corridor, and while the capture of Rangoon was left to an assault from the south, transport squadrons continued with unabated activity the supply of Fourteenth Army, who but for these outstanding efforts would not have been able to hold the ground they had won.

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Casualty Evacuation.

68. Throughout the period, the saving of lives, the morale of the fighting troops and the mobility of our ground forces has been materially assisted by the work of light aircraft and Dakotas flying out sick and wounded from the battle areas. The total of men thus saved from avoidable pain and suffering, from many days' journey by sampan, mule and ambulance, and from dying for lack of hospital facilities was formidable.

69. The flexibility of air power, by no means lessened when used in the interests of humanity, was well illustrated by a unique operation carried out by Sunderlands of No. 230 Squadron, which landed on Lake Indawgyi behind the enemy lines and flew out 537 wounded men of Special Force, whom General Wingate's columns would otherwise have been forced to abandon to the mercy of the Japanese.

70. This operation was, however, exceptional. The normal procedure was for light aircraft of the R.A.F. Communication squadrons and the U.S.A.A.F. Liaison squadrons to bring in the sick and wounded from extemporised landing strips to grounds where Dakotas and Commandos were discharging their cargo, and whence they would take them to base hospitals on return journeys. It was proposed at one time to attach light aircraft to the transport squadrons, and form one co-ordinated flying unit to undertake the whole process of casualty evacuation, but such a scheme would either have impaired the mobility of the light aircraft components or would have left them continually detached from their parent squadrons with no administrative or domestic backing for the difficult conditions under which they live and operate. Accordingly, as the American light aircraft are withdrawn from this theatre and the R.A.F. take on the whole of the work, it is proposed to form independent self-sufficient flying units to reinforce the Group Communication Squadrons in casualty evacuation. The resultant organisation will be sufficiently elastic to cover the whole front and yet be capable of concentration where casualties are heavy.

71. Casualty evacuation has been a regular part of the Air Forces' work in this theatre since the middle of 1943. It is unfortunate that with the increase in traffic which intensified operations have caused, there has been insufficient parallel growth of resources. Nursing Orderlies are 11 per cent. below establishment, and the buildings and accommodation for the reception of wounded at base airfields are not of the standard which good hygiene and humanity demand. If the Royal Air Force is to maintain the high reputation it has built in this sphere, far more generous scales of equipment and personnel must be authorised.

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Conclusions on Air Transport.

72. The first essential for air supply is good ground organisation. One weak link in the chain can vitiate the work of the aircrews and maintenance personnel, the estimates of the planners and the efforts of the fighting troops. It is worth outlining some of the faults that have occurred in order that they may be avoided in the future.

(i) Dropping Zones should always be located where a drop is feasible. This might sound a platitude to anyone who has not flown on supply-dropping operations in Burma and found dropping areas continually located in narrow valleys whose negotiation after each run is a major hazard.

(ii) The system of communicating information on dropping areas, on the composition of loads, on changes of location, on enemy interference and all other aspects of air supply must be such that the one small and vital item of knowledge which might make the difference between a successful or an abortive sortie is available at all links in the chain.

(iii) The British Army-Air supply system in South-East Asia has been continually marred by the failure to provide for meticulous organisation in a sphere where great efforts can be rendered nugatory by inaccuracy in minor details.

The following are some of the lessons learnt:—

(*a*) Adequate distributing facilities must be made available by the land forces at landing grounds to ensure that perishable goods are quickly distributed when unloaded from aircraft.

(*b*) Aircraft should not be detailed to convey food to areas in which the same commodities can easily be obtained by local purchase.

(*c*) Packing of goods must be strong enough to ensure that containers do not burst in transit.

(*d*) Adequate facilities must be provided for feeding and resting aircrews engaged on this arduous flying, as they are often absent from their bases for as long as ten hours at a time.

(*e*) An efficient supply of re-fuellers and facilities for night maintenance must be arranged, otherwise aircraft which could otherwise be making an effective contribution to the battle will be grounded.

(iv) Forward airfield commanders and flying control personnel took a long time to realise that air supply traffic is as vital as any other. Cargo aircraft should not be kept circling an airfield while tactical aircraft take off on a routine operation whose delay by half an hour is immaterial.

(v) Each part of the planning and assessment of air lift must be carried out by the Service in whose province it lies. Much confusion has been caused here by the Army attempting to quote and work on flying hours per aircraft with no knowledge of the implications of U.E. and I.E.*, aircraft serviceable

* U.E. = Unit Equipment.
I.E. = Initial Equipment.