

AIR ORGANISATION AND ADMINISTRATION.

38. *Airfields**.

Up to June, 1943, the progress of airfield construction was behind schedule, and many airfields were still incomplete.

Actually, at the beginning of 1943 the main airfield construction programme in India included the building of 215 standard all-weather airfields. Some were to be "operational," i.e., built to full scale with two runways and accommodation for two squadrons. Of this programme, which had initially been drawn up in March, 1942, five operational airfields were complete in all respects, and 88 had one all-weather runway ready (over 1,600 yards in length) by the end of 1942. In addition, sixty fair-weather strips or landing areas had been completed.

The increasing scale of offensive operations throughout 1943 entailed far more construction in the east than under the original plan. A number of fair-weather airfields had to be prepared in forward areas, with limited shelter type accommodation and tentage, and the decision to operate throughout the monsoon made it necessary to develop some of these as all-weather airfields with increased accommodation and accessories. A number of airfields was also completed in North East Assam to handle supplies to China, or on the supply route from the West for the same purpose. Moreover, in the same area certain airfields were developed from which the U.S. Air Forces could operate heavy bombers or defensive fighters.

In addition, the maintenance and reinforcing of the U.S. Army Air Force squadrons in Assam involved further construction in the southern, western and central areas. By November, 1943, a total of 34 all-weather airfields, and 11 fair-weather strips had been handed over to the U.S.A.A.F. Facilities were also given to them in certain other R.A.F. airfields.

In March, 1942, there were only 16 airfields possessing all-weather runways, of which four only were operational by modern standards. There were also twenty fair-weather strips. By November, 1943, there were 285 airfields completed and 15 under construction. Of this total, no less than 140 were complete in all respects, while 64 airfields had one all-weather runway ready, and a further 71 had fair-weather strips or landing areas, and were equipped in varying degrees with dispersal facilities and domestic and technical accommodation.

There have been great difficulties in the execution of this programme which has cost about fifteen million pounds. There has been a shortage of suitable constructional equipment and supervisory staff. Much of the work carried out by civilian contractors has not been satisfactory, and in all areas there has been delay due to bad communications or inadequate control. In the Punjab and United Provinces the Provincial Governments have given great assistance. In Eastern India, where the need was greatest, there has been less enterprise and efficiency. The fact remains, however, that the Air Forces in India can now expand rapidly with the sure confidence that there are suitable bases from which to operate. A tribute is due to the many military

and civil engineers whose devoted work has made this possible.

39. *Manpower in the Royal Air Force.*

Perhaps the greatest problem in the expansion of the Air Forces in this Command has been caused by the acute shortage of suitable manpower. Other theatres of war, whose more imperative needs have quite rightly been given priority, appear to have exhausted the available manpower in the United Kingdom, with the result that this Command has often seemed to be situated at the end of a badly leaking pipe-line. To combat this difficulty, the substitution scheme, whereby local manpower is recruited and trained to fill existing vacancies in R.A.F. non-operational units, was decided upon at the end of 1942, and put into practice during the first half of 1943.

The output of trained manpower under this scheme was not adequate, however, to meet the demand caused by the expansion of the Air Command. As a result we had to subsist mainly on whatever drafts became available from time to time from the United Kingdom or other Commands.

An important and complicating factor in this situation was the increased variety of aircraft operating from India, and the consequent multiplication of requirements of the different categories of aircrew trained for each type. As advanced aircrew training facilities were strictly limited in the Command, the main solution to this problem consisted in placing more accurate and detailed demands on the Air Ministry for the personnel required. At the same time training facilities were developed and utilised to the maximum extent for converting surplus aircrews from one type of aircraft to another.

Ultimately, as a result of the manpower shortage throughout the R.A.F., an establishment ceiling was imposed on the Air Command in India. This ceiling limited the personnel expansion of the Command to a total of approximately 90,000 R.A.F. and 10,000 I.A.F. personnel to meet a target of 73 squadrons. Any personnel recruited into the I.A.F. however, under the substitution scheme would not be counted against this ceiling. A target of 140 squadrons will become operative after Germany has been defeated and personnel become available again from the west.

Actually the figures of air manpower for July and November, 1943, were as follows, but these contained deficiencies among some classes of personnel and surpluses among others which could not be adjusted by interchange, without training afresh:—

	July 1943	November 1943
R.A.F. Officers aircrew	1,718	1,851
R.A.F. Officers ground	3,250	4,314
I.A.F. Officers aircrew	320	432
I.A.F. Officers ground	453	694
B.O.Rs. aircrew	2,290	3,621
B.O.Rs. ground	61,005	74,929
I.O.Rs. ground	4,894	8,072
Enrolled followers	9,142	10,338
Temporary followers	7,202	11,410
Non - Combatant Service personnel	1,266	1,345
W.A.C.(I)s	1,060	1,346
Civilians	1,142	1,600
Total	93,742	119,952

* See paragraph 35 above under 'Engineering'