

panies. The duties of these units were the packing, loading and, in the case of air-dropped supplies, the ejection of these supplies. I would like to emphasise the necessity for having trained units such as these for dealing with stores when air supply is operated on a large scale. The proper packing, etc., of supplies and stores, always against time, is a job for experts.

Normal supplies for the force dependent, including petrol, supplies and ammunition, were held at each R.A.M.O. Specialised items, engineer stores, ordnance and medical stores had to be held where accessibility to the main depots was best. This had a limiting effect on complete flexibility, but was the only practicable compromise between splitting stocks and the complete use of air flexibility.

354. The corresponding organization at the receiving airfield was the Forward Airfield Maintenance Organization (F.A.M.O.). In this connection I may remark that air landing was always established as soon as possible, as dropping results in a wastage of about 25% of the lift, and in addition many heavy stores, such as Bailey bridging, cannot be dropped at all. The organization at the forward landing grounds is most important. Speed is always essential first in completion of the forward airstrip itself and then in the quick unloading of aircraft. In the case of the C. 46 and C. 47 aircraft in use in Burma, fifteen minutes was the target unloading time for each aircraft. Considerable endurance and efficiency was required to achieve this target, as many loads were both awkward and heavy. As the commodities were unloaded, they were taken by lorry to the nearby depots, from which bulk issue was made to formations, except in the case of troops in the vicinity, who received their supplies from a Detail Issue Depot. Both F.A.M.Os. and R.A.M.Os. made heavy demands on labour, and Pioneer companies formed a vital part of the whole air supply system.

355. The use of air supply had the subsidiary but very beneficial result that it was possible to send fresh supplies to the forward troops, a valuable contributing factor to the maintenance of health and morale. As much as 50 tons per day of vegetables, fruit and eggs were sent forward in this way. Later, when the cultivated areas of Central Burma were reached, it was possible to make use of local resources and the availability here and in the Shan States was exploited to the full. In the case of Arakan, it was, of course, possible to send fresh supplies up by coaster.

356. I do not intend here to recapitulate the story of the loss of transport aircraft to China and the problems of the lengthening L. of C. It is enough to remember that the available lift was never as much as we wanted and that often it was sufficiently low as to constitute a major administrative crisis. Moreover, we could not plan with certainty on those we had, since the possibility of further withdrawals existed and had to be guarded against. Efforts, therefore, to increase the efficiency of the air supply system were continuous. But I would like to say at the outset that, in spite of these efforts, adequate supplies could not have been brought forward but for the courage and skill of the

R.A.F., R.C.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. squadrons, which often substantially exceeded the approved maximum sustained rates of flying effort, in spite of very hazardous routes over high mountains in often terrible weather.

357. The first major development during the period under report was the switch of an air supply base from Agartala to Chittagong on the 27th January, 1945, when No. 3 R.A.M.O. was moved across and reopened as No. 7. This was the first step in bringing the air bases forward to keep up with the advance of Fourteenth Army. Chittagong airfield had originally been designed for the operation of light bombers, and considerable engineering effort was required to adapt the installation to take continuous traffic imposing much heavier loads. Nevertheless C. 46 aircraft started to operate on this route on the 2nd February. No. 7 R.A.M.O., incidentally had no Air Despatch Company allotted to it but, using pioneer labour only, achieved the very fine average of over 700 tons per day in April.

358. In February there occurred an expansion of the Army Air Transport Organization, which had existed since October, 1944. The existing system of air supply had clearly been stretched to the utmost, and would not bear the strain of future operations unless expanded. As a result of investigations, I decided to appoint a Commander, Combined Army Air Transport Organization (C.A.A.T.O.), responsible for the co-ordination and executive control of the entire Army aspect of air transport, and under the direct control of my Headquarters. Brigadier J. A. Dawson was appointed to this important command. In more detail, his responsibilities included the command and control of the existing R.A.M.Os. the co-ordination of demands from formations for the transport by air of personnel, supplies and equipment, and for the allocation of these demands to the appropriate R.A.M.Os. His duties also included giving advice and assistance to units who were preparing for air-transported operational rôles and keeping my Headquarters informed of the air transport and supply situation.

359. To ensure that this new organization worked smoothly, I established it alongside Headquarters, Combat Cargo Task Force (Brigadier-General F. W. Evans), which was the Allied Air Forces' organization in charge of all the transport aircraft in the theatre. Subsequent events showed that this arrangement was on the right lines and that C.A.A.T.O. had played a vital part in the operational successes achieved by Fourteenth Army, 15 Indian Corps and Northern Combat Area Command. The closest cooperation and liaison with the Air Force is essential at all levels for the efficient working of an air transport and supply system and in this I was particularly fortunate in having General G. Stratemeyer, Commanding General, Eastern Air Command, to work with. The harmonious relations established between us, and the close and friendly working of our respective staffs, did much to dissolve the difficulties which, on occasion, are bound to arise when one Service is largely dependent on another for all the essentials of its existence under adverse conditions of climate and terrain.