

Air supply.

557. Burma proved how an Army could march for a thousand miles through some of the worst country in the world so long as air supply was guaranteed by our retaining air superiority and having adequate air transport.

558. There is no doubt that the Japanese fully appreciated how vitally important Allied air supply was to the success of our operations. They confessed that all means possible were used to interfere with Allied air supply, but, due to the small size of their Air Force, they failed in their efforts.

559. Burma, I consider, has given us the classic example of an Army in the field existing on air supply, and the technique evolved from these air supply operations must surely command serious attention.

Lessons which emerged in South East Asia.

560. The war in South East Asia, has immeasurably enriched our experience in air operations in the East; quickened our perception to the dangers of a purely static defence system for these Empire territories, and shown how essential is air power for future defence.

The need for greater squadron mobility.

561. One of the most noticeable features of our operations in South East Asia was the clumsy and inadequate method which we had been forced to employ to maintain the mobility of our squadrons, their personnel and equipment.

562. This implies no reflection on the ground staff and maintenance organisation, who succeeded in achieving good results with the equipment and facilities available when moving the squadrons forward, month after month, through a country devoid of proper communications and faced with flooding during the monsoon, when roads turned into quagmires.

563. But a squadron working in support of front-line troops must have greater mobility

to enable its ground organisation to move to its next base, and not find itself on some narrow inadequate road, choked for miles ahead with slow moving army transport.

564. It is on record that during April, 1945, when over 80 R.A.F. units moved forward in Burma to new bases in keeping with the overall plan of advance, one R.A.F. wing, having insufficient road transport, had to use bullock carts. Against this, there is the more logical instance of another R.A.F. wing which moved from Akyab to Rangoon by air, taking with it all its equipment and personnel and leaving behind only M.T., since it was picking up a new allotment of vehicles at its destination.

565. With so many moves by squadrons in the forward areas—many going ahead with the bare minimum of staff to keep aircraft operational pending the arrival of the remainder of their ground personnel bringing up essential equipment—squadrons often found themselves separated from a proportion of their servicing echelons for several days due to lack of transport. Until the full staff of the echelons arrived, an enormous amount of work was thrown upon ground crew, since aircraft at the time were being pressed into service in support of the advance and had to be loaded with bombs and with ammunition. They also needed daily servicing.

566. This, I consider, is one of the most important lessons which emerged from operations in South East Asia. Experience has shown that Air Power, in the movement of its ground organisations, must have infinitely greater mobility in future, and be air-lifted by its own transports.

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