

In June , the 11th Air Force , commanded by Major General William O Butler, went into action against the Japanese in the Aleutians, where they had made landings on Attu and Kiska Islands. Repeated air blows played a large part in stopping the Japanese northern invasion, and later in driving them completely out of the islands.

The 13th Air Force was highly instrumental in halting the Japanese advance in the Solomons, its heavy bombers pounding repeatedly at supply points and shipping up and down the island chain. Later P-38 fighter units cooperated with ground units in the Guadalcanal campaign.

Meanwhile the AAF entered the European war. The 8th Air Force made its initial assault on the enemy on June 17, 1942, when a dozen B-17s smashed the French city of Rouen. At the same time the 12th Air Force, under Doolittle, gave air support to the Allied advance in North Africa and the Italian invasion. Later, the 9th Air Force began to strike European targets.

Back in the Pacific, the 5th Air Force, came into prominence by smashing a Japanese convoy in the Bismarck Sea, in March 1943. Later the 5th gave air cover to ground and naval forces landing along the New Guinea and New Britain coasts.

The 12th Air Force assisted ground forces in the Allied break through to Tunis and Bizerte in May 1943. Its bombers hammered incessantly at German and Italian shipping in the Mediterranean. Bombers of the 12th sunk the 10,000 ton Italian cruiser, the Trieste, in a Sardinian harbor. Later, the 12th played the featured role in the bombardment of Pantelleria, which surrendered on June 11. In the July invasion of Sicily, the 12th flew both tactical and strategic missions, and even carried paratroopers for the final assault.

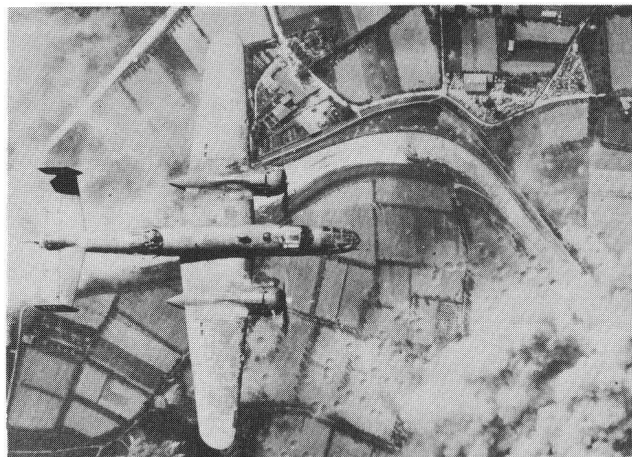
Major General Willie Hale's 7th Air Force was assigned the task of blasting enemy island bases as a prelude to invasion. the 7th struck at Tarawa, Makin, Nauru, Kwajalein and others. In November, 1943, Tarawa fell to Allied Forces, providing a base for further strikes against the Marshall Islands.



B-24's of the 484th Bomb Group fighting through flak on their way to a 15th AF target (File photo)

On November 2, 1943, the 15th Air Force entered the fight with a smashing blow against the German aircraft industry at Wiener Neustadt, Austria. It continued to strike against aircraft

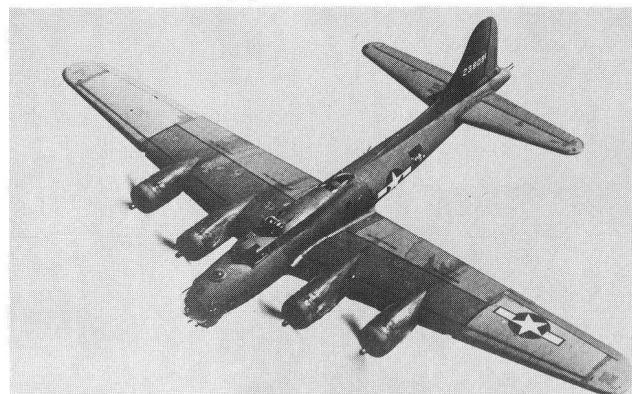
production and existing aircraft through the latter months of 1943 and the early months of 1944, its missions carrying through Germany, the Balkans, and Northern Italy. In April, 1944, with the Russian Army bearing down from the east, the 15th turned its attention to the German oil refineries and railroads in the Ploesti-Bucharest area, which helped weaken the German position in the Balkans.



A B-25 of the Mediterranean Allied Air Force attacks a bridge near Nice, France.

Meanwhile the 8th Air Force carried the fight against the German aircraft industry from another flank, striking again and again into the heart of Germany, smashing aircraft plants, and airfields, and destroying innumerable aircraft in aerial combat. In the spring of 1944, the German Luftwaffe now just a shadow of what it had once been, the 8th smashed at communications and troop concentration, softening the enemy for the impending D-Day.

D-Day, June 6, 1944, gave the AAF a chance to prove the value of air power in war time. On that day the AAF flew more than 8000 sorties, the 8th and 9th Air Forces lashing the Channel coast while the 12th and 15th flew diversionary raids against southern France. The 8th Air Force flew 2,500 heavy bombers in and out of Normandy, striking at coast batteries, communications and retreat roads. The 9th Air Force flew over 4,000 sorties, its troop carrier command dropping two airborne divisions on the Cherbourg peninsula.



A Boeing B-17G

Following the invasion, the AAF continued its pounding of the German industry, smashing factories, arsenals, oil refineries, and guided missile launching sites. A shuttling process,