

*Infantry Formations.*

50. Similar improvements took place in the condition of other formations. The intake of unarmoured vehicles was sufficient to allow me to replace the transport of the 1st South African Division and to complete that of the 4th Indian Division which had seen much hard service in East Africa and was unsuited to desert warfare. It was also possible to fulfil the requirements of the New Zealand Division, whose transport had been lost in Greece. The equipping of the 1st South African Division was particularly remarkable as the whole process of issuing and delivering 1,300 vehicles from the base to the desert occupied only six days. The 7th Armoured Division, the 1st Army Tank Brigade, and the 22nd Armoured Brigade were also brought up to full establishment in these vehicles during the period. In addition the requirements of a number of divisional and non-divisional troops have been completed while the losses in Greece have been largely replaced.

Table B of Appendix "C" shows the holdings of formations in unarmoured vehicles and equipment at the beginning and end of the period.

*Royal Artillery—Field Branch.*

51. There was a great improvement in the general state of equipment of the Royal Artillery Field Branch regiments as is shown in Table C of Appendix "C".

In the case of Field Regiments, however, a shortage of personnel precluded our taking full advantage of all the equipment available.

In spite of the very considerable increase in the number of 2-pounder equipments available, the situation was still unsatisfactory in two respects. There were insufficient guns to bring all regiments up to the full establishment of 48 guns; and in order to equip four of them on the new 64-gun basis, it was necessary to give them 16 eighteen-pounder guns apiece. However, the added weight of these guns may well prove to be an advantage.

More serious was the fact that three Infantry Divisions were without anti-tank regiments. As this weakness could not be tolerated in a terrain offering few natural anti-tank obstacles, it was necessary to convert the 149th Field and the 73rd Medium Regiments into anti-tank artillery, thereby setting highly trained personnel to a less skilled task.

*Royal Artillery—Anti-Aircraft and Coast Artillery Branch.*

52. Arrivals of Anti-Aircraft artillery increased the heavy anti-aircraft fire power by 40 per cent. and the light anti-aircraft by 75 per cent. (Table D of Appendix "C".) 106 captured anti-aircraft guns were retained in use in addition. Coast batteries provided for the defence of additional ports were mainly equipped with captured guns and searchlights.

The release of additional light anti-aircraft equipment and the arrival of fresh units made it possible to put into practice plans for providing divisional light anti-aircraft regiments. This involved re-organising one Australian and two South African regiments as divisional light anti-aircraft regiments on British war establishments. Five divisional light anti-aircraft regiments, all on a 36-gun basis, were provided for the Eighth Army, and the equipping of two Australian divisional light anti-aircraft regiments for the 1st Australian Corps was started.

*Passive Air Defence.*

53. Special attention has been paid to improving the Passive Air Defence organisation, which now embraces all military fire fighting.

*Royal Engineers.*

54. Unit equipment came forward fairly well and most units are now up to scale in the more important items, though there is still a shortage of certain essentials, and very few reserves. American equipment began to arrive, notably mobile compressor units and bridging equipment with special carrying vehicles.

A considerable number of new units were sent out from the United Kingdom. Several South African Engineer units also arrived from East Africa and the Union, forming a very valuable addition to our Engineer resources. There is still a chronic shortage of electrical and mechanical equipment operating units.

*Royal Corps of Signals.*

55. Considerable supplies of signal stores were received and the situation as regards line equipment for forward areas is now satisfactory. Although now more plentiful than they used to be, supplies of permanent line equipment, telephones and switchboards for lines of communications and back areas are still insufficient to provide a satisfactory reserve. Wireless equipment is still short, but at the end of June it was shorter. The services of the R.A.O.C. workshops and two mobile W/T repair sections have been particularly valuable in reconditioning existing wireless equipment.

Deficiencies in signal units have been very serious. In spite of the arrival of two corps signal units, we are still deficient of six complete non-divisional units and fifty-seven miscellaneous sections required to complete existing non-divisional units—a total shortage of 6000 personnel.

*Royal Army Service Corps.*

56. Apart from the lack of units the Royal Army Service Corps experienced a 15 per cent. shortage of personnel for existing units.

The number of vehicles held by the Corps steadily increased, reaching approximately 86 per cent. of authorised strength by the end of October. But it has not yet been possible to form a reserve of vehicles.

Improvements in bulk storage and distribution of motor spirit resulted in a saving in cost of tins of over £12,500 per month, and great economy in material, labour and transport. Further improvements now in hand should greatly increase these savings.

*Medical Services.*

57. Like the other services, the Medical Service suffered from shortages in units, stores and transport. Although the Royal Army Medical Corps had been very nearly completely equipped by the end of October transport resources were still inadequate, as the authorised scale of transport is scarcely sufficient to meet the highly mobile conditions obtaining in the Middle East. Practical experience of mobile warfare in Syria and the Western Desert, where the absence of roads and railways necessitates long evacuation by ambulance cars, had shown the need for increasing the proportion of motor ambulance convoys to fighting troops. Motor ambulances arrived slowly, and it is only recently that deliveries began to be adequate.