

G.O.C., L. of C. Command, has paid special tribute, as did United States officers who visited this L. of C. Considerable economy in recovery facilities was achieved in January, 1945, by locating a single recovery organization with the H.Q., L. of C. Transport Column, and making it responsible for the whole stretch of road. Other special measures included the equipping of each Recovery Company with twelve extra jeeps, which formed "Spanner Patrols." These "Spanner Patrols," which had by this time become a standard E.M.E. service with Fourteenth Army, had their origin in the earlier advances by 5 Indian and 11 (East African) Divisions. The condition of the roads would not permit the sending out of recovery vehicles as rearwards movement was only possible at certain times. In addition divisional and corps workshops had to be left behind. Fitters in the "Spanner Patrols" went up and down the roads in jeeps, doing what repairs they could, while vehicles needing workshop attention were put into parks for later repair. A lesson that was learnt was that such parks required careful guarding, if the vehicles in them were not to become unserviceable by the theft of vital parts and equipment.

328. Mandalay was captured in March and the implementation of my plans for the reorganization of the L. of C. became necessary. The raising of the new District to take over in rear of Fourteenth Army was comparatively simple and was brought about by the end of the month. The return of 202 Area to India, which was also part of my plan, was a much more complicated business, especially as it involved consideration of the question whether 404 Area should not also be handed over. It was not until May, 1945, after prolonged discussion with G.H.Q., India, at which the Supreme Allied Commander, the A.O.C.-in-C., South-East Asia, and the G.O.C.-in-C., Eastern Command, India, were represented, that it was decided that 202 Area would be transferred to control of India Command, while I retained 404 Area, but raised to District status. I may add here that the actual handover did not take place until the 1st June, 1945, on which date also H.Q. L. of C. Command was disbanded, and 404 Area came under my direct control. The overall administrative organization of Burma was considered at the same time and my proposal to form 606 District for South Burma out of the H.Q. L. of C. Command, which became redundant, was agreed. Thus after the fall of Rangoon, I should have three Districts, 404 controlling Chittagong and Arakan, 505 controlling Northern and Central Burma including Mandalay, and 606 controlling Southern Burma, including eventually Tenasserim.

329. Certain changes in organization had taken place on the Movements and Transportation side of the Northern L. of C. A new L. of C. Movement Control Group, No. 8, which had moved up in February, on the 15th March took over from the Movements and Transportation staff of L. of C. Command, which was moved to Arakan. This Group came under the direct control of my H.Q., which had also taken over the Movement Control Area (L. of C.), Manipur Road from L. of C. Command at the beginning of the month.

330. The final development of the Northern L. of C. was the rehabilitation of stretches of the Burma Railways. The line from Shwebo to Sagaing was found to have been damaged beyond repair, except as a long-term project.

The line from Myingyan to Meiktila was, however, capable of development. I have already said that it was thanks to our American allies that the locomotives were brought in. How this was done deserves description in greater detail. Six five-ton petrol-driven locomotives were flown in sections to Myingyan and there reassembled. General Stratemeyer provided a Liberator from his own H.Q. for this special task. For use on the line north and south through Meiktila, three giant MacArthur locomotives, each weighing over 70 tons, were loaded on special trailers (converted Macks) and brought in by road to Kalewa, and on to Myingyan, which involved ferrying over both the Chindwin and the Irrawaddy. A senior technical officer of the U.S. Army supervised this often hazardous journey, where these monstrous vehicles at times had to negotiate hair-pin bends overlooking deep precipices. Six steam locomotives and tenders, each locomotive weighing some 21 tons, were carried complete on transporters to Kalewa and thence loaded on to ramped cargo lighters and carried down river to Myingyan. In addition, 2,540 tons of heavy railway stores and material were brought in by road, I.W.T. and air.

The above, together with a few recaptured and reconditioned locomotives and rolling stock of the Burma Railways enabled us to reopen rail communication from Mandalay and Myingyan with a very limited though valuable capacity, and to begin the work of railway rehabilitation from Central Burma southwards against the day when we could also work northwards from Rangoon. On the 23rd April, the line from Myingyan to Meiktila was opened with jeep trains giving a lift of 150 tons a day, of which 70 tons a day could be taken forward as far as Pyawbwe.

331. When we captured Mandalay, a complete Japanese Base Workshop was found in the town almost intact. This was a great asset, as it saved bringing forward heavy equipment. It is interesting to note that—contrary to the generally held belief—the Japanese machinery in this Base Workshop included good quality high precision machine tools. The same applied to the mobile workshops that we captured, and their machinery lorries were equal to ours.

332. One further aspect of the Northern L. of C. deserves consideration, namely, petrol distribution. In a country with poor and, owing to the monsoon season, precarious communications, the advantages of distributing petrol by pipeline are especially obvious. It was agreed in December, 1944, that the control of both the six-inch American pipeline from Chittagong to Tinsukia in North-East Assam, and the British four-inch pipeline to Manipur Road, which ran parallel to it, should be vested in the American Chief Engineer, who controlled all the American pipelines in Bengal and Assam. The allocation of products to British and U.S. consumers was to be made by H.Q. Supreme Allied Command, South-East Asia. About the same time a joint Allied Land Forces, South-East Asia, and India Command Committee decided that in future the grades