

This measure was brought to its logical conclusion by the formation of No. 228 Group in February, 1945, to provide functional and/or administrative control of all units of Base Air Forces within the area of Eastern (Army) Command, and to provide R.A.F. administrative services within that area. As Eastern (Army) Command extends its boundaries to the Burma frontier, the area of responsibility of No. 228 Group will expand. R.A.F. India is thus split up between four administrative and training groups.

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Introduction of Wing H.Q. and Servicing Echelon Organisation.

163. In the Far East more than in the metropolitan air force, the administrative problems confronting junior operational commanders are such as to hinder them in the performance of their primary tasks. In recognition of this and to improve the mobility and flexibility of the wing organisation, it was decided to introduce the principle of wing headquarters and servicing echelons for single-engined and light twin-engined aircraft. The scheme came into effect by the end of September, 1944, with the wing headquarters based on certain major airfields, and the servicing echelons became responsible for the upkeep of the squadron aircraft. The squadrons were thereby relieved of the responsibility for their own administration and most of their first-line maintenance.

164. In anticipation of a more mobile kind of warfare, it became necessary in December, 1944, to remove the geographical restriction implied by naming the wing according to its current location. The wings were accordingly given numbers, and their attitude to mobility thus greatly enhanced, as evidenced by the advance of No. 906 Wing from Imphal to Rangoon in six months, in a series of well-organized moves. The scheme has been successful, and its principle has been extended to other squadrons in order to centralize control of resources and administration and to economise in overheads.

165. Perhaps one factor has marred full advantage being taken of the inherent mobility and flexibility which the organisation would afford. The provision of more servicing echelons than squadrons would allow of peak periods of operational effort at very short notice from advance airfields, for an additional servicing echelon could be flown in to supplement the existing maintenance personnel. This lesson was learned at Akyab where the providential presence of a servicing commando allowed of a much higher rate of effort from the island during the early days of the occupation than would otherwise have been possible.

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The Manpower Situation.

166. The Command has been continually hampered by an ill-balanced allotment of manpower, whereby shortages have been concentrated in certain vital trades, rendering the administrative machine extremely difficult to operate efficiently.

167. In June, 1944, the establishment and strength of the Command for ground British personnel were as follows:—

	<i>Establishment</i>	<i>Strength</i>	<i>Shortage</i>
Officers ...	6,277	5,170	1,107
Other ranks ...	88,636	80,967	7,669
	<hr/> 94,913	<hr/> 86,137	<hr/> 8,776

The deficiency of 18 per cent. in ground officers was concentrated principally in such important branches as Admin. G., Tech. (E), Code and Cypher and the like. The airman deficiency of 9 per cent. more seriously affected the clerical trades.

168. By May, 1945, the position had changed, but not improved, as the following figures and illustrations will show:—

	<i>Establishment</i>	<i>Strength</i>	<i>Shortage or Surplus</i>
Officers ...	8,103	7,573	530
Other ranks ...	105,470	110,459	Shortage 4,989 Surplus
Total ...	<hr/> 113,573	<hr/> 118,032	<hr/> 4,459 Surplus

169. The 6½ per cent. deficiency in ground officers affects principally the following branches, Admin., Code and Cyphers, Tech. (E), Catering, etc. The shortages in the Technical Branch have caused particular difficulty. The overall 5 per cent. surplus in airmen does not give a true picture of the situation, for there are very serious deficiencies in clerical and domestic personnel which are hampering the development of the Command. Clerks G/D are below establishment by no less than 36 per cent., Equipment Assistants by 29 per cent. and Cooks by 28 per cent. The surplus was concentrated in the technical trades and amounted to 7,100. Such a surplus was more of a liability than an asset, since it created additional work for the already overburdened administrative and domestic personnel and could not be used to offset the shortages elsewhere.

170. Since February, 1945, very strenuous efforts have been made to disband redundant units and prune such establishments as can conceivably be reduced. The diminishing air threat to the east coast of India and Ceylon has made it possible to thin out the early warning Radar system, and considerable economies have been effected. Much has been done to distribute the shortages where they could more easily be borne, and it was Command policy to make the strongest where it was most effective, that was nearest to the enemy.

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Conclusion.

171. The administrative network covering the vastness of India is now as complete and rational as present resources allow. It cannot be said, however, that the administrative problems of the Command are now solved. As the armies advance, the area to be controlled grows, and the net is in many places thin.