomons. The 43rd Division sailed from San Francisco on 1st October for New Zealand whence it was shipped in November to Guadalcanal. In December the 25th Division departed from Hawaii for Guadalcanal. By January 1943 there were 8 American divisions in the European and African theatres, but there were 11 overseas in the Pacific, including two divisions of

³ R. E. Sherwood, *The White House Papers of Harry L. Hopkins*, Vol II (1949), p. 622.

marines (three of the army divisions were in Hawaii). Early in December there were 34 groups of the Army Air Forces in the European, African and Middle East theatres, and 25 deployed against the Japanese. When the aircraft carriers and the Marine Corps' squadrons are taken into account the American air forces facing the Japanese were stronger than those facing the Germans and Italians.⁴

On 15th September one squadron of No. 5 Heavy Bombardment Group in Hawaii was ordered to join No. 11 Group at Espiritu Santo and two more squadrons of No. 5 arrived in October.

After the November offensive the Japanese used only destroyers to carry men and supplies to Guadalcanal, until, in the first days of February 1943, they admitted defeat, and withdrew their force from the island. It was then about 12,000 strong; the defenders at that stage were organised into the XIV Corps, which included the Americal, 25th and 2nd Marine Divisions.

Between 20th and 30th August 1942 seven squadrons had been established at Henderson Field if detachments from two dive-bomber squadrons from *Enterprise* are included. By 2nd February 37 squadrons were based there. These were provided by four separate Services: the Marine Corps, 16 squadrons; the Naval Air Arm, 10 including parts of carrier squadrons; the Army Air Force, 9; the R.N.Z.A.F., 2. In the total were 16 squadrons of fighters, 16 of bombers including torpedo bombers, 3 of reconnaissance aircraft, and 2 of Catalinas.

For both sides the struggle for Guadalcanal had proved a costly campaign of attrition. The American Army and Marine Corps had committed about 60,000 troops of whom about 1,600 were killed and 4,245 wounded; the Japanese had used about 36,000 men of whom 14,800 were killed, 9,000 died of illness and 1,000 were taken prisoner. At sea the Americans had lost 2 aircraft carriers, 8 cruisers, 14 destroyers, totalling 126,000 tons; the Japanese losses were 2 battleships, one carrier, 4 cruisers, 11 destroyers, 6 submarines, totalling 134,000 tons. Both sides had lost heavily in aircraft. The Japanese defeat, however, was far heavier than these figures indicate. Their advance towards the Pacific supply line had been halted. They could replace the losses of naval and merchant ships and aircraft at only a fraction of the rate at which American shipyards and factories were producing ships and aircraft even then. Of immense value too was the experience gained by American troops, seamen and airmen from generals and admirals downwards. A great part of the American Navy had learnt important lessons round Guadalcanal; four hitherto raw infantry divisions had fought on the island; twenty-five American air squadrons, not counting those of the naval air arm, had fought from Henderson Field, and the heavy-bomber crews of Nos. 11 and 5 Groups and the crews of other units operating from bases farther south were now veterans.

⁴ There were 4 groups in the Central Pacific, 5 in the South Pacific, 10 in the South-West Pacific, 4 in the China-India theatre, and 2 in Alaska.

The Army Air Force units had not been entirely happy under naval control. In particular, the senior Army Air Force officers considered that their Fortresses were used too much for reconnaissance and too little for strikes. On 29th November General Harmon proposed to Washington that an autonomous South Pacific air force be created from all Army Air Force units in the South Pacific Area, under the command of Brigadier-General Nathan F. Twining, of his staff, and that it should include a bomber and a fighter command. This was approved, and on 13th January the Thirteenth Air Force came into being. It comprised: Nos. 11 and 5 Heavy Bombardment Groups each of four squadrons of Fortresses; Nos. 69 and 70 Medium Bomber Squadrons (Marauders); No. 347 Fighter Group (2 squadrons of Airacobras, 1 of Kittyhawks and 1 of Lightnings); No. 12 Fighter Squadron (Airacobras); No. 44 Fighter Squadron (Kittyhawks); No. 13 Troop Carrier Squadron (Dakotas).

Thrown into relief by the Guadalcanal campaign were two points of strong disagreement between the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Army Air Force. These were the deployment of air units on the South Pacific "island chain" defence line, and European versus Pacific claims to the allocation of available forces.⁵ Closely related because they both concerned the acquisition of aircraft, they held considerable interest too for MacArthur's command which was a participant in the campaign to the extent that it lent what support it could. Divergence on the question of South Pacific island air defence rested in the navy's consistent advocacy of a series of island air bases, each defended by a substantial force including heavy bombers, as opposed to the Army Air Force conviction that it was quite wrong to immobilise urgently needed heavy-bomber strength in defending lesser island bases, and that the true answer to the question lay in placing a major mobile striking force at either end of the Pacific "line"—Australia and Hawaii—with fighter strength disposed along the line itself.

The chief contenders were Admiral King and General Arnold. As King saw it, the Coral Sea battle had but delayed the Japanese offensive. When the Joint Chiefs of Staff had reviewed Pacific strategy on 11th May he had taken the view—of pointed interest in the light of the sea-air actions that were to be fought in the early stages of the Guadalcanal campaign—that it would be futile to oppose, with two undamaged carriers, a powerful enemy force striking along the line, unless the carriers were supported by land-based bombers. He proposed a trial concentration of land-based aircraft on island bases as a test of how quickly this could be done and what added operational facilities would be needed. The War Department ordered preparations for such a test in the Fiji Islands and New Caledonia, but the battle of Midway had intervened. The planners were agreed that aircraft carriers should not be used other than as essential components of task forces, so upholding the navy's objection

⁵ For a detailed account of these issues and their influences the reader is referred to Craven and Cate, Vol IV, pp. 13-21 and 44-60. This work has been the principle source for the survey given above.

to placing them in fixed relation to given shore positions—they must have freedom to operate in the theatre as a whole. The navy, who incidentally regarded the allocation of heavy bombers to the S.W.P.A. as insufficient to meet that area's needs as well as being able to cope with a sudden emergency, thought that the air force failed to appreciate fully the problems of distance and logistics and placed overmuch faith in the efficacy of air attack. Thus they argued: "Exclusive reliance on long-range aircraft from Hawaii and Australia to meet the needs for the defense of intervening communications will jeopardise the safety of these communications and of the forces overseas which depend on them."⁶

The air force also claimed freedom of movement in the area and held to the concept of maintaining air bases disposed to accommodate a mobile air striking force so that such a force could be concentrated when and where needed. A chain of "subsidiary fortresses" stretched out across the Pacific, it was held, was uneconomical and out of keeping in a theatre entitled to minimum rather than large air forces. The mobile forces they advocated for Australia and Hawaii could be concentrated at the centre of the island chain in approximately one day. It was acknowledged that such a mobile force might not be assembled quickly enough to repulse an enemy carrier force which could strike and withdraw quickly, but it could be concentrated in time to oppose an enemy landing in force.

When General Marshall put the issue before Mr Roosevelt, early in May, the President appeared confident that strong Japanese offensives against Australia or New Zealand could be prevented. He directed that the flow of aircraft to the Pacific should be limited to the need to maintain existing commitments at full strength and refused to divert forces from the European theatre.

The rival claims of the two theatres were still being keenly debated four months later. On 24th July there had been a temporary swing in favour of higher priority for the Pacific. This came from a decision that an invasion of continental Europe should be postponed, which led in turn to agreement by the Combined Chiefs of Staff that in addition to American forces to be withdrawn from BOLERO—the name given to the plan to build up forces in Britain—for operations in North and North-West Africa, 15 air groups could be withdrawn from the same source for offensive operations in the Pacific.

But the hopes of Pacific commanders, thus stimulated, were soon reduced to the *status quo*. By the end of the month it was found that the needs of the North African operation would absorb the entire output of the aircraft factories. Even so King told Arnold in September that he regarded the statement of the Combined Chiefs of Staff on 24th July as a mandate to withdraw air groups from the forces allotted to Europe, adding that his contention gained force from the fact that this decision had been made before the intensity of the Japanese air attacks on Guadalcanal had so greatly increased the urgency in that sector. But Arnold,

* Submission to Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2nd May 1942.

unshakeable in his conviction that Germany was "Enemy No. 1", pointed to a previous decision of the Combined Chiefs which insisted on a maximum offensive against Germany at the earliest practicable date, and a strategic defensive with minimum forces in other theatres. That, he held, was a fundamental concept unaltered by any subsequent agreement. The North African invasion plan had been given the highest priority by President Roosevelt and Mr Churchill, and any diversion of air strength would jeopardise that operation. No pleas on behalf of the American forces facing the Japanese in the Solomons would move him. The pressure of the air war must be maintained in Europe to prevent the *Luftwaffe* moving its strength to North Africa; Germany's "vitals" were open to the Allied heavy bombers, which was not yet true of Japan, and Admiral Nimitz had authority to move air units throughout the Central and South Pacific. This last point was made in reply to a statement by King that the initial loss of the Marine air squadrons on Guadalcanal, based on the first 25 days of operations, was 57 per cent, a rate of attrition which, he declared, the navy could not meet if it was to continue to operate its carriers.

General Arnold who, late in September, made a rapid tour of the Pacific, added to his emphatic contentions the point that, even if additional aircraft were made available, the base facilities in the theatre would not be able to accommodate them. The real problem, he believed, was proper distribution of the aircraft already there. Thus the struggle between the two Service heads continued while the situation on Guadalcanal steadily became more grave for the American forces. On 24th October when Roosevelt urged that "every possible weapon be sent", Marshall pointed to lack of transports rather than troops as the gravest need, and reported that 23 heavy bombers were being flown in as reinforcements, with 53 fighters following by sea.⁷ MacArthur had been told to be ready to provide bomber reinforcements and Lightning fighter replacements, on call.⁸ Marshall, too, indicated the extent of the drain on aircraft in the United States by reporting that it would be impossible to draw on replacement training units at home without fatally checking the flow of trained aircrew to the various theatres, and that Western Defence Command had but 25 heavy bombers, none of them of the right type for combat in the Pacific.

Finally, on 27th October, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved a plan that ended the long-drawn-out debate; if this plan was carried out the South Pacific Command would never have fewer than 70 heavy bombers, its medium-bomber strength would be 52 and its fighter strength 150, not counting a squadron on Canton Island, one (R.N.Z.A.F.) on Fiji and detachments on Palmyra, Christmas, Johnston and Fanning Islands. All these aircraft were at the "complete disposal" of Nimitz whose autho-

⁷ On 27th October 1942 Harmon had 47 Fortresses (35 combat-worthy), 8 Liberators of a new group (No. 90) that were on their way from Hawaii to Australia, and 7 Fortresses of the battle-weary No. 19 Group then staging back to the United States, which were held in Fiji in case of need and which in fact were used for some operations.

⁸ Eight Lightnings of No. 39 (U.S.) Fighter Squadron flew direct from Milne Bay to Henderson Field and remained there until 22nd November 1942.

urity to deploy all available air forces in the South and Central Pacific was restated on 14th November, a proviso being that he must move them as units and not as individual aircraft and crews.

In the appointment of Major-General Harmon as commander of the U.S. Army Forces in the South Pacific Area, there were all the ingredients for a clash of personalities among the commanders resulting from inter-Service rivalry and divided command; a subject that, as already noted, was one for deep concern in the air component of General MacArthur's neighbouring command. In the South Pacific Command, as with the R.A.A.F. in Australia, the air force was willing to sacrifice operational control (in this instance to the U.S. Navy) but not "the training and indoctrination" of air units in the area. This was agreed, and Harmon, who was clearly informed that his appointment was subordinate to that of Vice-Admiral Ghormley, was charged with, among other tasks, the training of all army air units in the area both ground and air. To take up his new appointment Harmon had relinquished that of chief of the army's air staff. It was understandable therefore that he held strong opinions on the issue of forgoing operational control. But he was now serving in a naval command and had received no War Department directive to support his opinions on this always delicate point. With wisdom perhaps rare in such circumstances he therefore refrained quite deliberately from engaging in debate with Ghormley and Vice-Admiral McCain. The situation as he saw it "demanded a maximum effort to ensure the complete cooperation of all services necessary to defeat the Japanese, and he was determined to support his directive as fully as possible".⁹ This sensible and realistic attitude set a high standard of command behaviour that was maintained throughout one of the most crucial and, from the command viewpoint, most frustrating campaigns in the war against Japan. It was this standard that prompted an American historian to conclude his review of the first and critical phase of the Guadalcanal battle with the statement that:

The maximum effort of the Japanese had been met and turned back, and many of the initial problems of the South Pacific had been overcome. The solution for others must wait, but there was an awareness among an increasing number of personnel that service loyalties were subordinate to the primary task: defeat of the Japanese.¹

The Fifth Air Force, which General Kenney was to command while retaining his senior appointment as Commander, Allied Air Forces, had come into being officially on 3rd September 1942. With headquarters at Brisbane, it had eight groups plus one photographic-reconnaissance squadron. There were three groups of fighters and five of bombers. Temporarily the headquarters of the new Fifth Bomber Command were established at

⁹ Craven and Cate, Vol IV, p. 33.

¹ Craven and Cate, Vol IV, p. 60.

Townsville. Fifth Fighter Command was planned but its formation was deferred until sufficient units were available.²

In a letter to General Arnold, Kenney explained that, because in addition to operations he was responsible for administration and planning for both Allied Air Headquarters and Fifth Air Force, it was necessary for him to have his own headquarters at Brisbane, and, because all heavy and most medium-bomber units must remain based in Australia—Japanese air attacks still enforced this—it was necessary to accept the “horrible handicap” of operating from advanced bases. He therefore established an advanced headquarters—Advanced Echelon or Advon, as it became known—at Port Moresby under General Whitehead, whom he appointed as deputy commander of the Fifth Air Force.

Thus far Kenney was able to constitute an independent American air force. Simultaneously he had to provide an answer for General MacArthur to the question what should be done with the operational units of the R.A.A.F. On the day after the formal constitution of the Fifth Air Force, MacArthur wrote to the Australian Prime Minister, acquainting him of the details of this decision and stating that it was “considered advantageous to exercise operational control” of the Australian squadrons assigned to his command then performing defensive and anti-submarine duties around the perimeter of Australia. General Kenney would designate Air Vice-Marshal Bostock to exercise this operational control “through appropriate Area staffs as a single element” which, he anticipated, would be named “Coastal Defence Command”. The letter added that, while the units in this command would be largely R.A.A.F. squadrons, they might include any number of squadrons from the Fifth Air Force. Conversely, R.A.A.F. squadrons or groups might operate with Fifth Bomber Command or Fifth Fighter Command as, indeed, several were now doing in New Guinea.

“It will be noted in this organisation,” the letter continued, “that no essential change is contemplated. It is not proposed to request that Air Vice-Marshal Bostock be named to command R.A.A.F. units. Command will rest, as at present, with the Chief of the Air Staff. Air Vice-Marshal Bostock will merely exercise operational control of certain U.S. and R.A.A.F. units assigned to the Allied Air Forces, which are performing a special function. He will remain at Headquarters, Allied Air Forces, utilising the operations, intelligence and communications facilities now existing, thus avoiding duplication and increase in overhead. Eventually, upon the withdrawal of the Fifth Air Force, the R.A.A.F. elements in the Coastal Defence Command and in Allied Air Force Headquarters, will remain as an operating headquarters, thus avoiding even temporary dislocation of R.A.A.F. functions. Its disposition will, of course, then rest with the R.A.A.F.”

Next day an order constituting the Coastal Command and designating Bostock as its air officer commanding, was issued from Kenney’s head-

² Standard unit strength in the USAAF at the time was 3 squadrons for fighter groups and 4 each for bomber, reconnaissance and transport groups.

quarters.³ It concluded: "The organisation of the Coastal Command . . . does not alter the functions and responsibilities of R.A.A.F. Headquarters, Melbourne." The decision to form R.A.A.F. Coastal Defence Command was promulgated to R.A.A.F. units on 18th September in a R.A.A.F. Organisation Memorandum which specifically stated that the command would not have any administrative control. On 21st September the new force was more suitably renamed R.A.A.F. Command, Allied Air Forces.⁴

Mr Curtin referred to the Australian Chiefs of Staff Committee the letter he had received from General MacArthur, together with a copy of the War Cabinet's decision (in April) to approve the assignment of all combat sections of the Australian forces to MacArthur's South-West Pacific Area Command. The committee was directed to report specifically on the R.A.A.F.'s organisation, operational efficiency and the machinery for command and administration. Further, it was to consider the role of the R.A.A.F. in the whole plan of Australian defence, both as an independent Service and in relation to the navy and army. This was to be considered from the viewpoint both of the existing organisation of the South-West Pacific Area and after the withdrawal of the Fifth Air Force from Australia.

As a member of this committee Air Vice-Marshal Jones took the opportunity to make his own opinions quite clear. Since the initial agreement with Allied Air Headquarters had virtually been cancelled, he sought the return to R.A.A.F. Headquarters of all R.A.A.F. officers who had been serving with A.A.F.H.Q.—"Extra R.A.A.F. (Staff with Allied Air Headquarters)" as they had been designated by the Air Board—and the restoration of operational control of R.A.A.F. units to the Chief of the Air Staff. Under this plan Bostock was to become Vice-Chief of the Air Staff.

On 26th September the Chiefs of Staff reported that, while accepting the formation of R.A.A.F. Command, Allied Air Forces, it was desirable that it should be established, like the Fifth Air Force, with unified operational and administrative control, and that this control should be vested in the Chief of the Air Staff whose operational responsibility, subject to the direction of Allied Air Headquarters, should normally be exercised through the Air Officer Commanding R.A.A.F. Command. This would permit day-to-day operational direction by Allied Air Headquarters and the Commander, R.A.A.F. Command, without delay, and would at the same time, preserve the principle of unified control of the R.A.A.F.

At first Kenney was inclined to accept the committee's proposal which was in keeping with MacArthur's assurances to Curtin, but Bostock opposed it and, after further review, G.H.Q. rejected it.

At this time R.A.A.F. Command comprised all the operational units of the Australian Air Force in the South-West Pacific except those in New Guinea (which came under American command), and the American

³ Allied Air HQ General Order No. 47, 5th September 1942.

⁴ Allied Air HQ General Order No. 53.

units (in No. 49 Fighter Group) serving in North-Western Area. R.A.A.F. Headquarters thus had extensive and widespread administrative responsibilities but no operational functions whatever. The endeavour which Jones had made to regain operational control of the R.A.A.F. in the South-West Pacific was understandable, but the influence of the wholehearted way in which Curtin had offered Australia's defence forces to the American Command was strong and the system of Air Board control, which had been challenged unsuccessfully by Brett and Burnett six months earlier, held no appeal for MacArthur or Kenney, while Bostock clearly was not willing to serve as Vice-Chief under Jones. With that unwelcome prospect eliminated, Bostock, who had been freed from his appointment as Chief of Staff, Allied Air Forces, a role to be filled very soon by Brigadier-General Donald Wilson who arrived from the United States on 18th September, formed the headquarters of his new command in Brisbane close to G.H.Q. and A.A.F.H.Q.

Bostock's senior staff in R.A.A.F. Command was drawn mainly from the other R.A.A.F. officers who had been serving at A.A.F.H.Q., notably Group Captain Scherger, Director of Defence; Group Captain Ewart, Senior Administrative Staff Officer; Group Captain Walters, Senior Air Staff Officer; Group Captain Wiggins, Chief Signals Officer; and Group Captain Hancock, Director of Plans. The Command operated through the area system. The areas, somewhat amended again, became R.A.A.F. formations.⁵

The absence of direct liaison between R.A.A.F. Headquarters and Allied Air Headquarters caused through the changes in command was met by the formation in Brisbane on 9th September of Forward Echelon, R.A.A.F. Headquarters, with Group Captain Packer, a former Director of Intelligence, as commanding officer. Packer thus became the accredited representative of the Chief of the Air Staff with the Commander, Allied Air Forces. He also served as liaison officer with the separate headquarters of Allied Naval and Land Forces. The exception among the R.A.A.F. operational units to come under the control of R.A.A.F. Command were, as mentioned, all Australian operational air units serving in New Guinea. These units, originally controlled from North-Eastern Area Headquarters, had already been brought within the control of a R.A.A.F. group—No. 9 Operational Group—which had been formed on 1st September to provide what in effect was a mobile offensive force.⁶ Under the strong leadership of Group Captain Garing, its first commanding officer, the group quickly achieved cohesion among the R.A.A.F.'s operational squadrons, forming

⁵ On 19th August the boundaries of North-Western, North-Eastern and Western Areas were revised. North-Western Area took in the whole of the Northern Territory and that portion of Queensland contained within the Shire of the Barkly Tableland and the districts of Haslingden and Heywood, and that portion of Western Australia north of a line drawn from Yampi Sound to the intersection of 20 degrees S. latitude with the western boundary of the Northern Territory. North-Eastern Area took in the whole of Queensland except that portion included in North-Western Area, and Western Area the whole of Western Australia except that portion of its area allocated to North-Western Area.

⁶ Air Commodore Cobby had succeeded Air Commodore Lukis on 25th August 1942, in command of North-Eastern Area Station HQ, Townsville, formed on 23rd February 1942 and disbanded and replaced by Operational Base Townsville on 3rd July 1942. RAAF Station HQ, Port Moresby, similarly became an operational base on 6th July 1942.

them into an effective striking force at the most critical combat period in the New Guinea campaign. Initially the group came under the operational control of Allied Air Forces Headquarters, a control soon to be exercised by Whitehead as commander of Advanced Echelon, Fifth Air Force.⁷

The prompt formation by A.A.F. Headquarters of R.A.A.F. Command and the rejection of the Australian Chiefs of Staff proposal of 26th September had, as noted, brought a strong reaction from Jones. The Air Board, having promulgated the decision of A.A.F. H.Q. to form R.A.A.F. Command, took no administrative action to recognise that command as an element within the R.A.A.F. organisation. This caused Bostock to write at length to the board on 7th November saying in part:

The satisfactory discharge of the responsibilities laid upon me by the Commander, Allied Air Forces, is not possible without the complete support of the Air Board, since it is my view that a commander cannot exercise efficient operational control and direction unless he is accorded a voice in the determination of policies and major matters concerning the organisation, administration, equipment, supply, and technical maintenance of his command.

Bostock added that the organisation of R.A.A.F. Command, the responsibilities of the air officer commanding, and the relationship of R.A.A.F. Command to the Air Board and to the R.A.A.F. as a whole, should be promulgated at the earliest possible date. This was urgently necessary to ensure that subordinate commanders and staff officers throughout the Service might be properly informed and instructed. He added:

In the absence of a clear definition by the Air Board, I am severely handicapped because it is frequently made evident to me that the Service as a whole is confused and bewildered. Operational commanders and staff officers of R.A.A.F. Headquarters, as well as staff officers of my own headquarters, are uncertain of their responsibilities, their obligations and the scope of their authority.

In the meantime, in October, the Prime Minister had arranged an interview between the Commander-in-Chief and the Secretary of the Department of Defence, Mr Shedden,⁸ in the hope that the problem might be clarified. Shedden, who had outlined for MacArthur the proposals of the Australian Chiefs of Staff, later reported to Curtin that MacArthur considered that if the course proposed by the Chiefs of Staff—unification of operational and administrative control under the Chief of the Air Staff—was adopted, the situation would be comparable to that in the Australian Army, in which General Blamey must, sooner or later, choose between going forward with the land forces in offensive operations or remaining in Australia to command the forces retained for the defence of the base. Since the same principles appeared to apply to both Services, Curtin deferred any decision or action on the R.A.A.F. problem in anticipation of a review of the whole command question.

⁷ Responsibility for administration and discipline of the group was initially with North-Eastern Area HQ but, on 1st January 1943, it became a separate command under the administrative control of RAAF HQ.

⁸ Sir Frederick Shedden, KCMG, OBE. Secretary, Defence Committee 1929-36, Dept of Defence 1937-57, to War Cabinet 1939-46. Of Melbourne; b. Kyneton, Vic, 8 Aug 1893.

In his reply to Bostock, written on 20th November, Jones stated that no administrative action had been taken by R.A.A.F. Headquarters to include his command as a R.A.A.F. formation because the decision of the Commander, Allied Air Forces, to constitute it "was not concurred in by this Headquarters or the Minister for Air . . .", adding ". . . it now becomes necessary to embody the personnel who previously constituted the R.A.A.F. component of Allied Air Headquarters into the R.A.A.F. organisation in a form both acceptable to this headquarters and most convenient from the point of view of administration and organisation". The letter continued:

It is therefore proposed to organise the staff required by the Allied Air Commander to exercise operational control of R.A.A.F. units, as portion of R.A.A.F. Headquarters under the title of Directorate of Operations, Communications and Intelligence. The organisation so created will overcome the difficulties referred to in . . . your letter by enabling the officer holding the appointment of Director to deal with these matters of organisation and administration in the normal manner. The necessary action will be taken and orders issued to give effect to the organisation outlined above, and appropriate establishment tables will be issued in due course.

A copy of this letter was sent to Kenney who also received a letter from Bostock in which he declared:

My present position is that I am placed in an untenable position in which I am unable to discharge my responsibilities as Air Officer Commanding R.A.A.F. Command A.A.F., since all recognition and support by the R.A.A.F. administrative organisation is withdrawn. I do not think that command can be exercised by a director of the central headquarters of a fighting service. I believe that Jones' proposals are impracticable and display a lack of appreciation of the true functions of command.

In the same letter Bostock added that he might have to relinquish his appointment. Kenney's reaction to the two letters was to send word to Jones that he did not wish any action taken on the proposal to form a directorate of operations, communications and intelligence until they had had an opportunity to discuss it; and to write to Bostock saying:

The last thing I want to do is to relieve you of your present job and I will quarrel with you on that score. I not only sincerely believe you the best qualified officer in the R.A.A.F. to handle operations but am especially desirous of having you on my side all the way back to Tokyo.

The next move came from R.A.A.F. Headquarters, which, on 5th December, issued an Air Force Confidential Order which recapitulated the changes that had occurred in the R.A.A.F. since April and gave its definition of the positions of "the staff now known as RAAF Command".⁹ Kenney's action in forming the command was described as "a temporary measure to facilitate his operational control of the R.A.A.F. operational units assigned to him". The order stated further:

It is intended that, on relinquishment of control by the Commander, Allied Air Forces, the staff now known as R.A.A.F. Command, Allied Air Forces, shall revert

⁹ AFCO 391—Organisation of RAAF Operational Control 151/2/581, 5th December 1942.

to R.A.A.F. Headquarters as Directorates of Operations, Intelligence and Communications respectively. The staff is therefore being organised on this basis and appropriate establishment tables are being issued.

This staff is to be responsible to the Commander, Allied Air Forces, for operational control only, of R.A.A.F. units assigned to it by him. All matters of R.A.A.F. policy, administration, discipline, training, supply and maintenance are the responsibility of R.A.A.F. Headquarters. Nevertheless the R.A.A.F. staff, Allied Air Forces, is to offer advice to R.A.A.F. Headquarters on all matters affecting operations and is to give its views and relevant information on such matters as may be requested by R.A.A.F. Headquarters from time to time.

Bostock, on the 12th, wrote to the Air Board, describing this order as "a confusion of ideas". He claimed that it misrepresented the operational organisation required by Kenney, failed to state his own responsibilities as air officer commanding R.A.A.F. Command, and misrepresented the functions of his headquarters. The assertion that the organisation was intended as a "temporary measure" was misleading, he held; a change of Government policy or the end of the war were the only contingencies which Kenney had envisaged as requiring a change of organisation. The final paragraph of the order Bostock described as "unintelligible" because the staff of the command was responsible to the Air Officer Commanding and not to the Commander, Allied Air Forces. It was "ridiculous", he said, to require the staff to offer advice to R.A.A.F. Headquarters—a duty which could be performed only by the Air Officer Commanding, on whom the responsibility rested "to obtain the administrative services necessary to carry out the orders of the Commander, Allied Air Forces". The apparently deliberate omission from the order of all mention or reference to himself, Bostock wrote, had resulted in "presenting a picture of a complicated and impracticable organisation" for which there was no justification. The order was "badly drafted, misleading and likely to add to the already dangerous state of confusion now existing throughout the R.A.A.F." It should be withdrawn, he claimed, and a more suitable order published as early as possible.

On receipt of this letter, Jones wrote (on 16th December) to Drakeford, submitting a copy of Bostock's letter and declaring that the basis of Bostock's case—"that the command of R.A.A.F. operational units was assigned to him by the Commander, Allied Air Forces"—was unacceptable because operational control only, as apart from disciplinary control, had been assigned by Kenney who, manifestly, was unable to assign powers which he did not possess. Such a memorandum from a senior officer to the headquarters of his Service could be regarded only as "a very serious matter, indicating unwillingness to cooperate within the terms of the organisation laid down by competent authority".

Since his appointment as Chief of Staff to the Commander, Allied Air Forces (Jones' letter continued), Air Vice-Marshal Bostock has consistently endeavoured to obtain control of certain aspects of administration and organisation of the R.A.A.F. and has shown great resentment when his efforts in this direction have been checked. He has allowed his attitude to be known widely throughout the service and the effect of this on discipline is now assuming serious proportions. . . .

On the separation of the 5th Air Force and R.A.A.F. Command Staff from what was formerly Combined Staff of Allied Air Headquarters, I represented that the R.A.A.F. operations and administrative staffs should be reunited. Air Vice-Marshal Bostock bitterly opposed this, and for the sake of harmony the matter was not pressed. In order to achieve the maximum degree of cooperation, a Forward Echelon of our headquarters administration staff was established in Brisbane and I have no reason to believe that the service has suffered to any great extent because of the continuance of separate control of operations and administration. This result has been achieved, however, in spite of the attitude of our operations staff in Brisbane, which has not always been cooperative. In view of the position that has now arisen, I find myself forced to recommend that Air Vice-Marshal Bostock be relieved of his present appointment and posted to some other appointment where his well-known ability can be used to advantage, but in which he will not be able to cause further friction between the different sections of the service and our Allies.

Drakeford, conscious of the favour in which Bostock was regarded at Allied Air Headquarters, after discussing the proposal with Curtin, dissuaded Jones from pressing his recommendation.

Kenney accepted Drakeford cordially. "I considered that he was sincere and honest," he wrote of the Minister later, "and would help in every way possible. . . . One thing that I liked about him was that he didn't pretend to know anything about aviation or the strategy or tactics involved in the use of air power. He looked after the interests of the R.A.A.F. when it came to budget matters, allocation of manpower, resources and industry, and left the operating end to the operators."¹

On 28th December the Air Board recorded their opinion in a minute, which declared: "The Board regards Air Vice-Marshal Bostock's attitude as a challenge to the position and authority of both the Chief of the Air Staff and the board." The board claimed that the organisation which Bostock desired was contrary to the principles laid down by the War Cabinet; that it was inconsistent with General MacArthur's letter to the Prime Minister (4th September) and with Kenney's order constituting the force he commanded; that it would give him complete command, both operational and administrative, of all operational and associated units of the R.A.A.F. Already there were several Area Commands to which the Air Board had delegated appropriate responsibility and the board considered that a further superior command headquarters could be set up only by transferring to such a command the whole or part of the powers and responsibilities of the Chief of the Air Staff and the board. This would lead to a "hopeless state of confusion". If it was to serve any useful purpose, such a command would inevitably have to become the superior headquarters of the R.A.A.F. The existing organisation was "working reasonably well", and, if any change was to be made, the board considered that it should be one to reunite all sections of the R.A.A.F. Headquarters staff on the same basis as before the arrival of the United States Forces. It might be necessary for the Deputy Chief of the Air Staff to be situated normally at the headquarters of the Commander, Allied Air Forces, whose directions he would accept as representative of the Chief of the Air Staff.

¹ Kenney, p. 81.

This would be in keeping with the recommendation of the Chiefs of Staff Committee which examined the subject. The Air Board viewed "with alarm and apprehension any move which would tend to divide the R.A.A.F. into two sections not wholly under the same controlling authority" and which would "seriously weaken the fighting value of the service" and might do "very great harm to discipline and morale".

The Prime Minister, disturbed by the continuing friction, summoned Bostock and Jones to a conference with Drakeford and himself and, after hearing the contending views, directed that the problem should be referred to the Defence Committee (the Chiefs of Staff plus the Secretary of the Department of Defence) which should consult Bostock and then review the whole question and make recommendations. After reiterating the need for "unified operational and administrative control of the whole R.A.A.F. within Australia and its Territories under one head", the committee noted that a review of army organisation as a result of experience in New Guinea was pending. Since this might have a bearing on the organisation of the R.A.A.F., it was recommended that, pending the reorganisation of the air force, R.A.A.F. Command should be a R.A.A.F. unit to exercise operational control only over R.A.A.F. units assigned to the South-West Pacific Area; that administrative requirements should be met through the existing R.A.A.F. machinery; that the Air Officer Commanding R.A.A.F. Command should keep the Chief of the Air Staff informed on operational planning, and that the Chief of the Air Staff should keep the Air Officer Commanding R.A.A.F. Command informed on organisation and administration affecting the R.A.A.F.'s operational command. Bostock, it was stated, agreed with the committee's recommendations.

Curtin, whose association with MacArthur was most cordial, wrote to the Commander-in-Chief on 11th January reviewing the problem in considerable detail. He recalled the discussion which Shedden had had with MacArthur, outlined his understanding of the general's views as reported to him by Shedden, and said that he had deferred the question until there was an opportunity to discuss its wider implications with General Blamey. He said that "administrative requirements for operational purposes are to be met through the existing R.A.A.F. machinery". This, he remarked, would require "the closest cooperation between R.A.A.F. Headquarters and R.A.A.F. Command". The Chief of the Air Staff would "consider measures necessary to achieve this, including the provision of suitable administrative advisory staff for the Air Officer Commanding, R.A.A.F. Command". The arrangements made for a full flow of information on operational plans from Bostock to Jones (with reciprocal action on Jones' part concerning administration) conformed with the principles already agreed upon by which the Australian Chiefs of Staff were supplied with operational information so that they could discharge their responsibility to advise the Government on Australian defence policy. Curtin made it clear that the arrangements he had outlined were intended to operate pending the result of the review of army and air force organisation. He per-

sonally agreed with the proposals and said that he would be glad to have MacArthur's approval of them. He intended, he said, to consult the Commander-in-Chief later on "the wide question of the future organisation of the Australian Army and the R.A.A.F. in relation to operations in the South-West Pacific outside the Australian area". The letter ended with a note of appreciation of assurances he had received from MacArthur (on 20th September) that the organisation of the Allied Air Forces into Fifth Air Force and R.A.A.F. Command would have no bearing on the allocation of aircraft for the R.A.A.F. and that "there is nothing involved in the new organisation that will affect the full employment of the R.A.A.F. in active combat operations".

MacArthur, replying on 16th January to Curtin's letter of the 11th, declared:

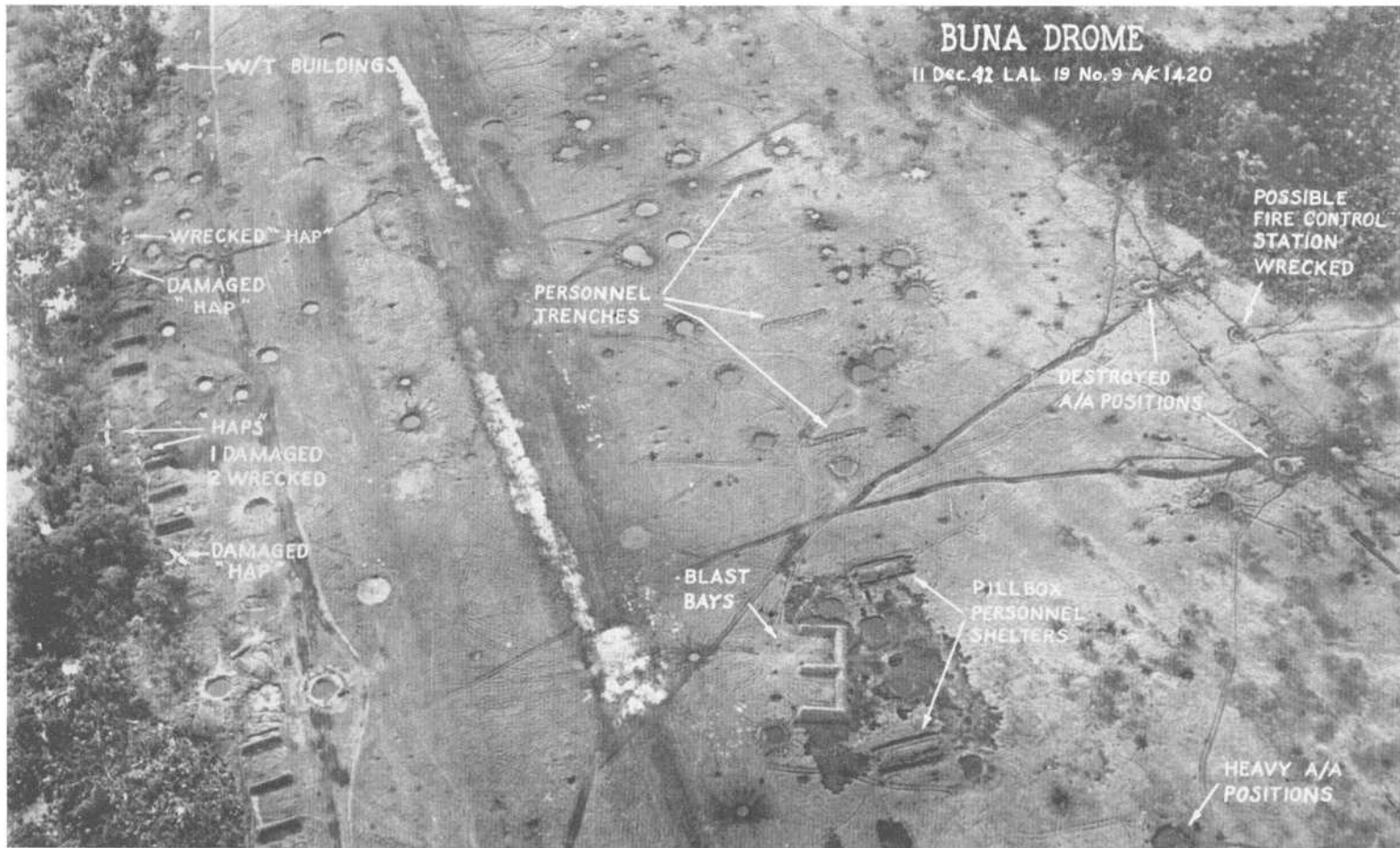
The basis for the procedure outlined therein [in Curtin's letter] is the proposal to withhold from the senior officer of the R.A.A.F. Command the authority to command that organisation and to give him only operational control thereof. I consider this idea to be completely violative of sound military principles and cannot concur therewith. Australian or American units assigned to the South-West Pacific Area must be actually commanded by officers who are assigned to that area. Administrative control flows down through national command channels, but the command function of the senior officer over his organisation cannot be impaired. 'Operational control' is in fact the military phraseology that describes the condition in which strategical or tactical direction rests in an officer who cannot exercise full command.

The letter went on to outline the organisation of A.A.F.H.Q. and R.A.A.F. Command, and then stated: "It is absolutely essential that the Air Officer Commanding R.A.A.F. Command exercise full and complete command over his organisation and that the Chief of the Air Staff exercise his administrative functions through the chain of command." To achieve this MacArthur requested:

- (a) That the A.O.C. R.A.A.F. Command have full legal command of his organisation with the responsibilities, authorities and limitations prescribed by regulation and customs of the Service;
- (b) That the A.O.C. R.A.A.F. Command be provided with the minimum staff necessary to operate and administer his command;
- (c) That forward service elements essential to the immediate operation of his organisation be assigned to the South-West Pacific Area as a part of R.A.A.F. Command;
- (d) That communications pertaining to the administration of the R.A.A.F. Command or of its component parts be directed to the A.O.C. by the Chief of the Air Staff.

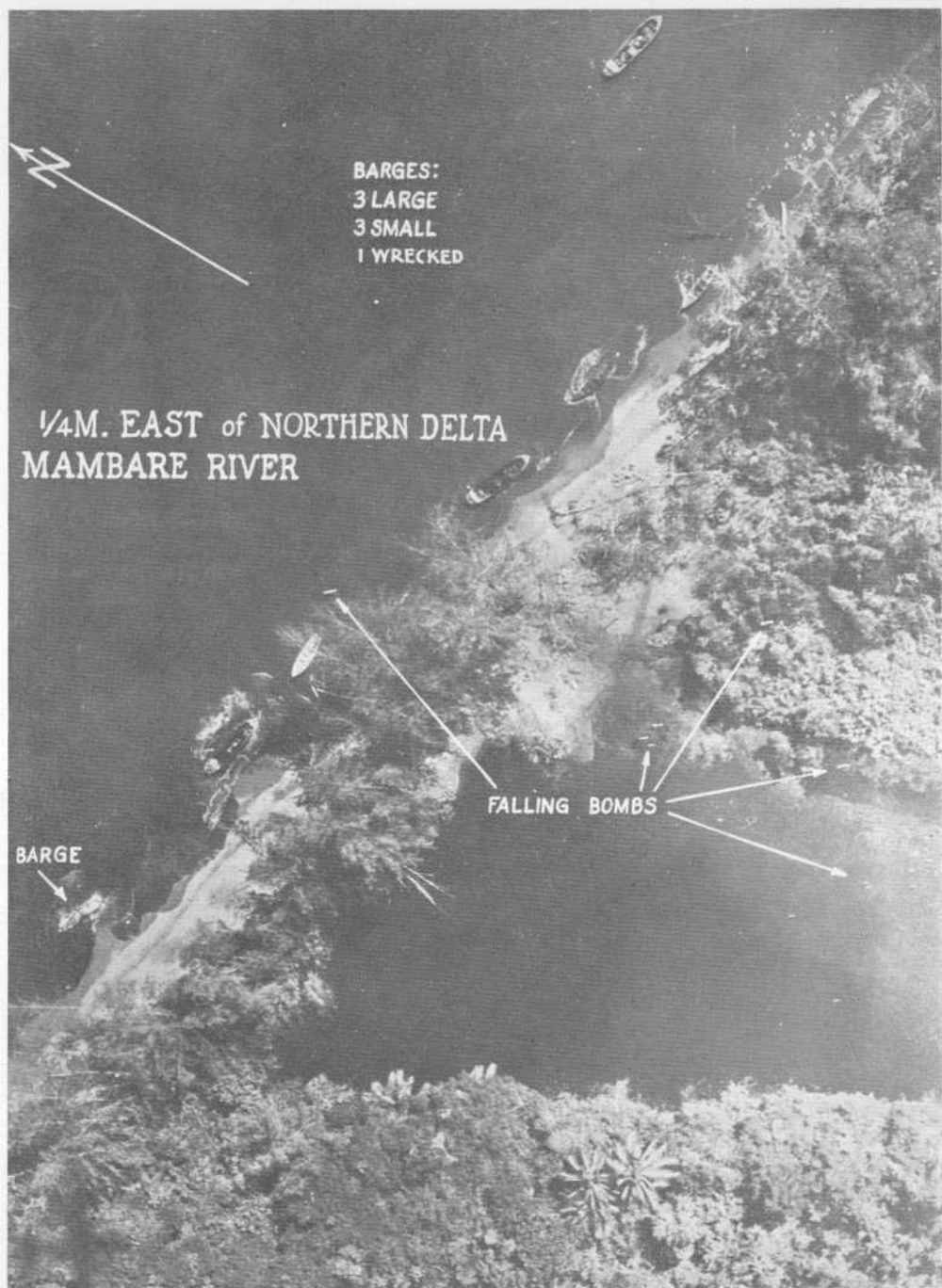
Favourable action in keeping with these requests, MacArthur added, would "have the effect merely to give to the R.A.A.F. Command the inherent structure essential to and present in every military organisation. . . ."

Early in March Bostock sent a memorandum to Kenney complaining that "after a lapse of two months no action has followed the Defence Committee's recommendations". In these circumstances he felt it his



(Allied Air Forces, S.W.P.A.)

Results of the bombing by 9 American Marauders of No. 19 Squadron of Buna aerodrome on 11th December 1942. The attack, in which sixty-three 300-lb demolition bombs were dropped at heights from 4,000 to 1,000 feet, destroyed aircraft, defences and storage dumps, and pot-holed the runway. Fires which were started were visible 35 miles away.



(Allied Air Forces, S.W.P.A.)

In a sustained attack in which Mitchells, Marauders, Bostons, Beaufighters and Kittyhawks of R.A.A.F. and American squadrons took part on 14th December 1942 Allied Air Forces bombed and strafed Japanese positions at the Mambare River delta and adjacent coastal areas. In 22 sorties from 5.20 a.m. to 4.45 p.m. in which 1,946 general-purpose, fragmentation and demolition bombs were dropped and 120,949 rounds were fired from cannon and machine-guns Allied aircraft destroyed and damaged a known 38 barges, knocked out defence positions, set fire to large fuel and munition stores and strafed personnel.

duty to report that "under the existing conditions which circumscribe the scope of my status and authority . . . I am unable to ensure the development of the maximum fighting efficiency of my command". Kenney sent this to MacArthur on 10th March and on the same day MacArthur wrote again to Curtin attaching a copy of Bostock's memorandum and urging that his own recommendations should be adopted. "The basic issue," he told the Prime Minister, "is a military one which does not properly admit of doubt. Reduced to its simplest terms it is that the forces placed at my disposal shall not be vitiated by outside control . . . to deny [this] would produce a situation the gravity of which I cannot over emphasise. May I ask that decisive action be taken. . . ." Curtin told MacArthur in reply (on 17th March) that when he had informed the Commander-in-Chief of the interim measures agreed to by the Defence Committee and Bostock, he had also informed Drakeford and he had since been under the impression that action had been taken. He was disturbed to find that this was not so. Curtin here, for the first time, indicated to MacArthur that the general himself had originally suggested "operational control only", and noted that "full and complete command" for Bostock would involve consideration of the whole question of the future organisation of the R.A.A.F., including the issue of the abolition of the Air Board and the appointment of an air officer commanding the R.A.A.F. He added that he had requested the Minister for Air to issue the necessary instructions for the interim measures and that he greatly regretted the situation that had developed.

MacArthur, in reply, noted that the interim measures proposed would "not of course, satisfy the principles of military organisation" he had outlined in his letter of 16th January. Despite this he felt that recognition by R.A.A.F. Headquarters of R.A.A.F. Command as a tactical formation, and the establishment of R.A.A.F. Command as a unit might tend to facilitate coordination of the administrative services with operational requirements to meet tactical needs. These interim measures, he said, were, however, a poor palliative and he wished to emphasise the vital importance of concluding the deliberations on the future organisation of the R.A.A.F.

Jones' attitude remained unchanged. On 16th March he had sent a signal to all air officers commanding areas which read:

Communications relating to supply, maintenance, personnel, works and organisation are not to be addressed to R.A.A.F. Command. Such communications may be repeated to R.A.A.F. Command only when they relate to important administrative matters having immediate effect on operations.

Bostock on 19th March sent a copy of this signal to Kenney to whom he complained that Jones was denying him direct access to the combat elements of his command on matters relating to the status of aerodromes, supply facilities and administrative arrangements, except for major matters reflecting on immediate operations, and even then operational headquarters or formations comprising his command were forbidden to reply directly. Information from R.A.A.F. Headquarters was often delayed, out of date,

inaccurate, or incomplete. Jones' latest order, he said, was dangerous and made it impossible to plan operations efficiently "or, indeed, with reasonable hope of success". His appointment was "rapidly becoming impracticable and untenable". Kenney sent this letter to MacArthur with a covering letter in which he said:

To effect efficiency of control it is essential that the Commander Allied Air Forces must rely on the Air Officer Commanding R.A.A.F. Command as the one responsible officer who represents the R.A.A.F. in all matters affecting the operations of the R.A.A.F. component of the Allied Air Forces. Such matters must necessarily include administration and supply.

Bostock also protested to Jones, asking that the signal, which was "unnecessary and dangerous", should be cancelled. This Jones refused to do. Since the viewpoints of the R.A.A.F.'s two most senior officers were apparently irreconcilable, Curtin directed Jones to discuss the matter with MacArthur. As a result of this interview Jones wrote to MacArthur setting out his contentions and proposing that if and when a R.A.A.F. expeditionary force left Australia, MacArthur, while continuing to command the South-West Pacific Area, should relinquish his responsibilities for the air defence of Australia to the Chief of the Air Staff. Acknowledging this memorandum on the 25th the Commander-in-Chief wrote briefly but with finality, saying that apparently his basic views had been misunderstood and that the outline submitted by Jones could not be used as a basis for further discussion. He hoped, however, that a clear definition of responsibilities could be arranged.

Thus the problem was discussed, debated and argued and, since none of the participants on either side would concede any ground, it remained unsolved, an irritant to them all and to many others at R.A.A.F. Headquarters and R.A.A.F. Command, who, all too often, were in doubt as to whose was the authoritative voice.

In this issue of divided command—a problem itself as old as is the alliance of independent armed forces—the disagreement between Jones and Bostock had now reached a state of complete obduracy. It was this element more than any other that intensified the ill-effects of what was at best an ill-fitting system of command. When the War Cabinet and the Advisory War Council, on 17th April 1942, had approved the assignment of all combat sections of the Australian forces in the South-West Pacific to MacArthur's new command, they had, with no other practical choice, accepted this system for the R.A.A.F. In this situation, with the Air Board as a composite top-level command authority that was geographically fixed, and operational control separated from administrative control, there were difficulties enough. But these were accepted, if not without some friction at least with realistic understanding and a genuine attempt to cooperate; it was an attitude comparable in some senses with that (already noted) which had been developed within the South Pacific Command. But when the R.A.A.F. was divided, with a separate operational command on the one hand and a R.A.A.F. Headquarters on the other, and when each

of these two elements of the Service was headed by an officer equal with the other in rank, in determination and, as it proved, in inflexibility, the complexities of command became to each of them most exasperating.

Initial responsibility for this second and much more exacting division of authority lay quite clearly with MacArthur. When he outlined the proposed formation of "Coastal Command R.A.A.F." in his letter to Curtin on 4th September, the Commander-in-Chief was most specific in his assertion that the command status of R.A.A.F. Headquarters would remain unchanged. There was not so much as a hint in his letter of the incipient dangers in his proposal. Yet, only four months later, he was writing to Curtin, indulging in an exposition of military doctrine that condemned the immediate and inevitable result of this, his own, direction as "completely violative of sound military principles", and defined operational control as being "the condition in which strategical and tactical direction rests in an officer who cannot exercise full command"—a condition that he himself had prescribed for Bostock.

Curtin, Drakeford and the members of the Air Board were entitled to believe that MacArthur's first assurances were sincerely expressed. Leaving the personalities aside, logic dictated that, in these circumstances, R.A.A.F. Command should be subordinate to R.A.A.F. Headquarters, its air officer commanding, while operationally responsible to the Commander, Allied Air Forces, unhesitatingly acknowledging the authority of the Chief of the Air Staff and doing all in his power to make the best of a difficult situation. R.A.A.F. Headquarters and the C.A.S., for their part should, by the same sensible dictation, have given R.A.A.F. Command just recognition and delegated to its air officer commanding as much administrative power as was compatible with the operational task to be performed.

The Prime Minister, who was also Minister for Defence, had all the constitutional authority he needed to determine the problem, but, the plan to appoint Air Marshal Drummond as Chief of the Australian Air Staff having failed, he felt bound in the absence of any other acceptable nominee to prohibit any decision that might conflict with the pledge of unlimited cooperation he had given to the Commander-in-Chief; insistence on the appointment of an officer regarded by MacArthur as unsuitable would certainly have been in that category. Drakeford's opposition to Bostock, which dated back to his clashes with Burnett, with whose name he had come to bracket that of Bostock, was so strong as to tend to outweigh the influence of Curtin's pledge of cooperation to MacArthur.² The members of the Air Board felt that the board was under threat and displayed an understandably strong sense of loyalty to the Chief of the Air Staff.

²The Minister did, in fact, at a later date, support a move by the Air Board, to replace Bostock as AOC RAAF Command. For the details of this incident and of the continuing problem of divided control the reader is referred to George Odgers, *Air War Against Japan 1943-1945* (in this series).

The actual extent to which the R.A.A.F.'s contribution to the war effort was hindered by the dispute must always remain arguable. It was easy to exaggerate this in an atmosphere of personal bitterness, heated exchange, and reaction to frustration; yet, whatever the degree of exaggeration, the acute personal tension between Jones and Bostock was certainly a serious check on Service efficiency and the cause of a distressing division of loyalties within the R.A.A.F.

Kenney's own attitude, it appears, was that he did not greatly care. "As a matter of fact," he wrote after the war, "except for the feud, which sometimes was a nuisance, I liked the situation as it was. I considered Bostock the better combat leader and field commander and I preferred Jones as the R.A.A.F. administrative and supply head", a statement that did not suggest that any very serious consequences flowed from the dispute.³ And there was some justification for this point of view. By the end of March 1943, the R.A.A.F. had already made and was maintaining a substantial contribution to the increasingly strong assault on the Japanese perimeter.

³ Kenney, p. 80. Kenney's admission of preference for the situation "as it was" and MacArthur's subsequent unwillingness to accept a RAF officer as commander of the RAAF suggest that the two American commanders had found a certain convenience in the division of RAAF authority and would not have welcomed the introduction to the command scene of a "strong" man, with considerable operational experience in another theatre, in whom there would be vested greater powers than those held by either Bostock or Jones.