

Most items of medical stores are now being delivered in satisfactory quantities. The percentage of hospital beds fell in arrears, owing to the exclusion from convoys of even the minimum number required. The number of field hygiene sections was, and still is, inadequate to the needs of the force.

In previous campaigns the need for mobile casualty clearing stations had been experienced. Three units were given sufficient transport to move the complete light section together with half the heavy section in one shift.

It has also been found necessary to form mobile surgical teams provided with their own transport, so that major surgery can be performed as far forward as the main dressing stations.

Royal Army Ordnance Corps.

58. The excellent example of ceaseless hard work set by my Director of Ordnance Services, Brigadier W. O. Richards, has been emulated by the whole Corps. Several measures have been taken to ensure even greater efficiency.

The Royal Army Ordnance Corps lacked a number of essential units, of which only a few arrived between the end of June and the end of October. On the other hand, deficiencies in equipment and vehicles except for reserves have been largely made up, although there is still a serious shortage of machine tools.

Reorganisation of the Corps in accordance with the latest system designed by the War Office is now in progress, but it is not yet sufficiently far advanced to enable me to see whether the system will need to be modified to suit the conditions in the Middle East. Some five thousand additional personnel will be required to complete the reorganisation and it is therefore unlikely to be completed before next August.

The swift movement and lengthy communications characteristic of mechanised warfare made two innovations necessary.

Strict limits have been set to the scale of repairs to be undertaken by second line repair workshops, recourse being had as far as possible to the system of assembly exchanges.

It has also been found necessary to organise a system for the delivery of urgent spare parts and fighting stores. A special unit has been formed to deliver such stores by road and a further scheme has been prepared in conjunction with the Royal Air Force for the delivery of stores by air.

59. It was no easy task to re-equip and re-organise practically the whole of the Middle East Forces within the space of four months. Units had to be restored to their brigades, and brigades to their divisions. Equipment had to be distributed in such a way as to meet operational needs and to permit a maximum of training to be carried out. At the same time Cyprus had to be reinforced, and Tobruk relieved, units withdrawn from Syria and East Africa and the concentration for the offensive begun. The coordination of all these activities placed a great strain on the Staff Duties Branch of the General Staff and of all subordinate Headquarters. The smooth efficiency with which it was all accomplished is largely due to the untiring efforts of my Deputy Director of Staff Duties, Brigadier B. Temple.

TRAINING.

60. Under the guidance of my Deputy Chief of General Staff, Major General N. M. Ritchie,

every aspect of training in theory and practice has received the closest attention.

The lull in operations made it possible to give almost every fighting unit and formation the opportunity of carrying out further training, although the scope of training was necessarily limited by deficiencies in equipment. Incoming units and formations put in a spell of training in desert warfare before being sent to the operational zone, and particular attention has been paid to desert movement of mechanised columns by day and night.

The Combined Training Centre at Kabrit was employed to capacity throughout. One Brigade of the 5th Indian Division and two brigade groups of the New Zealand Division underwent a complete course at the Centre.

Air Support.

61. An Inter-Service Committee, consisting of representatives of the Army and the Royal Air Force, was formed late in July to study the question of air support for the Army. Experiments were carried out during August, and a system was finally evolved.

The first two air support controls in the Middle East were formed at Mena on 8th October, the Army component of the first being formed by the Australian Imperial Force, and of the second from British and New Zealand personnel. The air component of both was provided by the Royal Air Force.

Parachute Detachment.

62. A small parachute detachment known as "L" Detachment, Special Air Service Brigade, was formed at Kabrit during July. It was composed of about 70 volunteers, recruited mainly from the survivors of the Commando Force.

Preliminary training was carried out during August and September, and the first live drops were successfully made on the 4th October.

Captain A. D. Stirling, who commanded the detachment directed all training without expert assistance. Great credit is due to him and to his officers and non-commissioned officers for their initiative in improvising equipment and inventing an entirely new type of training.

Schools.

63. The Middle East Officers Cadet Training Unit has been reorganised and expanded. The specialist wings have been abolished; and all cadets now follow the same eight weeks' basic course, specialists passing on to officers' wings at the training school of the arm concerned. The annual capacity of the Training unit has been thereby increased from thirteen hundred to two thousand and forty cadets.

Special stress has been laid on anti-aircraft action at the Weapon Training School, moving targets being employed. Experiments have been made with kites and drogues towed by a truck to produce a satisfactory target.

The School of Anti-Aircraft and Coast Defence moved to Haifa and reopened on the 14th September, as air raids had interfered with instruction at Port Said.

A Royal Army Ordnance Corps School of Instruction, having general engineering and ammunition wings, has been opened.

A school has been opened at the Infantry Base Depot for training regimental specialists.

Six Indian Wings have recently been opened at existing schools.