

largely dissipated in a desperate struggle to keep the units of the maintenance organisation abreast of the operational flying units. That this was achieved speaks volumes for the tenacity, skill and loyalty of the maintenance personnel.

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### (III) *Internal Air Lines.*

177. The growth of air routes during the past year is best illustrated by the following figures:—

	<i>Passengers</i>	<i>Freight</i>	<i>Mail</i>
May, 1944	2,103	166,313 lbs.	99,435 lbs.
April, 1945	11,514	1,579,119 lbs.	777,944 lbs.

178. This rapid increase was attributable to a greater intensity of operations, and better planning followed somewhat tardily by a growth of resources. At the beginning of the campaign, one squadron (No. 353) shouldered the whole burden while still largely equipped with Hudsons. In July, 1944, No. 52 Squadron was formed, and by flying 19,000 hours without an accident, speedily gained an excellent reputation for its high standard of operating and freedom from accidents over routes that include the hazardous flight over the Hump to China. In April, 1945, a flight of No. 232 Squadron, equipped with Liberator C-87 aircraft, began to operate on the longer routes, forming the most recent addition to a force the strength of which has grown to two and a half squadrons.

179. Parallel action to build up a ground organisation to handle greater traffic and more complex problems was necessary. To this end, static transport wings have been established at Delhi, Karachi and Calcutta; that at Delhi was intended eventually to move to Rangoon. Located at nodal points on the trunk routes, these wings also gave advice on all matters affecting air transport and ferrying to the group in whose area they were located. When their establishments were fully implemented, 229 Group Headquarters was relieved of a great deal of day to day work in administering some sixty units spread over India.

180. Even now, internal air communications within the theatre are not adequate. This fact cannot be fully realised by anyone who has not appreciated the vastness of India from a railway carriage or travelled over roads on which the twentieth century has barely left its mark. Moreover, in a sub-continent whose urban centres are so distant from one another, it is often necessary to plan an operation eight hundred miles from its mounting base, while the allocation of resources may be effected from another centre which may be fifteen hundred miles from the controlling headquarters. Furthermore, the major base for the prosecution of a campaign in southern Burma, Malaya or Java, is still India, and the need for swift communication between base and combat area is another continually growing commitment for squadrons who serve an area ranging from Karachi to Kunming and from Peshawar to Ceylon.

181. At times, local operational tasks have made the diversion of aircraft from internal routes to air supply a tempting solution to a pressing problem. This temptation has always been resisted, and it is a first principle that the

vital arteries of South-East Asia Command shall remain open. The mobility of the staffs, the despatch of urgent freight, close contact with the battle areas, and the building up of India as a base, must always be a prime consideration when assessing priorities for air transport resources in this theatre. Not only is the work of all three services dependent upon speedy communication over long distances; it is on the air routes that the Air Force can reap a dividend from the transport aircraft which are so frequently operated for the benefit of others. The R.A.F. should also use the speed and flexibility of its transport squadrons to improve the efficiency of its own organisation.

182. Air Command has derived great benefit from the Transport Groups allotted to this theatre, which has made possible a closer study of transport problems and a more effective supervision of this specialised type of flying. The improvement in operating standards is well illustrated by the accident rate. In October, 1943, there were 49 accidents per 10,000 hours of transport and ferry flights. By April, 1945, the rate had been reduced to 9 per 10,000 hours. Such an improvement reflects the greatest credit on all concerned and demonstrates the close co-operation which has been achieved between South-East Asia and Transport Command.

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### (IV) *The R.A.F. Regiment.*

183. Until mid-1944 the strength of the R.A.F. Regiment was deployed to the extent of rather more than two-thirds in machine gun anti-aircraft units, and the remainder in field squadrons designed for an infantry role. Events then forced a fundamental revision of the part for which the R.A.F. Regiment in South East Asia was cast. It had become apparent that advanced airfields, radar sites and other air force installations would not necessarily be guarded if their locations did not happen to fit into the tactical schemes adopted by the local army formations, and that unless the air forces were to withdraw everything to a safe distance behind the front lines they would themselves have to provide the necessary defence force. For this purpose the R.A.F. Regiment during the later months of 1944 was expanded and re-organised into ten wing headquarters, twenty field squadrons, three armoured (holding) squadrons and ten anti-aircraft squadrons, so as to provide tactical defence for air force units as required. The balance of functions in the Regiment as between air and ground defence was thus completely reversed.

184. The wisdom of this re-organisation was abundantly proved in the course of the 1944-45 campaign. As has already been explained, the essence of the tactics by which the re-conquest of Burma was achieved lay in the rapid advance of mechanised units thrusting through or around enemy positions, the strength of which had been weakened by air bombardment. The fighter bombers which provided the backbone of the latter, and also the fighters required for air defence, could only operate effectively from airfields close behind the advanced army units. The supplies on whose delivery the maintenance of the Army's advance depended were