

commitment. Reinforcements were a heavy drain; from February to the end of the campaign the total received by Eighth Army was over 33,000, and by the end of the campaign practically all units in the army were brought up to strength, some being even stronger than they were before the Battle of El Alamein.

31. The successful reinforcement of Eighth Army was accomplished despite three adverse factors: the length of the line of communication, the heavy demands as a result of the casualties sustained in the Battles of the Mareth Line and Wadi Akarit, and the conflict of the claims of preparations for the invasion of Sicily.

32. The transport difficulties inherent in the length of the line of communication were overcome by making the maximum use of all available sea, road, rail or air lifts. For example, between 14th February and 3rd March, 3,047 reinforcements were despatched from the Delta to Tripoli on road convoys carrying stores for Eighth Army, and at the end of March a special draft of 1,500 infantry reinforcements was sent forward by air. In all, as many as 7,000 reinforcements were flown forward.

33. To meet some of the difficulties involved in the supply of reinforcements, a transit camp was established at Tripoli and reinforcements were despatched unposted from the Delta, to be distributed from the camp among units as demanded by Eighth Army. From the end of April it was decided to despatch reinforcements from the United Kingdom via North Africa instead of round the Cape; drafts would then travel overland from Algiers to Tripoli and thence by sea to the Delta, such reinforcements as were required for Eighth Army being retained at the transit camp. The first convoy to use this route did not, in fact, arrive in North Africa until after the end of the Tunisian campaign, but the system was used for the reinforcement of units in Tripolitania and Tunisia until the Mediterranean was opened to shipping in August.

34. In addition to reinforcements and normal stores and supplies, 245 tanks were supplied to Eighth Army between 20th February and 12th May, as well as 109 armoured cars and 131 scout cars, and by the end of April all anti-tank regiments within the army had been equipped with one troop of 17 pounders per battery. Time fuzes were in short supply, but otherwise artillery equipment and ammunition were able to keep pace with the demands.

35. The policy of using North African postal facilities for providing mail services to and from the United Kingdom for Eighth Army and troops in Tripolitania and Tunisia was pursued to the fullest possible extent. Early in March, a direct air-mail service was set up between the United Kingdom and Tripoli to carry air-mail letter-cards, while arrangements were completed for the carriage of sea/air mail between Tripoli and Algiers by air, the journey between Algiers and the United Kingdom in both directions being made by sea. Later, when First and Eighth Armies made contact, Algiers was used for the handling of surface mails passing between Eighth Army and the United Kingdom in both directions, mails being conveyed overland daily via Pichon through the First Army lines of communication, thus materially reducing their transit time.

36. As Eighth Army moved forward, the ports to the West of Tripoli were brought into as full use as was possible. Zarzis and Gabes proved to be of little value and Sousse was, in fact, not used for Eighth Army maintenance. But Sfax, which was occupied on 10th April, was of considerable value. Although the channel was partially blocked, it could be used by light-draught vessels and on 15th April, 1,300 tons were discharged at this port. Ocean-going ships were loaded in the Delta for Sfax and sailed for Tripoli where they were lightened to meet the draught restriction of Sfax and were then called forward, together with such local tonnage as was available. Although limited by a shortage of powered harbour-craft (which was a limiting factor at Tripoli also), this system enabled a total of over 40,000 tons to be discharged at Sfax by the end of the campaign, an average of over 1,300 tons a day. This, together with the discharge at Tripoli, gave a daily average discharge of stores and supplies from Middle East of over 5,000 tons including bulk petrol.

37. In spite of the development of the port of Sfax, Eighth Army still had to forward a large proportion of its requirements from Tripoli by road. This entailed a heavy strain on vehicles, for by the time that the army was in the Enfidaville area the turn-round was 820 miles. A reserve of "B" vehicles had been built up in the Middle East in readiness for the demands of the long line of communication, and by the end of May, 2,000 "B" vehicles had been despatched to Eighth Army, in addition to which two 10-ton General Transport Companies had been lent to the army to help the supply system forward of Tripoli. Since all available tonnage was needed for stores, these replacement vehicles could not be sent by sea. As many as possible were sent by rail to Tobruk, but even then they had a road journey of over a thousand miles before arriving at army, so that many of them required considerable overhaul at Tripoli before they could be issued, and thus took about a month in the journey from Middle East Base. Economies in shipping were effected by sending up these replacement vehicles loaded, but this had the disadvantage that quantities of stores were locked up on the line of communication for a long period.

38. The heavy demand for replacement vehicles, and the fact that they had to be sent forward by road, at least from Tobruk, not only created a major problem of supply and maintenance, but also meant that the road had to be kept in repair.

39. In addition to the provision of replacement vehicles, Middle East also equipped two divisions, the 1st Fighting French and the 56th Division, before sending them up to Eighth Army in April.

40. In setting up Headquarters, Tripolitania Base and Lines of Communication, I ordered that the evacuation of material and personnel to Middle East Base should be kept to a minimum; casualties and salvage (especially petrol containers) were the chief back-loads.

41. Arrangements for evacuating casualties were made by sea, either direct or via Benghazi, by rail from Tobruk, or by air. Despite initial delays owing to shipping shortage, the arrangements worked well. Approximately 15,000 casualties were received