

were actually employed to collect the supplies dropped in the Divisional dropping zones.

432. One of the few decreases to be reported during the period of this Despatch is in animal transport. The decision in March to employ 5 and 17 Indian Divisions on a motor transport basis, as well as the fly-out of 2 British Division and later 36 British Division, entailed the progressive withdrawal of large numbers of animals. This involved a considerable change in the function of the Remount Service, Allied Land Forces, South-East Asia, which was designed to hold animal reinforcements at basic wastage figures. Large numbers of animals were collected and returned to India, while, of complete units, it was found possible to withdraw five Animal Transport companies and five Field Ambulance troops to India in April.

On the veterinary side, the only contagious disease of major importance which occurred among animals was Epizootic Lymphangitis. Energetic control measures were taken and although cases were fairly numerous, the disease did not interfere with operations. Successful results were obtained from plastic surgical operations, which enabled animals suffering from saddle injuries to be quickly taken into work again with special saddle fittings.

433. The efficient working of the field postal system is a very important factor in the maintenance of morale. In December 1944, exceptionally heavy Christmas mails were distributed without delay; a large number of low medical category British soldiers being lent to the Base Post Office to meet the abnormal pressure of work. In January, a daily fly-in of all classes of mail from Imphal to Fourteenth Army units was introduced, and, from the experience gained, it was decided to allot special aircraft for mail conveyance, flying two sorties per day. Mail deliveries which would have taken many days by road were thus accomplished in one—an improvement in service which was much appreciated. Free postage concessions were introduced early in February 1945, and concessional rates for parcels in March, which afforded substantial reductions as compared with the old rates.

434. I am glad to be able to report an improvement in the Canteen Services during the period of this Despatch, which can be judged by the fact that the sales increased from about 2½ million rupees in November 1944 to 5½ million in April 1945. This increase is greatly out of proportion to the increase in troops and was due to the opening of more canteens and the importation of a wider range of goods for sale. There was, however, throughout the campaign a serious shortage of both cigarettes and beer. In March 1945, for example, when operations were at their height, the fighting soldier had to be content with a meagre allowance of 100 cigarettes and three bottles of beer per month.

435. The problem of disposal of salvage was difficult in this theatre. The policy was to concentrate on the recovery of serviceable or semi-serviceable articles (capable of re-issue as far forward as possible) and to discourage the collection of scrap, which, even when it could be transported, was difficult to sell. In January 1945, the Salvage service assumed responsibility for breaking down vehicles written off by Ordnance, which by then had risen to many

thousands, at the rate of 2,000 per month. Engines and batteries were removed and returned through Ordnance channels, as were a large number of serviceable spares of other natures, including 21,600 tyres. Other important salvage operations included the back-loading of 218,700 parachutes and 180,300 petrol and oil containers, both items which were in great demand. Over 15,000 tons of material were salvaged between November 1944 and April 1945, inclusive; the estimated value of which exceeded £1,150,000.

436. Finally, no account of administrative matters in this campaign would be completed without a brief mention of deficiencies in equipment. These were inevitably many since the European theatre obviously had to have priority. In many cases lack of equipment was partially overcome by the ingenuity and improvisation of base and field units, and I therefore propose to confine my remarks to the most serious deficiencies.

437. When I assumed command in November 1944 the vehicle situation had become extremely serious. This was due to four causes. Firstly, provision action in the past had been inadequate; secondly, there had been very heavy wastage during the battles of the preceding summer; thirdly, the need to equip newly raised transport companies to support the coming offensive; fourthly, the difficulty of procuring vehicles of lend-lease origin, bids for which had to include full operational justification and were very carefully screened by the American authorities in India and Washington.

I had a close examination carried out and ordered that future estimated production should be allocated in detail only to essential projects. As a result it was found that, provided production and movement kept up to expectation, all essential commitments could be met except for specialist vehicles, especially breakdown lorries, the need for which was increasing owing to extended Ls. of C. and rough roads and terrain.

The responsibility for equipping units prior to moving them into my area rested with India Command. But the industrial capacity of India was stretched to the limit and many units arrived deficient, or equipped with worn out vehicles. This was a constant source of anxiety and I directed that a pool of Allied Land Forces, South-East Asia vehicles should be held in Calcutta, from which the requirements of units could be met as they passed through. This system worked well and had it not been initiated many units would have gone forward badly equipped, and it would have been impossible to re-equip 2 British and 26 Indian Divisions for the Dracula operation at such short notice.

438. It became apparent early in 1945 that the restriction of tyre imports to India on account of the world shortage of rubber would seriously affect the production of new vehicles unless considerable economies were at once effected. Tyres in short supply were those required for the 3-ton 4 × 4 lorry and the 15-cwt. 4 × 4 truck.* Reduction in the output of these vehicles would have had the most serious repercussions at a time when the increasing mobility of operations called for the greatest possible

* A 4 × 4 lorry or truck is one in which the driving power is transmitted to all four wheels.