

425. The work of the Electrical and Mechanical Engineers has already been mentioned in the early parts of the Despatch. I would like to draw attention to a few miscellaneous points which carry valuable lessons for the future. Just before the crossing of the Irrawaddy, most formations concentrated their workshops forward. The necessity for workshop personnel being trained to defend themselves became immediately apparent. Japanese "jitter-parties" crossed the river every night, while other parties of enemy stragglers, often quite large, attacked our E.M.E. recovery parties; enemy patrols laid mines actually in our workshop areas.

426. When it was decided to fly 2 British Division out of Burma, arrangements were made to collect their vehicles. Unfortunately the lessons which should have been learnt from similar circumstances in the Kabaw Valley were forgotten, and again it was not appreciated that elaborate precautions are necessary to guard vehicle parks. The result was that several hundred vehicles were rendered temporarily useless within 24 hours of being collected because valuable parts were stolen; considerable repair resources had to be diverted to make them serviceable again.

427. Another lesson learnt during this period was that when a force is dependent on air supply, careful consideration must be given to the provision of heavy spares such as tank

parts. A reserve of essential parts must be created as far forward as possible by the time the advance begins. There were occasions when heavy tank parts could not be brought in when required, because at the time the air lift needed was too great in proportion to their value.

428. Fourteenth Army took over 30,000 vehicles into Burma. Although the advance was over roads previously considered impassable for mechanical formations, only one sixth of these vehicles failed to reach their final destination. But the wear and tear was heavy; on an average, each vehicle passed through E.M.E. second or third line workshops once every three months. An additional load was placed on the E.M.E. by the long road L. of C. Replacement vehicles had to travel 600 miles from Manipur Road railhead to the Irrawaddy, and at least half the distance was over extremely bad roads. Nearly a third of these replacement vehicles required extensive repairs, and all of them required careful overhaul, before they could be issued to units.

429. It is not surprising, from what has been said so far of the enormous administrative effort which the Burma campaign entailed, that the labour force required was very considerable. As far as military labour was concerned, the Pioneer and Labour formations in the Allied Land Forces, South-East Asia area in November 1944 consisted of the following units:—

<i>Type of Unit</i>	<i>Number of Units</i>	<i>Total working strength</i>
Indian Pioneer Corps	234	71,872
Indian State Labour Units	59	42,100
Civil Pioneer Force Battalions	20	20,480
Assam Civil Porters Corps	11	10,560
Labour provided by the Indian Tea Association	—	78,796
Madras Labour Units	13	12,480
Ceylon Auxiliary Pioneer Corps	13	4,290
Italian Auxiliary Pioneer Corps	2 groups	1,520
5 (East African) Pioneer Corps	1	480
Total	242,578

This large force was mainly concentrated on the Northern L. of C. from Manipur Road to Imphal and southwards, and from Assam southwards down the Ledo Road with the United States forces. There were, however, also considerable numbers in the Chittagong area, and with the forward elements of Fourteenth Army.

430. By the end of April, 1945, the labour employed in Burma had reached the half-million mark, of which about half was unregimented civil labour. Some 53,000 of the regimented part of this labour force were employed on building and maintaining the Ledo Road to China. The Americans provided technical troops and recruited civilians, but organized military labour was commanded by Indian Pioneer Corps Group Commanders. There was a British Pioneer and Labour Staff on the increment with American H.Q., and the arrangement whereby the British provided the main labour force for the effort worked smoothly. The advance of Fourteenth Army entailed close support by Pioneer units, and there was a steady flow of Pioneer companies from the L. of C. into the Army area, especially during March, 1945. Civil Labour Control teams, composed of 150 officers who had received

special training, were flown into Burma in March, and they were most successful in obtaining local civilians to work for the Army. At Mandalay and Shwebo in particular, the arrival of these teams to organize civil labour avoided the necessity of transporting large labour forces over the already strained L. of C. The labour aspect of the development of Rangoon was well handled. Pioneer companies and Civil Labour Control teams were included in the earliest convoys, and the result was that at no stage was the port development hindered by shortage of labour.

431. The work done by the Pioneers and other labour units was both strenuous and varied. Their many duties included the building of roads, railways and airfields, and the handling of all military stores at docks, stations, depots and airfields. Pioneer companies took part in all the amphibious "right hook" operations on the Arakan coast, and they went well forward portering with Fourteenth Army and 36 British Division. They formed, moreover, a vital part of the great air supply organization, providing the working parties at both the Rear and Forward Airfield Maintenance Organizations; in the case of 36 British Division, they