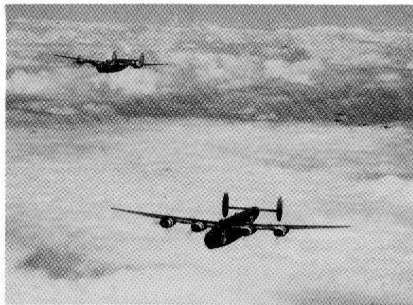




Total theoretical refining capacity in the area she dominated was 27,750,000 metric tons a year. Actual production was much less, due to great excess refining capacity due to the fact that many of the refineries were old-fashioned and unable to produce high octane fuels in quantity, and to the fact that her newly acquired assets represented somewhat of a hodgepodge. The best refineries were not always located near the richest oil fields. There was a deficiency of pipe lines and rail service in some places. In addition, Germany had to cope with sabotage and a certain number of recalcitrant local plant managers. As a result of all this, actual production in the summer of 1943 amounted to only about 16,500,000 tons a year. Seven million tons were from synthetic plants in Germany. Seven and a half million tons were from crude nearly two-thirds of it from Ploesti. The balance amounting to 200,000,000 tons, was made up of substitute fuels such as alcohol, coal tar, aromatics etc. Production continued at this rate for nearly a year, permitting the Germans to increase their level of stocks from a monthly average of under 3,000,000 tons in 1943 to nearly 4,000,000 tons in April of the following year.

The overall plan for the oil campaign, which started the following month called for the destruction of 24 synthetic plants and 80 refineries. The great majority of these were in six districts, the three soft-coal areas mentioned above in the Hamburg-Hanover district, a concentration of refineries in the neighborhood of Vienna, and another at Ploesti. These districts were divided three and three. The 15th Air Force was assigned Silesia, Vienna and Ploesti. The 8th got Hamburg, Leipzig and the Ruhr. Work started immediately. During May, eleven targets were hit, some of them two or three times. In June, 43 attacks were launched. The effect was catastrophic. The German High command faced with skyrocketing consumption to combat a large-scale Russian offensive in the East and the Normandy invasion in the West found their oil production cut almost in half in only two months of attacks. Their reserves which had looked so gen-



erous a few months earlier, were already shrinking dangerously. But this was nothing. By August, production was down to 37 per cent. Three weeks later, Ploesti, which had been nine-tenths destroyed by the 15th Air Force, was captured by the Russians. This freed the bombers of the 15th, who redoubled their efforts against Vienna and Silesia. The RAF was beginning to turn on the heat in increasing force. Production for September shrank to 23 percent. The enemy, now desperate, was being relentlessly squeezed between the jaws of mounting demand and dwindling supply. There was no fat to draw on. The home front had been living on starvation rations for some time. The Luftwaffe, already weakened by the aircraft campaign, was literally dying of thirst. Its training program was shaved to minuscule proportions, all gas being saved for combat operations, and even these became rarer and rarer as the weeks went by.

There were three things the enemy could do. He did them all to the limit of his endurance. First, he spent what little breath there was left in the Luftwaffe largely on the protection of oil targets. Second, he could, and did, protect them from the ground with what grew to be the densest concentration of flak the world has ever seen. Last, he could repair the plants. This he did with a doggedness and resourcefulness which is little short of amazing. But, after each attack, the job became harder and harder, and the time required, longer and longer. Almost every heavy strike destroyed some basic piece of equipment which was impossible to replace. Some plants were reduced by this to the production of only certain types of fuel. Others could be patched up to operate on a reduced scale through bypassing the smashed unit. As time went on, strains and stresses were revealed in units which were at first considered sound after attack. These often broke down by themselves. And whenever it appeared, through photo reconnaissances that a plant was again in operation, it was again bombed. The sense of frustration created in this way must have been enormous. Captured plant managers have refused to comment on this, but as early as 17 September, 1944, it was necessary for Reichsminister of War Production Speer to circulate a sort of "pep talk" telegram which reads partly as follows:

"The idea is spreading that the reconstruction of the synthetic oil plants and refineries is purposeless since the enemy always finds a suitable moment, soon after the resumption of work, to destroy these installations again by air attack. He then lists some of the plans for dispersing oil production, getting it underground, etc., and expresses the hope that impending bad weather will give the German oil industry a breather. It is therefore incorrect to regard reconstruction as a fruitless task; on the contrary, from a long-term point of view, the successful prosecution of the war depends in the final analysis upon this achievement. Heil Hitler!"

Yours, Speer."

Bad weather did come, and the situation was somewhat eased