

THE MANPOWER SITUATION IN SOUTH EAST ASIA

523. The energetic stepping up of operations in the Pacific directly against Japan, brought about a wide variety of circumstances which combined to deny Air Command, South East Asia that priority in personnel which the Command had expected would be forthcoming.

524. Demands in Europe and the Pacific for shipping; the sudden announcement, preceding the General Election, to reduce the Overseas Tour for Army personnel by approximately 10 per cent; the operation of the Release Scheme, and the priority accorded to the Pacific "Tiger Force", all adversely reacted upon Air Command, South East Asia.

525. In May, 1945, the establishment and strength of the Command for British personnel were as follows:—

	<i>Estab.</i>	<i>Strength</i>	<i>Surplus/ Deficiencies</i>
Ground Officers	8,103	7,573	— 530
Other Ranks ...	105,470	110,459	4,989 —

526. The 6½ per cent. deficiency in ground officers affected principally the branches in Administration, Code and Cypher, Tech. (E) and Catering. On the other hand, the position as regards airmen was that the technical trades carried a surplus of 7,100, whilst the trade of Clerk G.D. was deficient by not less than 36 per cent., equipment assistants by 20 per cent. and cooks by 28 per cent.

527. By September, 1945, the position had so deteriorated that an overall deficiency was shown, although certain trades continued to carry a surplus. The strength of personnel was as follows:—

	<i>Estab.</i>	<i>Strength</i>	<i>Surplus/ Deficiencies</i>
Ground Officers	8,116	7,525	— 591
Other Ranks ...	123,466	114,419	— 9,047

528. The 7 per cent. deficiency in ground officers was spread over a great many branches. Physical Fitness carried a deficiency of 36 per cent. and Code and Cypher a deficiency of 22 per cent.

529. The overall 8 per cent. deficiency in other ranks, however, clouded the very large deficiencies carried in the following trades:—

	<i>(Per cent. deficiency.)</i>
Clerks G.D. ...	43
Clerks Acctg. ...	36
Cooks ...	32
Driver M.T. ...	18
Equip. Asst. ...	36

530. The Command had clearly to take measures to rectify this weakness if it was to function administratively, and compulsory mis-employment of surplus tradesmen and aircrew was therefore introduced. It was fortunate that, on the defeat of Japan, an opportunity was offered for a large scale reduction of establishments and disbandments to begin.

531. The Release Scheme, coming so soon after the cessation of the European War, reacted very materially against the Command. It brought further grave losses in the difficult trades at a time when the efficient administration of the Command was essential for the prosecution of the war against Japan.

532. An even greater disadvantage was the fact that it withdrew from the Command the more senior and experienced personnel. Consequently, while the position in a branch or trade as far as actual personnel were concerned, may have appeared satisfactory on paper, it was not always so in actual performance of work, and efficiency thereby suffered.

Reduction in overseas tour for personnel.

533. On 6th June, 1945, the War Office suddenly announced a reduction in the overseas tour of Army personnel. This factor had every promise of producing serious repercussions in South East Asia, in which either coming operations, or morale, or both, might well have been affected. The fulfilment of the War Office announcement was rendered virtually impossible by the lack of homeward personnel shipping and the congestion in transit camps in India.

534. To avoid a parallel situation with regard to the Air Force in this Command, I signalled the Chief of Staff emphasising that any announcement of a reduction in overseas tour for the Air Force would be premature and impracticable at this juncture.

535. At the same time, I strongly recommended that shipping and air transport should be found in order to bring into effect, by 1st December, 1945, a reduction of tour from four to three and a half years, for all single officers and airmen. This reduction was agreed upon in August in principle, but was not fully implemented until December.

536. Between May and September, 1945, some 559 officers and 2,263 airmen left the Command under the Release Scheme. During the same period 2,201 officers and 12,932 airmen were repatriated in addition to those despatched on release.

537. The celebration of V.E.-Day in the Command was a sincere enough occasion for everyone, though it was only natural that it did not hold the same high spirit of enthusiasm for those in the East still fighting the last of the remaining Axis powers. The announcement that the Burma Star had been inaugurated gave general satisfaction to personnel serving in Burma—an award well merited—but personnel in India and Ceylon felt that the burden of their overseas service was not sufficiently recognised by the award of the Defence Medal.

538. The postal voting scheme for the General Election in July, 1945, was put into operation successfully during May and June, and ballot papers for personnel in South East Asia were flown out from England by transport aircraft. The papers were given priority over all other mails handled by R.A.F. Post Staffs. The total number of completed application forms for postal voting received by 25th June at R.A.F. Post Karachi was 33,500. A last minute supply of forms to the Cocos Islands, whose original consignment was mislaid in transit, produced satisfactory results.

539. Altogether, a total of 30,013 ballot papers was finally forwarded by air to the U.K. from the Command.