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COMBINED CHIEFS OF STAFF

BRITISH PARTICIPATION IN V.L.R. BOMBING OF JAPAN

Reference: C.C.S. 174th Mtg., Item 3

DECLASSIFIED PURSUANT  
TO JCS 927/495-1

Date 23 Oct 70

Memorandum by the British Chiefs of Staff

1. Following the discussion on the above subject at OCTAGON, the British Chiefs of Staff have given consideration to the share which British heavy bomber aircraft might take in the air bombardment of the Japanese mainland.

2. The position of probable allied land bases makes us dependent on aircraft of very long range. We have no very long range bombers, but steps have been taken to improve the range of the Lancaster by flight refuelling, for which the aircraft operate in pairs, one as a bomber and the other as a tanker. The Lancaster bomber thus operated is expected to carry a load of 4,000 lbs. of bombs over a safe radius of action of 1,500 miles. Preparations are in hand to modify aircraft for this purpose; to perfect the refuelling technique and to train the crews.

3. In view of their range, the most suitable areas for the basing of Lancaster refuelling bombers would seem to be Formosa, or the Chinese coast opposite to or northward of Formosa. Potential accommodation in this area is limited but the base requirements of the Lancaster are comparable to those of the B-17 or B-24 and therefore may be easier to provide than those of B-29 aircraft. In the present state of development it would be unwise to plan on operating the force from bases further from Japan.

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4. British planning and preparations cater for a force of 40 Squadrons of Lancasters for the direct attack on Japan. 20 Squadrons would be equipped as bombers and 20 Squadrons as tankers. The whole force can readily be converted to normal range Lancaster bombers. The earliest date of deployment of this force cannot be determined exactly until the date of availability of bases if known and the priority for the movement of the units is decided. Assuming that Squadrons can start to be withdrawn from Europe by 1st October, 1944, the earliest date by which the first Squadrons might be ready for operations is probably the early summer of 1945, the whole force being completed by September or October 1945, provided that the necessary priority is given to their movement.

5. It is recommended that the Combined Chiefs of Staff agree that planning should be on the following basis:-

(a) British flight refuelling Lancaster bombers will participate in the V.L.R. bombing of Japan.

(b) The scale of British participation should be 40 squadrons (half being tankers) it being understood that if limitation of bases or other considerations so require, this force may be reduced to such size as the Combined Chiefs of Staff may agree upon.