

personnel live in scattered communities on the eastern marches of India, housed in bamboo huts or tents, often widely dispersed in small groups of less than a hundred, and generally at least a day's journey from the nearest centre of what to them represents civilisation, and perhaps even from the nearest R.A.F. unit. To ameliorate as far as possible the drab and lonely life inevitable under these circumstances, 170 gramophones and 363 wireless sets have been made available during the period and distributed at special rates to units. It is the aim ultimately to provide a wireless set for every hundred men. Special arrangements have also been made for the distribution of books and the supply of sports gear. Correspondence courses which have been made accessible for airmen at a specially low fee have been meeting a heavy demand. Six mobile cinemas have been set up in Bengal to which the average attendance is 15,000 weekly, and touring concert parties have visited many units.

214. No single factor has conduced more to ill-feeling between the airman and the people of the country in which he is living than the uncontrolled operation of the laws of supply and demand at a time when so many men whose standards of self-respect and personal cleanliness are high were arriving, and stocks of tooth-paste, shoe polish and razor blades were short. The rise in the price of such essential goods was aggravated by the fact that there is in India no N.A.A.F.I. to cater for the essential needs of the serviceman, the Government of India preferring to retain the contractor system. Thus the only possible obstacle to the exploitation of the airman by bazaar store-keepers has been a progressively more rigid supervision of local canteen contractors. The problem has been made easier during the last few months by the provision from abroad of large stocks of essential articles which are disseminated through service channels and sold at controlled prices in canteens. The problem is now one of distribution rather than supply and in general it may be said that the airman can buy essential commodities at fair prices in his canteen—though not yet at all times or in all units.

215. Without the services of N.A.A.F.I., the provision of entertainment parties from England proved impossible for a long period. The Government of India have finally been prevailed upon to allow E.N.S.A. parties to perform in this country, and G.H.Q., India, has partly defrayed the cost from excess canteen profits.

216. Other advances which may be mentioned include the improved scales of accommodation and furnishings which have been sanctioned for Hill Depots, and the development of airmen's clubs. The number of beds available for personnel on leave has practically doubled during the past year, and Hill Depots have been made as informal as possible with no parades at all and a minimum of restrictions. In spite of this, approximately 70 per cent. of airmen still prefer to spend their leave

in towns. I cannot see any alteration in this proportion until travelling facilities on Indian railways vastly improve, and proceeding to distant leave centres becomes less of an ordeal. The unhealthy nature of most large Indian towns makes this improvement even more desirable.

217. Assistance has been given by my Welfare Staff to 915 airmen in need of advice or undergoing avoidable hardship, in addition to the many cases handled by the welfare officers in subordinate formations. The provision of amenities has continued with grants from the Amenities, Comforts and Entertainments for the Forces Fund, while the Royal Air Force Welfare Grant has been received from 1st April onwards. To deal with the growing scope of welfare duties, six selected airmen have been commissioned in the A. & S.D. (Welfare) Branch and five welfare officers with the rank of Squadron Leader have arrived from the United Kingdom.

XIII.—INDIAN OBSERVER CORPS

218. In November, 1943, the Indian Observer Corps consisted of three control units, six mobile companies in Bengal, static units in four main areas, Calcutta, Chittagong, Vizagapatam and Madras, and fourteen other mobile companies under training. These together with Care & Maintenance companies and training centres made up a total strength of 10,851 personnel. In December it was decided to break down the static organisation and certain Care and Maintenance formations, and form from them seven additional mobile companies. By May, 1944, the number of control units had increased to four, and that of operational mobile companies to seventeen with ten others under training or in process of formation.

219. During the battle in Arakan, four companies were involved, and re-deployment of a number of posts was necessary. Such posts as were forced to retire succeeded in destroying their equipment before retreating. Similarly, when the enemy advanced towards Imphal, nearly 50 posts had to be evacuated or re-deployed. The posts east and south of Imphal naturally lost much equipment, but a high percentage was saved and all abandoned equipment was denied to the enemy. Casualties, too, were light in view of the little or no warning provided, consisting of some six missing and six others wounded.

220. Experience gained during the period led at the end of April to the substitution of Mobile Control Units for the Base and Forward Control Units, with resultant closer supervision and greater flexibility. Ultimately there will be seven of these to control the seventeen companies, and each of the latter will control fifteen observer posts.

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23rd November, 1944.

Air Command, South East Asia.