

In Palestine and Syria operational command was assigned in the same way to the Headquarters of the Ninth Army, commanded by General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, and Palestine and Transjordan became a Base and Line of Communication Area.

Appointment of Lieutenant General Administration.

37. The great increase in the strength of the Middle East Forces since the collapse of France produced a corresponding increase in the volume of routine administrative work, while the promise of further growth of the forces and the prospect of large-scale operations on two fronts presented a large number of problems in administrative planning.

These matters had hitherto been dealt with by my Deputy Quartermaster General, Major General B. O. Hutchison and by my Deputy Adjutant General, Major General N. W. Napier Clavering. I wish to pay the highest tribute to the industry, efficiency and foresight with which they carried out their work, of which the vast amount of reorganisation and development carried out during the period covered by this Despatch and before is the best testimony.

I realised that, well served as they were, the problems confronting them were already too multitudinous, and that in due course the growing number of day-to-day questions must inevitably usurp most of their time. I therefore decided to ask the Chief of the Imperial General Staff to sanction the appointment of a principal administrative staff officer, who should relieve them of part of their burden, and whose functions should include co-ordinating the work of the Quartermaster General's and the Adjutant General's Departments and directing administrative planning.

On the 18th October Lieutenant-General T. S. Riddell Webster assumed the appointment of Lieutenant-General Administration as my principal administrative staff officer.

Formation of Union Defence Force Administrative Headquarters.

38. When South African troops first came to Egypt it was intended that they should be treated in the same way as British troops, matters peculiar to South Africa being dealt with by staff officers attached to my General Headquarters and provided with the necessary clerical staff. The differences between South African and British administration, however, were pronounced; and many of the problems arising had a domestic political bearing. In order to overcome these and other lesser difficulties Field Marshal Smuts decided to form a separate administrative headquarters. Accordingly on the 25th September Major-General F. A. Theron was appointed General Officer Administration, Union Defence Force, Middle East, with executive powers.

MANPOWER.

39. Of all the administrative problems of the Middle East the shortage of manpower was the most urgent. It arose in a particularly acute form in the British and South African elements of the force.

British.

40. The supply of British personnel was necessarily limited by the amount of shipping available and the great distance they must travel to reach the Middle East. In order to save

British manpower every effort has been made to provide substitutes. It is my policy to dilute British formations with Indian units and an exchange of battalions between Iraq and the Middle East has already taken place.

Men from Cyprus, India, Malta, Mauritius, Palestine, the Sudan, East Africa, and the South African Protectorate have entered the Services and are doing valuable work.

These services have also been tapped for the formation of Pioneer Corps units. By the end of October there were 69 such units in the Middle East.

To supplement uniformed labour, civilian labour has been used to the greatest extent practicable. The number employed has risen from 101,000 in July to 144,000 at the beginning of October. Unfortunately local labour was not altogether satisfactory when bombing first occurred. But confidence gradually returned with experience of the slight casualties inflicted when proper precautions are taken. Labourers enlisted from the Sudan and elsewhere showed themselves better able to stand up to bombing.

I have also examined the practicability of using women in the place of men for non-combatant duties. Appreciable numbers of European women are to be found chiefly in South Africa and Palestine. The Union has already sent 250 women to the Middle East and all are engaged in useful work in Egypt and the Sudan. The Government of Palestine and the War Office have agreed in principle to units of the Auxiliary Territorial Service being raised in Palestine.

South African.

41. The South African contingent felt the manpower problem even more acutely, and the Government of the Union decided to employ in all units as many Non-Europeans as possible for non-combatant work in order to release Europeans for combatant service. This is to be carried out on a very comprehensive scale, the new war establishment of a South African Division being 14,900 Europeans and 10,400 Non-Europeans.

DEVELOPMENT OF BASES AND COMMUNICATIONS.

42. The growth of the Middle East Forces was naturally reflected in the tonnage to be handled at ports. To deal with the increased volume of traffic and to provide alternative approaches to the Base, as a precaution against enemy action, extensive Transportation and Works developments have been undertaken.

Much constructional work has been undertaken to meet both future operational requirements and the general needs of the growing force. A comprehensive programme for the expansion of base installations is being carried out. Many improvements to communications and harbours have been put in hand, and much new accommodation is being completed.

Transportation.

43. The Movements Branch of the Staff and Transportation Services have been brought under one head in the person of my Deputy Quartermaster General, Movement and Transportation, Brigadier R. K. Hewer, and the new organisation is working well.

Seventy-five miles of the extension to the Western Desert Railway have been completed and the line between Suez and Ismailia has been doubled during the period under review. The Transportation Service has also been engaged