

The initial scheme provided for the formation of temporary maintenance depôts near the ports of Brest and Nantes, but it was soon evident that, with so long a line of communication, an advanced base was required.

The use of the port of Havre had at first been considered undesirable owing to certain geographical and technical difficulties in the air defence of the docks. These were, however, overcome in mid-November, and an Advanced Base area is now being established near this port with the co-operation of the French authorities, while Field Supply Depôts are being set up further forward. By mid-December, the staff of the Movement Control were working some ninety stations, while fourteen ports were in use for landing personnel, animals and stores. Through these ports, a quarter of a million men, forty-five thousand mechanical vehicles and a monthly tonnage varying from sixty to one hundred thousand tons of stores of all kinds were imported and distributed to their various areas and reserve depôts.

Works projects of great magnitude have been in progress from the outset, and the problems of accommodation have been many and complex. An extensive programme of building and hutting for depôts, hospitals and reinforcement camps was put in hand, together with installations for electric light and power, the bulk storage of petrol and so on. A vast amount of minor work in connection with accommodation has been carried out by the Royal Engineers.

Railway construction at depôts and aerodromes has been undertaken by the Transportation Services under very adverse weather conditions.

The complicated nature of modern military equipment has added greatly to the work of the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, as regards both storeholding and repair. Great difficulty has been experienced in finding suitable accommodation for depôts and workshops at the bases, more especially since the whole of the resources of France are engaged at high pressure on her own war industries. New installations have therefore been planned and are now under construction.

The maintenance of mechanical vehicles has received constant attention and the number of road accidents, and consequently of repairs, has been greatly reduced through measures taken by the Provost Service to enforce road discipline.

The labour problem bids fair to become one of great magnitude, and its solution may be difficult. As no adequate labour force was available on mobilisation, the gap was filled by the temporary use of cavalry and infantry reservists. Later, the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps absorbed the various labour units already in France. This Corps has carried out cheerfully and efficiently the important, but often unexciting tasks allotted to its units.

I am grateful to the Government of India for the high standard of the animal transport units sent to France, which have proved their usefulness on many occasions.

Major General P. de Fonblanque, General Officer Commanding, Lines of Communication Area, has under his command the greatest part of the undertakings described above. They now cover almost one third of France, stretching from Dunkirk to Brest and from Cherbourg to Marseilles.

The Welfare of the Force

23. The health of the Force has been good and the number of troops in the care of medical units has never exceeded 2·8 per cent. of the strength of the Force, despite the unusually severe weather conditions in December and January.

I wish to express my appreciation of the work of the Royal Army Medical Corps under my Director of Medical Services, Major General J. W. L. Scott.

The arrangements for leave came into force on 18th December. The numbers permitted to be absent on leave at any one time are based on the percentage of strength which can be spared from the Force. By the end of January ten days' leave home had been granted to some sixty thousand of all ranks and compassionate leave had also been granted in deserving cases.

The question of leave was worked out in great detail by the Adjutant General, Lieutenant General Sir Douglas Brownrigg, and the members of his staff.

The Expeditionary Force Institutes have now established some ninety institutes open on the Lines of Communication and bulk stores have been established in forward areas to enable units to replenish their own canteens. The same organisation is providing concert parties and mobile cinemas, and a proportion of the troops are able to visit each week one of the entertainments provided by the Entertainments National Services Association.

I am likewise grateful to those organisations which have co-operated so whole-heartedly with the Royal Army Chaplains Department in attending to the welfare of the troops.

Amongst these are the Catholic Women's Guild, The Army Scripture Readers' Association, The Church Army, The Church of Scotland, Toc H, The Salvation Army, The Young Men's Christian Association, and the Young Women's Christian Association.

The despatch and delivery of mails takes place with regularity, and more than nine thousand bags of mail have been handled in one day by the Postal Service. The necessity for censorship is fully realized, but there has been no delay in the time taken in the transit of mail for an ever increasing force.

The great distances between forward troops and the base made it necessary to depart from the old established procedure whereby the 2nd Echelon of the Adjutant General's Branch has always been located in the theatre of war. This office is now established in Margate, and the move has been fully justified by the increased speed with which matters are now handled.

Training and Organisation.

24. The absence of fighting has afforded opportunities to continue the training of the Force. Weapon training has been possible for almost every unit, and thanks to the co-operation of the French Army, artillery practice camps have been held and other training facilities provided. Exercises with troops involving road movement on a large scale have been held and much progress has been made in the technique of co-operation with the Royal Air Force.

About eight hundred and fifty officers and non-commissioned officers have been sent home