

aircrew, both R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F., in the Bay of Bengal.

203. The demand made upon the marine craft has on the whole been light, except in the Chittagong area where some lone sorties have been made off enemy-controlled coasts, and where an advanced rendezvous position off Katabdia Island was manned day and night for several months. This position has now been superseded by an advanced base established on Maiakhal Island.

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X.—BALLOONS

204. Balloons were flown subject to weather conditions at six sites : at Calcutta for the protection of the docks and Howrah Bridge ; at Jamshedpur, defending the vital iron and steel works ; at Colombo and Trincomalee to protect harbour installations and naval anchorages ; at Chittagong to protect dock facilities and the Janali Hat Bridge ; and, since 12th May, at Kharagpur airfield to protect the Very Heavy Bomber base established there.

205. There were no impacts with balloon cables by enemy aircraft, but two by Allied aircraft. During the enemy attack on Calcutta in December, many bombs were dropped in the area occupied by No. 978 Squadron, killing two and wounding ten other ranks. Some equipment was destroyed and buildings damaged, but the efficiency of the unit was unimpaired.

206. Indianisation of Balloon Squadrons has continued and by the beginning of May there were 1,246 I.A.F. other ranks compared with 971 B.O.R.s. There are now no surplus R.A.F. Balloon Operators in the Command, and all those rendered redundant by the Indianisation are being absorbed into other trades. When the process is carried further it should be possible to release another 400 to 450 British airmen.

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XI.—PHOTOGRAPHY

207. Photographic reconnaissance and survey commitments in India have produced a high quality of photographs, and the speed of reproduction has been good considering the many technical difficulties involved. The construction of mobile photographic processing vehicles is progressing, and a plan to construct two self-sufficient photographic units each comprising eleven vehicles will be begun in the near future.

208. Experiments in night photographic reconnaissance by Ceylon-based Liberators of 160 Squadron are proving satisfactory. Cameras and storage for 28 flashes have been installed in aircraft, together with the means of releasing the flashes at variable intervals to obtain line-overlaps. Other trials have proved the practicability of obtaining stereo pairs at night using two F.24 cameras installed in tandem. Plans to use carrier-borne aircraft for long-range reconnaissance have been implemented to the extent of installing and testing equipment in Hellcat aircraft. Experiments now wait upon the provision of American and British cameras.

209. R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. processing and interpretation in Eastern Air Command have been integrated at Photographic Reconnaissance

Force Headquarters at Bally Seaplane Base, Calcutta, where British and American staffs work together and have achieved a high degree of co-ordination.

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XII.—MEDICAL: WELFARE

210. The health of the Command as a whole shows only a slight improvement compared with the analogous period for the preceding year. The sickness rate for malaria and dysentery, although lower than that for 1943, has since February maintained the seasonal rise; that for venereal disease alone has steadily declined. The rate of invaliding in the Command has risen gradually. In 1943 the incidence was 1.44 per thousand, whilst in 1944 the rate has increased steadily from 2.00 in January to 2.50 per thousand in May ; these figures are doubtless connected with the increasing average length of the sojourn spent by personnel in the Command. Malaria has continued to be the most important single cause of lost service days through sickness, and measures have been actively taken in hand further to combat it. A Deputy P.M.O. (Malariology) has been appointed to re-organise the plan for malaria control and to give the necessary technical directions. Action has been initiated to raise, by propaganda and instruction, the standard of personal anti-malaria discipline, and plans have been prepared for forming anti-malaria units. A further step has been the experimental spraying from aircraft of areas where malaria-carrying mosquitoes are known to breed, and a flight of No. 134 Squadron has been detailed for this purpose.

211. It is hoped to increase the liaison with the Army and the U.S.A.A.F., which has hitherto not been as close as desirable. Arrangements are being made to increase hospital accommodation to meet the potential needs of the eighty-five squadrons accepted as the short-term target. Work is now proceeding on the conversion of the buildings of La Martiniere School, Calcutta, to serve as the 500-bedded General Hospital, the first R.A.F. Hospital in the Command, for whose opening sanction was given in April. When open, the existence of this hospital should not only obviate to a very large extent the present necessity for sending R.A.F. casualties in the forward areas to army hospitals, with all the consequent administrative difficulties, but should also put the four R.A.F. Mobile Field Hospitals in a much stronger position with regard to the supply of stores and equipment. They have been frequently overcrowded, and on occasion it has been found that essential equipment for which they had vainly been asking was nevertheless being made available to neighbouring Army hospitals.

212. At the beginning of the year a representative of the R.A.F. Physiological Laboratory, Farnborough, toured the Command and investigated flying conditions, including such matters as oxygen needs, flying clothes, flying rations and length of operational tour. A report on his visit has since been received and action is being taken where necessary.

WELFARE

213. The provision of amenities for airmen has continued to be a pressing and difficult problem. The greater proportion of R.A.F.