

CAMOUFLAGE AND TACTICAL DECEPTION.

64. The urgent need for general training in the theory, practice and discipline of camouflage has been met by creating small camouflage training units on the scale of one to each division and higher formation. In addition, the formation of a camouflage training and development centre, Royal Engineers, has been authorised.

The 85th Camouflage Company, South African Engineering Corps, joined the Middle East Forces on 22nd August. It was the first and only complete camouflage and deception works unit in the British and Dominion Forces in the Middle East. It is well equipped. It provides mobile detachments for work in forward areas, and a factory and experimental section capable of limited production of deception equipment and of new devices.

The principal technical developments during the period under review have been improved types of lorry hoods for use on tanks, mobile dummy tanks mounted on lorry chassis, collapsible static dummy tanks of improved design, and collapsible dummy guns.

Under the technical direction of the camouflage staffs, defence lines on all commands have been extensively camouflaged. Much work has been done on installations of all kinds.

Progress has been made with organised concealment and display in battle. Operations at Tobruk provided the opportunity for carrying out local schemes of deception both in defence and attack, schemes of misdirection, decoy and ambush being employed with promising results.

Two battalions of dummy tanks using static dummies and two battalions using mobile dummies have been provided.

HEALTH.

65. The general health of the troops has been very good with comparatively low percentage of cases of dysentery and a very low percentage of cases in the typhoid group. The low incidence of Malaria has, in the circumstances, been satisfactory.

WELFARE AND EDUCATION.

66. Considerable progress has been made in catering for the welfare of the troops but the demand for amenities of all kinds continually outstrips the supply. To meet the growing demand for welfare and educational facilities throughout the Army it has become necessary to provide additional Welfare and Education Officers.

PRISONERS OF WAR.

67. The evacuation of prisoners of war from Egypt and the Sudan has proceeded reasonably satisfactorily, the number of Italian and German prisoners of war in Egypt having been reduced from 58,000 to 27,000 and those in the Sudan from 23,000 to 9,000.

Many schemes for employing prisoners of war have been considered and tried, but the results have on the whole fallen short of expectations. This has been due to several causes, chief among them being the difficulty of finding the number of guards needed and the restrictions imposed by the Geneva Convention.

CO-OPERATION OF OTHER SERVICES.

68. I have referred to our great indebtedness to the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force

for enabling us to maintain and relieve Tobruk. This was but a small part of their contribution to the preparations of the Army. Both Services were ceaselessly engaged in preventing the enemy from reinforcing and supplying his forces. It was largely due to the conspicuous success which attended their efforts that the enemy was compelled to allow us the respite we so sorely needed. Moreover it is due to their tireless devotion in organising and protecting convoys that we received the reinforcements and vast quantities of stores which enabled us to reorganise and re-equip the armies of the Middle East. To the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force and to Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham and Air Marshal A. W. Tedder in particular we owe a deep debt of gratitude.

APPRECIATION OF SERVICES.

69. It must be clear that the manifold activities related in this Despatch were not carried on without the loyal co-operation of every Branch of my own Staff and of Commanders and Staffs of subordinate Headquarters.

I wish to place on record my appreciation of the fighting spirit of all combatant units in the Middle East Forces and of the conscientious and efficient work of all ranks employed in base areas, without whose loyal efforts the usefulness of the battle formations would have been impaired.

APPENDIX "A" (see para. 24).

SUBJECT: Policy covering the defence of the Western Desert.

G.H.Q., M.E.F.

21 July, 1941.

Lieut.-General Sir Noel Beresford Peirse,
K.B.E., D.S.O., Commanding W.D.F.

1. Intelligence appreciations indicate that the enemy will not be in a position before September 1941 to launch an attack with the Delta as his first main objective. An enemy advance, before that date, with a series of limited objectives is, however, possible.

2. A comparison of relative strengths shows that, while at present the enemy can put into the field an appreciably superior force of armoured fighting vehicles, this situation should have been considerably alleviated early in September.

3. In view of these factors, the Commander-in-Chief has decided that in the event of an enemy advance, his armoured forces will be brought to battle in the area South of Matruh.

4. In order to concentrate the maximum armoured forces for the main battle South of Matruh, no serviceable cruiser or "I" tanks should be located prior to the battle in the "boxes" at Matruh or Bagush. This ruling will be reviewed at a later date, when the total number of tanks available has increased.

5. In order that as much assistance as possible may be rendered by other formations to 7 Armoured Division during this tank battle, you are authorised to proceed with the development of a position to the West and South of Matruh, for occupation by not more than two Infantry Brigades.