There were local labour difficulties in Arakan where the small isolated Japanese air raids of the Autumn of 1944 had caused casualties. These raids had repercussions over a wide area and there was a marked reluctance by civil labour to work on airfields. Although I have not covered the whole field of rear airfield construction work, I hope I have said enough to show that it represented a very considerable engineer effort, requiring organization and a high peak rate of output.

381. In dealing with forward airfield construction, it is, I think, best to take the advance of Fourteenth Army first. The first group of four forward airfields, apart from the reconditioning of the strip at Tamu, were constructed near Kalemyo. These strips were all developed to operate transport aircraft as well as fighters; and were constructed by a Forward Airfield Engineer Group. The other axis of Fourteenth Army's advance, that of 19 Indian Division *via* Pinlebo and Wuntho, was at first covered by fighters operating at extreme range from the Imphal airfield group. Later, three Japanese airstrips in the Indaw oilfields area were developed. These, when captured, were found to be short and built to a very poor specification. Much work was required to render them adequate for the operations of our own aircraft.

382. For the main advance into Central Burma and southwards, the Shwebo group of airfields became of paramount importance. These were captured at the end of December, 1944. The group consisted of five Japanese airstrips which all gave considerable trouble in development. Owing to the enemy's denial measures, it was found quicker to develop the taxi-tracks as strips than to repair the runways. The volume of air traffic and the friable nature of the soil in this area made the dust problem acute, which shortage of water made is difficult to remedy. With the capture of Monywa in January a further group of four enemy airfields was developed. Little work was required as denial measures had been slight. A noticeable feature of these as of other Japanese airfields was the elaborate nature of the dispersal areas —a tribute to our air attacks. Another group lay near Myingyan, important because it was the southern terminal of the I.W.T. link from Kalewa. Here five airfields were developed, two of which were Japanese. The latter had been denied in the most effective way yet met by our engineers, nine inches of hand-packed stone having been spread over the surface.

383. In February 1945, four airfields were constructed to support 33 Corps' crossings of the Irrawaddy. These were sited at Sadaung, Ondaw (two) and Allagappa. The work was not only extensive and technically difficult owing to the soil, but much of it had to proceed under observed artillery fire. Meanwhile, 4 Corps was advancing down the Gangaw Valley towards Pakokku. The airfields here were essential to the advance since the road could not carry the traffic required by a Corps of two divisions and a tank brigade. By analogy with the railhead, from which the road traffic proceeds forward, airheads were constructed. One was constructed about halfway down the Gangaw Valley at Kan, with a subsidiary airfield at the top of the valley at Tilin, while another was made near the Irrawaddy at Sinthe. These airheads each consisted of two 2,000 yard airstrips and a 700 yard casualty evacuation strip, complete with unloading bays, taxi tracks, etc. The Tilin airfield had one 1,500 yard strip and a 700 yard casualty strip. These airfields held the fighters to cover the Irrawaddy crossing and in addition some 200 transport aircraft landed daily with supplies and stores. They were constructed in record time by the forward airfield engineers, assisted by Corps and Divisional engineers and infantry working parties. Sinthe is of particular interest for two reasons. It was made operational in five days, and completed in ten, by a Forward Airfield Engineer Group whose motor transport had only had one day for maintenance while covering 2,300 miles from Cocanada on the Madras coast of India. The other is that to alleviate the bad dust conditions, a six mile ditch had to be bulldozed from the nearest sources to bring water to a channel between the airstrips, whence it could be pumped onto them.

384. Directly our forces had broken out of the bridgeheads, a group of six airfields were constructed south of the river, while to the north, 19 Indian Division was supported from the reconditioned Japanese airfields at Singu and later at Mandalay. The siting of these airfields had to be in accordance with the tactical situation, which often increased the engineering difficulties. Most of them were built under fire. One of them, at Tada-U, had to be operational for C.46 aircraft in 48 hours, and the job was completed within this incredibly short space of time.

385. The capture of Meiktila gave us a group of five important Japanese airfields. Moreover, owing to the speed of our advance, the enemy's denial measures were comparatively ineffective. One airfield was in five hours made ready, under fire, to receive transport aircraft bringing reinforcements. By the irony of fate it was not the Japanese denial measures which caused us trouble, but the Japanese efforts to maintain the airfields in action. Bomb craters caused by our attacks had been so inexpertly filled in that when heavy rain fell, water penetrated to the subgrade to such an extent that some fields had to be abandoned.

386. For the final advance to Rangoon there were three well defined groups of airfields, sited respectively in the Pyinmana, Toungoo and Nyaunglebin areas. All consisted of light Japanese airfields damaged to varying degrees. In addition to rendering these operational, other fair-weather strips had to be constructed. The advance was so rapid that at times it outstripped the physical movement of the forward airfield engineers. An additional complication arose in that we were now in the season when heavy pre-monsoon storms had to be expected, and in fact some exceptionally heavy storms occurred. A special organization had to be adopted to meet these particular circumstances. An advanced reconnaissance party of airfield engineers accompanied the armoured spearhead; the C.R.E. (Commander, Royal Engineers) followed as closely as possible with a forward echelon of two field companies and a mechanical equipment platoon; while with the following brigades came the rear echelon consisting of an engineer battalion and a Corps mechanical equipment platoon. Forward airfield engineers had to carry seven days' rations and petrol, owing to rapid changes between formations and the fact that they were usually