

eral Giffard, in his Despatch.\* I will therefore only deal with the more forward communications which immediately affected the campaign. These were three in number: the Northern line of Communication, the Southern Line of Communication and the Air Line of Communication.

304. The Northern L. of C. was made up, at its fullest and longest development, of three main sections from the Manipur Road railhead. The first was 320 miles of road from the railhead, *via* Imphal and Tamu, to Kalewa. It was in part a mountainous route, and the stretch from Tamu onwards could at first only be called a road by courtesy, though subsequently brought up to all-weather standard. The second section was by river from Kalewa to Myingyan, about 240 miles downstream, in Inland Water Transport craft. During the dry weather there was also the fair-weather road from Kalewa *via* Pyingang to Shwebo and thence on by the Central Burma all-weather road system, but our engineer resources never allowed the conversion of this stretch to higher standard. The third section was by a combination of railway and road from Myingyan south-east to Thazi and thence south to Rangoon, about 430 miles. In addition, a secondary I.W.T. L. of C. ran down the axis of the Irrawaddy. Demolitions and bombing had cut the railway into sections, which were operated to a limited extent with motor transport bridging the gaps. The Northern L. of C. is thus seen to total nearly a thousand miles, using road, rail, and water transport. The resources to operate this immense and complicated L. of C. had either to be brought in by road from the Manipur Road railhead or be flown in. The limitations and development of this L. of C. will be described later.

305. On the Southern L. of C. maintenance was initially by sea from the main base ports in India to Chittagong and to small river ports such as Cox's Bazaar and Maungdaw. After the capture of Akyab and Ramree Islands the bulk of this maintenance was sent direct to Akyab and Kyaukpau. The latter were however capable of only limited development, with the harbour-craft which we had available.

The Southern L. of C. could, by land and by coastal craft, only serve the Arakan operations. There were only two overland routes from the coast inland to Central Burma, one a rough track *via* An, incapable of development as a road L. of C. without thorough and expensive construction, for which we had neither the time nor the resources. The other was the fair-weather road from Taungup to Prome. The reasons why this route was never opened up have been discussed fully in Part I of this Despatch. It is sufficient here to say that it could not have been developed to a sufficient capacity in time to be any use, even if we had had the engineer resources available. Thus the only way the Southern L. of C. could feed Central Burma and Fourteenth Army was by air transport, and this is what it did. The development of this L. of C. will be described later.

306. At the start of the offensive, the air supply organization was based on groups of airfields near Imphal in the north, Comilla,

Agartala and Chittagong in Eastern Bengal. With the limited land lines of communication and no access to Central Burma by sea, air supply was the only way of getting in sufficient maintenance for Fourteenth Army's operations. That is, when all other means were being worked to absolute maximum capacity, there remained a large essential tonnage which could only be brought in by air. Were this essential tonnage reduced, I would be forced to cut down my forces. The total tonnage which could be lifted by air, however, depended not only on the number of available transport aircraft squadrons but on the location of the transport airfields at economic ranges from the delivery airfields. In the case of the C 46 and C 47 aircraft which were being used, this was about 250 miles. It was not long therefore before the advance of the Army took it beyond the economic range of the air bases mentioned above. To move these bases forward on the Army's L. of C. was impracticable owing to the undeveloped nature of the country and the limitations of the L. of C. itself. The air bases near Imphal were already uneconomical since everything for them had to be moved by road from the Manipur Road railhead to Imphal. The desired result could, however, be achieved by opening new and improved air supply bases on the coast, where the material of war could be delivered by sea. This showed at once the vital importance to the maintenance of Fourteenth Army of Akyab and Ramree Islands, where airfields could be constructed, and where there were ports capable of development, even if limited. From these bases, aircraft could operate at economic range to Central Burma and the Irrawaddy and road/railway axes south to Rangoon. It was a question of capturing the areas in time to allow their development and stocking before the monsoon.

307. There was one other route into Burma, the road from Ledo, *via* Myitkyina to join with the Burma Road to China. This was under construction under American control (as has been said already). Northern Combat Area Command in their operations down this road axis towards Lashio were almost entirely supplied by American air transport, operating from the Chabua group of airfields north-west of Ledo.

308. Two factors should be considered when the Ls. of C. are under examination. First, land Ls. of C. in an undeveloped country like Burma and with a determined enemy like the Japanese are liable to be cut by hostile action. On the other hand, our complete air and sea supremacy made transport by these elements secure.

Secondly, I must again draw attention to the factor of the weather. During the monsoon, say 15th May to 15th November very roughly, we had to expect all fair-weather routes to be out of action; even all-weather roads were subject to wash-outs and damage. Although flying was certain to be intermittent and hazardous, air supply became often the only practicable means, but it was entirely dependent on all-weather airfields. All administrative planning had to include provision for the continuance of adequate maintenance under monsoon conditions. The absolute importance of completing the construction of all-weather airfields for supply aircraft before the monsoon was therefore obvious.

\* Operations in Burma and North-East India from the 16th November 1943, to the 22nd June, 1944.