

## CHAPTER 14

### AIR TASK FORCES

■ 1030. An *air task force* is a grouping of air, base, and service units formed to conduct the air missions required by a plan of operations.

The types of air missions required by the plan of operations determines the composition, strength, organization, and types of airplanes and other equipment of an air task force. Changes in the types of missions, or in the plan of operations, often dictate changes in the force, such as variations in the numbers and types of units composing it, and in the location of air bases. Organization must be flexible. There always should be available trained commanders and staffs in adequate numbers for all probable air task forces.

The air task force should contain the number and type of *reconnaissance*, *bombardment* and *pursuit*, *air transport* and *base* and *service units* essential for the successful accomplishment of the mission with which it is charged.

■ 1031. In general, airplanes of all combat types can be used within the limits of their range for reconnaissance, on missions against hostile air forces or vital elements of an enemy's national structure, for air attack of ground objectives, or in support of ground or naval operations. Pursuit aviation fights offensively in the air. Other combat aviation normally engages in air fighting only for its own protection in the execution of its primary missions.

Bombardment aviation is useful principally for air attack of surface objectives. Though pursuit aviation is useful primarily for air fighting, it can be used in emergency for air attack of such objectives as are vulnerable to light bombs, aircraft cannon, and machine guns. Pursuit is required to intercept and limit the operations of hostile bombers and other types of hostile aviation.

The size or surface of airdromes or landing fields may preclude the use of certain types of aircraft in the air task force.

■ 1032. In all air operations, the *weather* is of such importance that trained weather personnel must be with the force

to make accurate weather forecasts for the longest possible periods ahead. The time of initiating and conducting important operations is determined largely by these forecasts.

■ 1033. *Air superiority* in the area involved is prerequisite to continued, successful military operations. Greater numbers of airplanes, higher performance characteristics than corresponding hostile types, thorough training, high morale, intelligent employment and leadership, and superior base facilities tend to assure air superiority. Numerically inferior air forces possessing some of these factors may attain temporary or local air superiority.

■ 1034. To gain complete control of the air, hostile air forces must be destroyed, or neutralized by pinning them to the ground. The best method of accomplishing this result is air attack with bombs and aircraft gun fire against aircraft on the ground, air base facilities and installations, fuel reserves, bomb dumps and routes of communication; and against aircraft, engine, and equipment factories. Such attacks must be intensive, concentrated, and sustained. Detailed reconnaissance prior to and throughout the operations is essential. In many cases, protective measures by the enemy, such as concealment, dispersion, and antiaircraft defenses prevent complete neutralization, and hostile bombers will continue their operations. These must be opposed with pursuit aviation and with antiaircraft artillery.

■ 1035. An *air offensive* requires an estimate of the situation to determine the bombing objectives. These should contribute directly to the success of the military or naval operations as a whole. All bombing operations must be coordinated, both in time and in space, so that the full capabilities of the air task force are realized. Extensive and detailed preparatory reconnaissance is mandatory. Distance of the target from the base and the type of target determine the type of airplane required to perform the mission. When distances and loads to be carried are too great for available aviation of suitable type, preliminary operations must be undertaken to seize and prepare bases sufficiently close to the objectives.

■ 1036. There may be great temptation to disperse or dissipate combat aviation. It is the *responsibility of the commander* to whom air task forces are assigned or attached

to decide the relative importance of various lines of action and assure concentrated effort. Bombing attacks once begun must be continued to the complete and permanent destruction of the objective, or must be continued indefinitely at the rate necessary either to neutralize it or to realize the cumulative effect of air bombing. Otherwise, most of the value of any damage inflicted initially is sacrificed. In most situations, aviation units must be conserved in their employment, to insure their maximum effectiveness when most needed. During critical phases they should be thrown into action without hesitation or reservation, in the full strength required or available.

■ 1037. For the general doctrines applicable to combat aviation in *support of ground operations* see paragraphs 78 to 82, inclusive.

■ 1038. Effective close support of ground troops is not practicable until local air superiority has been established.

■ 1039. In *critical phases* of the ground battle, delivery of fire by combat aviation on the immediate front of the ground forces frequently is required. The added firepower and moral effect of combat aviation often are quickly decisive. In order to exploit their full mobility, fire support by combat aviation is ordinarily essential to the operations of mechanized forces. Supporting aviation can assist materially in the supply of, and communication with, fast moving ground forces.

■ 1040. Methods of operation and control must insure prompt and accurate designation of targets, effective use of signal communication, and mutual recognition by friendly units. Intensive preliminary reconnaissance is most desirable. Signal communication for target designation and mutual recognition normally is by panel from the ground, pyrotechnic signals, colored tracer ammunition, aircraft maneuvers, and radio. Wire communication from the supported force to the air unit command post is highly desirable, otherwise radio must be used. Liaison officers are necessary. The organic and attached observation airplanes of the supported unit can assist greatly in coordinating the air and ground actions during the operations.

■ 1041. Close supporting operations on the immediate front of the ground unit may require such intimate coordination,

and the time element in signal communication and staff action may be so short, that the air unit must be attached to the ground unit for operational control for definite limited periods.

■ 1042. Support of *troops transported by air* requires extremely close coordination and close control. Such operations require special air force support, including convoy by pursuit aviation, to prevent hostile air action against the expedition while in flight, and on the ground after landing. Preliminary air attack on the landing area and its vicinity may be required to destroy or disorganize local defenses. During the landing and subsequent ground operations, supporting air operations include the laying of a smoke screen and the attack of defending or counterattacking units, both ground and air. While in flight, control of the movement is a responsibility of the air commander.