

to keep two divisions resting in addition to one division in G.H.Q. (India) reserve. Initially, one of the nine active divisions would be in Army Group reserve.

I also decided that only one division (17 Indian) would leave the Fourteenth Army area for rest and re-organization and that the others would remain in the Shillong–Imphal area. The following formations would move back into India Command: H.Q. 4 Corps, 50 Parachute Brigade, 23 L.R.P. Brigade, 268 Indian Lorried Infantry Brigade, and three Armoured Corps units.

127. By this time our air supremacy, and our improved strategical situation, justified the disbandment of a considerable number of light A.A. batteries. The officers and men thrown up in consequence were available to train as infantry and, added to increased reinforcements from England, enabled me to bring 2 British Division up to strength.

The relief of 36 British Division did not arise during the period covered by this Despatch.

128. As a result of the experience gained from the operations of Special Force, I had decided that the future rôle of such a force be either—

(a) To provide mobile infantry brigades specially equipped to make turning movements away from roads and tracks or protect flanks in exceptionally difficult country.

(b) Deeper penetration as a Special Force capable of continuous mobile operations for long periods.

I also considered that a change of name, to conform with these rôles, was desirable and the term "Penetration Brigade" was substituted for "Long-Range Penetration Group".

129. Taking into consideration our available manpower and the desirability of providing at least one Penetration Brigade by the end of the year, I asked the Commander-in-Chief, India, early in August—

(a) To re-form initially four brigades, of which one would be entirely British.

(b) To re-form two more British brigades later, if reinforcements became available.

I estimated that one brigade would thus be ready for operations by mid-December and the other three a month later. The period of re-organization and training of Special Force had to allow for the re-formation of its ancillary services, as these brigades had to be self-contained.

130. A month later, after consultations with the War Office and the Commander-in-Chief, India, it became clear that we should have to reduce Special Force to four brigades, and this I recommended to the Supreme Allied Commander.

During October the decision to form an Air Landing Brigade and to provide a third brigade for 36 British Division further reduced the possibility of forming Penetration Brigades, because reinforcements for the two former formations could only come from Special Force. I agreed, therefore, that this Force should consist only of three Brigades.

Formation of an Indian Airborne Division.

131. In August, the Supreme Allied Commander asked the Commander-in-Chief, India,

to examine the problem of forming an airborne division, the raising of which was supported by the War Office. The main points in the Commander-in-Chief's reply were—

(a) The division could be formed and trained by the 15th February, 1945, subject to the conditions given in (b) to (e) below.

(b) A British parachute brigade from outside India must arrive fully trained by the 15th November.

(c) 26 Indian Infantry Brigade to be made available as an air landing brigade at the expense of making up 36 British Division to three brigades. (A brigade from Special Force was later substituted for 26 Brigade as an air landing brigade and the latter remained allotted to 36 British Division).

(d) 875 glider pilots to be available by the 1st December.

(e) Transport aircraft equivalent to twenty squadrons to be made available by the 15th January.

During the prolonged discussions regarding the formation of an Indian airborne division I had provided India Command with my proposals for the re-organization of 50 Indian Parachute Brigade which I assumed would provide the nucleus of such a division.

44 Indian Airborne Division was finally formed by India Command on the 1st November.

Conversions of Divisions to a Standard Divisional Basis.

132. As I wrote in my first Despatch, our earlier operations had shown that divisions organized and equipped for special rôles were uneconomical and wasteful. Later we had had experience of the unsuitability of a division, such as the 2nd British or 25th Indian, equipped solely with mechanical transport, for warfare in mountainous jungle country and of the tactical disadvantages inherent in a Light Division of two brigades such as the 17th Indian.

To overcome this, the organization of a Standard Division—details of which are contained in my first Despatch—was produced, and the Commander-in-Chief, India, had accepted my recommendations.

Army and Corps Commanders were given a free hand to select the most suitable time for the re-organization of their divisions.

When I relinquished command all divisions, except Special Force of which I have already written, had either re-organized or were re-organizing.

17 Indian Light Division.

133. 17 Indian Light Division was the only large formation to be rested and re-organized outside the area of Fourteenth Army. I had decided that this Division should be rested in India because it had been in the forward zone for 3½ years and had to be completely re-organized.

Among other changes it had to absorb a third brigade and to change the composition of its brigades from three Gurkha battalions to brigades of one British, one Indian and one Gurkha battalion. The Division was to be ready for service again by February.