

HEADQUARTERS
MEDITERRANEAN ALLIED AIR FORCES
Public Relations Section

The Mediterranean Allied Air Forces today hurled its greatest striking force against the German stronghold town of Cassino in a bombing operation unsurpassed in the history of warfare.

Wave after wave of aircraft of every type roared relentlessly over the bastion in the few hours between first light and 1200 noon, unloading more than 1400 tons of bombs upon a target area which covered less than a square mile.

It was the smallest area ever to feel the weight of so many bombs in so short a time.

The tremendous attack had one object—to destroy every building in Cassino, to reduce to rubble the ancient stone houses concealing countless guns which have stubbornly blocked the Fifth Army's advance in Italy.

Every unit of Lieut. Gen. Ira C. Eaker's Mediterranean Allied Air Forces was in action. Loaded to the hilt with bombs, the planes began taking off throughout the Mediterranean theater shortly after dawn to unload their bombs on the target area, return to their bases, reload, fly back to the attack.

Time to split-second perfection, here is the timetable for the powerful striking force's attack on the town:

<u>Time</u>	<u>Formations over target</u> <u>Type of aircraft</u>
0830	B25
0840	"
0850	Heavies
0900	"
0915	"
0930	"
0945	"
1000	"
1015	"
1030	"
1045	"
1100	"
1115	"
1130	B26
1145	"
1200	"

(OVER)

The planes that roared into this massive attack thus represented practically every type of combat aircraft--B17 Flying Fortresses, B24 Liberators, B26 Marauders, B25 Mitchells, A20 Bostons, with P38 Lightnings, P47 Thunderbolts and Spitfires in great numbers to ward off any interceptors the enemy might send up.

Engaged elsewhere, on defensive patrol and in supporting operations against other targets, were P47 Warhawks fighters and fighter-bombers, as well as A36 divebombers.

Important roles in support of the main effort were assigned to the veteran RAF fighter and fighter-bomber pilots of the Desert Air Force, which made attacks in the Anzio beachhead area.

It was the first time that air power had been employed in support of ground troops on such a large scale--yet the operation against Cassino was but one phase of an all-out effort that continued into the afternoon with increasing fury.

Approximately the same weight of bombs was rained upon towns, bridges and communications centers to the north and northwest--upon places where the enemy might attempt to make another stand like that at Cassino, where for three months of grim fighting the Germans have controlled the main avenue to the north.

Few other air operations were comparable with today's. One was that carried out by the Tactical Air Force, then commanded by Air Marshal Sir Arthur Coningham, to effect a break-through for Allied forces advancing upon Tunis and Bizerte in May, 1943. In the peak of that attack, the 24 hours from dusk of May 5 to dusk of May 6, more than 2000 sorties were flown. Today's sorties promised to total well over 3000, and the tonnage of bombs dropped to set a new record for aerial warfare.

Last June's aerial conquest of Pantelleria, too, saw a vast number of sorties flown, but the campaign against that island stronghold differed from Cassino in that it was directed mainly at gun positions, without involvement of ground forces in large numbers, and continued over a period of days.

On the peak day of the Allied air attack on the Salerno beachhead last September 14, more than 2000 sorties were flown.

For another departure in Allied air tactics, a leaf was torn from the Luftwaffe's book. One bomber group was instructed to attach whistling devices to as many of its bombs as possible. The planners of the Cassino operation thus aimed to see how the enemy stood up under the "Screamers" used with psychological effect against so many of his victims.