

in Middle East Base during the period from February to May. Of these 1,688 were flown direct to the base. The successful evacuation of casualties by air was due to excellent co-operation between the medical services and the Royal Air Force, and to the pilots of the seven ambulance aircraft, who flew their machines in all weathers and operated from the most forward landing grounds; the chief difficulty was the shortage of suitable aircraft.

42. That Eighth Army was successfully maintained over a line of communication stretching some 1,000 miles by sea from Middle East Base and a further 400 miles forward of the advanced base at Tripoli, is in itself proof of the success of the planning, organisation and co-ordination which went into the task.

43. The result, however, was not achieved without severe strain. The demands made on engineering, signalling and movement services by the long line of communications were very heavy, and the drain on Middle East stocks was also a serious factor, aggravated as it was by the large quantities locked up in transit and in the advanced bases. For example, the demands rose at times to as much as 900 tons of supplies a day, and to meet this demand reserve stocks had to be back-loaded from Syria and the Sudan. Similar steps had to be taken to meet the demands for anti-aircraft ammunition, of which supplies had to be called in from outlying areas and obtained from Persia and Iraq Command to meet Eighth Army's requirements. Reinforcements, too, had at times to be diverted from other tasks, and a draft of 1,500 which had been allotted a special role in preparation for the invasion of Sicily was sent up to Eighth Army at the end of March. An indication of the difficulties involved can be gathered from the fact that, although towards the close of the campaign great care was taken to prevent too much ammunition being sent forward, yet when the campaign ended there were 35,000 tons of ammunition in, or en route to, the forward areas.

44. When Eighth Army began to move forward, the system of normal deliveries, demanded well in advance by Headquarters Tripolitania Base and Lines of Communication, had to be supplemented on occasions to meet urgent demands for operational requirements, particularly for specialised stores such as signals, medical and survey equipment.

45. Throughout the Tunisian campaign all of these problems were further complicated by the fact that I had been given the task of training and mounting the Eastern Task Force for the invasion of Sicily; planning and training for this task were taking place from February onwards.

Cyrenaica.

46. As the lines of communication extended, the army had to be relieved, as much as possible, of responsibility for rear administration so that it could concentrate entirely on the maintenance of actual operations. This was successfully done by the establishment of administrative headquarters, under Middle East Command, to control the sectors of the lines of communication.

47. The organisation and administration of a large portion of the lines of communication was carried out by Headquarters Cyrenaica District, which had been formed in the Delta

under the command of Major-General A. L. Collier, and had moved up to take over Benghazi from the Eighth Army on 15th February, 1943, by which date maintenance of Eighth Army through Tripoli was assured. Cyrenaica District assumed direct responsibility, under General Headquarters Middle East, for the whole of Cyrenaica. In March, Headquarters Cyrenaica District, moved from Benghazi to Barce, and on 15th April the southern boundary of the District was extended to include Kufra, which had formerly been under Headquarters, Sudan.

48. Within the District the first task was to assist the forwarding of supplies to Tripoli and Eighth Army. In order to shorten the shipping run, packed petrol, oil and lubricants were sent up by rail to Tobruk and thence by sea to Benghazi and Tripoli. Pumping sets, floating pipelines, and bulk petrol storage to a capacity of over 6,000 tons were kept in repair at Tobruk, and over 11,000 tons storage capacity was maintained at Benghazi. A tin factory was also put into operation at Benghazi by 11th March, whilst extra sidings were built to the railways and docks at both of these ports.

49. Traffic on the Western Desert Railway declined, with the development of Tripoli Port, from 65,000 tons in January to 22,000 tons in March, but the line still had to be maintained and worked. At the same time, not only had the road itself to be maintained, but petrol points and staging areas for road convoys had also to be organised.

50. In addition to forwarding supplies to Tripoli, Cyrenaica District had to re-organise and administer its own territory when the army had passed westwards. Much valuable salvage work was achieved, with special emphasis on petrol containers (of which almost a million and a half were salvaged from the District by the end of the year), whilst stores left behind as the army advanced were also put into circulation again. There were, for example, 11,000 tons of ammunition left in Benghazi when maintenance of Eighth Army through that port ceased.

51. These tasks entailed heavy demands for both skilled and unskilled labour, some of which was provided by Middle East Command, some from civilian sources. A signals headquarters and three companies were required there, with a further headquarters and three companies for Air Formation Signals. This undertaking was later reduced as these units had to be made available elsewhere, and much of the responsibility for maintaining signal communications was taken over by a South African unit, the Union Defence Force Lines of Communication Signals.

52. By the end of the campaign there were sixty-eight pioneer companies stretched from the Egyptian frontier to Eighth Army area; the companies came from India, the High Commission Territories, East Africa, Mauritius and the Seychelles, and were mainly employed as shore labour in the ports, in the advanced depots, and on airfield and road construction. In addition, there were some 10,000 civilians employed forward of the Egyptian frontier. As far as Cyrenaica District was concerned, the extent of the problem may be gauged from the