

118. Small veterinary detachments were attached to both the 13th and 30th Corps to train units in animal management, first aid and the use of improvised pack transport, so that the best use might be made of civilian and captured animals acquired during the operation.

119. The assault on Sicily, when it took place, inevitably produced a crop of new lessons, and caused some of the doctrines taught during this period of intensive training to be revised. But the training establishments had none the less proved invaluable in teaching many essentials and in getting formations physically fit for their task.

120. As the climax of these preparations, Middle East Command was responsible for embarking, in addition to army, corps and line of communication troops, that part of the 13th Corps which consisted of the 5th and 50th Divisions and the 4th Armoured Brigade, and the 231st Infantry Brigade, which was in the 30th Corps. This commitment brought to the proof all the planning and training, and stretched the movement facilities to the maximum.

121. Sixty M.T./Stores ships, tactically stowed, and twenty-five troopships, in addition to a large number of landing craft, were required for the first two convoys. The outline plan was that M.T./Stores ships were to begin loading at Beirut, Haifa and Alexandria early in June. Personnel ships were to load at Suez at the beginning of July. Half of the L.S.Ts. (tank-landing ships, with a capacity of fifty vehicles, or twenty-two tanks and twenty vehicles) were to load half at Suez and half at Alexandria. L.C.Ts. (tank-landing craft, with a capacity of ten vehicles or six tanks) were to load at Benghazi. The M.T./Stores convoys were planned to arrive as follows: the assault convoy on 10th July, first follow-up convoy on 13th July, and second follow-up convoy on 24th July. Thereafter reinforcements and maintenance convoys would be sailed every fourteen days until 22nd August, when they would be sailed every ten days.

122. Excluding personnel ships, sixty British and Allied and thirty United States vessels were allocated to form the first three convoys. The necessary work of fitting these vessels was begun at Ismailia, Port Said and Port Sudan early in April.

123. To avoid heavy calls on transport, the stores for the first convoys were moved by the middle of May to depots adjacent to the ports, ready to be called forward for loading. Loading in accordance with pre-stowage plans began early in June and, apart from initial difficulties with vehicle weights and measurements, proceeded very well.

124. During this period the strain was increased by the fact that vehicles and signal equipment, once waterproofed, could not be used for ordinary purposes, and a duplicate service had to be provided. This was particularly heavy on signals, who were also carrying a heavy weight of traffic over the long line of communication to Tripoli.

125. Another problem which had to be overcome was that of checking, changing and charging vehicles' batteries to ensure that they would hold their charge for the five to seven weeks during which they might have to stand in ships' holds. This was done by special arrangements, including the provision of

batteries at the ports of embarkation and to accompany landing craft and vehicles during transit.

126. When loading started it was found that many vehicles were mechanically unfit, and arrangements were made to inspect all vehicles before they were called forward. Light repairs were effected on the spot and special arrangements were made in the nearest base workshops to carry out heavier repairs. Out of 3,200 vehicles inspected at Alexandria, 932 required repair and 138 were condemned as unfit for operational use.

127. Embarkation of all personnel in M.T./Stores ships took place at Beirut, Haifa and Alexandria and was completed by 5th July. While the M.T./Stores ships for the 5th and 50th Divisions and the 231st Brigade were being loaded at Beirut, Haifa and Alexandria, other formations were being moved to Malta in readiness for the assault or follow-up. The assault troops of the 51st Division were moved in landing craft from Sousse and Sfax, and Main Army Headquarters and the 30th Corps Headquarters with air formations, also in landing craft, from Tripoli to Malta. The ferrying of these troops with their vehicles, equipment and maintenance stores, involved the most careful planning in conjunction with the Royal Navy for the use of the landing craft available. Before the attack was launched the Tripoli-Malta ferry had convoyed 7,000 personnel and 1,400 vehicles. In all some 32,000 personnel and 6,000 vehicles, as well as guns and tanks, were embarked at Tripoli for Sicily. Other headquarters and units with equipment, stores and vehicles were moved from Egypt to Malta in personnel and M.T./Stores ships. From 3rd to 10th June, 7,000 personnel and 600 vehicles were despatched from Alexandria to Malta.

128. Embarkation of the assault personnel on the assault-day convoy into fifteen personnel ships and of the follow-up personnel on the third-day convoy into twelve personnel ships took place at Suez on 29th-30th June and 1st July. Although in these three days approximately 46,500 personnel were embarked the operation was carried through smoothly.

129. The programme for loading the vehicles of the assault convoy was also successfully carried out. Since the date of the arrival of the L.C.Ts. through the Mediterranean left little margin for loading in Egypt, Benghazi was to be used as the port of embarkation. Assault personnel and vehicles of four brigades (the 15th, 17th, 151st and 231st Brigades) were therefore moved by rail and road from the Delta to Benghazi, where they embarked between 24th June and 5th July; this involved a total of 2,700 personnel and 850 vehicles.

130. On 16th June the loading of 8 L.S.Ts. with vehicles and escorts only was begun at Suez. The L.S.Ts. then sailed to Alexandria, where they embarked the remaining personnel and joined up with 9 L.S.Ts. which had been loaded there. The embarkation of the L.S.Ts. was completed by 21st June. In all, for the first two convoys a total of 65,000 personnel, 9,400 vehicles and 60,000 tons of stores was loaded.

131. The equipping, training and mounting of Eastern Task Force had been an extensive