

This is particularly so in those areas vacated by the advancing tactical groups, and extra provision must continually be made to administer those formations left in the backwash of the advance. It has even been necessary to graft additional administrative responsibilities on to the air supply group in the forward areas (No. 232), for lack of personnel to set up the requisite administrative framework. The conflicting factors of function and distance have called for an organization far more complex than would be the case in a more compact theatre. For this the only solution is a realization at home that additional personnel and transport facilities to maintain India as a base, and conduct an energetic campaign in Malaya and beyond, must be allotted on a more generous scale than previously.

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(II) *Maintenance.*

172. The maintenance organisation in South East Asia embraces supply, servicing, repair and salvage of all air force material in India, Ceylon and Burma; an area approximately the size of Europe. It was realised at an early stage that it was impossible to have the same maintenance system operating throughout the Command, since the extensive topographical diversities encountered necessitated that the ultimate systems adopted be dictated by the geography of the country. Broadly speaking, therefore, one system applies in Ceylon and India as far eastwards as the Brahmaputra, and an entirely different one was evolved to operate throughout Assam and Burma. In the former area conditions are more or less static, the ground communications, although greatly inferior to those of Europe, are reasonably good with no considerable land or water barriers. Here, a large and efficient base maintenance organisation has been built up which provides adequate backing for the air forces far beyond the Brahmaputra; it is in this base area that the Base Repair Depots, Equipment Depots and Aircraft Storage Units are to be found. In Assam and Burma, however, the situation bears a vastly different appearance, parsimonious communications from Calcutta to the railhead at Dimapur and thence by road over the Naga and Chin Hills to Central Burma prohibited the use of a maintenance organisation which was possible in England and which, to a limited degree, has also been found possible in India.

173. From the time of the siege of Imphal to the capture of Rangoon, air lift, the principal means of supply to our combat Army and Air Force formations, was restricted to essential needs and could not be provided to support avoidable maintenance at forward airfields. As a result, a policy was agreed of flying aircraft back to India for comparatively simple servicing requirements such as periodical inspections and engine changes. This obviated the necessity for flying spare engines and to some extent, equipment and spares, into the forward areas; at the same time it increased the mobility of squadrons and reduced their maintenance personnel requirements. Aircraft which crashed away from airfields had normally to be written off charge, while those which crashed on airfields, provided the damage was not too great, were repaired on

the site. Surface movement back to India was restricted to a minimum, since damage to an aircraft during transit in this part of the world is normally so great that it is beyond economical repair on arrival at its destination. On occasions, damaged fighter aircraft were dismantled and flown back to India, the servicing personnel becoming so expert that they were able to pack the whole of a fighter aircraft and its components into one Dakota fuselage.

174. Owing to the speed and intensity at which the campaign was being fought, and the vital need to capture the strategic base of Rangoon before the onset of the monsoon, I decided that all the normal rates of effort must be exceeded, and all our Air Force resources were thrown into the battle. During one month of 1945, no less than 700 aircraft passed through the Aircraft Storage Units and Reserve Aircraft Pools in order to provide replacements for the 75 squadrons operating east of Calcutta. During the early stages of the campaign, the small number of combat losses introduced a major maintenance complication, since low wastage rates, giving aircraft a long life, placed upon the repair organisation a storage commitment which had not been foreseen. A further strain was caused by severe deterioration owing to climatic conditions, such as to subject aircraft to monsoon rains accompanied by sudden bursts of sunshine. This had an adverse effect upon the timber, fabric, rubber and electrical parts of aircraft. In the autumn of 1944, for instance, Mosquito aircraft had to be grounded as a result of such defects, until extensive repairs had been effected.

175. The maintenance organisation in the forward areas consisted of the Repair and Salvage Units (R. and S.U.) supporting squadrons at their airfields, and taking on all work which the flying units could not complete within forty-eight hours. Air Stores Parks held sufficient stocks of spares and equipment for three months supply, and the Forward Repair Depots which were located far enough forward to undertake major inspections and repairs beyond R. & S.U. capacity. In addition Motor Transport Light Repair Depots were deployed in the forward areas, and the importance of their work can be measured by the fact that in traversing the tortuous line of communication from Calcutta through Dimapur and Imphal to central Burma, mechanical transport vehicles had expended the major part of their useful lives before reaching their destination. Thus a great deal of ingenuity and inventiveness on the part of M/T servicing personnel was necessary in order to keep vehicles running, vehicles which in base areas would have been scrapped.

176. The maintenance effort in Burma can best be summarized as a triumph of improvisation to overcome bad climate and worse terrain, the paucity of spares, tools and equipment which was designed for the European theatre of war and not designed to be flown over, driven through or manhandled in the cruel country of Assam and Burma. The overloading of home production, and the overriding need to finish off the western war first, were adequate reasons for this situation, and the maintenance effort during the period which culminated in the capture of Rangoon was very