

commitment, but it was successfully accomplished largely because most of the force had been withdrawn to the Delta for the purpose. Although the undertaking involved great quantities of equipment and large formations, most of the difficulties came from changes in the operational plan and from the wide area from which the assault was mounted.

132. Having launched Eastern Task Force, Middle East Command then had to implement its maintenance plans. It had been decided as a general principle that the commands in which formations were mounted would be responsible for the maintenance of these formations for the first four convoys, that is to say, convoys arriving in the first four weeks after the landing. Then Middle East would be responsible for all British forces in Sicily for the first seven weeks. After that date, maintenance of the forces in Sicily, other than United States Army troops, was to be based on the principle that such items as were considered to be Eastern Group Supply (of Eastern origin) were to be shipped from Middle East and items of Western Group Supply from the United Kingdom or United States.

133. This system of maintenance was carried out as planned. Middle East received detailed loading programmes from Eighth Army for the first four convoys. Then, until Allied Force Headquarters assumed administrative control, Middle East received demands direct from Eighth Army, provided Eastern Group supplies and certain items of Western Group Supply, and laid off to the War Office the remaining demands, mainly for Western Group supplies, which it had been agreed would be shipped from the West.

134. From 12th August, 15 Army Group, under Allied Force Headquarters, took over both operational and administrative control in Sicily and so Allied Force Headquarters assumed administrative control of all forces in Sicily; thereafter the total demands ceased to be placed direct on Middle East, who now received from Allied Force Headquarters demands for Eastern Group supplies and from the War Office instructions to provide those items of Western Group supply which could not be provided from the United Kingdom or from the United States. In addition, demands for urgent requirements of controlled stores were made direct on Middle East by Allied Force Headquarters.

135. In all, from June to October a total of 230,000 tons and 19,500 vehicles were loaded for despatch to Sicily. Stocks of ammunition had been built up throughout the early part of 1943 and, therefore, little difficulty was experienced in providing the 30,000 tons exported for this operation; a certain amount of ammunition was earmarked in Tripoli for calling forward if necessary.

136. The provision of supplies presented no serious problems. Forty-eight hour mess-tin rations, provided as landing rations, were loaded in bulk and issued to each man prior to disembarkation. The mess-tin and composite rations proved very successful for an operation of this nature. The force was maintained on composite rations for the first three weeks, after which the change-over to Middle East Field Service hard-scale ration was made possible by the gradual building up of rations

in the first three convoys. By the end of six weeks, stock on the ground represented seven days for 235,000 men, whilst reserves had been established at Malta and Tripoli.

137. Planning for the requirements of petrol and oil was based to a great extent on previous operational consumption in the desert and proved to be an over-estimate, as the line of communication was much shorter and the losses en route and on loading were much less than had been anticipated. A reserve dump of 6,000 tons was built up at Tripoli; this was not required and was eventually used for normal maintenance. In addition, Middle East provided facilities for bulk oil supply for the Royal Navy at Benghazi and at Tripoli.

138. Ordnance stores, of which some 90,000 items were issued from 4 and 5 Base Ordnance Depots, needed special precautions for packing and shipping; special packing cases were designed and manufactured in the Middle East, limited in weight to one-man lifts. Engineer base depots also were heavily employed in packing and shipping stores for the operation. In all, 20,000 tons of engineer stores and about 500 items of heavy plant were shipped to Sicily from Middle East stocks.

139. These maintenance tasks were effectively accomplished, both during the assault, the subsequent period of maintenance through beachheads, and later when the ports of Augusta and Syracuse were in operation. The success was due to two main factors—our low losses at sea (thanks to the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force) and the care and forethought which had been put into the preparations during the previous five months.

140. In addition to maintaining its quota of the Eastern Task Force with supplies and equipment, Middle East had to provide reinforcements, to handle rear signals and postal traffic and to receive casualties.

141. Pools of reinforcements were, therefore, built up in the Delta, Tripoli and the Sousse and Sfax areas from Middle East resources, in addition to personnel provided by British North African Force. No. 1 Advanced Second Echelon was established at Malta to serve both Middle East Forces and British North African Force. Advanced Second Echelon reported battle casualties direct to the United Kingdom and maintained reinforcement officers at Tripoli, Sousse and Philippeville. In close contact with these reinforcement officers and with Advanced Second Echelon, Libya, it was responsible for the supply of reinforcements to Sicily. It also served as a clearing-house for the supply of the necessary information to Second Echelon, Middle East Forces, and Second Echelon, British North African Force.

142. Middle East also supplied a base headquarters for Sicily. This was supplied from Tripolitania Base and Lines of Communication Headquarters, which went to Sicily almost *en bloc*, the Base Headquarters' duties in Tripolitania being taken over by Headquarters, Tripolitania District, from 16th July.

143. Whilst these arrangements were made for reinforcements, the provision of cashier and postal services caused some difficulty. In addition to providing and equipping cashiers to proceed with the force, arrangements had to be