

officers. Their allegiance and responsibility was towards the A.O.A. Air Command, who looked to them for staff work, for records and for facts. They were not, however, his advisers in the formulation of new policy—these continued to be the heads of the services in New Delhi, who might if they wished send their own staff officers from Delhi or come themselves to make representations to the A.O.A., Air Command, on matters of Command policy external to the responsibility of the Air Marshal Commanding, Base Air Forces. This was not a normal system. But the separation of the Supreme Allied Commander and the Headquarters of his Commanders-in-Chief from the seat of the Government of India and duality of channels to the United Kingdom Government—either through the Government of India or direct—constituted an abnormal situation.

156. The value and effectiveness of the base organisation thus created was endorsed by the Air Member for Supply and Organisation (A.M.S.O.) during his visit in February, 1945. Air Chief Marshal Sir Christopher Courtney was impressed by the extent of the negotiations which were necessary in New Delhi with the numerous organisations concerned with the conduct of the war from India. He counselled a progressive decentralisation of functions to Base Air Forces and its gradual endowment with a greater measure of autonomy; this was of course in keeping with the original scheme and was accordingly pursued.

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#### *Disbandment of Third Tactical Air Force and Formation of H.Q., R.A.F., Bengal-Burma.*

157. Eastern Air Command, from its formation in December, 1943, onwards, was an exclusively operational Headquarters with no administrative responsibilities. When its Headquarters moved to Calcutta in March, 1944, administrative services for the area of Eastern (Army) Command were being provided by Headquarters No. 231 Group, and this Headquarters also administered the R.A.F. element of Eastern Air Command. But it was clearly anomalous that a Bomber Group engaged in active operations should continue to be saddled with the wide responsibilities for administration which were of no concern to the Strategic Air Force.

158. This, and other considerations pointing towards a re-organisation of the groups in India, was discussed with the A.M.S.O. in August, 1944. The logical course would have been to confer administrative responsibilities upon the R.A.F. Element of Eastern Air Command and to form a new Group Headquarters under it to exercise them. But owing to the manpower shortage it was impossible to create a new headquarters altogether distinct from Headquarters, Eastern Air Command, and it was therefore agreed that H.Q. No. 231 Group should give up its extraneous administrative responsibilities, and that the administrative staff so released should be reconstituted as Air Headquarters, Bengal. At the same time, the Deputy Air Commander, Eastern Air Command, was to become Air Officer Commanding, Bengal, with administrative responsibilities extending eastwards as far as the Brahmaputra. They could not be further extended, since this

would have meant that the Air Marshal Commanding, Third Tactical Air Force, would have been administratively subordinated to the Air Vice-Marshal, A.O.C. Bengal.

159. It was therefore decided to propose the disbandment of Headquarters, Third Tactical Air Force. For such a course there were other good reasons outside the administrative sphere—operationally, the title was now a misnomer, since in June, 1944, the Tenth U.S.A.A.F. had been reconstituted as an independent formation under Eastern Air Command, and the Headquarters of the Fourteenth Army was due after the opening of the new campaign to move forward to Imphal, where Headquarters, No. 221 Group had long been established, leaving XV Corps in the Arakan to operate independently under the G.O.C.-in-C., Allied Land Forces. Authority for the disbandment of Headquarters, Third Tactical Air Force was given in October, 1944.

160. The disbandment of Third T.A.F. involved also the expansion of Headquarters, No. 221 Group and the allotment to Eastern Air Command of direct operational control of all its subordinate operational formations. The date of this further re-organisation was timed to synchronize with the move of Headquarters, Fourteenth Army to Imphal beside Headquarters, No. 221 Group, and the establishment of Advanced Headquarters, Allied Land Forces, alongside Eastern Air Command at Calcutta. This move took place on 4th December when the Air Marshal Commanding, Third Tactical Air Force, became Deputy Air Commander, Eastern Air Command and Air Marshal Commanding, R.A.F., Bengal-Burma.

161. Headquarters, R.A.F., Bengal-Burma was the name given to the administrative formation now brought into existence to combine the functions of R.A.F. Bengal and the administrative responsibilities previously wielded by Third T.A.F. Geographically, its responsibilities covered both the base area of Bengal and the more easterly marches, bit by bit being extended into Burma with the advance of the Fourteenth Army. The military suzerain of the former was G.H.Q., India, and of the latter, Headquarters Allied Land Forces. Headquarters, Bengal-Burma was accordingly built up on a dual basis commensurate with the existence of two sets of army authorities with which it would have to deal, and also with an eye to future development whenever the reconquest of Burma should compel it. This stage was reached in February, 1945, when it became possible to carry out the anticipated divorce between Bengal and Burma components of the Air Marshal Commanding's province. R.A.F. Bengal was then expanded into Headquarters, No. 228 Group and returned to Base Air Forces, though the filling of its establishments proved a slow process.

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#### *Administrative and Training Groups.*

162. In order to ensure better co-ordination of administrative services, to facilitate combined training, and to ensure close liaison on internal security measures, the groups in India underwent a rationalization of their areas to coincide with those of the army formations.