advent of the decentralised system of establishment control introduced at the end of 1943 manning has been placed on an entirely new basis. Personnel are now demanded against ceiling establishment figures as fixed by the Asian Establishments Committee after consultation with my Headquarters.

* * * * * *

II.—MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR

155. I referred in my last despatch to the uphill task confronting the maintenance organisation in this Command. Without actual knowledge of the conditions, however, many of the inherent difficulties cannot be fully appreciated and deserve further emphasis.

156. The low standard of industrialisation in India throws a heavy burden on the shoulders of Service maintenance personnel, who receive none of the assistance from contractors' working parties that is available at home establishments. Even when it is possible to sub-contract work to civilian firms, the quality of the products leaves much to be desired. Secondly, the vast distances involved call for a wide dispersal of existing stocks and make A.O.G. procedure extremely slow. Thirdly, there is a case for stating that it is not sufficiently realised that more manpower is needed per unit of output than in other theatres of war where spares are more readily available, the sickness rate lower, and base repair not rendered so difficult by the distances between depots and the operational areas, with the inevitable deterioration of damaged aircraft in transit. It is in the light of these and similar difficulties that the work of maintenance and repair should be considered.

157. Expansion during the period was directed mainly to preparations for dealing eventually with the load of 156 squadrons envisaged under the Long Term Target for the Command. Additional civilian capacity has been mobilised; one unit—No. 2 Command Maintenance Unit Trichinopoly—is in process of being doubled in size, and three new C.M.U.s have been formed. No. 322 M.U. at Cawnpore is now in operation, constituting the largest service base repair depot in India. When it reaches full capacity it will be able to deal with major repairs to about 55 large aircraft and with the overhaul of nearly 500 engines per month.

158. A comprehensive organisation has been built for holding reserve aircraft at Aircraft Storage Units and Reserve Aircraft Pools so disposed as to cover the whole of India in three zones. The A.S.U.s hold a two-months' reserve, while the R.A.P.s hold a fortnight's reserve of aircraft ready for immediate issue. This organisation has contributed in no small measure to the high rate of serviceability in squadrons, since it is generally possible to replace aircraft within twenty-four hours.

159. Lack of storage accommodation for holding main stocks has been due to poor progress in the erection of new buildings planned long since, and is a most serious problem at the present time, when approximately 30,000 cases of R.A.F. stores have had to be stored in the open.

160. Often in this Command an aircraft which has crashed or force-landed away from an airfield has to be written off because of the fundamental and ineradicable shortcomings of the transport system. Even if a damaged aircraft can be taken to the nearest railway, the journey thence to a repair depot generally causes so much further damage that a machine that was capable of repair is fit only for write-off when it reaches its destination. One remedy, which is having encouraging results, was the formation of an Airborne Salvage Section in November 1943 to fly to the scene of a crash in a specially fitted transport aircraft which can carry spares, tools and engines. On reaching the site, patch repairs are effected and the damaged aircraft nursed to the nearest depot. The Airborne Salvage Section was given one of the first Dakotas it salvaged, and in that aircraft mainplanes of large aircraft and complete Spitfires have been carried. Up to date, the Section has salvaged eighteen aircraft; the possibility of forming further similar sections is under consideration.

161. An example of the shortage of manpower to meet emergencies arose in April when transport operations necessitated the maximum output of Dakotas both from major inspections and repair. By diverting all available resources, the time taken on the floor was progressively reduced until it became half of what it had been at the end of 1943. This rapid turnover was only achieved, however, by concentrating maintenance personnel on Dakotas at every stage of their travel, with a consequent reduction of work on other types. The output of Dakotas from repair rose from two in December to ten in April and eleven in May. The later figures would have been higher still but for the complete lack of certain spares in this Command which had to be demanded from America.

162. Attempts to produce locally jettison tanks exemplify the difficulties and delays experienced in indigenous production. The tanks were requested in October/November 1943 to implement the long-range fighter policy. The most suitable firm for their manufacture was chosen, but found that it could not work to the required limits laid down in the standard Vickers' drawings, and more generous tolerances had to be permitted. In spite of this, one difficulty after another arose, and metal tanks are still not available for issue. I have already indicated the urgency with which they were needed in the Third Tactical Air Force. As an alternative, a plywood tank was developed and successfully flight tested in December 1943. There were, however, the inevitable delays in getting it into production, and they were not actually available for operational use until May.

163. Simple types of equipment more suited to the manufacturing resources of the country have been produced to the fullest extent, and British production thereby relieved of a considerable burden. The monthly output of supply-dropping parachutes increased from 35,000 to 144,000, and it is anticipated that this figure will be increased to 250,000 by the end of the year.

164. Very close liaison has been maintained with the U.S. Air Service Command. There is a free and complete exchange of technical information and liaison officers are established at both Headquarters. At the time when the Dakota position was acute, the Air Service Command released to the R.A.F. one-third of