

in a larger number of vehicles being got forward. Delivery was, in theory, to be made to the nearest depot in Fourteenth Army's area, at this time at Imphal, but as the advance into Burma progressed, it was unfortunately often found necessary for Fourteenth Army to send back part of the way, owing to shortage of drivers.

316. In December 1944, India Command came to our rescue and accepted the responsibility for moving up replacement vehicles to Manipur Road by the rail/road route, but, unfortunately, the supply of civilian drivers proved inadequate to meet increasing demands. Recourse had to be made to pulling back drivers from the L. of C. Transport Column, to using spare drivers of units going forward, and of combing our reinforcement camps for drivers. By these expedients, the forward flow of replacement vehicles was maintained at a sufficiently high level to meet essential requirements. Thus, for example, in March 1945, over 7,000 vehicles, including trailers were sent forward, whereas, before December 1944, it had never been found possible to exceed 2,000 replacement vehicles per month.

317. It was during December 1944 that an important development of the Northern L. of C. started, namely the building of the Inland Water Transport base on the Chindwin near Kalewa. As part of the policy of developing the Northern L. of C. to its fullest extent, it was obvious that we should have to make the maximum use of the river waterways. At this time it was not possible to estimate exactly to what extent this I.W.T. link could be developed, but as will be seen later it subsequently became of the utmost importance.

318. In January 1945, the success of operation Capital—Fourteenth Army's offensive into Central Burma—necessitated the extension of administrative planning for the maintenance of the army south of Mandalay. It now became clear that we could not spare the resources for the reconstruction of the road from the Chindwin crossing at Kalewa, via Pyingaing to Shwebo up to all-weather standard. At the same time, the development of the River Chindwin L. of C. showed great promise. It was therefore decided to put the maximum effort into the I.W.T. project and to abandon any idea of using the road between Kalewa and Shwebo during the monsoon. In any case, it would not be possible to maintain the Bailey pontoon bridge across the Chindwin when it started to rise with the advent of the rains. The Chindwin River had thus to be developed as fast as possible to bridge the gap between Kalewa and the all-weather road system of Central Burma: this link in the chain and the extent to which its capacity could be raised governed the overall capacity of the Northern L. of C. once the monsoon had started. As the lower terminal of the I.W.T. link, and as the Advanced Base for supplying the forces in Central Burma, Myingyan was chosen, and plans for its development were prepared. Myingyan was on the existing all-weather road system of Central Burma and there was also the possibility of being able to use stretches of the railway. It was well placed with regard to Meiktila, the road/railway axis to Rangoon and the Irrawaddy River axis to Prome and beyond.

319. The development of the I.W.T. project deserves to be discussed in detail, since in many ways it is unique in the annals of warfare. There were three main ways in which we could build up the fleet; from craft transported in sections from India, from craft built on the spot out of timber felled in the jungle, and by salvaging and capturing boats already on the river. All these methods were used to the fullest extent. During January, I.W.T. Operating Companies, Craft Erection and Workshop Companies, Salvage Companies, a Higgins Barge Erection Section and—somewhat to their surprise—a Railway Workshop Company were moved to Kalewa. It should be remembered that the whole project started right from nothing. The boat-building yards, jetties, piers and accommodation had first to be built on an open sand bank. Timber was felled in the jungle, hauled by elephants and shaped in improvised sawmills, the work being carried out by an Artisan Works Company and a Forestry Company R.E. Craft were despatched in sections from Calcutta by rail to Manipur Road and thence carried by road 304 miles to Kalewa, where they were reassembled. The cutting of a large boat into section for re-erection elsewhere was no easy task technically, as anyone who saw the experiments carried out near Calcutta will agree. The transport of these awkward loads over the already congested road L. of C. also presented many problems. About 50 craft of all types were normally under construction at the same time. Between January and April 1945 (inclusive), no less than 415 rivercraft were built, comprising 11 different types, including barges, tugs, ramped cargo lighters, launches, etc., all of which were pre-fabricated types. The vessels constructed even included two gun boats for the Royal Navy, armed with Bofors and Oerlikon guns, which were commissioned for operations on the Chindwin. This must represent a high watermark of inter-Service co-operation. Engines and other vital stores were at times brought in by air transport. Much improvisation was necessary to maintain the rate of constructions, as, for example when fencing wire was used for welding electrodes.

320. Local construction was concentrated on the building of blunt-ended pontoons, which, lashed in threes and decked over, made a raft of 30 tons capacity. These rafts were towed by the power pre-fabricated craft. By the end of April, 541 pontoons had been built and put into service. In addition to these, 174 ex-enemy and other crafts of various types were salvaged and powered with engines, largely flown in from India. When Mandalay was captured in March, the Government Dockyard was found to contain a large quantity of dismantled machinery. The power plant, smithy and foundry were soon put into working order and assisted the Kalewa boat-building operations. A measure of the size of the whole Kalewa project is perhaps indicated by the fact that over five million rivets were used.

321. The target for the capacity of the I.W.T. link between Kalewa and Myingyan was 700 tons a day by the arrival of the monsoon. Operation started on a small scale between Kalewa and Alon (120 miles downstream) on the 1st February and by the end of February the capacity of this link rose to 255 tons per