

Sutri. On 24 October one more mission was flown against Wiener Neustadt. A total of 111 B-17's and B-24's took off, but the target was hidden by 10/10 clouds so that only twenty-three Liberators of the 98th Bombardment Group bombed the objective and they did so by dead reckoning. Sixteen planes of the 301st went seven miles beyond Wiener Neustadt and hit Ebenfurth with excellent results. The weather kept the Luftwaffe grounded and there were no encounters. Strategic also flew a long-distance mission against the Antheor viaduct near Cannes in southern France on 3 October, thirty-eight B-17's placing a heavy concentration on the target and its approaches and scoring direct hits on tracks and near-by roads.

And so by the end of October, NAAF's Strategic and Tactical Air Forces had established a pattern of operations that would endure with but little change almost to the following spring. Coastal, too, had its regular and routine duties, except that it had taken over from 12th ASC the additional job of protecting harbors and other installations along the west coast of Italy. Photographic Reconnaissance flew its daily missions, seeking out new targets and recording the damage done to old ones.

Troop Carrier continued to bring in supplies and personnel and to take out wounded. During the month, NAAF's planes flew approximately 27,000 sorties and dropped more than 10,000 tons of bombs. The USAAF's share was between 14,000 and 15,000 sorties and 8,000 tons.

On the ground, some 100 were claimed destroyed, 40 probably destroyed, and 80 damaged. The brunt of operations was borne by Strategic and Tactical, but Coastal also put in a busy month, its planes flying 5,222 sorties, shooting down 22 enemy planes, and escorting ships an over-all distance of 1,400,000 miles with the loss of only 3 vessels.

Operations settled down to the prosaic but vital jobs which kept the air elements in shape to fly. The beginning of experimental supply drops to the patriot forces in France by modified B-24's of the 5th Bombardment Wing's special flight section was something new, but these operations would be on a small scale for many months.

Since the summer of 1942 a major consideration in the development of the Mediterranean strategy had been the capture of airfields from which Allied air forces could reach profitable targets in northern Italy, Germany, Austria, and the Balkans. And now that southern Italy had been conquered, one of NAAF's most important and urgent jobs was to repair and lengthen old fields and construct new ones for use by the units of Strategic, which continued to operate from bases in Tunisia. The responsibility devolved largely upon American aviation engineers, who, with assistance from British airdrome construction groups, had prepared before the end of October enough fields on the mainland to take care of the immediate needs of Tactical's planes.

Various U.S. aviation engineer units in the theater were promptly assigned to a new command. On 4 November, Brig. Gen. Donald A. Davison became commanding general. The new command held responsibility for all airfield construction except the fields for Desert Air Force in eastern Italy, which were to be handled by the British. Near the end of October the engineers began the construction of heavy bomber fields around

Foggia, in the Heel, and in the Cerignola area and medium bomber fields in Sardinia and Corsica. In spite of great difficulties imposed by rain and mud, insufficient equipment and personnel, and poor transportation, the engineers during November and December completed or were in process of completing construction on more than forty-five airfields. The work ranged from repairs and drainage to building paved or steel-plank runways as much as 6,000 feet in length.

A second major activity of the 12th AF engineers AFEC was the construction of pipe lines for aviation gasoline. In October, an Engineer Petroleum Distribution Company began laying lines and setting up pumping stations in the Foggia area, and in December a second company started to lay pipe in the Heel. By 25, November the first line had been completed and was in operation; it ran from Manfredonia to Foggia and could move 160,000 gallons of 100 octane gasoline each week. By the time NAAF's heavy bombers were ready in December to move to their new fields in eastern Italy the problem of keeping them supplied with gasoline had been solved. Use of the pipe lines reduced the tonnage to be off-loaded at ports and relieved road and rail transportation of a heavy burden. A small system was established at Naples also.

Maintenance of the lines, and more particularly the handling of the gasoline at the fields, was the responsibility of 12th Air Force Service Command. Both the engineers and service command were able to supplement their limited personnel by employing along the lines and at the airfields small numbers of French aviation engineers on Corsica and by using large numbers of Italian prisoners of war in Italy.

The development of air bases in Italy not only created problems of airfield construction and of moving gasoline but also of handling supplies for the air forces. An Adriatic Depot was established at Bari, a depot that operated under the control of 12th Air Force service command but was staffed largely by ground forces service personnel. It got under way late in October and by the end of the year was supplying American air units with common items from numerous offices, warehouses, and dumps in and around Bari. Few operations in the Mediterranean were more unique or more successful than the depot, in which the American air forces ran a ground force activity in a British-controlled area.

Ploesti would be much easier to attack; half of the GAF's fighters currently facing the United Kingdom would have to be moved to the southern German front; and bombers flying from Italy would enjoy the shield of the Alps against the German radio warning system. The Americans expressed agreement with these thoughts, though they believed that the air offensive could be as effectively prosecuted from fields immediately above Rome as from bases north of the Po River, which the British had considered desirable.

Within a month after QUADRANT both Eisenhower and Spaatz had endorsed Arnold's plan to use Italian fields as bases from which to bomb

German-held Europe. In a message to Marshall, Eisenhower noted a number of the advantages which had been mentioned by Portal and argued that a more intensive air effort against Germany could be maintained with proportionately smaller losses if a substantial part of the heavy bomber effort were applied during the winter from Italian bases. He pointed out, however, that new

