

51. However, by the end of the month, the enemy was in retreat, and food and munitions were available to speed his withdrawal. The threat to India and to the China life-line had been removed, and a grim defence, sustained solely by air supply, was becoming a vigorous offensive, whose progress was also fed from the air. From July until November, 33 Corps fought its way eastwards to the Chindwin, southwards along the Kabaw valley and down the Tiddim Road, provided entirely with munitions and food by our transport squadrons. Until the end of the monsoon, supply was carried out under conditions of unbelievable difficulty. In July the commander of 33 Corps sent the following signal to No. 194 Squadron: "Your unflagging efforts and determination to complete your task in spite of appalling flying conditions are worthy of the highest praise." In August, another squadron summarised its efforts as follows:—"It has taken on occasion six to seven days of battling through torrential rain, strong winds and 10/10ths cloud down to 200 feet to achieve one mission, but it has been done."

52. In August and September it was becoming clear that the planning and day-to-day control of air supply operations required an organisation separate from Third Tactical Air Force, whose responsibility air supply operations had been since the dissolution of Troop Carrier Command. This was rendered all the more necessary by the large part that it was proposed airborne operations should play in the coming dry season. Thus, in October, Combat Cargo Task Force (C.C.T.F.), an integrated U.S.A./British Headquarters, was formed and became responsible for the day-to-day control and the planning of air transport operations in support of Fourteenth Army and 15 Corps.

53. One of the first measures undertaken by H.Q.C.C.T.F. was the reorganisation of the allocation of tasks, whose importance when demand is always outrunning supply cannot be stressed too strongly. The original procedure had been that, prior to the beginning of each month, Fourteenth Army submitted to Third Tactical Air Force its planned air supply requirements, which were based on the assumption that the Army's advance in the various sectors would invariably be strongly opposed. Consequently, demands were always high and supplies were occasionally fifty per cent. below the planned figure but withal more than sufficient for current requirements. The Rear Airfield Maintenance Organisation (R.A.M.O.) received its day's tasks direct from the headquarters of the Corps which it was supplying, and at the same time asked the Air Forces for the requisite number of aircraft. If, as often happened, the Army's daily requirements exceeded the air resources available, considerable confusion resulted, since no proper system of allocating priorities had been evolved.

54. This problem was solved by forming, alongside C.C.T.F., the Combined Army-Air Transport Organisation (C.A.A.T.O.) which received and collated daily requests, assessed their urgency and, having a full knowledge of aircraft states, allotted the tasks accordingly. The organisation was thus more in line with current European practice, with two notable exceptions, the lack of signals and telephone communications

was such as to clog any air supply machinery no matter how well-planned, and second, there were crippling deficiencies of personnel in such ancillary bodies as Staging Posts and Casualty Air Evacuation Units.

55. On December 20th, the first strip for landing-on of supplies was opened at Indaing-gale. Others followed in quick succession, Taukkyan near Kalembo, Kawlin and Indaw trans-Chindwin as soon as the river had been crossed, and Kan in the Myittha Valley where 4 Corps had returned to the line, replacing the Lushai Brigade and representing another and growing commitment to our transport forces.

56. Thus, by January, the increasing demands of mobile warfare, which did not accord with the plans on which resources had been allotted and organisation developed, and the engagement of larger forces, witnessed a gradual and sustained rise in the demands of Fourteenth Army for air supply. Many unforeseen difficulties were now coming to light, and when the Supreme Commander visited the forward areas he was informed that the Air Forces were not carrying enough supplies. C-in-C. A.L.F.S.E.A. circulated a memorandum calling for more resources in transport aircraft, without which, he stated, not only would the advance to Mandalay and beyond be arrested, but due to the impossibility of supplying forces in front of the roadhead he might be forced to withdraw beyond the Chindwin for the monsoon. This view of the situation (which in my opinion was unduly pessimistic) caused an urgent request to the Chiefs of Staff for additional transport squadrons, and as a result Nos. 238 and 267 Squadrons arrived in March. Actually a better organisation of existing ground transport resources would have met every commitment, and for this reason Air Marshal Garrod undertook a tour to investigate the working of the system.

57. It is as well here to outline, for the sake of comparison, the working of air supply in the N.C.A.C. area, to which but little reference has so far been made.

Air Supply in the Northern Combat Area Command.

58. The most striking feature of this organisation was the high standard of co-operation achieved by all agencies concerned—N.C.A.C., Service of Supply, Tenth Air Force, Air Service Command and all ancillary formations. Collective responsibility for the task of aid supply was rated higher than service allegiance; each body trusted the ability of the others to carry out their part of the work and did not attempt to dictate on matters outside its own sphere. The second great advantage was the abundance of good signal communications; every link in the chain, organisational, supply, squadrons, co-ordinators, being linked by a teletype and telephone network which allowed of a quick dissemination of the next day's tasks and priorities as allotted by the collating agency in N.C.A.C., and of speedy re-adjustment if necessary. A last-minute change in location of a Dropping Zone could be signalled back by a Division and retransmitted to an aircraft already airborne for another objective. Moreover, the packing and loading processes were organised on a moving-belt principle whose