

WAR IN THE AIR

tralia has proved itself to be a very formidable one, and it is certainly growing stronger as more aircraft are despatched from the factories in Britain and the United States.

Persistent Japanese

IN the meantime the Japanese have been making efforts to assert themselves in the air. One day last week they sent nearly 100 aircraft in a raid on Port Moresby, which was the strongest raid they had ever attempted on that important Australian port in the south of New Guinea. The result was disastrous to the enemy, for the Australian and American fighters shot down 29 for certain, while the A.A. guns accounted for others. It was reckoned that 37 enemy machines at least were put out of action. A somewhat optimistic report after this action set forth the belief that the enemy's air offensive was blunted and his immediate plans dislocated.

A few days later, however, came a heavy enemy raid on Milne Bay, the scene of a Japanese land defeat some time ago, when an invading force which landed there was wiped out. The Japanese are a persistent nation, and are not easily deterred from a



NOW TURRETED: A Baltimore taking off for a sortie in Tunisia. Note the power-operated twin-gun dorsal turret in place of the old arrangement of pivot-mounted machine guns.

project by heavy loss of life. Loss of material may be more important.

The improved weather has led to more air activity on the Russian front, and the Red Air Fleet has been able to spare formations of heavy bombers to make several raids on the East Prussian port of Königsberg. Strategic bombing does not seem to hold a high place in Russian military doctrine, and

the air fleet is used almost entirely for work with the armies. The Russians are doubtless wise, for their war is almost entirely a land war, and they seem slightly contemptuous of the bombing offensive by the R.A.F. as a means of helping their own efforts. It is, therefore, always interesting when they indulge in a little strategic bombing on their own account.

New Mediterranean Air Command

Three Main Sub-divisions

THE reorganisation of the Allied Air Forces in the Mediterranean area, outlined by the Prime Minister in his House of Commons speech on February 11th, just after his return from North Africa, has now been completed, and a Mediterranean Air Command established under Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder.

There are three sub-divisions of the command—Middle East Command, North-West African Air Forces, and R.A.F., Malta. The A.O.C.-in-C.s of all these smaller commands are directly responsible to Air Chief Marshal Tedder, the Air Commander-in-Chief, who is himself directly responsible to General Eisenhower for all air operations in the North-West African theatre of war. The Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Air Forces, under Air Chief Marshal Tedder, is Air Vice-Marshal H. E. P. Wigglesworth.

The biggest of the sub-divisions, Middle East Command, is commanded by Air Chief Marshal Sir Sholto Douglas, former Chief of the R.A.F. Fighter Command, with Air Marshal F. J. Linnell as Deputy Commander-in-Chief. It comprises the Air Forces which are disposed in the various countries between the frontiers of India and Tunisia and southwards as far as Madagascar.

The North-West African Air Forces, which include British, American, and French units, are commanded by Major General Carl Spaatz, with Air Vice-Marshal J. M. Robb as his deputy. This command is sub-divided into five subordinate formations, three of which are operational, the remaining two dealing with training and servicing. Throughout this command British and American staffs have been combined and work as a unified organisation. The operational formations comprise the Tactical Air Force, commanded by Air Marshal Sir A. Coningham, with Brigadier General L. S. Chuter as his deputy; the Strategic Air Force, under Major General James Doolittle; and the Coastal Air Force, under Air Vice-Marshal Sir H. P. Lloyd. The Tactical Air Force is divided into three main groups: The Western Desert Air Force, under Air Vice-Marshal H. Broadhurst, operating in support of the Eighth Army; the 12th United States Air Support Command, under Brigadier General P. L. Williams; and another force commanded by Air Commodore K. B. B. Cross, in support of the First Army in Northern Tunisia.

The principal duties of the Tactical Air Force are defined as supporting the armies operating in Tunisia. Its aircraft consist of fighters, fighter-

bombers, light bombers, and observation aircraft. The Strategic Air Force is composed of United States heavy and medium bomber units and R.A.F. medium bomber units. Its duties comprise long-range attacks on enemy bases in Tunisia, Sicily, Sardinia and Southern Italy, as well as attacks on enemy communications and shipping. The Coastal Air Force embodies R.A.F. and United States general reconnaissance wings and fighter squadrons, and its functions are to defend our bases, ports and supply centres, as well as to attack enemy shipping and carry out anti-submarine patrols and reconnaissance.

The Functions of Malta

The R.A.F., Malta, which previously formed part of the Middle East Command, now comes directly under the Mediterranean Air Command. It is commanded by Air Vice-Marshal Sir Keith Park. This force has fighters for day and night defence of the island, bombers and torpedo-bombers to strike north against Sicily and Italy and west against targets in Tunisia and the Italian islands of Pantelleria and Lampedusa, as well as for offensive operations against enemy convoys, and for convoy escort, anti-submarine and general reconnaissance patrols.