

Now, how does the Allied Army, in its need, contact the fighter-bombers hundreds of feet over the battlefield? When the Army Commander calls for air support, he sets in motion an intricate mechanism. Well forward are an Air Liaison Officer and an R.A.F. officer with operational experience. The A.L.O. is an Army officer with personal knowledge of battle conditions, one who has gained his "wings" as a pilot or has been a parachutist, and who accompanies and works with a fighter-bomber unit.

### Running Commentary by Radio

As soon as the Army asks the Air Force to bomb a certain target the control car radios the request to an organization known as "Army-Air Support Control," the brains-trust at Allied Army H.Q. which co-ordinates air co-operation with the land battle. However fluid the section of the front concerned, the A.L.O. is in a position to give an up-to-the-minute picture. He is linked by radio with the airfield controlling the "cab rank" overhead, and the pilots, briefed in mid-air, swoop down almost at once on their targets. The A.L.O. himself sees the bombing and is able to radio the result back to Air Support Control.

How do Allied pilots avoid hitting their own men when the battle with the enemy is so closely joined? The A.L.O. is able to give an accurate "running commentary" on the precise disposition of the opposing Forces in the target area. The R.A.F. Regiment also takes a hand. Serving alongside the forward troops they pin-point the targets. These visual indications help the pilots if their aircraft are hit by flak or otherwise put out of action, as they know on which side of the line to make for "home."

It sometimes happens that the "cab rank" completes its patrol without once being called on to intervene in the land battle. Then, as the new formation arrives to take over, the individual fighter-bombers are allowed to peel off and attack any enemy target they see in compensation for their "fareless" tour of duty.

The key man in this complex yet smooth-working organization of Air Support Control is the Air Liaison Officer.

Each wing of Allied light or medium bombers has its own A.L.O., a staff officer who lives on the airfield with the pilots and shares their activities on and off duty. He helps to brief them on Army operations and keeps them well informed on the general military situation. Equally he interrogates *them* on any battle information they may bring back from their patrols, and relays it to the Army.

Air Support Control in the Allied Forces has grown tremendously since the war began. At the start there were few A.L.O.s, and they were attached to tactical reconnaissance squadrons only. They briefed the pilots on the targets to be reconnoitred, sent them into the air in conjunction with the station commanding officer, and interrogated them on their return.

As co-operation between the Army and the Air Force has become still closer, the functions of A.L.O.s and of Air Support Control are broadened. The A.L.O. has come to be an integral part of the light, medium, and fighter bomber organization. He is not only an information merchant. He has become a part of the Air Force. He studies aircraft recognition, he takes a deep interest in squadron life, and he often goes on operational bombing trips.



An Army liaison officer questions a pilot.