

all items; this was particularly necessary since Indian troops were involved, and their maintenance demanded their own special supplies.

169. The principal difficulty has arisen with the supply of meat, both frozen and fresh. Owing to the shortage of refrigerator coasters it became necessary to turn Malta into a "feeder" at which ocean-going refrigerator vessels discharged, the meat being subsequently discharged by coasters at Italian ports; fresh meat (largely for the use of Indian troops) was ultimately provided by shipping live sheep from the Middle East.

170. In answer to periodic calls for assistance, Middle East has subsequently had to ship various stores and equipment to Italy. Replacement vehicles and ammunition have been in demand, and vehicles have also been shipped to Italy from Tripoli instead of driving them back to Egypt.

171. To the end of my period in command, direct supply from the United Kingdom and the United States to the advanced Ordnance depots in Italy had not yet become effective, and the Ordnance depots in the Delta were being used as the bulk breaking point for all Eastern Group stores, as well as for certain Western Group stores, for the Central Mediterranean Force as well as for Middle East Forces. In September the Provision Branches of Central Mediterranean Force, British North African Force and Middle East Forces were amalgamated under the title of Deputy Director of Ordnance Services (Provisions), Mediterranean, and the organisation was based on Cairo. Consequently the number of troops for whom provision had to be made rose from 730,000 in January, 1943, to 1,750,000 in September and the ensuing months.

172. The magnitude of the part played by Middle East Base during this period is shown by the fact that from August to December 284,000 tons of stores and 23,000 vehicles were loaded for shipment to Italy.

173. The provision of medical facilities and the evacuation of casualties for the forces in Italy placed a further commitment on Middle East. Casualties from Sicily had been less than was anticipated, and the arrangements had worked smoothly. Casualties from Italy continued to be received in Middle East, by sea or air, up to the end of October, and although at one time the shortage of hospital ships for further transportation to the United Kingdom caused some anxiety and a danger of accumulation, the facilities proved adequate. Between 10th July and 7th January, forty-four hospitals and expansions amounting to 13,800 British, Dominion, Indian and African beds and 5,500 beds for convalescents were despatched from the Middle East to Italy.

174. Although the 10th Corps was the only formation which Middle East contributed to the assault on Italy, the subsequent build-up drew heavily on my reserves of manpower (and precluded the undertaking of any other enterprise demanding the use of a major formation). Allied Force Headquarters wished the build-up to take place as quickly as possible; in this the limiting factor was not the availability of formations but the intake capacity in Italy. A programme was laid down for the Middle East which envisaged the despatch of one division,

with corps and ancillary troops and vehicles, each month. In pursuance of this programme, the 8th Indian Division was despatched from Haifa and Beirut in September, the 2nd New Zealand Division was despatched from Suez and Alexandria during October, the 4th Indian Division from Alexandria during December, and the 3rd Carpathian Division (Polish) during January. Three medium regiments, Royal Artillery, were also equipped and despatched, and arrangements were also made for the 5th Polish Division and Headquarters and Corps Troops of the 2nd Polish Corps to be despatched. All of these formations had to be trained, re-equipped and shipped by Middle East.

175. Meanwhile, the 1st British Armoured Division, the 2nd Fighting French Armoured Division and the 1st Fighting French Infantry Division had been despatched from Middle East to Allied Force Headquarters, the total of pioneer companies provided by Middle East for Sicily and Italy had been brought up to fifty, and the 8th Armoured Brigade and a number of administrative units had been shipped to the United Kingdom.

176. In addition to mounting build-up divisions for Italy, Middle East Command also had to provide reinforcements, particularly for Indian, African and Local Colonial troops (for which Allied Force Headquarters had no facilities). In all, from 1st September to 8th January, Middle East despatched over 11,000 reinforcements to Italy; of these 5,000 were British, almost 3,000 Indian and 3,600 New Zealanders. Reinforcements and new formations between them took a total of 110,000 men from Middle East to Italy and Sicily during the months from September to December, a monthly average of 30,000.

177. This very heavy drain in men and administrative effort for Italy, even after Eighth Army had nominally passed out of my sphere, meant that any other operation which I might contemplate would have to be largely of a diversionary nature and could be undertaken only at the risk of unduly weakening troops required for internal security and garrison duties within the Command. This proved to be the limiting factor in the operations in the Aegean, which the overthrow of the Italian Government precipitated.

#### *Operations in the Aegean.*

178. Plans for the seizure of small islands in the Aegean as bases for raiding operations against the enemy's lines of communication had been under consideration for some time before I took over command in the Middle East, and in February, 1943, the Joint Planning Staff began seriously to consider the possibilities of a major assault on the Dodecanese (which were Italian possessions), with Rhodes and Scarpanto, the two most strategically placed islands, as the principal objectives. Planning for such operations was complicated by the conflicting ambitions of the Greeks and the Turks for the ultimate possession of the islands and, after considering all the possibilities, it was decided that the actual operations should be carried out by British forces only, and that the future of the Dodecanese should not yet be discussed with either of the interested parties.

179. Operations in Tunisia, however, were our first commitment at this time. When the