

two months, and it is with great personal regret that I now leave you on the arrival of your new Army Commander. During these weeks you have stopped the enemy; and, in spite of your heavy losses and the inevitable disorganisation consequent on a rapid withdrawal from the frontier, you have forced him on the defensive, taken ten thousand prisoners from him and destroyed or captured many of his guns, vehicles and other equipment. You will, I know, join me in acknowledging the great and glorious part our air forces have played in helping us to achieve these results. Without their aid the story would have been very different. I thank you with all my heart for the magnificent way in which you have responded to the heavy calls I have made on you and for your unfailing cheerfulness and tenacity in the worst circumstances. I know you will continue in the same fine spirit and determination to win under your new Commander. I wish you luck and speedy and complete victory."

PART III.—ORGANISATION, TRAINING AND ADMINISTRATION.

The Organisation of the Army.

To find the correct organisation for the fighting troops to enable them to defeat the enemy under the peculiar conditions of mechanised war in the Desert was of prime importance. This problem, therefore, was always foremost in my mind.

At the conclusion of the Eighth Army's offensive in Cyrenaica it was plain to me that our existing divisional and brigade organisation did not allow of that very close co-operation on the battlefield between the armoured corps, the artillery and the infantry which was to my mind essential to success. The Germans had reached a very high standard of co-operation between the three arms and I felt that we must try at least to equal and, if possible, surpass them.

There was no doubt, too, that as a result of the recent fighting an impression had been created in the minds of some junior leaders and soldiers, other than those of the Royal Armoured Corps, that our armour had not altogether pulled its weight in the battle. It was very necessary to eradicate any such feeling, and I felt that the best way to do this was to associate the three arms more closely at all times and in all places.

It seemed to me that our pre-war divisional organisation was too rigid and lacking in flexibility to be really adaptable to the conditions of modern quick-moving warfare in the Desert, or even elsewhere, having regard to the fact that great battles are fought and won in flat country, not in mountains.

I decided, therefore, while keeping the divisional framework with its traditions and associations, to reorganise the brigades, armoured, motorised and infantry, into brigade groups each with its own artillery and engineers, so that they could be self-contained and capable, if necessary, of rapid transference from one higher formation to another to meet the temporary needs of a rapidly changing situation. In this way I felt too that the three arms would be forced into closer permanent contact with each other and all officers would have a chance to acquire a broader outlook, which was often conspicuous by its absence as a result of faulty traditions and training.

Secondly, I was sure that our practice of forming large armoured divisions, strong in tank units and relatively weak in infantry, was wrong, because it tended to encourage the idea that the Royal Armoured Corps was an army within an army and also because, to gain the mobility and flexibility we required for victory, we must have more armoured divisions. By diluting armoured divisions with motorised infantry we could not only form twice as many armoured divisions, each with a smaller content of armour it is true, but also restore the proper balance of the three arms and so secure their better co-operation on the battlefield.

I therefore reorganised my armoured divisions, giving to each an armoured brigade group and a motorised infantry brigade group instead of two armoured brigades and a support group. This organisation, which proved its value in the subsequent operations, was later introduced into the army in the United Kingdom.

At the same time I had considered the inclusion in the armoured division of a lorried infantry brigade group, but later discarded this idea as likely to make the formation too cumbersome. But, as a result of the fighting which culminated in the battle of El Alamein, I again considered changing the basic divisional organisation so as to produce a division of increased striking power and mobility in place of the infantry division, which, as often as not, had proved to be a liability rather than an asset in desert fighting, owing to its relative immobility and its vulnerability in open country.

My idea was that the normal or basic division should contain an armoured brigade group and a motorised brigade group, each with its own artillery component, and, in addition, an artillery group comprising two field regiments and a motorised medium machine-gun battalion. Each division would also have allotted to it a lorried infantry brigade. This brigade would not necessarily move with its division at all times, but, being lorry-borne, could be rushed forward when needed, either to carry out a deliberate attack on an entrenched enemy position, or to consolidate ground gained to form a pivot of manoeuvre. The remaining infantry would be retained in their divisional organisations and used for holding defensive positions, protecting forward aerodromes, and guarding vital points on the lines of communication against air and sea-borne attack. They would be specially trained and equipped for these duties and also to serve as replacements for the lorried infantry brigades in the mobile divisions. These ideas were being examined when I handed over my command.

The Training of the Army.

Reorganisation alone obviously would not bring about that closer co-operation on the battlefield and improvement in mutual understanding between the three arms which was so necessary. I therefore ordered a drastic overhaul and reorganisation of our training system. In this I was most ably assisted by Major-General A. Galloway, my Deputy Chief of the General Staff, and by my Director of Military Training, Major-General A. F. Harding who was appointed in January 1942 to this post, which was created at my request.