

America At War

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Formation of the new 21st Bomber Command under the 20 Air Force, along with B-29 operations against Jap steel and aircraft works from American bases in the Marianas, marks the true beginning of the real strategic air attack on Japan.

But it is only the beginning. The round trip is over 3,000 mi, and the weight of fuel necessarily still lessens the loads of explosives and incendiaries. These missions are a grueling experience for the crews; weather is tough; and maintenance and supply remains an enormous task. Considering the weight of air attack on Germany, and the Germans' ability to take it, the obvious conclusion is that, if the Japs are just as tough, they cannot be seriously hurt till they receive comparable bombardment.

This beginning, however, will rapidly swing into full-force operations. Since gasoline is delivered direct from tankers at the Marianas to planes of the 21st, a fuel limitation is not suffered like that of the 20th, whose supply is still mostly flown over the Hump. Meantime, the Army's call for more *Superfortresses* is being strongly backed up by the home front. Missions of 100 bombers will be boosted to several hundred.

From their new positions in the Philippines, Army and Navy have air control of the entire China Sea area. Their next forward move, probably, into the Bonin and Volcano Islands, will not only greatly increase the "pay" load of the B-29s (by reducing the distance to 600 or 700 mi) but it will also bring the B-17s and B-24s within range of Japan. Bombing missions then will be accompanied by the *Lightning*, *Mustang*, and *Thunderbolt* fighters. The *Lightnings* have already been there, from whence is not told.

When Navy task forces can get close enough, their ship-based fighters also can cover the Army's bombers and can attack ground objectives direct. The Navy soon will be able to concentrate fights of 2,000 or more warplanes when necessary.

The 20th Bomber Command, organized with the 20th Air Force, of course continues to operate from China and India, under great supply difficulties. However, the international news experts still predict that Russia will grant the Allies the use of bases lying less than 700 mi from Jap objectives.

While the Mikado's army aviation grows stronger by replacing its losses, by improving power and design, and by concentration as it backs up toward home, Vice Adm Marc A Mitscher, commander of the Third Fleet's carrier forces, states that Japan's naval aviation has been virtually wiped out. All of her original carrier fleet has been sunk; the amount of replacement is unknown, but it is ineffectual.

The Naval battles for the Philippines rubbed out Japan as a major sea power, which can not again take on a major pitched battle; but it can inflict damage in opposing the advance of American forces. Most of the sunk Jap warships were slugged by American surface ships, which gave rise to a new flurry of talk on an old subject: Air vs sea power.

In Europe, Allied air forces are setting new records in number of sorties flown and in weight of bombs dropped. Air power advocates are increasingly surprised at the amount of demolition a first class military power like Germany can take and retain strength. The reduced *Luftwaffe* took quite a part in the recent German counter push; underground and dispersed production of fighters probably will continue near its present rate.

In three years of war, Army Air Forces have flown more than 1,500,000 combat sorties; dropped more than 1,000,000 tons of bombs; and destroyed 30,000 enemy planes. These data were released by the War Department in a Pearl Harbor day summary. American losses were put at less than 14,000, below half that of the enemy with roughly 8,000 shot down in combat, less than 300 destroyed on the ground, and 5,000 brought down by A-A fire. Eighty-five percent of bomb tonnage was dropped on Europe. Berlin received 14,000 tons, more than any other target.

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