

belong to an Air Ministry, a Ministry of Aircraft Production, a Ministry of Labour, a Ministry of Economic Warfare, and perhaps even a Board of Trade. Estimated at its lowest, Air Command, South-East Asia, exercises the powers at least of Deputies to such bodies.

150. The formation of South-East Asia Command resulted in extensive developments in organisation, and a whole hierarchy of Headquarters has been called into being. Headquarters, Supreme Allied Commander, South-East Asia, moved from Delhi to Kandy in March, 1944. It was not possible to move my Headquarters to Kandy at this time, as the expansion and development of my Command necessitated maintaining the closest contact with G.H.Q. India, and so it was necessary to form an Advanced Headquarters, A.C.S.E.A., consisting of a Planning and Liaison Staff, to accompany H.Q. S.A.C.S.E.A. in its move to Kandy. Air Headquarters, India, was set up as an autonomous unit to control operations on the North-West Frontier and assume responsibility for the I.A.F., directly responsible under its own A.O.C. to C.-in-C. India. Eastern Air Command was established to co-ordinate air operations on the Burmese frontier. Its Headquarters moved on 15th April to Calcutta in order to maintain closer touch with its subordinate units—the Strategic Air Force, Third Tactical Air Force, Troop Carrier Command and Photographic Reconnaissance Force. Thus administrative control of American units also gravitated to Calcutta, since this remained the responsibility of Major-General G. E. Stratemeyer in his other capacity, that of Commanding-General of the U.S.A.A.F. in the India-Burma Sector of the China-Burma-India Theatre.

151. In December, 1943, three new R.A.F. Groups were formed—Nos. 229 (Transport) Group, 230 (Maintenance) and 231 (Bomber). Within the period covered by this despatch eleven R.A.F. and I.A.F. squadrons were added to my command either by formation or on transfer from another theatre. In addition, a second flight has been added to Nos. 681 and 684 P.R. Squadrons, whilst at the height of the defence of Imphal, No. 216 Transport Squadron was operating under my command on detachment from the Mediterranean. A further eight squadrons were held in back areas for re-equipment, and seven others changed their battle rôle. The conversion programme has been mainly bound up with the further infusion of Mosquitoes and Spitfires into the Command, while Thunderbolts are also arriving, and plans to re-equip the Hurricane squadrons with them have been formulated. The flow of aircraft in support of this modernization has been steady, though the R.A.F. in South-East Asia remains, as far as aircraft types are concerned, at least a year behind other theatres. Parallel to this expansion and re-equipment has been the rationalisation of the areas for which Groups in India are responsible to correspond with the boundaries of Army Commands.

152. The large programme of airfield development has been continued, with the ultimate purpose of providing accommodation for the approved number of squadrons included in my long-term target. Save for certain new sites in the forward areas and in Ceylon, all

development has been of existing airfields. Five airfields west of Calcutta have been developed for the U.S.A.A.F. as bases for V.H.B. aircraft. The need for pressing forward our offensive and air transport operations has been responsible for the expansion of a number of airfields in the Fourteenth Army area east of the Brahmaputra. In Ceylon, work has begun on the development of two new airfields at Kankasanturai and Negombo for heavy aircraft, while, for special operations, runway extension and strengthening of taxi-tracks has been undertaken at China Bay. Work is being started on a plan for reinforcement route development. In this field of development effective use has been made of bitumenised hessian—"bithess"—for both runways and apron hardstandings. The serviceability of this experimental material under monsoon conditions is being closely observed.

153. The procedure of implementing works projects was altered slightly in January, 1944, though the difficulties and delays remained as before. In the Fourteenth Army area, priorities awarded to the R.A.F. services have been liable to alteration by Army commanders without any reference being made to the Air Commander concerned, and without any appreciation of the effect of such alterations on the future of the air offensive. Labour and material has been diverted and moved without giving any notification to the R.A.F. authorities concerned; frequently the first intimation that they receive of such action is the complete cessation of work upon some R.A.F. project.

154. The expansion of establishments connected with the formation of new Headquarters units and the preparation of cadres for the reception of future reinforcements has aggravated the manpower shortage. The overall Command deficiency of effective strength against current establishments has throughout the period been approximately 12 per cent.; but although this deficiency may not appear unduly in excess of the global R.A.F. shortage, nevertheless there has been very severe lack of personnel in individual trades. Since reinforcements in the period reached this Command in only negligible quantity, various alternative sources of supply to meet the deficiencies have been tried. An extensive scheme has been inaugurated for remustering British other ranks from lower trade groups into the more severely deficient higher trade groups, but this, besides merely transferring the shortage from one trade to another, has also meant a loss to effective strength of the airmen undergoing conversion training. The recruitment of Indians both as officers and men to fill the vacancies has also offered some solution, but this has continued only at a diminished rate and it has been very difficult to find suitable officer candidates. Further, some months must elapse even after the period of formal training before such reinforcements can be counted on as fully effective. The question of substitution by women has also been given special attention. The W.A.A.F. mission from the Air Ministry led by Air Chief Commandant Dame Trefusis J. Forbes arrived in February. As a result of her investigations discussions have been begun with the Government of India. Meanwhile W.A.C. (I) recruiting for the Air Forces in India has been at a standstill. It may be added that with the