

assault, in addition to lightweight stretchers and locally designed folding splints for assault battalions. No suitable drug could be provided for the elimination of sea-sickness, but boiled sweets were prepared for issue on the approach voyage and steps were taken to eliminate sea-sick prone personnel; these measures did not prove completely satisfactory.

86. Preparations were also made to combat malaria, which is prevalent in Sicily; suppressive mepacrine treatment was prepared and one hundred per cent. bush or mosquito nets and veils were provided. Malaria control units were also equipped, as well as a malaria field laboratory, of which a section was to be landed early, for survey purposes.

87. In addition to these problems of the movement, communications and casualty clearance of the force, detailed planning was required on all aspects of equipping, mounting and maintaining so large an overseas operation. In particular, special plans were made for the equipment of units in the assault; landing reserves and beach maintenance packs of ordnance stores, limited to essentials, were planned and prepared. Under the guidance of Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers specialists, local manufacture of waterproofing materials for vehicles and artillery equipment was undertaken. In addition special arrangements were made for the provision of vehicle batteries at ports of embarkation and to accompany landing-craft and vehicles during transit. Stocks of ammunition had been built up continuously throughout the early part of 1943, and by June a total of 310,000 tons was held in the Middle East. This proved ample to meet the demand.

88. The results proved that meticulous care in detailed planning, methods of packing and marking, planned loading and off-loading, and co-ordination of supply problems can save casualties and can make maintenance through a beach-head a secure basis for an expeditionary force.

89. Whilst planning for Sicily was going forward, Eastern Task Force was also being assembled, equipped and trained. The Force was, in effect, to be Eighth Army, but the programme for the withdrawal, concentration and re-equipment of formations of Eighth Army was considerably delayed owing to the Tunisian campaign. By the end of the campaign in May, the only major formation which had been withdrawn was the 50th Division, which moved to the Delta in early May, by road and rail via Tobruk.

90. After the conclusion of the campaign, Headquarters of the 30th Corps, the 51st (H) Division, 23rd Armoured Brigade and 5 Army Group, Royal Artillery, all of which had been engaged in Tunisia, were withdrawn into the area Tripoli-Sfax. During April, the 231st Brigade moved from Malta to Alexandria and the 168th Brigade from Persia and Iraq Command to Kabrit. Other units and formations destined to form part of Eighth Army were concentrated either in Syria or the Delta. These were headquarters of the 13th Corps, the 5th and 50th Divisions, the 4th Armoured Brigade, and 31, 32, 33 and 34 Bricks for beach maintenance. The Bricks, each of about 2,300 men, were new units which had to be formed; the main components were a headquarters, head-

quarters company, beach maintenance centre, beach engineer unit, signal platoon, anti-aircraft unit (of one heavy and one light battery), a defence company and two Bren-carrier sections, and the equivalent of nine working rifle companies, formed from the nucleus of an infantry battalion. Ordnance brick detachments were formed from volunteers who received intensive training in the procedure for the handling of stores on the beaches, and brick medical sections were also provided. Four beach brick repair and recovery detachments were also formed. The personnel and equipment for three of these were found from the third-line workshops of the force, the remainder from Middle East Base.

91. From experience gained in Tunisia it was decided to provide a uniform third-line workshop for each division, instead of the combination of armoured troops workshops and infantry troops workshops previously used. The additional personnel required were found at the expense of Middle East Base.

92. In addition, Middle East had to provide nineteen pioneer companies. In view of their good record with Eighth Army, Indians and Africans from the High Commission Territories of South Africa were chosen. Although Indian pioneers were, technically, enrolled non-combatants and unarmed, they were among the best pioneer troops available in the Middle East. As it was considered undesirable to send large bodies of unarmed men into what might be actual contact with the enemy, urgent application was made to General Headquarters, India, for the grant of combatant status. This was not agreed, but authority was given to arm the Indian pioneers for self-defence. Accordingly they were issued with rifles and light machine guns and fully trained in the use of these weapons before embarkation. A further four pioneer companies from Mauritius and four Basuto companies were also sent (similarly armed and trained) to Malta in March, 1943.

93. Ultimately Middle East Command reformed, trained, equipped and mounted Headquarters of the 13th and 30th Corps, the 5th and 50th Divisions, the 4th Armoured Brigade, the 231st Independent Brigade Group, four Beach Bricks, and all ancillary units, in addition to numerous army, corps and line of communication troops. All units were brought up to full strength. The bulk of this equipping and training was carried out in the Delta and Palestine. Headquarters, the 30th Corps, remained in Tunisia during this period and was mounted from Tripoli, whilst the 51st Division and the 23rd Armoured Brigade, although partly equipped from Middle East Base, completed their training in Algeria and were mounted from North Africa. This, however, did not detract from my responsibility, although it decreased the pressure on facilities in the Delta. The 1st Airborne Division, in Eastern Task Force, was also mounted from North Africa; for this Middle East had only to provide some early training for the 4th Parachute Brigade.

94. Whilst this force, which was called Force 545 from March onwards, was being prepared for operations in Sicily, the dual problem of providing stores and equipment whilst at the same time preparing for subsequent maintenance had to be faced. This involved, first the