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OPERATIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST FROM 16TH FEBRUARY, 1943,
TO 8TH JANUARY, 1944.

The following Despatch was submitted to the Secretary of State for War on 31st August, 1944, by GENERAL SIR H. MAITLAND WILSON, G.C.B., G.B.E., D.S.O., A.D.C., Commander-in-Chief, The Middle East Forces.

I. INTRODUCTORY.

1. When I was appointed to Middle East Command, on 16th February, 1943, the Command included Egypt, Libya, Malta, Palestine and Transjordan, Cyprus, Sudan, Eritrea, most of Syria and a small part of Iraq.

2. The situation within the Command, and in the Middle East generally, was then more satisfactory than at any time since the outbreak of the war. The Axis armies had been driven back from the outskirts of the Delta to the borders of Tunisia, the possibility of a German attack through Turkey had been diminished, the Balkans were proving a serious burden to Germany, Italian morale was obviously cracking, and British equipment was better and British morale higher than at any previous time.

3. My main tasks, in order of priority, were to maintain Eighth Army and support its present operations to the utmost, to plan for future operations in conformity with the requirements of General Eisenhower, to prepare to support Turkey, and to conduct amphibious operations. In addition I was to make plans, when required, for land operations in the Balkan States, Crete, and the islands in the Ægean; I was to plan possible operations in Arabia and to be ready to assume command of the land forces in Aden should major land operations develop in or beyond the borders of that Protectorate.

4. Under my command, to carry out this role, were about 31,000 officers and 494,000 men, divided between the major commands of Ninth Army, British Troops in Egypt, Sudan, Palestine, Cyrenaica District, Aden and Malta. The Order of Battle of these troops is given in Appendix I.

5. This total did not include the 8,500 officers and 180,000 men of Eighth Army, which had reached the borders of Tunisia by February, and which passed under command of 18 Army Group on 20th February. Maintenance of Eighth Army during the remainder of the Tunisian Campaign, until 12th May, 1943, when the campaign ended with the capture of Tunis and Bizerta, remained my responsibility and proved a heavy one. All other claims were subordinated to this task. Expenditure in materials, vehicles, and, at times, in personnel was high, but the Army was always well-found and this, together with the absence of food deficiency diseases in a campaign fought over a thousand miles from the Middle East base, speaks better than anything else for the adequacy of the maintenance system.

6. During the later stages of the Tunisian campaign the second of my tasks, planning for future operations, began to assume increasing importance. Plans for the invasion of Sicily had been laid at the Casablanca Conference, and detailed planning of these operations was continued throughout the campaign in Tunisia. So, even before the Tunisian campaign was over, Middle East had already begun to train and equip units for Sicily.

7. The invasion of Sicily was to be conducted by two forces, of which the bulk of the Eastern Task Force was to be trained, equipped, mounted, and maintained in the early stages, from Middle East Command. This meant that Eighth Army had to be withdrawn from

Tunisia, re-formed, re-equipped, trained for a new kind of warfare; and supplied with ancillary units necessary for amphibious operations. The resources of the whole Command, from Syria to Malta, were co-ordinated in this preparation for knocking Italy out of the war—and once more, as in Tunisia, the operation was successful.

8. With the conquest of Sicily and the invasion of Italy, Eighth Army passed out of the sphere of Middle East Command, as a direct maintenance responsibility, when 15 Army Group took over its administration and maintenance on 12th August, 1943. The actual maintenance, however, could not be transferred immediately, and Middle East slowly transferred the commitment during the ensuing weeks, thereafter being responsible only for partial maintenance on demands made by 15 Army Group. Even then, reinforcements and supplies for Eighth Army were still required in considerable quantities, and the 10th Corps remained to be mounted from Tripoli for the landing at Salerno. Meanwhile, with the collapse of Italy, Middle East Command had become engaged in another role.

9. Plans for action in the islands of the Ægean had already been prepared by Middle East Command and by September a division was mounted ready to carry out the operation. But the diversion of the shipping, and other commitments, caused this operation to be cancelled at the last minute; before other plans could be made, the armistice with Italy was announced and the Germans succeeded in gaining control over the Italians on the two key islands of Rhodes and Scarpanto. The most which we could achieve by extemporised action with the forces available was to slip small garrisons into Cos, Leros, and Samos, and to place patrols in outlying islands.

10. With Rhodes, Crete and the airfields on the Greek mainland at their disposal, the Germans had command of the air in the Ægean, and with the loss of our only landing grounds at Cos on 2nd October we were unable to ship adequate reinforcements and were in no position to defend the other two islands. Leros was captured by assault, after a prolonged bombing and dive-bombing attack, on 16th November, and Samos was evacuated in the next few days.

Nevertheless, the German local air superiority was not sufficient to prevent our air and naval forces continuing to make the enemy's reinforcing efforts hazardous and for a time ineffectual.

11. Our lack of success in the Ægean undoubtedly affected our rising prestige in Middle East countries. Despite this setback, Middle East Command was able to fulfil its tasks, largely because the year was marked by internal security and confidence in the Allied cause. This was achieved although Egypt, Palestine, Syria and the Lebanon all suffered from political troubles: Egypt owing to the failure of the Wafd Government to remedy social and economic difficulties, Palestine owing to the ambitions, suspicions and lawlessness of some elements in the Jewish population, and Syria and the Lebanon owing to the clash between their demands for independence and the views of the French Mandatory authorities.

12. These various political situations demanded constant watchfulness and careful handling. During the year they were not allowed to interfere with military requirements and considerations, and British prestige has on the whole been enhanced during the period, with consequent advantages and increased freedom of action in the military situation.

13. As in our dealings with Middle East countries, so in dealing with our allies (always excepting the United States), there has been a constant danger that political considerations might prejudice military problems. Much effective work has nevertheless been carried out in stimulating and maintaining patriot activities in the Balkans and in equipping and training allied forces in the Middle East. The policy of supplying Turkey with armaments has also been carried out by Middle East Command, and large commitments have been undertaken to prepare that country for entry into the war.

14. In general, it may be said that during the year of my command the war moved away from Middle East, leaving it a role which was no longer operational but which was of great importance as a base and training centre.

II. NARRATIVE—TUNISIA.

15. By 16th February, 1943, when I took over command of Middle East Forces, Eighth Army had taken Tripoli (on 23rd January) and was preparing to advance in Tunisia. The first responsibility of Middle East Command was to supply Eighth Army for this advance.

16. This responsibility involved Middle East Command in three major administrative commitments: to repair the port of Tripoli and establish it as an overseas advanced base; to build up reserves in Tripoli in preparation for the advance; to supply the needs of Eighth Army during the advance, and to clear backloads and casualties from Tripoli.

17. 18 Army Group was set up on 20th February, 1943, under the command of General Sir H. Alexander. General Alexander was to command First and Eighth Armies, and 18 Army Group was to co-ordinate the operational and administrative efforts of the two armies. This, however, did not affect the role of Middle East Command, and the task of maintaining Eighth Army remained my first responsibility.

18. Until 3rd March, 1943, all arrangements for maintenance were made direct with Eighth Army, which, during this period, was bringing up parts of the 10th Corps from the Benghazi area, forming the New Zealand Corps for the attack on the Mareth position, and re-equipping itself for a further advance. The distance at which Eighth Army was working from Middle East Base made it necessary to modify this arrangement; Tripoli is 980 miles by sea from the Delta and 650 miles by sea from Tobruk, the nearest railhead.

19. Headquarters, Tripolitania Base and Lines of Communication, was therefore established and took up its role, under the command of Major-General Sir B. N. Robertson, on 3rd March, 1943. This headquarters was under command of Eighth Army, for which it acted as a rear echelon; under the general direction of General Headquarters Middle East, Eighth Army was to be responsible for the lay-out and administration of the advanced base. This was in conformity with the principle that the army

should retain control of its sea-head. On all matters save those of policy, Headquarters, Tripolitania Base and Lines of Communication, was to deal direct with Middle East and, in effect, it consolidated Eighth Army's demands on General Headquarters Middle East, and distributed supplies to Eighth Army, thereby simplifying many of the problems of supply.

20. This re-organisation, valuable though it was, left Middle East Command still faced with the problems inseparable from the length of the supply route, the need for maintenance and guards, the time-lag involved, and the large tonnages required to stock the advanced base and to keep the army in action.

21. In order to prepare the port of Tripoli and to put it into working order as rapidly as possible, heavy repair and maintenance projects had to be carried through, with consequent demands for cement, oxygen, acetylene and labour.

22. The most important installation to need repair was the bulk petrol storage. Captured storage tanks with a capacity of nearly 11,000 tons were rapidly repaired and put into service, and bulk tanker shipments of petrol were begun immediately. It proved quicker to repair existing installations than to erect new ones, and further repairs were continued; although not completed by the end of the Tunisian campaign, a total of 26,000 tons of petrol storage was in use by the end of May. In addition, a tin factory was despatched to Tripoli and erected there, but was not in use until 16th May. By that date it was too late to be of use in the Tunisian campaign, but proved of great value for subsequent maintenance of the line of communication and for building up reserves in preparation for the invasion of Sicily.

23. Another problem was the repair and operation of the cold-storage plant at Tripoli. The difficulties of keeping the army supplied with fresh meat were never satisfactorily solved to the end of the Tunisian campaign, owing to the shortage of refrigerator ships, of which there were only two available for this run. Although the cold-storage capacity at Tripoli was increased from 200 tons in February to 700 tons in April this was still barely adequate for the needs of the Army.

24. As a result of the repair and maintenance work carried out at Tripoli, by 23rd February the port had reached an average daily capacity of almost 3,000 tons, excluding bulk petrol which then averaged 1,000 tons a day. During March the capacity was further increased and at times reached 5,000 tons of stores a day in addition to bulk petrol. By the end of the campaign, in May, nearly 290,000 tons of stores and 66,000 tons of bulk petrol had been discharged at this one port.

25. Whilst these heavy repairs were being carried out at Tripoli, Middle East was also providing many of the new installations necessary to enable the advanced base to be set up.

26. The development of Tripoli as a medical base was slow owing to the limited amount of shipping space available, and some anxiety was felt before the Battle of Mareth because of the number of hospital beds available. By 13th March only two general hospitals and two African sections, with accommodation for 1,600 beds, plus a further hospital with

stretchers for 200 light cases, had been opened. By 21st March this had been increased to 4,400 beds, and by the middle of April Tripoli had 5,100 hospital beds and a convalescent depot with a capacity of 2,000.

Owing to the distance from Cairo it was also necessary to establish a base transfusion unit at Tripoli. Blood was got from troops in the Tripoli area, which relieved the strain on the unit at Cairo. During March to April over 2,800 bottles of blood and almost 2,500 bottles of plasma were sent to Eighth Army. This efficient blood transfusion service, and the mobile casualty clearing stations and field surgical units, avoided much suffering and saved many lives.

27. Middle East was also still responsible for fourth echelon repair after Eighth Army passed to the command of 18 Army Group, and to carry out this duty it was necessary to establish an advanced base workshop at Tripoli. This was installed and at work by the end of February. Although difficulties were anticipated, during the campaign the field workshops of Eighth Army were always kept amply supplied with major replacement assemblies to meet the army's requirements.

28. This development of Tripoli as the advanced base for Eighth Army did not mean that the Western Desert ports and the road line of communication could be neglected. Much work remained to be done at Tobruk and Benghazi; at both ports water supplies were developed and improved, electric supply and drainage systems were repaired and kept running, and large slipways were constructed for the Royal Navy.

On the line of communication both up to and forward of Tripoli, engineering work was handicapped by a shortage of transporters for moving forward heavy equipment; but the road system was put into working order after the systematic demolitions which it had suffered, the telephone system had to be re-organised and re-established, and there was also a considerable amount of work to be undertaken in the construction of airfields urgently needed for both the offensive and defensive operations of the Royal Air Force. In all twenty-two all-weather runways were completed in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, in addition to about fifty fair-weather landing grounds and the numerous fighter strips made for Eighth Army.

29. The result of the successful establishment of Tripoli as an advanced base was that the build-up of Eighth Army for its further advance was carried through. Both the 30th Corps and the 10th Corps were brought up to strength, and by 3rd March, 11,318 reinforcements had been despatched from the Delta as against demands for 8,900. Sixty-two per cent. of Middle East's intake of vehicles was sent up to Eighth Army during the period up to 15th March, including a special despatch of 520 vehicles which was sent up on 23rd February, and by the end of March 20,000 tons of ammunition had been sent through Tripoli for distribution to Eighth Army.

30. Once the advanced base at Tripoli had been established, and Eighth Army prepared for its further advance, the forwarding of supplies and reinforcements for the army during the advance became my most serious

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

in Middle East Base during the period from February to May. Of these 1,688 were flown direct to the base. The successful evacuation of casualties by air was due to excellent co-operation between the medical services and the Royal Air Force, and to the pilots of the seven ambulance aircraft, who flew their machines in all weathers and operated from the most forward landing grounds; the chief difficulty was the shortage of suitable aircraft.

42. That Eighth Army was successfully maintained over a line of communication stretching some 1,000 miles by sea from Middle East Base and a further 400 miles forward of the advanced base at Tripoli, is in itself proof of the success of the planning, organisation and co-ordination which went into the task.

43. The result, however, was not achieved without severe strain. The demands made on engineering, signalling and movement services by the long line of communications were very heavy, and the drain on Middle East stocks was also a serious factor, aggravated as it was by the large quantities locked up in transit and in the advanced bases. For example, the demands rose at times to as much as 900 tons of supplies a day, and to meet this demand reserve stocks had to be back-loaded from Syria and the Sudan. Similar steps had to be taken to meet the demands for anti-aircraft ammunition, of which supplies had to be called in from outlying areas and obtained from Persia and Iraq Command to meet Eighth Army's requirements. Reinforcements, too, had at times to be diverted from other tasks, and a draft of 1,500 which had been allotted a special role in preparation for the invasion of Sicily was sent up to Eighth Army at the end of March. An indication of the difficulties involved can be gathered from the fact that, although towards the close of the campaign great care was taken to prevent too much ammunition being sent forward, yet when the campaign ended there were 35,000 tons of ammunition in, or en route to, the forward areas.

44. When Eighth Army began to move forward, the system of normal deliveries, demanded well in advance by Headquarters Tripolitania Base and Lines of Communication, had to be supplemented on occasions to meet urgent demands for operational requirements, particularly for specialised stores such as signals, medical and survey equipment.

45. Throughout the Tunisian campaign all of these problems were further complicated by the fact that I had been given the task of training and mounting the Eastern Task Force for the invasion of Sicily; planning and training for this task were taking place from February onwards.

Cyrenaica.

46. As the lines of communication extended, the army had to be relieved, as much as possible, of responsibility for rear administration so that it could concentrate entirely on the maintenance of actual operations. This was successfully done by the establishment of administrative headquarters, under Middle East Command, to control the sectors of the lines of communication.

47. The organisation and administration of a large portion of the lines of communication was carried out by Headquarters Cyrenaica District, which had been formed in the Delta

under the command of Major-General A. L. Collier, and had moved up to take over Benghazi from the Eighth Army on 15th February, 1943, by which date maintenance of Eighth Army through Tripoli was assured. Cyrenaica District assumed direct responsibility, under General Headquarters Middle East, for the whole of Cyrenaica. In March, Headquarters Cyrenaica District, moved from Benghazi to Barce, and on 15th April the southern boundary of the District was extended to include Kufra, which had formerly been under Headquarters, Sudan.

48. Within the District the first task was to assist the forwarding of supplies to Tripoli and Eighth Army. In order to shorten the shipping run, packed petrol, oil and lubricants were sent up by rail to Tobruk and thence by sea to Benghazi and Tripoli. Pumping sets, floating pipelines, and bulk petrol storage to a capacity of over 6,000 tons were kept in repair at Tobruk, and over 11,000 tons storage capacity was maintained at Benghazi. A tin factory was also put into operation at Benghazi by 11th March, whilst extra sidings were built to the railways and docks at both of these ports.

49. Traffic on the Western Desert Railway declined, with the development of Tripoli Port, from 65,000 tons in January to 22,000 tons in March, but the line still had to be maintained and worked. At the same time, not only had the road itself to be maintained, but petrol points and staging areas for road convoys had also to be organised.

50. In addition to forwarding supplies to Tripoli, Cyrenaica District had to re-organise and administer its own territory when the army had passed westwards. Much valuable salvage work was achieved, with special emphasis on petrol containers (of which almost a million and a half were salvaged from the District by the end of the year), whilst stores left behind as the army advanced were also put into circulation again. There were, for example, 11,000 tons of ammunition left in Benghazi when maintenance of Eighth Army through that port ceased.

51. These tasks entailed heavy demands for both skilled and unskilled labour, some of which was provided by Middle East Command, some from civilian sources. A signals headquarters and three companies were required there, with a further headquarters and three companies for Air Formation Signals. This undertaking was later reduced as these units had to be made available elsewhere, and much of the responsibility for maintaining signal communications was taken over by a South African unit, the Union Defence Force Lines of Communication Signals.

52. By the end of the campaign there were sixty-eight pioneer companies stretched from the Egyptian frontier to Eighth Army area; the companies came from India, the High Commission Territories, East Africa, Mauritius and the Seychelles, and were mainly employed as shore labour in the ports, in the advanced depots, and on airfield and road construction. In addition, there were some 10,000 civilians employed forward of the Egyptian frontier. As far as Cyrenaica District was concerned, the extent of the problem may be gauged from the

fact that in March, 1943, forty pioneer companies (13,000 men) were employed in the District.

To meet the heavy demand for labour, the experiment of using Prisoners of War Working units was tried. Three such units were in use, mainly on roads, by the end of May, and the number was increased to seven by the end of the year. On the whole, the experiment worked well.

53. A further source of labour was the civilian population. Under International Law I was responsible for the military government of occupied enemy territories in my command, and from 5th March, 1943, I delegated this responsibility to the Civil Affairs Branch and the Chief Political Officer, Middle East Forces, Brigadier H. R. Hone. Under him, the administration of the civilian population of Cyrenaica District was organised by the British Military Administration of Cyrenaica (the use of the formula Occupied Enemy Territory Administration—O.E.T.A.—being abandoned); the Deputy Chief Civil Affairs Officer dealt with the civilian population under the direction of the Military Commander. The British Military Administration in Cyrenaica was faced with a friendly but hungry population, and its chief tasks were the provision of food and the organisation of labour. Supplies were despatched from the Middle East Base to supplement captured stocks and local produce, and the control of supplies made the organisation of labour easier, since it was possible to secure local labour in considerable numbers by paying partly in rations, particularly in sugar, tea and cigarettes.

54. The provision of garrisons for the District was not a serious problem. At Tobruk and Benghazi anti-aircraft protection and coastal defence batteries were needed, while anti-aircraft protection was also necessary on the Cyrenaica airfields; but for ordinary local defence purposes, during the Tunisian campaign, only a battalion of the Sudan Defence Force was needed to supplement the Libyan Arab Force (recruited originally from Cyrenaican refugees in Egypt and from Cyrenaican prisoners of war volunteers, and later converted into the Cyrenaican Gendarmerie).

55. Although the traffic for Eighth Army through the ports of Tobruk and Benghazi declined rapidly as Tripoli was developed, the responsibilities of Cyrenaica District remained. Once the Tunisian campaign was over, the decline in the volume of traffic through the District became still more marked; for example, whereas traffic on the Western Desert Railway reached 65,000 tons in January, 1943, it had fallen to 6,000 tons in December; imports at Benghazi dropped from 50,000 tons in January, 1943, to 17,000 tons in December, and from April onwards no stores were brought into Tobruk by sea.

56. Nevertheless, during the summer months the facilities of the District were of considerable value. The Royal Air Force and the local garrisons had to be maintained and supplied, and when Eighth Army was re-formed for the attack on Sicily those units and formations which were recalled to Egypt were staged on their journey. For the invasion of Sicily, 2,700 personnel and 846 vehicles were embarked at Benghazi.

57. To conform to the reduction in the importance of the District, the organisation was changed from time to time. When it was originally established, the District included 83 Area at Benghazi and 99 Sub-Area at Tobruk. In March, when District Headquarters moved to Barce, 93 Sub-Area relieved 83 Area at Benghazi, and in November, when the traffic through Tobruk had considerably declined, Tobruk Zone Headquarters relieved 99 Sub-Area there. Ultimately, on 15th December, Headquarters Cyrenaica District was abolished and Headquarters, Cyrenaica Area, took over, relieving 93 Sub-Area at Benghazi.

Tripolitania.

58. Similar arrangements to those made in Cyrenaica District were also made in Tripolitania. Here, Headquarters Tripolitania Base and Lines of Communication, took over responsibility from Gabes to El Hamma with Advanced Headquarters at Sfax on 24th April, when part of Rear Headquarters of Eighth Army was withdrawn to prepare for the invasion of Sicily. The Advanced Headquarters at Sfax was closed on 1st June, when First Army took over responsibility for Tunisia.

59. On 16th July, 1943, Headquarters Tripolitania Base and Lines of Communication, was replaced by Headquarters Tripolitania District, under the command of Major-General N. Clowes. Tripolitania District Headquarters was under direct command of General Headquarters Middle East, and was given a heavy task to perform in re-equipping parts of Eighth Army for operations in Sicily and in preparing the 10th Corps for operations in Italy.

60. In preparation for Sicily, the advanced base at Tripoli had to maintain a force of over 200,000 men during May and June. For this operation, 32,000 men, 6,000 vehicles and 310 guns were embarked from the port of Tripoli. For the attack on Italy, the whole of the 10th Corps Headquarters, the 56th Division and the 7th Armoured Division embarked from this port. This involved the use of 342 vessels and the embarkation of 73,000 men, 14,000 vehicles, 686 guns and 447 tanks.

61. After Eighth Army had departed for Sicily and Italy, the port of Tripoli was still used for its partial maintenance. In particular, Tripolitania became a medical base for the evacuation of casualties from Sicily, receiving 10,321 casualties by sea and 3,708 by air during the campaign.

62. Within Tripolitania District the same problems of maintenance, local administration and food supplies were encountered as in Cyrenaica District. Here also the British Military Administration set up courts, recruited a police force, assisted the Italian agricultural population, provided and distributed food, and assisted greatly in the provision of labour for military purposes.

63. Owing to its role in preparing for the Sicilian and Italian operations, the commitments of Tripolitania District did not decline quite so rapidly as did those of Cyrenaica District. But imports, which reached their peak with 131,000 tons in April, were only 91,000 tons in June and had dropped to 40,000 tons in July; during December they were down to 16,000 tons. Similarly the ration strength

dropped from 200,000 in June to 91,000 in October and 45,000 in January, 1944. Therefore, on 14th December, 1943, Headquarters Tripolitania District, was reduced to the status of Headquarters Tripolitania Area.

Sicily.

64. The successes achieved in Tunisia, to which the satisfactory maintenance of Eighth Army and the administrative arrangements in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania had largely contributed, removed the enemy threat to Egypt and the Canal from the West. The defensive period for my command was over, and I was free to develop offensive operations within the scope of my resources. The first stage in carrying the war into Europe was to be an attack on Sicily, to be followed by an invasion of the Italian mainland. As the Tunisian campaign reached its conclusion, my command was steadily freed to make preparations for this overseas offensive.

65. In the North, also, I was no longer concerned with the problem of countering an Axis threat to Egypt and was able to concentrate on plans and training for future operations. When the Russians held Stalingrad, and subsequently counter-attacked, the threat of a German advance through Turkey into the Lebanon and so, possibly, towards Egypt was removed. As long as this threat to Egypt from the North had been a serious possibility, Ninth Army had had an important operational role in Syria and the Lebanon, and troops had been concentrated and plans made with this in view. When the threat was removed I was able to revise the role of Ninth Army and to turn it very largely into a centre for training.

66. The same considerations which enabled me to develop Ninth Army largely as a training centre made it possible for the War Office to revise the role of Persia and Iraq Command (which had been separated from Middle East Command in September, 1942) and to draft troops thence to Ninth Army for training for the invasion of Sicily and for other operations.

67. Many of these troops were administrative units, without which it would have been impossible to mount the Eastern Task Force for Sicily from Middle East resources. The two major formations so received were the 5th and the 56th British Infantry Divisions. Of these, the 5th Division arrived in Middle East on 16th February, 1943, and was re-equipped, fully trained, and ready to take its part in the assault on Sicily by July. The 56th Division arrived in Middle East in March, to train and re-equip for Sicily: but early in April it became necessary to send the Division (except for 168th Brigade, which remained to complete its training for Sicily) to Eighth Army, to gain battle experience and to replace the casualties sustained by the army at Mareth.

68. In addition to troops transferred from Persia and Iraq Command for training for Sicily, the 3rd Corps Headquarters was also transferred to Ninth Army for training and re-equipping in April. They brought with them from Persia and Iraq the 8th Indian Division and 7th Army Group, Royal Artillery, and also took under command the 10th Indian Division, from Cyprus. In addition, the 2nd Polish Corps arrived in Ninth Army in August and September, with Corps Troops, the 3rd Carpathian Infantry Division, the 5th Kresowa

Infantry Division, the 2nd Polish Army Tank Brigade, the 3rd Carpathian Lancers, Army Group Polish Artillery and the 7th Polish Anti-tank Regiment. Ninth Army also received the 31st Indian Armoured Division from Iraq in October, and the 4th Indian Division was given its mountain warfare training there on its return from Tunisia, whilst the 13th Corps Headquarters carried out its early training for the attack on Sicily under Ninth Army before being brought to Cairo to act as the first planning staff for the operation.

69. All of these formations required considerable equipment, especially in vehicles, artillery, and signals stores; some of them needed re-organisation to bring them on to the latest British war establishments, and all of them made serious demands on the training establishments in Syria and the Lebanon, which had to be greatly enlarged. The Mountain Warfare Training Establishment, in particular, had to be increased, so that training could be given both to the formations destined for Sicily and to those for which other roles were reserved.

70. As early as February, 1943, plans and preparations for the invasion of Sicily were put in hand. The attack was to be carried out by a Western (American) and an Eastern (British) Task Force, for which Middle East Command had a four-fold role. I had to carry out detailed administrative planning for the Eastern Task Force; to organise, train and equip two Corps; to mount these two Corps for the operation, and subsequently to maintain the whole of the British forces in Sicily for a period. This maintenance commitment was to last from the fourth week of the attack until a later date, on which Allied Force Headquarters (Algiers) would take over administrative control; for the first four weeks of the operation, during which the first four convoys were due to arrive, formations were to be maintained by the command which mounted them. After Allied Force Headquarters had taken over administrative control of all forces in Sicily, Middle East was to be given a role of partial maintenance.

71. The first step in carrying out my task was the organisation of a staff to carry out the detailed planning for Eastern Task Force. In February, 1943, a planning headquarters was formed round the 13th Corps Headquarters in Cairo. As it became possible to release elements of Eighth Army Headquarters from the operations in Tunisia, Rear Headquarters of Eighth Army took over the planning from the 13th Corps Headquarters, and planning became the responsibility of Eighth Army Headquarters, assisted by a planning increment and planning staffs of the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force. At this stage the planning staff was designated Twelfth Army. The elements of Eighth Army Headquarters which were not absorbed in planning remained in Tripoli, commanding units and formations of Eighth Army.

72. Difficulties in detailed planning were to some extent inevitable owing to the need to give priority to the claims of Tunisia while planning a future operation which was to be carried out by the same commanders, staffs and units. Nor were matters made easier by the fact that planning for yet further operations was begun even before the Sicilian attack was launched. These difficulties were particularly

felt by Survey, who found the shortage of photographic units a great handicap.

73. A further great difficulty was the distance which separated Allied Force Headquarters from Cairo. This necessarily made co-ordination and liaison difficult, and planning would have been much easier had the staffs of the forces involved been concentrated in one area instead of being over 1,500 miles apart. My chief administrative officers and those from the War Office could then have made co-ordinated visits and held combined administrative staff conferences, at which problems could have been considered and decided, instead of examining these problems by signal, with inevitable delay.

74. The role allotted to Middle East remained unchanged, but its implications varied considerably as planning went forward. The operational plan for Eastern Task Force, which controlled the detailed planning in Cairo, originally contemplated an assault landing on the South-east corner of Sicily, followed by an assault landing at Catania. Both assaults were to be prepared by Middle East and were to be commanded by Eighth Army, under Allied Force Headquarters. The initial assault in the South-east was to be undertaken by the 13th Corps, with the 5th and 56th Divisions, an army tank battalion, an armoured regiment and a commando, all mounted from Egypt; the subsequent assault landing at Catania was to be undertaken by the 3rd Division, a brigade group and two commandos, all mounted from the United Kingdom and later coming under the command of the 13th Corps. There was also to be a follow-up division (not assault-trained) from North Africa.

75. This plan, however, was subjected to both major and minor modifications as preparations went forward. The assault-landing at Catania was abandoned; the 56th Division was diverted to Tunisia and later to the 10th Corps, its place in the 13th Corps being taken by the 50th Division, which was withdrawn from Tunisia for re-forming and training. The 30th Corps was nominated as the second corps of Eastern Task Force, to carry out an assault on the South coast of the island in the Modica area, whilst Western Task Force concentrated its initial assault just to the West, in the Gela area; the 3rd Division was transferred to the 30th Corps when the assault on Catania was abandoned. Later, the 3rd Division was withdrawn and its place was taken by the 1st Canadian Division, with the 1st Canadian Army Tank Brigade, to be mounted with a commando from the United Kingdom. The 51st Division was eventually nominated as the second division of the 30th Corps, which was to include the 23rd Brigade. The 1st Airborne Division was also given a role in Eastern Task Force, and the 78th Division was to be the follow-up division. Both of these divisions were to be mounted from North Africa, and Middle East only had the responsibility of planning for them and of providing the 4th Parachute Brigade for the 1st Airborne Division.

76. These changes very considerably increased the difficulties of planning, and of training and equipping the force; but preparations were in fact completed to time although the date of the assault was advanced and the period for preparation was cut down as planning continued.

77. Experience showed that the planning of combined operations requires far more detail and consequently a larger and possibly more specialised staff than normal operations.

78. The most important subject of detailed planning, to which all other considerations were preliminary and subordinate, was the ultimate embarkation and shipment of the force.

79. By the end of February an outline plan had been prepared. The force to be mounted from Middle East required sixty M.T. ships and twenty-five troopships in addition to a large number of landing craft. To enable vehicles and stores to be discharged in the order of priority laid down by Twelfth Army Headquarters, plans were made for stores-ships to be tactically loaded. To implement this, in mid-April a pre-stowage planning staff was set up at Cairo: this included representatives of the War Office and of the Ministry of War Transport, who had had experience of planning stowage for the landing in Algeria.

80. Planning for anti-aircraft defence involved a two-fold problem. It was necessary to provide strong anti-aircraft cover for the Suez Canal and for the Middle East ports of concentration in addition to anti-aircraft protection for the assault. The Middle East Bases would be valuable targets at any time during the last five weeks of preparation, and strong anti-aircraft reinforcements had to be deployed for their defence. Units for this reinforcement programme were provided by bringing back a proportion of the Eighth Army anti-aircraft units and by reinforcements from the United Kingdom.

81. The planning for the anti-aircraft and coast defences of ports and airfields in Sicily, when they should be captured, with its complicated problems of distribution and co-ordination, was carried out by an inter-services committee.

82. Signals planning had to deal with problems for implementing the inter-communications plan, the provision of units and equipment, the provision of special equipment for combined operations for non-signals units, and the provision of communications in embarkation areas during the loading of formations.

83. One of the main difficulties anticipated was that of bridging the gap between the landing craft and the water's edge on the very shallow beaches. To assist in the solution of this problem considerable experimental work had to be carried out.

84. Originally it was intended that Malta should be used as a casualty clearing station area, but this was vetoed by the Royal Navy. Arrangements were accordingly made for the evacuation of casualties from the beaches direct to Tripoli, Sousse and Sfax; Middle East was responsible only for Tripoli, where plans were made to provide 9,000 hospital beds and accommodation for 4,550 convalescents. To implement the evacuation plan, eight hospital ships and four carriers were required. Of these the latter were provided from the United Kingdom and the former from the Middle East, India and South Africa. They were to rendezvous at Tripoli fully equipped.

85. Large dumps of stretchers, blankets and hospital linen were also established at base ports, and extra medical supplies and equipment were provided for the medical units in the

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

re-equipment of formations and units for operations, and secondly the release of large quantities of stores to form landing reserves and beach maintenance packs. It was only the provision of certain items such as mine detectors and light base plates for the mortars of assault flights that occasioned difficulty. The emergency calls for stores after the operation had started were, it is believed, largely due to the inability of the army to distribute the stores locked up in the landing reserve and maintenance packs rather than to the insufficiency of the reserves.

95. Very large quantities of ammunition were provided for the maintenance of the Eastern Task Force. Although some difficulty was experienced in providing smoke generators, the demands were eventually met.

96. The main factor which delayed the preparation of the formations and units was the provision of vehicles. In addition to the 5th Division, which was completed on arrival from Persia and Iraq Command in April, the 231st Brigade from Malta was fully equipped, and the 50th Division was given 1,500 vehicles and 400 motor cycles. No. II Mobile Naval Beach Defence Organisation was also completely equipped, as its own transport from the United Kingdom arrived too late. These, and numerous administrative units, were prepared in Egypt, whilst in Tunisia the 51st Division was equipped partly by stripping other formations, but largely by Allied Force Headquarters.

97. The issue of vehicles was in the main completed by early June, together with the provision of a small immediate reserve of four hundred vehicles in Tripoli. A request from Allied Force Headquarters for assistance was met by the despatch of 2,970 vehicles by road from Egypt in the six weeks after 21st July.

98. The requisite number of Royal Army Service Corps units was made up from all sources in the Middle East, including a certain number of recently arrived units from Persia and Iraq Command. The Royal Army Service Corps Mobilisation Centre at Tahag was required to re-equip approximately 80 per cent. of the units, which involved a total of about 4,500 vehicles. Since many of these vehicles had been operating in the desert for some considerable periods, the repair programme was extensive. It was found quite impossible for the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers to cope with the Royal Army Service Corps vehicles in addition to those of all other arms. Accordingly a grouped workshop, comprising the Royal Army Service Corps workshops platoons belonging to the units being re-equipped, was formed at the Royal Army Service Corps Mobilisation Centre. Six hundred and fifty new vehicles were issued to the Royal Army Service Corps, and with these and the repair facilities of the grouped workshop, all units were re-equipped completely.

99. In addition to being provided with transport by Middle East Command, Eighth Army was issued with about a hundred and sixty armoured and scout cars. After re-equipping, formations moved with the following vehicles and guns, most of which were issued from the Delta: 2,136 "A" vehicles, 29,800 "B" vehicles and 1,604 pieces of artillery.

100. Besides equipping the artillery in its component of Eastern Task Force, Middle East

Command despatched twenty-two 105 mm. self-propelled equipments to the 11th Honourable Artillery Company Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery, at the request of Allied Force Headquarters. These were provided at the expense of units in my command which were not taking part in the attack on Sicily.

101. No difficulty was experienced in equipping the light anti-aircraft units, but heavy anti-aircraft presented a different problem. All the equipment held by Eighth Army units had travelled some 2,000 miles and was in various stages of disrepair. The stocks in the ordnance depots were barely sufficient to cover normal casualties. The majority of guns and Radar equipment in transit to Middle East would not arrive in time, and the defence required for the concentration areas in Egypt and the Levant, and for the Suez Canal, made it impossible to withdraw much equipment from the units remaining in the Middle East. The only remaining source of supply was Persia and Iraq. All available serviceable guns and Radar equipment were despatched by land and sea from there, arriving in time to complete the re-equipment of all heavy anti-aircraft regiments with new or practically new guns. However, owing to the scarcity of Radar equipment, all units had to sail with only one gunlayer, Mark II, per battery.

102. No difficulty was experienced in the equipping of units with signal stores except those specially designed for combined operations. In the Tripoli area, units and formations were supplied from three signal parks and an advanced ordnance depot, and in the Delta direct from base ordnance depots. Owing to the fact that the ship conveying certain of the special combined operations' signal stores from the United Kingdom broke down, many of them did not arrive until the expedition was due to sail. This involved a considerable amount of improvisation. As a consequence none of the special stores were issued until 24th May, one week before the last day on which units could accept delivery, which severely handicapped the training of operators in these new types of equipment. A certain amount of difficulty was also caused by the arrival of battle batteries in unserviceable condition. Fortunately a second consignment arrived, which eased the situation.

103. The re-equipping of the force for Sicily involved a heavy programme of production, as well as of planning, manpower allocation, and distribution of equipment and stores. In particular, many stores required for the landing and assault, and a very large number of petrol and water containers, were manufactured locally, whilst, to equip the assault and follow-up forces to the maximum possible extent with returnable containers, all base and line of communication troops were provided with bulk and non-returnable containers, and as many captured containers as possible were back-loaded from Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. As a result of these efforts the assault and first follow-up convoys were completely equipped with small returnable containers, although subsequent convoys were only equipped with fifty per cent. returnable and fifty per cent. non-returnable containers.

104. During the preparatory period Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers Base workshops were fully employed in turning out

"A" and "B" vehicles and guns for the re-equipment of Eighth Army. During the same period they also manufactured a considerable quantity of special items such as Scorpions, mine detectors and beach carts. From February they carried out experiments at Kabrit in water-proofing "A" and "B" vehicles, guns, etc., as the information then available from the United Kingdom was very meagre. Experiments were also carried out with materials manufactured locally. Out of some 15,000 vehicles prepared in Middle East ports, United Kingdom materials were available for only 4,500; the rest were waterproofed with local materials.

105. Survey, also, had its share of production. From material provided by the War Office, augmented by air photography in so far as the very inadequate supply of the necessary specialist aircraft permitted, just under four million maps for Sicily were printed in the Middle East, including an urgently required set of charts for the Royal Navy.

106. Air-letter forms, copies of the "Soldier's Guide to Sicily", and pamphlets were other minor, but not unimportant, products of local manufacture.

107. Whilst Middle East Command was busy maintaining Eighth Army in Tunisia, planning for Sicily and re-forming and re-equipping formations for that campaign, it had also to provide and staff the training establishments necessary for the new type of warfare on which Eighth Army was about to embark.

108. Training involved the preparation of two brigade groups in each of the 5th and 50th Divisions, and the 231st Independent Infantry Brigade Group, for the assault role, and of one brigade group in each division for the follow-up role. In addition to these formations, certain army and corps troops, No. 1 Commando and some Royal Air Force personnel were to be trained in combined operations.

109. To implement this programme, five brigade groups, in addition to normal training, were assault-trained at the Combined Training Centre, while two brigade groups were trained at the Mountain Warfare Training Centre and in Dryshod training to act as follow-up brigades. Four beach bricks were also trained in their role.

110. The Combined Training Centre, Kabrit, had previously been on a care and maintenance basis. With the staff and facilities available, the utmost that could be done was to train one brigade group in four weeks. This was inadequate, as the programme envisaged not only the training of a brigade group in three weeks, but also the training of the four beach bricks. To cope with this, a new system of training had to be devised to accelerate the training of brigades, and the existing Combined Training Centre was enlarged and new establishments set up. To reduce the time spent by a brigade at the Combined Training Centre all training which did not require the use of craft was transferred to Dryshod training wings, which were set up as far as possible in the areas in which formations were concentrated. In these areas, mock landing craft and ships' sides were erected, and training consisted of lectures, Dryshod exercises, craft drill and precision driving. After fourteen days at a Dryshod wing, formations moved to Kabrit for fourteen

days' Wetshod training, culminating in a full-scale brigade landing exercise. In all cases brigades intended for assault roles did their training with the beach brick with which it was intended they should operate.

111. Considerable work was involved in providing facilities for Dryshod training and suitable beaches for Wetshod training. The latter involved very heavy dredging operations. The almost completed deep water quays at Adabiya Bay were taken over by the Royal Navy for berthing and maintaining landing craft and training their crews.

112. The Combined Training Centre was substantially increased, the bulk of the additional instructors being drawn from the United Kingdom. A Formations Combined Training Staff was organised primarily with the object of setting and running rehearsal exercises. In addition there were two increments for attachment to formations for advice on combined operations, planning and training.

113. A major exercise called BROMYARD took place for the 13th Corps in the Gulf of Aqaba in June, 1943. The convoy sailed from Suez on 10th June, and on 13th June all assaulting troops of the 5th and 50th Divisions, with associated beach bricks and special service troops, were landed on the beaches. Troops re-embarked on the following day. This involved the embarkation into twelve personnel and four M.T./Stores ships of 23,000 men and 350 vehicles; the stores ships were tactically stowed with dummy stores and non-operational vehicles specially issued for the exercise.

114. Bad weather prevented the rehearsal exercise of the 231st Brigade and 31 Beach Brick taking place at Sofaga. Accordingly the convoy was sailed to Aqaba, where a landing exercise was carried out after the conclusion of exercise BROMYARD.

115. The training of the anti-aircraft units was difficult because many of the units had only recently arrived from the United Kingdom or Persia and Iraq Command, and had not been in active employment for a long time. On the other hand, the Eighth Army units had been so continuously engaged in operations that they had not properly absorbed recent technical developments and drills. The sixty anti-aircraft batteries involved were concentrated in the Delta and during May and June a training programme was carried out by which every battery was put through a practice camp.

116. No Bailey bridges arrived in the Middle East until 24th May. From this date until the launching of the operation, cadres from as many units as possible were given one week's intensive training in the new equipment which they were to use to such an extent during the operation.

117. Courses for Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers personnel in water-proofing were held at Kabrit. These personnel were used as instructors for training cadres of unit personnel so that units could waterproof their own vehicles. This plan, however, was revised when it was shown by the exercises and the early loading of a ship that the state of training of unit personnel was not good enough to allow units to do their own water-proofing and that it would have to be carried out by Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers personnel at the ports.

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

commitment, but it was successfully accomplished largely because most of the force had been withdrawn to the Delta for the purpose. Although the undertaking involved great quantities of equipment and large formations, most of the difficulties came from changes in the operational plan and from the wide area from which the assault was mounted.

132. Having launched Eastern Task Force, Middle East Command then had to implement its maintenance plans. It had been decided as a general principle that the commands in which formations were mounted would be responsible for the maintenance of these formations for the first four convoys, that is to say, convoys arriving in the first four weeks after the landing. Then Middle East would be responsible for all British forces in Sicily for the first seven weeks. After that date, maintenance of the forces in Sicily, other than United States Army troops, was to be based on the principle that such items as were considered to be Eastern Group Supply (of Eastern origin) were to be shipped from Middle East and items of Western Group Supply from the United Kingdom or United States.

133. This system of maintenance was carried out as planned. Middle East received detailed loading programmes from Eighth Army for the first four convoys. Then, until Allied Force Headquarters assumed administrative control, Middle East received demands direct from Eighth Army, provided Eastern Group supplies and certain items of Western Group Supply, and laid off to the War Office the remaining demands, mainly for Western Group supplies, which it had been agreed would be shipped from the West.

134. From 12th August, 15 Army Group, under Allied Force Headquarters, took over both operational and administrative control in Sicily and so Allied Force Headquarters assumed administrative control of all forces in Sicily; thereafter the total demands ceased to be placed direct on Middle East, who now received from Allied Force Headquarters demands for Eastern Group supplies and from the War Office instructions to provide those items of Western Group supply which could not be provided from the United Kingdom or from the United States. In addition, demands for urgent requirements of controlled stores were made direct on Middle East by Allied Force Headquarters.

135. In all, from June to October a total of 230,000 tons and 19,500 vehicles were loaded for despatch to Sicily. Stocks of ammunition had been built up throughout the early part of 1943 and, therefore, little difficulty was experienced in providing the 30,000 tons exported for this operation; a certain amount of ammunition was earmarked in Tripoli for calling forward if necessary.

136. The provision of supplies presented no serious problems. Forty-eight hour mess-tin rations, provided as landing rations, were loaded in bulk and issued to each man prior to disembarkation. The mess-tin and composite rations proved very successful for an operation of this nature. The force was maintained on composite rations for the first three weeks, after which the change-over to Middle East Field Service hard-scale ration was made possible by the gradual building up of rations

in the first three convoys. By the end of six weeks, stock on the ground represented seven days for 235,000 men, whilst reserves had been established at Malta and Tripoli.

137. Planning for the requirements of petrol and oil was based to a great extent on previous operational consumption in the desert and proved to be an over-estimate, as the line of communication was much shorter and the losses en route and on loading were much less than had been anticipated. A reserve dump of 6,000 tons was built up at Tripoli; this was not required and was eventually used for normal maintenance. In addition, Middle East provided facilities for bulk oil supply for the Royal Navy at Benghazi and at Tripoli.

138. Ordnance stores, of which some 90,000 items were issued from 4 and 5 Base Ordnance Depots, needed special precautions for packing and shipping; special packing cases were designed and manufactured in the Middle East, limited in weight to one-man lifts. Engineer base depots also were heavily employed in packing and shipping stores for the operation. In all, 20,000 tons of engineer stores and about 500 items of heavy plant were shipped to Sicily from Middle East stocks.

139. These maintenance tasks were effectively accomplished, both during the assault, the subsequent period of maintenance through beachheads, and later when the ports of Augusta and Syracuse were in operation. The success was due to two main factors—our low losses at sea (thanks to the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force) and the care and forethought which had been put into the preparations during the previous five months.

140. In addition to maintaining its quota of the Eastern Task Force with supplies and equipment, Middle East had to provide reinforcements, to handle rear signals and postal traffic and to receive casualties.

141. Pools of reinforcements were, therefore, built up in the Delta, Tripoli and the Sousse and Sfax areas from Middle East resources, in addition to personnel provided by British North African Force. No. 1 Advanced Second Echelon was established at Malta to serve both Middle East Forces and British North African Force. Advanced Second Echelon reported battle casualties direct to the United Kingdom and maintained reinforcement officers at Tripoli, Sousse and Philippeville. In close contact with these reinforcement officers and with Advanced Second Echelon, Libya, it was responsible for the supply of reinforcements to Sicily. It also served as a clearing-house for the supply of the necessary information to Second Echelon, Middle East Forces, and Second Echelon, British North African Force.

142. Middle East also supplied a base headquarters for Sicily. This was supplied from Tripolitania Base and Lines of Communication Headquarters, which went to Sicily almost *en bloc*, the Base Headquarters' duties in Tripolitania being taken over by Headquarters, Tripolitania District, from 16th July.

143. Whilst these arrangements were made for reinforcements, the provision of cashier and postal services caused some difficulty. In addition to providing and equipping cashiers to proceed with the force, arrangements had to be

made for the provision and distribution of adequate supplies of British Military Administration currency and for the exchange into this currency of the local money in the hands of the embarking troops. In view of the large numbers of troops and the large sums involved, this entailed a considerable organisation.

144. Postal services laboured under severe difficulties. The need for the strictest security was a great handicap, the facilities enjoyed by the Middle East and British North African components of the force required adjustment to make them similar, and the division of complete units into several parties distributed over the Middle East in transit to Sicily and in Sicily itself made the re-direction and diversion of mail extremely difficult.

145. As maintenance of Eighth Army was a Middle East responsibility in the initial stages, there was a large volume of administrative signal traffic between Middle East and Eighth Army. On 14th August (with Eighth Army finally established in Sicily), submarine cable fullerphone was established between Sicily and Malta to meet signal traffic back to 15 Army Group and General Headquarters Middle East, by means other than wireless. Malta cleared traffic to and from Algiers and the Delta by submarine cable. This fullerphone circuit was replaced by high-speed morse on 9th September.

146. Whilst Middle East Base played this important part in the Sicilian operations, Malta, an outlying portion of my command, also fulfilled a role which necessitated most careful planning and administration. The 231st Brigade was taken from the garrison, trained and re-equipped in the Middle East, and took part in the assault and subsequent operations. In addition to providing this brigade, Malta was also called upon to use all of its facilities to the utmost in preparation for the attack on Sicily.

147. Owing to the lack of accommodation and other facilities, it was decided that Malta should not be developed as an advanced base. Its role, therefore, became that of a combined advanced headquarters and staging post. In preparation for the assault it had to accommodate the assault troops of the 51st Division, numerous army and corps troops and Royal Air Force personnel, the main headquarters of the 30th Corps and Twelfth (later Eighth) Army, Headquarters of the Desert Air Force, Naval Headquarters and Tactical Headquarters of the Army Group; in all an additional commitment of approximately 30,000 personnel and 2,700 vehicles.

148. Although a large proportion of the vehicles arrived at Malta in landing craft, the discharge of the cargo ships placed a great strain on the movement and transportation facilities. To deal with this extra commitment a number of additional staff was sent to the island as well as extra administrative units, including two general transport and eight pioneer companies.

149. Accommodation on Malta, which had never been large, had been substantially reduced by bombing. Twelve tented camp sites and eighteen bivouac areas, each to accommodate 1,000 men and 70 vehicles, were therefore

prepared. A well-boring section was despatched to the island and sixteen bores were sunk for military and civilian needs in areas where the existing water supply was insufficient.

150. Twelve hards, selected by the Royal Navy, were prepared in the Grand Harbour and Marsh Muscetto Harbour; of these only four could be used for L.S.Ts. owing either to lack of draught or to the unsuitability of road approaches.

151. Even when the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers personnel in Malta had been strengthened by a draft from Middle East, not more than 300 vehicles could be water-proofed a day. Three vehicle marshalling parks were therefore organised within two miles of the hards. There vehicles, after waterproofing, were assembled until they were called forward for loading. These three areas could accommodate only 900 vehicles. Another vehicle marshalling park capable of holding 600 vehicles was therefore organised about five miles from the hards. It was realised that, after stage two of the waterproofing, vehicles should not be driven more than two miles, but in view of the congestion in the harbour area and the necessity to hold sufficient vehicles in readiness for embarkation, this distance was accepted.

152. Royal Air Force units were the first to arrive, on 3rd June, 1943. From this date until 7th July, units arrived continuously either by landing craft or by troopships. Stores of all natures, both reserves for Eighth Army and for the maintenance of Malta, were also received during this period.

153. Advanced holdings were established of 3,200 tons of supplies, 5,000 tons of petrol and oil and 6,000 tons of ammunition. In addition, small reserves were held of vital Ordnance stores, including hospital requirements and waterproofing kits. Ultimately, a substantial proportion of the petrol and oil and ammunition was not required and was used for Malta maintenance. The ammunition proved of great value, especially for emergency demands to cover unforeseen expenditure.

154. Originally it had been intended that Malta should be used as a casualty clearing area for evacuation from the beaches, but as the Royal Navy objected to hospital ships and carriers calling at the ports the plan was abandoned and Malta was prepared as a medical reserve area only, for the reception of such casualties as might arrive in normal naval and military craft destined for the island. For this purpose, 7,760 beds (including 1,000 for convalescents) were held ready, but in actual fact these were not all used. The casualties which passed through Malta were mainly airborne personnel and other survivors picked up by naval vessels.

155. During the period 8th-16th July, a total of 20,400 personnel, 2,700 vehicles and 3,500 tons of stores was embarked and loaded at Malta. The call forward of personnel and vehicles after the initial assault presented some difficulty, and quick turn-round of craft was maintained only at the expense of a certain amount of discomfort to the troops and congestion at the quayside. This arose because the number of craft available for the next flight was seldom known sufficiently early,

so that it was necessary in some cases to move down to the docks personnel and vehicles ordered by the ferry control and to keep them there until craft became available.

156. Once the operations had started and the troops which had been staged there had been ferried to Sicily, Malta's role diminished. The dumps of supplies, petrol and oil, ammunition and Ordnance stores were partially despatched. Supplies of bread, approximately 18,000 lbs. daily, were shipped from 22nd July to 13th August. Apart from that, little was done by the island except to meet small urgent demands.

157. Undoubtedly Malta was used to full capacity. The hards in the Grand Harbour were of necessity extremely close together and difficult of access, but our air superiority discouraged the enemy from attempting any appreciable interference. Further, owing to lack of suitable sites, three of the vehicle marshalling parks were also in the middle of the harbour area. One vehicle marshalling park was camouflaged most successfully, but lack of labour and material did not permit of this being done for the others.

158. The administrative arrangements at Malta worked smoothly, thanks to the co-operation of the Royal Navy and the hard work of the garrison, and the island proved invaluable in the mounting of our overseas offensive in the Mediterranean.

159. The success achieved in preparing and mounting the offensive against Sicily was demonstrated by the operations. Eighth Army and its lines of communication and administration were firmly established, and on 12th August, 1943, 15 Army Group, under Allied Force Headquarters, took over administrative responsibility for Eighth Army. The actual hand-over took some weeks, but with effect from that date Middle East Command was officially relieved of this responsibility.

Italy.

160. In anticipation of the successful conclusion of the Sicilian campaign, plans were next made for exploitation in Italy. The planning was carried out at Allied Force Headquarters, and I was not directly concerned at this stage, although, at the request of Allied Force Headquarters, Middle East Survey revised some two hundred maps for the operation, despite the continued lack of suitable aircraft.

161. The plan, finally, called on Middle East to mount the 10th Corps Headquarters, Corps troops, the 7th Armoured Division and the 56th Division. These formations were to be mounted from the Tripoli area and were to take part in the attack either on the toe of Italy or at Salerno. In the end, although they were mounted for operations in the toe of Italy, they were launched against Salerno. The remainder of the force was to be mounted in North Africa and was not a commitment of Middle East Command.

162. Accordingly, the 10th Corps Headquarters, the 7th Armoured Division and the 56th Division were concentrated in the Tripoli area and were trained and equipped for their task. Re-equipment in artillery and vehicles was carried through without any great strain,

mainly by stripping the 1st Armoured Division and the 4th Indian Division, who were at that time without an operational role, whilst signals, engineer and other equipment was also provided and the formations were brought up to their full scale of both armoured and other vehicles.

163. The task of equipping these formations, at a distance of over a thousand miles from the main base in Egypt, and with the planning staff still further removed (at Algiers) provided a sharp contrast to the advantages which had been gained by withdrawing most of Eighth Army to Egypt for re-equipment for the attack on Sicily. Much confusion was caused by the inevitable lack of close liaison, and to meet urgent demands considerable use had to be made of air transport, as a result of which the freight carried by air from Cairo to Tripolitania rose from 1,600 lbs. in July to 135,000 lbs. in August and 154,000 lbs. in September.

164. The arrangements for concentration and embarkation were delegated very largely to Headquarters Tripolitania District, owing to the great distance from the main base at which the operation had to be mounted, and in spite of the fact that a single port was used for the embarkation of so large a force, and of the distance from main base, the task was successfully accomplished. For the assault, nine personnel ships, eight stores ships and ten L.S.Ts. sailed from Tripoli on 7th September, whilst a further 170 L.S.Ts. completed the Corps by mid-November. In all, including follow-up shipping, some 73,000 men, 14,000 vehicles, 600 guns and 400 tanks were embarked from Tripoli, involving the use of 342 vessels.

165. Eighth Army crossed from Sicily into Italy on 3rd September, and the assault landing at Salerno was carried out on the 9th by which date preparations for launching the 10th Corps were complete. Although most of this embarkation was successfully delegated to Headquarters Tripolitania District, the Middle East base ports were also called on to ship 4,500 tons of stores direct.

166. Middle East Command was responsible for maintaining this force for the first three weeks of the operation, that is to say, from 9th September to 2nd October. For this period, convoys were loaded with 43,500 tons of stores.

167. From 2nd October onwards, maintenance of the force in Italy was on the basis of the Eastern and Western Group system, which was also being used for the other forces, including Eighth Army, in Sicily and Italy. Under this system the War Office made demands on Middle East, but in order to simplify the shipping problem Allied Force Headquarters also informed Middle East, every ten days, of the separate demands for Naples and the toe of Italy respectively.

168. From 13th September, the normal ten-day convoys from Middle East were switched from Sicily to Italy, but normal maintenance and the building up of reserves were affected by the demands made on port and shipping capacities by the move to Italy of follow-up divisions. This demand was made heavier because, in view of the low holding of reserve stores in Italy, the first three follow-up divisions had to take with them sixty days' reserves of

all items; this was particularly necessary since Indian troops were involved, and their maintenance demanded their own special supplies.

169. The principal difficulty has arisen with the supply of meat, both frozen and fresh. Owing to the shortage of refrigerator coasters it became necessary to turn Malta into a "feeder" at which ocean-going refrigerator vessels discharged, the meat being subsequently discharged by coasters at Italian ports; fresh meat (largely for the use of Indian troops) was ultimately provided by shipping live sheep from the Middle East.

170. In answer to periodic calls for assistance, Middle East has subsequently had to ship various stores and equipment to Italy. Replacement vehicles and ammunition have been in demand, and vehicles have also been shipped to Italy from Tripoli instead of driving them back to Egypt.

171. To the end of my period in command, direct supply from the United Kingdom and the United States to the advanced Ordnance depots in Italy had not yet become effective, and the Ordnance depots in the Delta were being used as the bulk breaking point for all Eastern Group stores, as well as for certain Western Group stores, for the Central Mediterranean Force as well as for Middle East Forces. In September the Provision Branches of Central Mediterranean Force, British North African Force and Middle East Forces were amalgamated under the title of Deputy Director of Ordnance Services (Provisions), Mediterranean, and the organisation was based on Cairo. Consequently the number of troops for whom provision had to be made rose from 730,000 in January, 1943, to 1,750,000 in September and the ensuing months.

172. The magnitude of the part played by Middle East Base during this period is shown by the fact that from August to December 284,000 tons of stores and 23,000 vehicles were loaded for shipment to Italy.

173. The provision of medical facilities and the evacuation of casualties for the forces in Italy placed a further commitment on Middle East. Casualties from Sicily had been less than was anticipated, and the arrangements had worked smoothly. Casualties from Italy continued to be received in Middle East, by sea or air, up to the end of October, and although at one time the shortage of hospital ships for further transportation to the United Kingdom caused some anxiety and a danger of accumulation, the facilities proved adequate. Between 10th July and 7th January, forty-four hospitals and expansions amounting to 13,800 British, Dominion, Indian and African beds and 5,500 beds for convalescents were despatched from the Middle East to Italy.

174. Although the 10th Corps was the only formation which Middle East contributed to the assault on Italy, the subsequent build-up drew heavily on my reserves of manpower (and precluded the undertaking of any other enterprise demanding the use of a major formation). Allied Force Headquarters wished the build-up to take place as quickly as possible; in this the limiting factor was not the availability of formations but the intake capacity in Italy. A programme was laid down for the Middle East which envisaged the despatch of one division,

with corps and ancillary troops and vehicles, each month. In pursuance of this programme, the 8th Indian Division was despatched from Haifa and Beirut in September, the 2nd New Zealand Division was despatched from Suez and Alexandria during October, the 4th Indian Division from Alexandria during December, and the 3rd Carpathian Division (Polish) during January. Three medium regiments, Royal Artillery, were also equipped and despatched, and arrangements were also made for the 5th Polish Division and Headquarters and Corps Troops of the 2nd Polish Corps to be despatched. All of these formations had to be trained, re-equipped and shipped by Middle East.

175. Meanwhile, the 1st British Armoured Division, the 2nd Fighting French Armoured Division and the 1st Fighting French Infantry Division had been despatched from Middle East to Allied Force Headquarters, the total of pioneer companies provided by Middle East for Sicily and Italy had been brought up to fifty, and the 8th Armoured Brigade and a number of administrative units had been shipped to the United Kingdom.

176. In addition to mounting build-up divisions for Italy, Middle East Command also had to provide reinforcements, particularly for Indian, African and Local Colonial troops (for which Allied Force Headquarters had no facilities). In all, from 1st September to 8th January, Middle East despatched over 11,000 reinforcements to Italy; of these 5,000 were British, almost 3,000 Indian and 3,600 New Zealanders. Reinforcements and new formations between them took a total of 110,000 men from Middle East to Italy and Sicily during the months from September to December, a monthly average of 30,000.

177. This very heavy drain in men and administrative effort for Italy, even after Eighth Army had nominally passed out of my sphere, meant that any other operation which I might contemplate would have to be largely of a diversionary nature and could be undertaken only at the risk of unduly weakening troops required for internal security and garrison duties within the Command. This proved to be the limiting factor in the operations in the Aegean, which the overthrow of the Italian Government precipitated.

Operations in the Aegean.

178. Plans for the seizure of small islands in the Aegean as bases for raiding operations against the enemy's lines of communication had been under consideration for some time before I took over command in the Middle East, and in February, 1943, the Joint Planning Staff began seriously to consider the possibilities of a major assault on the Dodecanese (which were Italian possessions), with Rhodes and Scarpanto, the two most strategically placed islands, as the principal objectives. Planning for such operations was complicated by the conflicting ambitions of the Greeks and the Turks for the ultimate possession of the islands and, after considering all the possibilities, it was decided that the actual operations should be carried out by British forces only, and that the future of the Dodecanese should not yet be discussed with either of the interested parties.

179. Operations in Tunisia, however, were our first commitment at this time. When the

possible withdrawal of some British troops from North Africa to the Middle East for Ægean operations was raised, General Eisenhower replied that the ability of North Africa to furnish British troops after the completion of the Tunisian campaign depended upon the decisions of the Combined Chiefs of Staff on the course of operations in the Mediterranean, following the planned invasion of Sicily. He declared, therefore, that the movement of troops from North Africa to Middle East should follow, and not precede, these decisions.

180. Nevertheless, although the prospect of obtaining troops from North Africa was uncertain, a detailed plan for a full-scale attack on Rhodes and Scarpanto, and the subsequent occupation of other islands, was produced by 2nd May. The principal feature of the plan was the landing of forces two hundred and fifty miles from their nearest air bases in Cyprus, and still farther from Cyrenaica, and the crux of the operation was the provision of the necessary air cover and adequate air reinforcements. But to offset this difficulty, other large-scale operations would probably be in progress in the Central Mediterranean to deter the enemy from reinforcing the Ægean.

181. The minimum troop requirements for the whole Ægean operation, including garrisons for Rhodes, Scarpanto and other islands, were three infantry divisions, one armoured brigade, two independent infantry battalions, two parachute battalions and corps troops.

182. This plan was produced by No. 2 Planning Staff, which had just been formed in Cairo, and which was composed mainly of officers of the 3rd Corps Headquarters. No. 2 Planning Staff was re-designated Force 202 in June, 1943, when it seemed likely that active operations in the Ægean were to be undertaken and a Force Headquarters would be required to conduct operations in the field. But the uncertainty of Turkey's attitude, the complexities of the political situation in the Balkans, and the needs of Sicily and Italy made detailed planning difficult, and during the nine months from May, 1943, no less than seven plans were produced for the capture of Rhodes, Crete and other islands in the Dodecanese and the Ægean.

183. The scope of each plan varied in relation to the object to be attained, the varying degrees of opposition likely to be encountered and the scale of co-operation of the Turkish Government. The early plans, which envisaged not only the capture of the Dodecanese and Ægean Islands but further operations on the mainland of Greece, had to provide for crushing both German and Italian resistance. Later plans, after the collapse of Italy, dealt only with the capture of Rhodes or Crete held by the German garrisons supported by Fascist elements of the Italian garrisons. In some cases the plans had to be made in the absence of a Naval Planning Section, and consequently were never fully completed.

184. On four occasions a force was assembled and partially prepared to undertake the capture of Rhodes. As the collapse of Italy appeared imminent, the 8th Indian Division was actually embarked and rehearsed in a landing operation at Suez. This rehearsal took place on 24th, 25th and 26th August and the force was to be ready to sail on 1st September. Unfortunately, however, on 26th August I was informed that the transports had received orders to proceed

to India,* and the force was disembarked and returned to its stations; the 8th Indian Division was sent to Italy almost immediately. When, on 8th September, the Italian armistice was announced and an opportunity for seizing the island arose, the shipping and the force which had been specially prepared for a quick seizure of Rhodes had been dispersed.

185. Thus the Italian armistice took me at a complete disadvantage. Owing to the claims of other Commands, a carefully planned and rehearsed operation had just been jettisoned and no urgent action was contemplated in the immediate future, since I was not kept informed of what was afoot and first learned that Italy was discussing terms only a few days before the public announcement that the armistice had been concluded. I therefore had neither time, troops nor shipping to prepare to take advantage of the chances which were thus offered, whilst, even before the Italian capitulation was announced, the movements of German troops in the Aegean and Ionian islands indicated that they were preparing to be attacked there, and that they expected to find the Italians of little fighting value.

186. Events immediately following the armistice showed that German plans to cope with such an eventuality had been well laid, and the attitude of General Vecchiarelli, commander of the Italian Eleventh Army, at Athens, who refused to co-operate with us, and whose troops were ultimately disarmed, undoubtedly assisted the Germans to consolidate their positions. The German take-over in Crete was accomplished quite smoothly, and at Scarpanto the newly arrived German Fortress Infantry Battalion had little difficulty in asserting itself.

187. In spite of this, the opportunity for seizing Rhodes before the German garrison there could re-organise and adjust itself to the changed circumstances (provided the Italian garrison could exert itself in our favour) still existed. I therefore decided to despatch the 234th Brigade, a regular brigade which had come from Malta in June, 1943, to the island, to assist the Italians in overpowering the Germans.

188. At this time the German air forces in Greece and the Aegean were not considered sufficiently strong to constitute a major threat to these operations, nor were their land forces on Rhodes of any great consequence, consisting as they did of one division, General Kleeman's "Sturm" Division, six thousand strong, which was outnumbered by the Italians by six to one.

189. The expedition of the 234th Brigade was to be preceded by a small mission whose task was to make contact with the Italian commander in Rhodes and induce him to take over

* It had been agreed at the Washington Anglo-American Conference in May, 1943, that in order to keep up the maximum pressure on the Japanese, a combined operation against the Arakan should be staged later in the year. This operation had been given priority for resources after the main operations against Italy. In view of the possible developments, part of the shipping destined for the Arakan operation was held for a time in the Mediterranean. In order to implement agreed strategy in the Far East, however, it was necessary to release those ships before the end of August. It was considered at the time that the Arakan operations would have been of greater benefit to the War as a whole than the capture of Rhodes. In the event, however, the Arakan operations were later cancelled.

control of the island. The mission left Haifa by sea on 8th September (the day on which the armistice with Italy was announced) and went to Castelrosso, which capitulated to a small detachment of the Special Boat Squadron on 10th September. Meanwhile, the very scanty warning of the Italian collapse which I had received was cut still further by the weather. The first attempt to drop two officers by parachute on Rhodes, on 9th September, failed, so that the Germans got an extra day in which to organise their positions on the island and to undermine the morale of the Italians. It was not until the night of 9th-10th September that Major the Lord Jellicoe and another officer were dropped by parachute and established contact with Admiral Campione, the Italian Governor, whose spirit was clearly affected by the delay and by the fact that the Germans were already present whilst we were not.

190. At 1715 hours on 11th September, information reached me that Campione had lost heart, had refused permission for us to enter the island and did not wish to have any further dealings with us. The 234th Infantry Brigade was in the meantime being prepared for operations, but, owing to the limitations of shipping and the time taken to collect it, the brigade could not be ready to sail until 18th September. The urgency was such that this delay was unacceptable, and one battalion was ordered to embark in motor launches and Royal Air Force launches for transit to Rhodes, while preparations for the mounting of the remainder of the brigade went on as fast as possible. It was, however, imperative that we should have a guarantee of unopposed entry into the port of Rhodes and an unopposed occupation of an airfield either at Marizza or on Cos before the expedition could be launched, since a landing against opposition was out of the question. Before anything could be done, the German commander, Von Kleeman, had taken advantage of Campione's weakness and indecision, and the Germans assumed undisputed control of Rhodes.

191. The positive nature of the enemy's reaction in Rhodes, and our inability to restore the situation, made it necessary to revise completely our planning for the Aegean. Hitherto all the plans which had been made involved the employment of considerable forces, and had as their first objective the capture of Rhodes. Future plans would, of necessity, have to be made on a smaller scale and, since it was essential to act quickly, they would have to be improvised.

192. German resources in the Aegean had been stretched to the limit by their recent takeover in Rhodes and Crete, and there was a possibility that by a rapid move we could obtain control of other Aegean islands, notably Cos, and by so doing partially neutralise the recent enemy successes over the Italians, enhance our prestige throughout the Middle East, and act as a diversion for the operations in Italy.

193. General Eisenhower had already made it clear that little material support, especially in the air, could be given by North Africa to such an undertaking, and had emphasised that the campaign in Italy must not be prejudiced by any other operation in the Mediterranean. There was, however, a good chance that,

even with the limited resources at our disposal, the occupation of such islands as Cos, which had an airfield and landing grounds, Leros, where there was an Italian naval base, and Samos could be undertaken, since the garrisons seemed likely to welcome the prospect of a British occupation.

194. With the limited number of German aircraft based on Greece and Crete at this time, and with our own fighters based on Cos, the possibility of major seaborne or airborne German operations was slight, and with the aid of the loyal garrisons of Cos and Leros, who were thought to be reasonably well equipped for ground and air defence, there was every prospect of maintaining ourselves in these islands until an attack could be launched on Rhodes from the Middle East.

195. I therefore decided on the despatch of small forces to Cos, Leros and Samos, to act as stiffening to the Italians. Cos and Samos were secured by the detachment of the Special Boat Squadron which had occupied Castelrosso, and troop movements began, both by sea and air, on 15th September. Sea transport was almost entirely limited to Royal Navy destroyers going direct to Leros, or to small coasting vessels going as far as Castelrosso; thence the journey to the islands had to be made in small sailing ships. Owing to the shipping difficulties, the limitations of port capacity and disembarkation equipment, and our inability to break down Bofors guns and heavy equipment into small loads, troops could take with them only their personal weapons, rifles, mortars and Bren guns. No anti-tank, field or anti-aircraft guns could be taken, nor could any transport other than jeeps be sent. Reliance for such equipment had to be placed on the Italian equipment already in the islands, which, in the case of Leros especially, was thought to be reasonably up-to-date and effective. This regrettably was not the case. The defences of Leros were not at all well developed, much of the anti-aircraft material was out of date, and the system of fire control was deplorable; certain natures of ammunition were in short supply, and motor transport was always inadequate. The defences of Cos were on an even lower scale.

196. For the first few days the transport of troops went on without opposition, and in addition to the occupation of Cos, Leros and Samos, the islands of Simi, Stampalia and Icaria were occupied on 18th September. Air transport was used to reinforce Cos by day, troops being landed at Antimachia airfield, while destroyers went direct to Leros, the reinforcements to Samos going thence in small local craft.

197. Cos was easily the most important of these islands to us, since it possessed an airfield from which single-engined fighter aircraft could operate over the Aegean and could cover an attack on Rhodes when the time arrived for that operation to be resumed. By comparison with the facilities at Rhodes, this airfield at Antimachia was a poor one, and it was not considered possible, even from the start, to hold Cos in strength without Rhodes, for which Cos was to be a preliminary step. The island, about thirty miles long and nowhere more than seven miles wide, is the most fruitful in the Aegean; water

and food are plentiful and adequate for the population of 20,000 and for any garrison which we were likely to put in. The only port is the town of Cos, on the north-east coast, opposite the Turkish mainland; facilities here were very poor, with little depth of water and only one berth alongside the quay for a small vessel. A main road runs the length of the island, connecting Cos town with Antimachia airfield, some eighteen miles away, at the broadest part of the island.

198. The small force of fighters which could be operated and maintained on Cos was not sufficient, in view of the strongly reinforced German Air Force, to ward off for long the determined attacks on the landing ground which began on the 18th September. This was the more so since an adequate early warning system could not be established and the ground anti-aircraft consisted of twenty-four Bofors guns only, a few poorly manned and out-of-date Italian anti-aircraft guns and the small arms weapons of the British troops. Air Transport by day had therefore to be cancelled and all future reinforcement took place by night.

199. The need for British anti-aircraft defences at Antimachia, and for the defence of other landing strips which were being developed on Cos, soon became acute in the face of the increasing number of German air attacks. Bofors guns were sent forward in destroyers, L.C.Ts. and even in submarines, while stocks of aviation fuel and ammunition were despatched in every kind of craft. The ever-growing intensity of German air attack was, however, still preventing the shipping of heavy equipment such as heavy anti-aircraft guns, heavy Air Force equipment for warning systems, and motor transport, all of which were urgently required.

200. Although heavy equipment was lacking, by the end of September the garrisons of Cos, Leros and Samos, had been built up to approximately the strength of one battalion with ancillary troops on each island; on Cos twenty-four Bofors guns were in action and detachments of the Royal Air Force Regiment had arrived and partly taken over the defence of the airfield and landing strips in the island.

201. From air reconnaissance carried out on 1st and 2nd October, it was known that a considerable enemy convoy was at sea; on the 2nd it was sailing east in Naxos area, and the garrison commander on Cos assumed it was a reinforcement for Rhodes. The enemy's air superiority made it impossible for the Royal Navy to intercept the convoy by day, and a sweep carried out by destroyers on the night of 2nd October failed to locate it. At first light on the following day R.A.F. Beaufighters attacked the convoy, but without success. The garrison was therefore only conducting its ordinary routine precautions when, at 0500 hours on 3rd October, the enemy assault on Cos began. The seaborne invading forces, consisting of troops from the Greek mainland and from Crete, landed from merchant vessels, landing-craft and caiques, covered by aircraft and three destroyers, while a strong force of parachute troops, flown from the Greek mainland, was dropped on Antimachia airfield, which our aircraft were unable to use since it had been badly cratered in the air-raids which

preceded the attack. By 4th October all organised resistance on our part had been brought to an end.

202. The enemy's success on Cos was due chiefly to the rapid build-up of his air force in Greece and the Aegean (achieved at the expense of his Italian strength and in spite of the bombing of bases by available R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. aircraft), and the heavy and unceasing effort he was able to maintain in the air which disorganised the defences. Our small garrison was concentrated mainly in the area of Cos town, whilst at Antimachia, some eighteen miles away, there was one company and a detachment of the Royal Air Force Regiment with some light anti-aircraft guns. The main enemy landing, on the north coast, took place virtually without opposition; striking inland, he quickly cut the road Cos-Antimachia and forced our garrison to fight two independent actions with no weapons other than small arms and a few light mortars, which were no match for the heavy mortars and infantry guns which the invaders had brought with them. In spite of a gallant resistance, the garrison, which consisted mainly of the 1st Battalion, the Durham Light Infantry, was overwhelmed and the greater part was made prisoner.

203. The loss of Cos deprived us of our only airfield from which single-engined fighters could operate over the Aegean. As a result, no adequate daylight cover could be given to our shipping, which now became exposed to attack by a greatly strengthened German Air Force based in Greece and Crete, which had been rapidly expanded until it was at least equal to that in Italy; sea transport was henceforth confined to darkness. The disposition of our forces in the Aegean was readjusted on 5th October, when the small garrison which we had established in Calino, the neighbouring island to Cos, was withdrawn; but patrols were maintained there and on Gairos, Kythnos, Stampalia and Simi.

204. As a result of their success, the Germans were enabled rapidly to consolidate their position in the Cyclades, and with the exception of Andros, where some resistance was offered, all the islands garrisoned by Italians fell into German hands. The enemy did not use any great number of troops for these operations, rather he seemed to be gathering his strength for an assault against the islands still occupied by British garrisons, particularly Leros.

205. Constant naval and air patrols were maintained to meet this threat, and on 7th October, the Royal Navy struck a heavy blow at enemy shipping by intercepting a large enemy convoy off Stampalia and destroying four ammunition ships, six landing craft and some armed trawlers. The Royal Air Force, too, and the U.S.A.A.F. were very active and, in addition to carrying out anti-shiping reconnaissance, made repeated attacks upon the Greek mainland, Crete and Rhodes, and other strategic points occupied by the enemy, including Cos (which had now become an objective).

206. The enemy assault on Leros, which had been expected soon after the fall of Cos, hung fire and in the meantime we were able to strengthen our garrison there. It is probable that the first setback to the enemy's invasion plan was the destruction of the convoy off

Stampalia on 7th October. The continued delay was certainly due to our naval and air offensive against shipping and German key points. Heavy toll was taken by British and American air forces, who, although handicapped by the lack of airfields, and operating from very considerable distances, kept up a ceaseless offensive under trying conditions.

207. Nevertheless, in spite of all we could do, the enemy continued methodically to consolidate his position in the smaller islands. Naxos and Paros were occupied on 12th October, and on 15th October Simi, which we had evacuated two days before after heavy dive-bombing raids had made the position untenable, was occupied by the enemy. The German Air Force was well dispersed; its heavy bombers were concentrated at Eleusis, its fighters at Kalamaki and Argos, its dive-bombers at Megara and Marizza, and from these bases constant attacks were made on Leros. Delayed-action bombs put Portolago Bay, on Leros, temporarily out of action on 16th October, and on 17th and 18th October, Castelrosso was bombed for the first time since our occupation.

208. On 26th October, air activity against Leros and Samos increased in intensity, but there was still no movement from the enemy's invasion fleet. The enemy concentrations remained in the Cos and Calino areas, and further considerable concentrations were seen in the Piraeus and at Khios; but from the middle of October onwards the bad weather which set in probably contributed to the postponement of the attack.

209. Up to the end of October, operations in the Aegean had been controlled by Middle East Command through the 3rd Corps Headquarters (Force 292) and the 234th Brigade (Major-General Brittorous) on Leros, but recent developments obviously justified the establishment of a separate command to take over operations in that sphere. On 1st November, Major-General Hall was appointed G.O.C. Aegean, with the specific task of holding Leros and Samos in order to cause as much damage as possible to the enemy's lines of communication in the Aegean. In addition, he was given command of all British, Allied and Italian land forces in the Aegean, including and north of Rhodes, Scarpanto and Crete, as well as of naval personnel in shore establishments not under Commander-in-Chief, Levant, or Senior British Naval Officer, Aegean, in that area. General Hall and Brigadier Tilney, who was to take the post of Fortress Commander, Leros, arrived at Leros on 5th November, and from that date Headquarters, Aegean, started to control operations.

210. After discussion with Major-General Brittorous, who relinquished command of the 234th Brigade, General Hall decided to make Samos his headquarters. He remained on Leros long enough to see the defences of the island organised to his satisfaction and to clarify relations with the Italians there, and since the re-organisation of the island's defences was proceeding satisfactorily, he was able to leave for Samos about midnight on 11th November, leaving Brigadier Tilney in command on Leros.

211. It was unfortunate that at this time a planned extensive air effort against enemy

bases and shipping was limited by the weather and the temporary unserviceability of our Cyrenaican landing grounds owing to rain. The enemy, on the other hand, taking full advantage of the proximity of his air bases, was able to make our reinforcements of Leros difficult. The dropping of flares at night hindered unloading operations on certain occasions, and the laying of minefields also added to our difficulties; in spite of all this enemy activity the strength of the Leros garrison was built up to the strength of a brigade. The original garrison, which had arrived between the 17th September and the 2nd October, was the 234th Brigade Headquarters, and the 2nd Royal Irish Fusiliers, with a company from the 2nd Royal West Kents, the remainder of the battalion being on Samos. This was reinforced by 4th November by the 4th Buffs, although their Headquarters Company was lost at sea, and early in November the 1st King's Own completed the Brigade.

212. From the beginning of November, some increase in enemy preparations was observed. On 3rd and 4th November, landing craft and escorts were reported in Lavrion, and on the 5th aircraft reconnaissance showed them moving eastwards. Between then and the evening of 10th November when they arrived in the Cos/Calino area they moved only by day under heavy fighter protection, dispersing and lying up during the night, first in the Paros/Naxos area and later in Amorgos, Levitha and Stampalia. Every effort was made by the Royal Navy and R.A.F. to intercept the force, but our efforts met with small success due by day to the heavy scale of enemy fighter protection and by night to the difficulty of spotting the craft, which were probably beached and certainly camouflaged in the many bays available. During the afternoon of 9th November, our troops moved to their battle stations to await the enemy attack.

213. The island of Leros consists of three mountainous regions connected by two narrow necks of land, neither of which is much more than a thousand yards in breadth, and so indented is the coastline that no point on the island is more than a mile from the sea. The northern and southern mountain areas are both penetrated by a valley which runs roughly from North to South, so that an easy natural course is afforded to the main road; the central mountains alone are continuous, and here the main road has to skirt the coast to avoid the hills. There are practically no possibilities of movement across country; the mountains are steep, stony and scored with ravines. The lower and flatter areas, which are intensely cultivated, are cut up into small fields by low rubble walls, which are a constant barrier to movement.

214. The main problems of the defence were the same as on Cos. We were certain to suffer from inferiority in the air—in particular, single-engined fighter cover was impracticable and the available bomber forces including some diverted from Italian operations, were obviously not sufficient for the task of neutralising all the German air bases simultaneously. Moreover, the topography of the island made it easy to split any defence and to isolate sectors. To meet the threat of invasion, the island was divided into three sectors, within each of which all troops, including the Italians,

came under command of a battalion commander. The three battalions under the 234th Brigade, 4th Buffs, 2nd Royal Irish Fusiliers and 1st King's Own, were made responsible for the northern, central and southern sectors respectively.

215. The enemy attack, supported by dive-bombers and destroyers, began about six o'clock on the morning of 12th November, when German troops disembarked on the extreme North-east of the island and at Pandeli Bay, to the East of Leros town. In the North-east, about five hundred troops were landed and gained the high ground running from Dellapalma Bay to Grifo, including Mt. Vedefta. The enemy were held on this line throughout the day, but by two o'clock on the morning of 13th November, they had overrun Mt. Clidi and extended their bridgehead from Mt. Clidi to Ste. Madonne.

216. The landing at Pandeli was made by a much smaller force, about one hundred and twenty men in all. Some progress was made at first, but the landing was successfully counter-attacked by a company of Royal Irish Fusiliers, and was pinned down on the lower slopes of Mt. Appetici. It was here and to the immediate North, on the narrow Gurna-Alinda neck of land, that the move to split the defence up into isolated sectors developed. The Pandeli landing was reinforced during the night of 12th-13th November and a further night landing was made on the northern shore of Gurna Bay.

217. Meanwhile, during the afternoon of 12th November, the equivalent of a battalion of enemy parachutists had been dropped in the North-east and on Gachi Ridge, and although at 1600 hours our troops were still holding the high ground overlooking the ridge, the enemy had gained control of the Gurna-Alinda neck, thus cutting land communications between the southern and central and the northern sectors of the island.

218. On 13th November there was no significant change in the North-east, although some enemy infiltration took place to the South-east of Quirico. High winds and heavy seas probably prevented any further enemy reinforcements being landed during the day. No activity of any kind was reported from the southern sector, but in the centre the enemy, having strongly reinforced his troops in the Appetici area the previous night, unexpectedly captured Appetici at midday and thus exposed our right flank and strengthened his hold on the Gurna-Alinda neck.

219. That night a counter-attack by the reserve company of the King's Own, supported by heavy bombardment from His Majesty's ships Echo and Belvoir, was launched against the enemy at Appetici, but it failed to achieve its object, and the enemy, striking South in strength with mortar and machine-gun support towards Meraviglia, made considerable progress and had almost reached our main headquarters on Meraviglia by seven o'clock on the morning of 14th November.

220. The situation in the northern and southern sectors was more encouraging; the Buffs recaptured Mt. Clidi during the night of 13th-14th November and continued to advance, whilst a general advance in the southern sector made, in conjunction with the advance from

the North, a converging attack on the enemy in the Gurna-Alinda neck. Good progress was made, and shortly after midday it was reported that the enemy was almost entirely surrounded in the Quaranta area. The Buffs were to his North and North-west, one company of Royal West Kents, brought from Samos and operating under command of Fortress Headquarters, was also to his North-west, and the Royal Irish Fusiliers and King's Own had gained a strong footing on Gachi Ridge, although they were not in complete control. Over two hundred prisoners were taken in this action and fairly heavy casualties were inflicted on the enemy.

221. Our attack continued throughout the 14th November in spite of heavy enemy air activity, and at eight o'clock the next morning a further strong attack was launched against the enemy still holding out on Gachi Ridge. Further personnel of the Royal West Kents, who had been landed from Samos the previous night, were able to give added weight to the attack, but shortly after midday on the 15th, it was reported that little headway was being made in the face of intense and continuous bombing and aerial machine-gunning by the enemy.

222. Communications were by now disrupted, making control and movement difficult, and, what was worse, our troops were showing obvious signs of fatigue. By the end of the day the Gachi objective had not been reached, and there is little doubt that the failure of the attack was due to the enemy air onslaught, which the Royal Air Force, operating under a heavy handicap, was unable effectively to counter. Some four hundred sorties were made by the enemy against our troops during the day.

223. During that night the enemy reinforced his positions and at first light launched a heavy attack on Meraviglia. By 0815 hours on the 16th November, it was reported that the situation was serious and that the Meraviglia position was being neutralised by dive-bombing attacks and machine-gun fire. Nevertheless, in spite of their extreme fatigue, our troops fought back desperately, and were able to report an improvement in the situation by 1130 hours; Meraviglia was still in our hands, communications had been partially restored and reorganisation was in progress. A further message, originated at 1200 hours, confirmed this and added that the Fortress Reserve Company had been re-formed.

224. By this time, however, the enemy had succeeded in building up a substantial reserve and had extended his bridgehead at Pandeli Bay. Another message received during the afternoon said that the position had deteriorated and was becoming desperate, but there was still a hope of bringing the battle to a successful conclusion if the valley running from Alinda Bay to Pandeli Bay could be bombarded, since a heavy attack from that area on the fortress position was certain during the night.

225. Shortly after 1830 hours, all communications with the island faded out, and, in view of this, further troops which had been embarked at Samos for Leros were disembarked. It was later learned that the garrison had surrendered at 2000 hours.

226. Meanwhile, on Samos, to which a small mission had been sent via Turkey on the night of 9th September, the Italian garrison, under

General Soldarelli, had been persuaded to espouse the British cause and to disarm the 1,500 Blackshirts on the island. A temporary civil government had been set up under the Metropolitan Archbishop, the local guerrillas had been kept in order, and an Allied force of one infantry battalion (2nd Royal West Kents, less one company) and the Greek Sacred Squadron had been built up.

227. On Major-General Hall's appointment as G.O.C. Aegean, he made a thorough inspection of the defences of Leros and arrived at Samos on 12th November, the morning of the enemy's attack on Leros. The battle of Leros lasted five days, and from the beginning the Samos garrison was standing by to provide reinforcements should they be needed. On 12th November, Leros asked for the despatch of the Royal West Kents; preparations were put in hand to move the battalion that night, but in the absence of suitable shipping the men were returned to their battle stations. The next night, 13th-14th, a suitable vessel was found and one company was sent to Portolago, where it arrived the following night; the remainder of the battalion arrived by destroyer on the night of the 15th-16th. The Greek Sacred Squadron, too, was ordered to move and was actually embarked, but since it was reported that Leros had fallen on the afternoon of 16th November, the squadron stood down.

228. That night I instructed Major-General Hall to leave Samos and return to Cairo, leaving the conduct of operations in the hands of Brigadier Baird, the Military Governor of Samos. I also ordered that if, at a later date, the enemy were to attack Samos, and Italian resistance proved to be of no value, Brigadier Baird was to evacuate himself and his staff, leaving the Greek troops and the guerrillas to operate on the island.

229. On 17th November, the enemy switched his air offensive to Samos. At about midday Vathi and Tiganion were heavily bombed and extensive damage was caused, including the disruption of communications with Middle East.

230. Next day I ordered the withdrawal, if possible, of all British troops and the Greek Sacred Squadron, on the night of 18th-19th November. Brigadier Baird was to remain in Samos until the last possible moment for reasons of prestige, and maintenance was to continue as long as possible under arrangements to be made with the Military Attaché at Ankara. I also ordered that arrangements should be made for evacuating some Greek civilians.

231. During the evening of 19th November, a caique fleet left Turkey and the evacuation was carried out, although the rendezvous on the Turkish coast had to be changed owing to the unwillingness of the caique captains to face the Samos channel, where German "E" boats were thought to be operating. The fleet arrived at Kusadasi early on 20th November, bringing with it Brigadier Baird and his staff, Colonel Tzigant, commander of the Greek Sacred Squadron, General Soldarelli, the Italian Commander, the Metropolitan Archbishop and all British and Greek forces, with a hundred Italian civilians. The British Attaché at Ankara gained the consent of the Turkish Government for the evacuees to pass through Turkey in the guise of civilians.

232. Since it appeared, on 20th November, that the Germans had not yet occupied the eastern end of Samos, a second fleet set out on the night of 20th-21st November, and returned next morning with all British and Greek stragglers, one thousand Greek civilians and four hundred Italian troops. Meanwhile, some two thousand Greek civilians had arrived in Turkey by their own means, and arrangements were put in hand for the evacuation by rail of all refugees and military personnel. This was accomplished by means of special refugee trains which began to leave on 23rd November.

233. During 21st November, news was received that the Germans had landed on Samos, and permission was given to the Greek Sacred Squadron to organise a final round-up of stragglers. This they did, and a further two hundred Greek civilians and two thousand eight hundred Italians were successfully evacuated.

234. The only outstanding British commitments, apart from Castelrosso, were now isolated patrols from the Long Range Desert Group (playing a new role) on the islands of Seriphos and Nikonos; these were successfully evacuated to Turkey by 29th November. Castelrosso was kept, with a small garrison, as a base for possible future operations.

235. The maintenance of the forces in the Aegean was exceedingly difficult, and, owing to the complex lines of communication, which were liable to interruption, and the dispersion of the forces, presented a problem out of all proportion to the number of troops involved, which amounted in all to the equivalent of two brigades.

236. It was intended that reserves for each garrison in the islands, plus the civilian population and such Italian troops as were not evacuated, would be established as soon as possible on the general basis of thirty days' reserve and fifteen days' working margin.

237. Maintenance was to be by sea from the Middle East bases, supplemented (primarily for the civilian population) as far as was practicable from Turkey. The main islands to be supplied were Castelrosso, Cos, Leros and Samos. The original sea movement plan was that direct shipments should be made to Castelrosso, Leros and Cos, from Middle East ports, including those in Cyprus, whilst for Samos and the other islands transshipments were to be made in caiques or L.C.Ts. from Cos and Leros or from Kusadasi in Turkey.

238. In the initial stages, until Cos fell, this plan was carried out, and small stores-ships sailed direct from Egypt and Palestine to Castelrosso, Leros and Cos; there the cargo was transhipped for distribution throughout the islands by caique and other small craft. Arrangements were also made for maintaining Cos by air, but this method was only used to meet urgent demands which could not be satisfied in time by sea. Between 14th September and 3rd October, aircraft of 216 Group, R.A.F., landed or dropped on Cos, 458,100 lbs. of freight, 714 Army and 310 Royal Air Force personnel.

239. With the fall of Cos, on 3rd October, and the consequent lack of single engined fighter cover, it became impossible to despatch stores-ships to Leros except when favourable opportunity offered. In the middle of October

the Royal Navy also stopped stores-ships sailing to Castelrosso. A number of ships was held loaded in Middle East ports ready to proceed if suitable opportunity offered, but in fact they never sailed.

240. During the most difficult period, after the fall of Cos, the system of maintenance to Leros and Samos was either by caique from Castelrosso, by caique from Kusadasi in Turkey, by submarine from Beirut and Haifa, by destroyer from Alexandria, or by air-dropping from Cairo.

241. At this time Castelrosso became, to a certain extent, the main transshipment point for the islands. Supplies were taken there either by caique from Cyprus and Haifa, by stores-ships from Middle East until the middle of October, by L.C.T. from Port Said, Haifa and Cyprus, by other naval vessels from Alexandria, or by air from Abuqir. After the use of stores-ships to supply Castelrosso had been vetoed by the Royal Navy, and caiques had to be relied upon for this service, care was taken to ensure that only those caiques were used for this run which refused to sail into the Aegean. Supply by naval vessels was used only as an emergency measure. In addition, a number of flying boats and Italian float planes was flown from Abuqir Bay to carry forward personnel and stores urgently required. Originally, two Sunderlands and four Cants were available, but this number was reduced by November, when the daily lift did not exceed 3,000 lbs., excluding personnel.

242. A limiting factor to the transshipment of stores from Castelrosso was that there was available on the island storage space for only 4,500 tons, of which only 800 tons could be petrol. However, towards the end of the operations, three caiques were used as a floating reserve of about 250 tons of petrol and oil. Further, owing to the extremely erratic operation of caiques and schooners, no reliable estimate of the carry-forward was available for maintenance planning. All that could be done was to ensure that supplies and stores of the right kind were always available when opportunity for transshipment offered.

243. In view of the difficulties of supplying Leros and Samos via Castelrosso, and of the short distance from Samos to the Turkish coast, the supply route through Turkey was developed as fully as was possible. The primary object of this route was to ship supplies for the civil population. But there was also hope that certain military maintenance might be provided from this source and, in fact, the Turks allowed certain military stores to be supplied.

244. Up to 11th October, the Turkish supply route for Samos and Leros was rather improvised and piecemeal, but none the less substantial shipments continued until, on the 11th October, I formally placed the main responsibility for the island with Military Attaché, Ankara, working through Kusadasi, and drawing from the dumps which, with other objects in view, we had established in Turkey. As a result of this decision, and of the decision not to evacuate Samos and Leros as an immediate consequence of the loss of Cos, it became necessary to arrange for increased supplies, both for civil and for military consumption. Suitable arrangements were made with the Turkish

Government, and until the evacuation of the islands a regular service was maintained.

245. Supplies and stores were moved by rail and road from the dumps and were shipped in caiques from Kusadasi. But since only certain items, such as rations and a limited range of ammunition and stores, were available from these dumps, they were, by agreement with the Turkish Government, supplemented by stores (mainly supplies, petrol and oil) railed from Syria through Turkey to Kusadasi. Despatch started on 21st October, the first wagons crossed the frontier on 29th, and stores crossed the frontier at a daily average of 70 tons, until flow was stopped on 17th November after the fall of Leros. By this time a total of 1,400 tons had been sent into Turkey.

246. Although it was possible to move stores to Kusadasi, and the short journey to Samos presented no difficulty, the main problem was the onward distribution to Leros, since, after the fall of Cos, great difficulty was found in persuading the crews of the caiques to make the voyage to Leros. However, from 28th September to 16th November, a total of 3,000 tons was shipped to Samos and of 480 tons to Leros, including civilian foodstuffs.

247. From 11th October onwards, these supplies from Turkey were intended to be the main source of maintenance for the garrisons of Samos and Leros, but they were supplemented to a very considerable extent from other sources.

248. During the period, 16th October to 7th November, two British and five Italian submarines operated to Leros from Beirut and Haifa. The turn-round was estimated to be fourteen days and it was expected that 150 tons a week could be supplied by this method. The main limitation was the Royal Navy's inability to sail the submarines during the period of the full moon owing to the risks involved. Another limiting factor was the size and weight of the package that could be carried, the ideal being a 16-inch cube which could be lifted by one man. However, this limitation was overcome by close co-operation between the submarine commanders and the army personnel responsible for loading, and amongst other awkward loads twelve Bofors guns, six 2-pounder guns and one Jeep were sent, in addition to eighteen M.M.Gs. and 250 tons of more easily handled stores.

249. Stores and personnel were also carried in destroyers, mainly from Alexandria. The loads that could be carried by destroyer suffered from limitations similar to those carried by submarine, but much was accomplished by co-operation and improvisation. In order that no lift in destroyers or submarines should be missed through stores not being available, 300-ton dumps were established at Alexandria, Beirut and Haifa, and 100-ton dumps at Famagusta and Limassol. A priority which altered from time to time to meet the operational requirements was laid down for the despatch of these stores. By this means, 250 tons of stores and ten Jeeps were moved forward. This work, carried out by the Royal Navy under the most hazardous circumstances, was invaluable, and one of the main factors enabling the islands to be held as long as they were. Over the period of the operation H.M.

Ships carried the following totals of men, stores and equipment.

By Surface Ships.

4,990 men.
950 tons of stores.
32 vehicles plus trailers.
27 guns.

By Submarines.

17 men.
325 tons of stores.
1 vehicle.
12 guns.

250. The limited lifts which the Royal Navy could accept were supplementary to a caique service to Leros and Samos, both direct from the Levant and Cyprus, and from Castelrosso. Many difficulties arose, however; the chief of these was to find crews willing to go beyond Castelrosso. This was partially overcome by the finding of some crews by the Royal Navy and of others by the Army.

251. Arrangements were also made for dropping by air; this method was used mainly to meet urgent demands for ordnance stores and in the latter stages of the operation for various natures of ammunition, as there was no other reliable and fast method of meeting such demands. Initially, one aircraft was used each night, but ultimately as many as eighteen were used. During the period, 5th October to 19th November, 334,000 lbs. and 200 personnel were dropped by 216 Group, Royal Air Force. A greater effort was attempted but thwarted by adverse weather.

252. The evacuation of casualties from the Aegean was carried out by destroyer, caique, and transport aircraft. From the end of October, the evacuation of casualties from Leros to the Middle East by sea or air was most difficult; accordingly arrangements were made with the Turkish Government whereby they agreed to accept up to forty seriously wounded men in hospital at Bodrum without internment. Cases requiring operation were to be sent to the Izmir French Hospital. Less seriously wounded men were evacuated by caique to Bodrum, whence they were sent on to Castelrosso.

253. Maintenance by all these methods, none of which was reliable, was necessarily somewhat erratic and very difficult to regulate. The maintenance of our forces could never be regarded as assured, but, in spite of this, the combination of the various methods employed proved successful in that, when the operations were finished, G.O.C. Aegean reported that there was no lack of any vital commodity during the final stages of the operations, which were never influenced by a shortage of ammunition or supplies.

254. In fact, throughout the Aegean operations, it had been accepted that our garrisons could be maintained in supplies and ammunition, but that the cost of such maintenance would be high and the difficulties, especially in shipping heavy equipment, serious and at times prohibitive. On the other hand, our presence there was certainly of great value in causing diversion to the Aegean of German material which was badly needed elsewhere. The enemy was forced to concentrate 350 aircraft in Greece, Crete and Rhodes (of which about 125 were reinforcements) and his aircraft

casualties by 23rd October amounted to over a hundred destroyed, over fifty probably destroyed, and a large number damaged. He had also lost eight motor vessels totalling about 16,000 tons, seven lighters and seven escorts; these vessels, although only a small proportion of those available, were virtually irreplaceable from outside the Mediterranean.* Furthermore, as long as we held Leros the German position on Rhodes remained under threat, and in many ways the enemy's difficulties were at least as great as our own. The crux of the situation was that Leros could not be effectively built-up and the enemy's sea movement intercepted owing to the fact that our air bases were too distant to allow adequate cover to be given to the Royal Navy. If our position could be maintained long enough to effect the build-up on Leros and to take advantage of the German difficulties, the moral and political effect on the whole of South-East Europe would be so great that I decided to retain Leros as long as possible with the limited forces available, whilst making every effort to secure adequate air reinforcements. If these could be procured, not only would Leros be secured but the enemy's supplies by sea to the whole of the Dodecanese would be seriously threatened.

255. When the actual German attack came against the garrisons in the Aegean our failure to maintain our positions was due (as had been anticipated) to the impracticability of providing adequate air cover before and during the battles. For this the underlying cause was that the Aegean operations had never been allowed to encroach on the prior demands of the Italian campaign. Major formations, aircraft and shipping alike, could not be diverted from Italy; for Italy, Middle East's available resources had been concentrated, and although an improvised operation in the Aegean was undertaken (on orders from London) in the hope of seizing the opportunity offered by the Italian capitulation, the risks, from the start, were great.

Middle East Base and Training

256. In fact, the Aegean operations were mounted by Middle East at a time when its role had largely been reduced from an operational command, with troops at its disposal, to that of a base and transit centre and, above all, a training centre for warfare in Europe.

257. As part of its function as a base and training centre, Middle East Command was given an important role in training and equipping allied contingents to take their place in field formations or to release British troops for operational roles. This duty involved a constant regard for the acute political problems which disturb all "refugee" governments, in addition to the difficulties of training the formations, equipping them on British war establishments, and instructing them in British methods,

* Later information showed that the following losses, were, in fact, inflicted on the enemy:—

1. Merchant vessels sunk or destroyed in harbour ...	9
(Approx. 18,000 tons)	
2. F/Lighters and landing ...	14
3. Torpedo-boats, escort vessels and similar craft including small minelayer ...	13
4. Floating Dock ...	1
5. Armed caiques ...	5
6. Number of Germans put into sea ...	4,000*

so that they could take their place in a British field force.

258. The 2nd Polish Corps, under command of General Anders, was the largest allied force to be trained and equipped in this manner. In August, 1943, a Polish Corps of two infantry divisions and one tank brigade began to move to Middle East from Persia and Iraq Command. By the middle of October the first part of the move was complete, and most of the corps was concentrated for training in Southern Palestine. At the end of November the corps moved to Egypt, preparatory to moving overseas to Italy. Here re-organisation took place on the latest British war establishments, to bring the corps into line with British formations and units, and on 10th December the move to Italy began. The corps was landed in Italy fully equipped with the exception of a small number of technical vehicles, of which there were none available in the Middle East.

259. The Fighting French have also been trained and equipped by Middle East. In February, 1943, General de Larminat requested that a Fighting French Division should be formed from the two independent Fighting French Brigades then concentrated at Gambut. This was agreed, and the division was completely equipped by the end of March and moved from Tobruk to Tripoli on 18th April. There it came under command of the 10th Corps and moved up to relieve the 51st Division in the line at Enfidaville on 6th and 7th May. A Fighting French Flying Column was also placed under command of Eighth Army during the advance to Tunisia. It came under command of the 30th Corps at Ben Gardane, and after a short attachment to the 4th Light Armoured Brigade it passed, on 31st March, under command of General Leclerc as part of "L" Force, which had come up from Chad.

260. After the defeat of the enemy in Tunisia, the French forces were withdrawn to Tripolitania for re-organisation; the 1st Fighting French Division was organised as a normal British Division and the 2nd Fighting French Armoured Division was formed from "L" Force, the Flying Column, two Tank Squadrons which had arrived from the Delta by sea at the end of June, and from recruits from Tunisia. The 1st Fighting French Division remained on British war establishments and with British equipment, and its battle losses were made up from the 2nd Fighting French Armoured Division, who were to be equipped from American sources. Both divisions and the 4th Fighting French Brigade passed under French command at the end of August. French forces in Syria have acquitted themselves creditably in the static role to which they have been assigned.

261. The Poles and the French brought considerable numbers to be trained and equipped; the Greeks have been fewer in numbers, but have none the less presented a difficult problem. In February, 1943, two Greek Brigades were training under command of Ninth Army. At this time the formation of the 1st Greek Division, which was to be a training and administrative formation, was under consideration and the staff was being collected and trained in Cairo. Political unrest, which had been a considerable source of anxiety during the period under review, then broke out and at the beginning of March, 1943, led to a grave state of

indiscipline in both brigades. The instigators of the disturbances were left-wing officers and men with violent anti-Metaxist sympathies. It became necessary to remove a number of officers, but for political reasons the ringleaders could not be removed. The formation of the 1st Greek Divisional Headquarters was discontinued and the command of both brigades was taken over temporarily by British Brigadiers. On 6th July further disturbances took place, this time mainly in the 2nd Greek Brigade, as a result of which two battalions of the 2nd Brigade were disbanded, and the 1st Brigade was completed to war establishment from the reliable elements of the 2nd Brigade. The 8th Greek Battalion, which was intended for guard duties only, was formed from the remnants of the 2nd Brigade, less the ringleaders, who were sent to the Sudan. There were no further disturbances throughout the period and in December, 1943, the 1st Greek Brigade was pronounced fit for an operational role.

262. The Greek Sacred Squadron, which represents the finest elements in the Greek Army, was part of General Leclerc's "L" Force from the middle of February to the end of March, 1943, and took part in active operations under command of the Fighting French Forces. On 1st April it came under command of the New Zealand Division, and on 17th April it left them at Enfidaville to return to the Delta. The Squadron was re-organised by the middle of May and came under command of the Special Air Service Regiment. It was trained in combined operations as a parachute squadron, and on 29th October part of the squadron went to Samos by sea, the remainder being dropped by air three days later. On the fall of Samos they were safely evacuated to Middle East through Turkey.

263. The Greek Armoured Car Regiment, of two squadrons, has been a first-class unit throughout my period of command. It has been stationed in Syria, under the command first of the 10th Armoured Division and then of the 9th Armoured Brigade.

264. At the beginning of February the Yugoslav Army in the Middle East consisted of a headquarters, one battalion and a depot. The battalion came under command of the 10th Indian Division (25th Indian Infantry Brigade) on 21st July 1943, and moved to Ar Rama; it has remained under command ever since. By October the battalion, fully equipped and up to strength, had reached a high standard of training and was included in the Order of Battle for operations in the Aegean.

265. At the end of December, Partisan propaganda leaflets were distributed in the battalion by the sympathisers of Marshal Tito. Shortly afterwards about one-third of the men and one officer from the battalion signed a declaration refusing to obey orders from the General Headquarters of the Yugoslav Forces, and placed themselves under British command until such time as they could join the Partisan Forces. They were segregated and put into a camp at Geneifa.

266. A Belgian Brigade Group arrived in the Middle East from the Belgian Congo between the middle of April and the middle of June, 1943. It was organised on Belgian war establishments and had been trained for jungle warfare.

267. The role for the brigade agreed between the War Office and the Belgian authorities in London was that they should carry out garrison duties only. It soon became clear, however, that this decision had not been communicated to the brigade, and on its arrival in the Middle East a demand was made for an operational role. This request was backed by Lieut.-General Ermens, C.-in-C. Belgian Congo, in his interview with me in July, 1943. I stated that, provided the Brigade Group was re-organised on British war establishment, it might be possible to contemplate an operational role after six months' guard duties. With this Lieut.-General Ermens agreed. The continued and extensive guard duties on which the brigade was employed throughout 1943 resulted in little training being carried out; the guard duties were partly responsible, too, for the general apathy to which the majority of the European personnel succumbed, but the promise of a relief from guard duties and of employment in a more active role gave a fillip to morale. At the beginning of 1944 the brigade was showing more aptitude for training.

268. Throughout the period, the Egyptian Army has never failed to meet any request of the British Forces to take over duties within Egypt, to free British troops for operations in field formations. They have taken over the duties of mine watching in the Suez Canal and much of the anti-aircraft and searchlight defence of Egypt, in addition to the coast defence of Alexandria and Port Sudan. Frontier control has been carried out satisfactorily by the Egyptian Frontiers Control Administration, working in close co-operation with Headquarters, British Troops in Egypt.

269. Political problems have occurred in higher command, and the relations of high officers with the Egyptian Government have not always been smooth, but junior officers have been largely unaffected and the rank and file have been good. British Commanders with whom Egyptian units have co-operated have frequently expressed their appreciation of the degree of efficiency displayed, particularly in their anti-aircraft and searchlight duties. This state of affairs is the more praiseworthy since the Egyptian Army has been gravely handicapped throughout by shortages in transport and equipment of all types.

270. In addition to training and equipping Allied troops within the Command, Middle East has also played an active but difficult part in organising and equipping the guerilla movements in the Balkans. These guerilla operations have become, since the beginning of 1943, a serious commitment for the Germans. Movements for national liberation have gathered impetus and strength, and in Yugoslavia especially the Germans have been forced to tie up divisions which would most certainly have been of great use elsewhere. Unfortunately, the Partisans in Yugoslavia, Greece and Albania have not been able to agree on common action in their respective countries against the Germans. In fact their quarrels, which have been very bitter, have helped the enemy considerably and have undoubtedly postponed the realisation of their national liberation.

271. In Yugoslavia the Partisan movement has made the most effective military contribution to the Allied cause. Regular military formations have been organised, and a Partisan

General Headquarters under Marshal Tito has been established. By August, 1943, Partisan troops numbered 100,000, and the collapse of Italy gave them increased morale and easier access to arms and supplies, both from Italian sources and because, with the opening of the Adriatic, it became possible for us to supplement air supplies by shipments. As a result, by the end of the year, Partisan forces in Yugoslavia numbered some 250,000 men. During the year they survived three major attacks and contained a force of sixteen German and six Bulgarian divisions, together with large numbers of Croat and Serbian troops under German command.

272. With Partisan General Headquarters, Middle East Command has maintained constant and cordial relations since the first British liaison officers were dropped by parachute in May, 1943. By the end of the year twenty liaison missions were being maintained with the Partisans, and over 6,000 tons of stores had been shipped to them in addition to 339 tons dropped by air.

273. As against the growing effect of Marshal Tito's Partisans must be set the fact that, by playing upon fear of Communism, German propaganda has succeeded in nullifying the value of the other liberation movement in Yugoslavia, that of the Chetnicks, under General Mihailovic. Large numbers of Chetnicks have actively gone over to the Axis and have taken part in operations against Tito's forces, and by the end of the year the Chetnick movement was of no value to the Allies and was receiving no supplies from Middle East.

274. In Albania, British officers have been instrumental in training national forces, which amounted to four brigades at the end of the year. Here also there were political difficulties between the parties of the "National Front" and the more left wing "National Liberation" movement which, in fact, has carried out most of the operations.

275. In Greece, a British Mission had arrived during January, 1943, but for some time found it impossible to control the quarrels and unco-ordinated activities of the guerillas, among whom the rival bands of the left-wing E.L.A.S. and the Republican E.D.E.S. (commanded by Colonel Zervas) were engaged in constant fights. At last, in July, a National Band Agreement was drawn up to divide the whole country into area commands and control all guerilla activities under a General Headquarters.

276. Under this co-ordinated command, a widespread and successful attack on communications was carried out before and during the attack on Sicily. But when Italy was invaded, the Greeks, realising that the liberation of Greece would not immediately be attempted, relapsed into a civil war in which the E.L.A.S. bands set to work to destroy all other bands, so that they might ultimately claim to be the sole liberators of Greece. During the civil war no more supplies were sent to E.L.A.S., but Zervas, our most loyal ally, was kept supplied. By 19th December, 1943, both parties were exhausted and ready to come to terms and, after an appeal by M. Tsouderos, the Greek Prime Minister, negotiations for a renewal of the National Band Agreement were begun.

277. In Crete, also, a small British mission was established, but the strength of the

garrison has made large guerilla activities impossible. None the less, the Germans have been seriously disturbed, our mission has been maintained and increased, and Cretan morale stands high.

278. In Crete, and still more in Greece, the personal popularity of the British liaison officers has been of great value to them in their difficult task of organising (and at times restraining) the guerillas in their attacks on the Germans whilst at the same time seeking a settlement of the disputes between the bands.

279. Whilst these operations were being pursued to achieve the liberation of the Balkan countries, plans were also being made for their administration after their liberation. In February, 1943, the Allied Territories (Balkans) Committee was established, under the chairmanship of the Lieutenant-General in charge of Administration and including representatives of all interested organisations in Cairo, to consider the steps necessary on military grounds to ensure efficiency of the civil administration in the Balkan territories after their liberation.

Planning was at first confined to Greece, but was part of a wider policy of planning relief for the civil population in the Balkans which was started, on War Office instructions, on 15th April, 1943. Middle East's responsibility was laid down as Greece, Yugoslavia, Albania and the Dodecanese only, and no planning was to be undertaken for Roumania or Bulgaria.

280. By October, 1943, it became apparent that owing to the speed of the Russian advance in South-east Europe the commitment might arise earlier than had at first been expected, and that planning to meet it would have to be accelerated.

On 12th October, 1943, therefore, British Military Liaison Headquarters (Greece) was set up, under command of Major-General Hughes, to maintain liaison with the Greek authorities and to plan for the relief of the country on evacuation by the Germans. The basis of the plan was that the Greeks themselves would be responsible for civil administration and for the execution of relief measures to the maximum extent compatible with their resources.

281. It was also accepted that only essential relief could be undertaken by the army and that the rehabilitation of liberated territories would be a matter for such civil relief authority as might be later appointed. The period of military responsibility was arbitrarily fixed at six months from the date of occupation, during which time it was intended that the civil relief authority should have observers in the various territories to enable as smooth a transfer of responsibility as possible to take place.

282. A special Balkan planning section, attached to the staff of the Chief Civil Affairs Officer, was set up to prepare detailed estimates of requirements for the first six months' period. These estimates, which included, *inter alia*, requirements of foodstuffs, medical supplies, clothing, petrol and oil, chemicals, soap and coal, were based on intelligence received from the territories concerned and from information given by the War Office. The procedure adopted was that all estimates were passed to the "O" Staff at General Headquarters, Middle East, for examination and, when finally agreed, forwarded through staff or service channels to the War Office for approval and action.

This planning section was later transferred to the staff of Major-General Hughes, leaving the Chief Civil Affairs Officer responsible for planning for the Dodecanese only.

283. The intention was to stockpile in Middle East sufficient quantities of the commodities required to tide over the period needed to organise supply direct from the United Kingdom or United States to Balkan ports. This period was estimated by the War Office as six to eight weeks, and by January, 1944, considerable shipments of grain had been received, but little progress had been made in the stockpiling of the remaining requirements, other than those available locally.

284. Another activity which came into greater prominence as the Balkans increased in importance was political warfare. The Political Warfare Executive, Middle East, had been active during the Tunisian, Sicilian and Italian campaigns, using leaflets and radio to soften enemy morale; officers trained by the Executive went with our forces to the Aegean islands, and now in preparation for activity in the Balkans much valuable work was done. For this theatre, a pool of trained officers was set up and a school was established for training field units.

285. Whilst training, organising, equipping and planning for those Balkan countries which were already involved in the war has been a difficult task, it has been even more difficult to perform the same functions for Turkey, since that country has been willing to enter the war only on its own terms and when it considers itself properly equipped to do so.

286. In the tortuous and interminable negotiations with the Turks, and in providing and forwarding the supplies which have been the main object of discussion, Middle East Command has been closely concerned.

287. Our programme of assistance, resulting from the Adana Conference on 30th and 31st January, 1943, was two-fold. First, we had to supply Turkey as soon as possible with sufficient equipment to provide her armed forces with one year's reserve for war. Secondly, we had to despatch to Turkey, if she were forced into war, a self-contained force under British command to provide fighter defence of vulnerable points and to support the Turkish Army in the field; in addition, certain British anti-tank and anti-aircraft units were to be placed under Turkish command. Later the Turks were given the choice of further strong Royal Air Force reinforcements or a corps of two armoured divisions; it was not considered practicable to provide both until at least the Aegean was opened to our shipping and the port of Izmir could be used.

288. The limiting factor to our programme of assistance, both in preparation for war and after Turkey should enter the war, was the capacity of the Turkish railway system, and it was agreed that the staff talks should be resumed at the earliest possible date to study this problem and to consider the means by which the capacity could be improved.

289. Accordingly, talks were resumed in Ankara on 26th February, 1943, under the chairmanship, on the British side, of the Military Attaché, Major-General A. C. Arnold. Progress was handicapped by Turkish inability or unwillingness to appreciate the limitations of

the railway system or to give any reliable estimate of their own civil and military demands in war. In the absence of reliable information from the Turkish General Staff it was estimated that, without the use of Izmir port, 2,500 to 3,000 tons a day would be the maximum import figure and that, after meeting Turkish requirements, both military and civil, not more than 500 to 1,000 tons could be relied on for British requirements; it was realised that import capacity would be considerably increased by the use of Izmir. These figures were inevitably guesswork, but were accepted as the basis of subsequent planning.

290. It was therefore decided in March that, to avoid concentrating in Turkey a larger force than could be subsequently maintained, the despatch of British forces would be phased. In the first phase twenty-five Royal Air Force squadrons would be sent, with an army component and two anti-tank regiments; in the second phase we would send twenty Royal Air Force squadrons, in the third phase three anti-tank regiments and five anti-aircraft regiments, and in the fourth phase, after Izmir port was opened, two armoured divisions. This plan was known as HARDIHOOD.

291. No. 3 Planning Staff was sent to Turkey in March to continue discussions on the operational employment of this force and to implement the programme of administrative planning required in Turkey for its reception and subsequent operation and maintenance. This was followed in March by a visit to Ankara by Air Marshal Sholto Douglas and in April by a visit by myself, in order to discuss the implications of the HARDIHOOD plan with Marshal Cakmak and the Turkish General Staff.

292. The maintenance requirements of the forces contained in the first three phases amounted to some 1,200 tons a day, or 200 tons a day in excess of the maximum capacity estimated to be available. We hoped, however, that the action we had taken and were continuing to take to improve the railways would enable the force to be maintained.

293. This action was mainly the provision of additional locomotives and wagons. We planned to earmark 100 locomotives and the equivalent of 2,500 15-ton wagons; of these 50 locomotives and 1,800 15-ton wagons were included in the Adana list and would be supplied when available; the remainder were to be held as a reserve in the Middle East. Action was also taken to build up a reserve supply of locomotive coal in the Middle East for use in Turkey should we have to maintain a force there. Holdings of Middle East railways were increased by 40,000 tons so that, in the event of Turkey coming into the war, it would be possible to divert incoming supplies direct to Turkish ports.

294. Further administrative preparations included pre-dumping of stores at certain selected places in Turkey and an extensive programme of airfield and base and lines of communication construction. Certain stores had already been pre-dumped in Turkey; for HARDIHOOD the number of dumps was increased from five to eleven, and dumping continued with a target of twenty-eight days for the first three phases of HARDIHOOD.

295. In the spring of 1943 there were sufficient airfields in Turkey to accommodate twenty-five Royal Air Force squadrons during the dry weather only; it was therefore necessary to undertake an extensive programme of development to accommodate forty-five squadrons, including sixteen heavy-bomber squadrons, under all-weather conditions. This work was divided between the Turks and the British Royal Engineer construction parties already in Turkey. The target date for completion of runways and hard-standings was 31st October, 1943; later, certain minimum technical and domestic accommodation would be necessary. In addition to these airfields the Turks undertook to provide fair-weather landing grounds at Milas and Mugla in South-West Anatolia.

296. In July, 1942, an advanced base had been reconnoitred in the Ulukisla-Cakmak area, but by the spring of 1943 very little construction had been done, although certain covered accommodation was available and all the necessary material was on the site. It was agreed to continue with the project, and representatives of No. 3 Planning Staff were instructed to prepare a key plan for the HARDIHOOD forces. Later, after reconnaissance of both areas, it was decided to locate the advanced base at Afyon Karahinsar, which was more suited to the increased forces of Plan HARDIHOOD than Ulukisla. Further planned development of the lines of communication included port depots at Mersin and Iskenderun, a Royal Air Force base maintenance unit at Cakmak and a road-rail transshipment point at Ulukisla. These proposals were submitted to the Turkish General Staff in early June. Turkish consent to the construction of the advanced base was not given until August, and then only on conditions which made it quite impossible to complete the project by the end of the year. Work had to be carried out by the Turks, under the supervision of only those British personnel already in Turkey, and it had to be disguised as commercial construction. Permission to start constructions of the port depots was not given until December.

297. Plans were also produced to extend the existing petrol installations at Iskenderun, to provide tankage at airfields, to build hospitals and to improve communications by the construction of a network of trunk telephone routes.

298. Our plans in all cases were delayed by the Turks, with the result that little progress had been made by the end of the year, and if it had been necessary to implement HARDIHOOD, the administration and maintenance of the forces would have presented an almost insuperable problem.

299. In September, as a result of decisions taken at the Quebec Conference, a new directive defining the operational and administrative commitment of my command was received, in which no provision was made for HARDIHOOD other than the construction parties already in Turkey. Our various construction programmes, however, were to continue and No. 3 Planning Staff was to remain in Turkey to maintain continuity in planning.

300. In October, 1943, as a result of instructions to the Middle East Defence Committee by the Chiefs of Staff, an invitation was extended to Turkey to enter the war. The Chiefs of Staff pointed out that should Turkey enter the

war Bulgaria might collapse, and the collapse of Roumania and Hungary would probably follow. Under these conditions Germany would probably be unable to hold out very long owing to the cutting off of her Balkan sources of supply.

301. In the event of Turkey entering the war, three problems were outstanding: first, her two largest ports, Istanbul and Izmir were largely built of wood and were very vulnerable to air attack; secondly, her coal supply, which in the main, came from Zonguldak on the Black Sea, was also very vulnerable; and thirdly, her railways were not sufficiently developed to stand the strain of a modern war.

302. Obviously the main difficulty confronting a successful Allied plan was to provide sufficient fighter and anti-aircraft defences in time to forestall German air attacks. Owing to the great length of the Turkish lines of communication, it was essential that a major portion of our forces should be infiltrated into Turkey before she actually entered the war.

303. Accordingly, towards the end of November, plans for the establishment of eighteen Royal Air Force squadrons and five heavy and five light anti-aircraft regiments in Western Anatolia were considered. This plan was known as Plan 437 and No. 3 Planning Staff assembled in Cairo towards the end of November, becoming members of Headquarters, Force 686, which was responsible for its detailed planning.

304. Work was stopped on the heavy bomber airfields for HARDIHOOD, but construction was begun to make Milas and Kizilyaka all-weather airfields, as well as those at Dalaman, Gokova and Antalya, with a view to operations in the Aegean.

305. It was envisaged that Force 686, which was to carry out Plan 437, would be maintained from an advanced base at Izmir; pre-dumping had continued throughout the changes, with an initial target of thirty days for the whole force now contemplated, of approximately 33,000 personnel (13,000 Royal Air Force and 20,000 Army) and 5,000 vehicles; of these stores some were in fact used for the maintenance of the forces engaged in the Aegean operations. In mid-December the target was raised to forty-five days. In all, during the year, some 52,000 tons of stores were despatched to meet this commitment.

306. To carry out Plan 437 it was considered that 7,500 men must be infiltrated into Turkey, and the Prime Minister discussed this problem with President Ineunu immediately after the Cairo Conference. In December, however, the Turks agreed to the infiltration of only 250 specialists in plain clothes, of whom the majority was infiltrated. The Turkish Government later agreed to further infiltration of up to 1,750 specialists, subject to approval by the Turkish General Staff. None of these was sent forward, but action was taken to concentrate elements of Force 686 in Northern Syria.

307. The situation was by no means easy, and on 28th December a mission left the Middle East for Ankara to discuss the main problem of supplies and infiltration. Although the mission was received most cordially when it arrived, it soon became apparent that there was a wide divergence between the Turkish point of view and our own. The main differences

were that the Turks expected thirty-six Royal Air Force squadrons as against our offer of eighteen, and they demanded an enormous amount of equipment, which they said they must have before operations could begin. It was estimated that the minimum time required to get this equipment into Turkey, even if it were available, would be about four months. Shortly after I relinquished my command, negotiations reached a deadlock, the mission returned to Cairo and Force 686 was dissolved.

308. Although Turkey is still not at war, much valuable military construction has been carried out and considerable quantities of military stores have been dumped there for our own use in addition to those supplied to the Turkish Army. Turkish opinion of the correct state of equipment necessary to enable her to enter the war has varied considerably during my year of command in Middle East, and our supplies have never equalled her demands; but at least that country is now better equipped than she was a year ago.

309. For although by no means all that the Turks have demanded has been available, and supplies have at times had to be diverted to Italy, yet, under the Adana Agreement, during the year 97,000 tons have been delivered to Turkey by sea, 11,000 tons have been delivered by rail and 1,300 vehicles, 300 tanks and 2,300 guns have been despatched by Middle East Command.

310. In addition to these freights to implement the Adana Agreement, much has been supplied both for Turkish military and civilian use and for our own dumps. During the year the total tonnage transported by Middle East to Turkey was 375,000 tons, including 48,000 tons for our own dumps. For this tonnage Middle East was either the supply centre or transit centre, or both, whilst 40,500 tons were supplied by Persia and Iraq Command but were routed by Middle East.

311. These considerable quantities have certainly not met Turkish demands, a fact which contributed to the breakdown of negotiations and the failure of our plans. But Turkish insistence on the supply of equipment is difficult to understand, for the land threat to Thrace has steadily diminished, their transport facilities could probably not have handled the quantities of goods which they demanded, and even after delivery the equipment could not be in use for many months. Moreover, it is extremely doubtful if the Turks could have put their materials to effective use at all, for despite urgent representations from our Military Attaché and the provision of personnel and courses by Middle East Command, they have not trained even adequate cadres for mechanised warfare.

312. Only in anti-aircraft training have the facilities offered been used to advantage. This fact is significant, for there can be little doubt that the German air superiority during the Aegean operations was as weighty an argument for Turkish delay as was the non-delivery of stores, although it could not be used with as good a countenance.

313. This air inferiority over the Aegean might, however, have been avoided, and the course of the operations altered had Turkey been willing to take action. For in November, 1943, with the object of providing fighter

cover for our forces in the Aegean and a small force to assist in the protection of Istanbul, two plans, called SUPERCHARGE and LITTLE HARDIHOOD, which envisaged Turkey as a co-belligerent, were produced. Our forces were to be maintained from depots in the Izmir and Istanbul areas and would require no advanced base. Executive action was taken to concentrate the forces for both these plans in the Aleppo area, but the fall of Leros on 16th November removed the need for the immediate establishment of these fighter squadrons in Turkey and the plans were abandoned.

314. Even after the fall of Leros and the evacuation of Samos, I thought it possible to drive the Germans out from the Aegean if air support could be provided from the airfields which, under Plan 437, were to be operated by the Royal Air Force on the Turkish mainland. Accordingly, in December, the 3rd Corps Headquarters began the preparation of Plan HERCULES, for the capture of the key island of Rhodes. On 2nd January, 1944, however, the landing-craft for this operation were diverted to the Anzio landing in Italy, and HERCULES was cancelled; nevertheless, in the hope that Plan 437 would ensure Turkish co-operation, planning was continued and all the possibilities of such an operation were investigated.

Politics and Internal Security.

315. However the precise weight of argument for the failure to bring Turkey into the war may be distributed between our failure to supply her demands and her fear of the Luftwaffe, the ultimate conclusion must be that Turkey doubted our power to save her from at least the initial stages of a German attack. Elsewhere in the Middle East, such political problems as affected the military situation during my year of command arose from precisely the opposite cause—a feeling that fear of German attack was removed and that political quarrels might be indulged more freely.

316. In Egypt this has caused no military problems, though there has been considerable political uneasiness. For although the Wafd Government, under Nahas Pasha as Prime Minister, has continued to support the United Nations war effort loyally, in its internal administration it has not proved so satisfactory.

317. The failure of the Government to take effective measures against those responsible for profiteering and hoarding has reduced its support in the country. From the British point of view the most serious factor in the internal security situation is the danger of an increase in anti-British feeling. There is a tendency to blame us for the state of affairs because we are supporting the Government responsible; and there is evidence that the profiteers and other anti-social elements are endeavouring to lay the blame for their own acts on British shoulders.

318. Another result of the scandals and accusations in which the Wafd Government has been involved has been to widen the breach between the Prime Minister and the King, who pronounced the Government guilty of peculation and corruption and clearly expected their resignation. The King did not,

however, dismiss the Government which, whatever its demerits, was affording the Allies full and valuable support; but the political crisis thus produced in May might well have caused serious interruption in the preparations for the attack on Sicily.

319. The Egyptian people generally are disillusioned by all the political parties, but although the political situation is clearly one which must cause much unrest for Egypt, it has not led to any diversion of the effort of Middle East Command from the prosecution of the war, and Egyptian policy has become increasingly pro-Allied.

320. In Palestine, on the other hand, the period under review has been noticeable for a gradual hardening in the attitude of the Jewish community towards His Majesty's Government, an attitude encouraged by the Jewish Agency and its associated bodies.

321. In February, 1943, four British deserters were arrested and charged with selling stolen arms and ammunition to an illegal organisation in Palestine. The ensuing major Military Court cases, in August, had widespread repercussions on the political and internal security situation in Palestine; for the defending officer, in mitigation, suggested that the real responsibility lay with the Jewish Agency. The case was heard in open court, and the defending officer's speech was given wide publicity and brought a protest from the Jewish Agency, which went so far as to say that the trials were a deliberate anti-Semitic frame-up and compared them with the Dreyfus case.

322. Hardly had this excitement died down when a search in the Jewish settlement of Hulda, for Polish deserters, uncovered a cache of weapons, and on 16th November another search with the same purpose in the village of Ramat Hakovesh resulted in a fracas. This was followed by a campaign of misrepresentation and threats on the part of the Jewish Agency, which left no doubt that any future searches would be met with strong resistance. The policy in regard to searches, reaffirmed in 1943, has been that only if reliable information is received should searches be made, and then with particular care to avoid any incidents. After this search, His Excellency the High Commissioner informed the General Officer Commanding in Palestine that for political reasons it was regarded as most important that action likely to lead to major incidents with the Jewish population should be avoided at the present time.

323. By January, 1944, the attitude of the Jewish Agency towards the Government had hardened to such an extent that any action conflicting with the policy of the Biltmore Programme or for enforcing the White Paper met with opposition and obstruction. The Jewish Agency was in some respects arrogating to itself the powers and status of an independent Jewish Government. It no longer attempted to deny the existence of arms caches, but claimed the right not only to hold arms for self-defence but to resist any attempt on the part of lawful authority to locate them. It was, in fact, defying the Government, and to that extent rebellion could be said to exist.

324. There has also been some unrest among certain units of the Palestine Regiment. In

August, 1943, a decision to send the 2nd Battalion of the Palestine Regiment out of Palestine for duty produced considerable unrest among the Jews, who argued that the decision arose from political rather than military reasons, and there is no doubt that this had a further adverse effect on the recruiting figures, which, throughout the period, have remained very low.

325. During November, 1943, the authorised badge for the Palestine Regiment became available for issue, and twenty soldiers of the 1st (Jewish) Battalion, the Palestine Regiment, and forty-nine from the 3rd Battalion refused to accept or to wear the badge. All these men were tried by Court Martial for disobeying a lawful command. In every case the defence took the line that it was against the men's religious principles and their conscience to wear the badge. They were all found guilty and given sentences varying from forty-five to sixty days' field punishment. It was obvious that this wholesale refusal was prompted by political considerations and on investigation it was ascertained that all the accused were members of the Revisionist Party. In an interview with the General Officer Commanding in Palestine, the head of the political branch of the Jewish Agency expressed the view that the incident was a stupid demonstration by a minor group and that their attitude was not supported by the Jewish Agency.

326. Some repercussions in the form of pamphlets and articles in the Hebrew Press were felt, but the official attitude that the men were soldiers who had refused to obey a proper order was unquestionable, and the incident soon lost any public significance.

327. The Arabs in Palestine have given no cause for anxiety from the security aspect. They have continued to acquire arms and have been carefully watching Zionist activities, but, unlike the Jews, they have remained unable to compose their differences sufficiently to allow of organisation in support of their aims.

328. Uneasy though the Palestinian situation remains, it did not assume such proportions as to warrant interference with military training or to cause major military decisions to be taken. The troubles were throughout caused by a minority. In Syria and the Lebanon, on the other hand, I was faced with a majority movement which at one time seemed likely to cause serious trouble.

329. Nineteen hundred and forty-three was the year of long-awaited constitutional changes in the Levant States. The proclamation of Syrian and Lebanese independence in 1942 had left the population expectant, and delay in the holding of elections gave rise to some impatience in the early months of 1943. But a decline in the pro-Axis sympathies of certain political circles, encouraged by the rising tide of Allied success, boded well for our co-operation with whatever government might come into power.

330. In Syria the growth of the National Bloc Party outstripped that of the other political parties, but in the Lebanon the situation was less clear. Some slight political unrest, coupled with a food shortage, led to riots and strikes in Damascus in February and March, and minor disturbances over food were common in other parts of the country during the first six months of the year until a plentiful harvest restored confidence.

331. Appreciating the effect on military requirements of the transfer of powers to these States, whose administrations were ill-equipped to undertake the onus of government amidst the difficulties of wartime economy, the General Officer Commanding Ninth Army suggested an examination of the problems which might arise. Being anxious not to impede in any way the realisation of independence by the States, he approached His Majesty's Minister in Beirut in August with a view to reconciling the minimum requirements of the British authorities with the legitimate aspirations of the States. His Majesty's Minister did not agree with the suggestion; nevertheless, an examination of the military point of view was carried out and was completed in October, 1943.

332. The elections which had been held a few months previously in Syria and the Lebanon had passed off without any serious disorder, but the intensely nationalistic character of both of the governments caused some concern to the French authorities. Nothing of a serious nature occurred, however, until November. On 8th November, despite a request from the French Délégué Générale, the Lebanese Government exercised what it believed to be its rights under the constitution to eliminate all references to the Mandatory Power. The Délégué Générale reacted by arresting, on the morning of 11th November, the President of the Lebanese Republic, the Prime Minister, three other Cabinet Ministers and a leading Sunni Mohammedan Deputy.

333. Large crowds collected in Beirut, demonstrating violently against the French, and similar disturbances were reported from other parts of the country. The General Officer Commanding Ninth Army authorised the provision of British guards on internment camps and the replacement of French patrols, where necessary, by British military police, and he remained throughout the crisis in close touch with the French military commander.

334. The sympathy and moral support of the neighbouring Arab countries greatly encouraged the Lebanese people, who adopted a surprisingly united, calm, but firm, attitude while waiting to see what line His Majesty's Government would take. On 14th November it was reported that the Druze Emir Majed Arslan, Minister of Defence in the Lebanese Government, had collected a small force of armed men in the hills to the south of Beirut; and tribes in South Lebanon were also reported to be gathered in armed bands.

335. In view of the gradual deterioration in the situation it became necessary to make preparations to take action to protect our communications in the Lebanon in the event of French failure to relieve the situation. Accordingly, I instructed Ninth Army to draw up the necessary plans for such an emergency, and a detachment of officers recently trained in civil administrative duties was despatched to the Lebanon. All arrangements were made for feeding the civil population, primarily of Beirut and subsequently of other centres and country districts. All necessary arrangements for the establishment of military control were completed, and arrangements were also made to extend it to Syria if necessary.

336. These plans, however, proved unnecessary, for on 22nd November General Catroux, who had been sent from Algiers with full powers

to settle the matter, reinstated the President and released the other detainees. During the eleven days which the crisis lasted, feelings had run very high, and it was only the confidence that His Majesty's Government would see justice done that prevented a serious explosion. Once the detainees had been released and the Lebanese Government re-installed the situation rapidly returned to normal.

337. As a result of this political crisis, the General Officer Commanding Ninth Army anticipated a difficult period in regard to security, as there were indications that the Lebanese were no longer disposed to accept the limitations on their independence imposed by the necessities of the war. It was clear that both the Syrian and the Lebanese Governments would now demand a very considerable transfer of powers from the French, and that these demands would include a considerable share of the control of security arrangements and of the *Troupes Speciales* or native levies. After a preliminary examination of the problems involved, Ninth Army began discussions with His Majesty's Minister and the French military authorities, as a result of which it was hoped that full agreement would be reached as to the extent to which powers could be transferred to the local Governments, without damage to the interests of His Majesty's Government in the successful prosecution of the war.

Garrisons and L. of C.

338. The situation in the Lebanon was held in check until the arrival of General Catroux largely because the Lebanese had confidence in the British Government and in the local British military administration. These feelings have been general throughout the Middle East during my period of command and have been a condition without which the vast training and administrative commitments of the Command could not have been carried out.

339. Without such feelings, also, the burden of the garrison and line of communication troops would have been heavy. As things were, the garrison and line of communication areas in my Command were able to provide troops to take part in active operations or to release others to meet the heavy demands which were made; Ninth Army and Palestine have been the only two areas in which problems of internal security have required serious consideration.

340. In Syria and the Lebanon the continued Russian successes created a new problem by removing the threat of German invasion; the demands of the Syrians and Lebanese for independence became more insistent and the task of maintaining an adequate standard of security more difficult. It therefore became of primary military importance to keep those populations quiet by maintaining a belief of operational urgency in spite of the continued progress of the Russian armies in the North.

341. The role of Ninth Army, in addition to the above, has been to prevent sabotage and spying by enemy agents, to assist in the operational training of formations located in the Ninth Army area, to supervise schools and training centres and to maintain law and order in Syria and the Lebanon.

342. Relations between the British and French military authorities in Syria have remained good. Feeling ran high for a few

days during the November political riots, but on the resolution of the crisis the situation rapidly returned to normal.

343. In Palestine, apart from political agitation by the Jews, nothing of military importance happened throughout the year. The movement of troops from Persia and Iraq Command to Egypt and preparations for the mounting of the attack on Sicily entailed a good deal of work, but the organisation was able to cope with all that was demanded of it.

344. Although the political situation in Egypt has required constant watchfulness, and the rise in prices has led to increased pilfering and made additional train and other guards necessary, no serious problems have occurred. The decision of Admiral Godefroy to bring the French fleet at Alexandria over to the Allies, on 21st May, 1943, relieved a state of considerable tension and enabled me to release troops, detailed for action in case Admiral Godefroy should reach a different decision, to other duties.

345. In Cyrenaica and Tripolitania the administrative arrangements have worked smoothly; there has been no outbreak of serious trouble between Arabs and Italian settlers, the British Military Administration has won the confidence of the civilians, and it has been possible to use the facilities of these areas to the full and to reduce garrison troops to a minimum.

346. The defeat of the Axis in North Africa and Sicily removed the threat from Malta, and the island was used as an advanced headquarters and staging post for the attack on Sicily. The 1st Malta Brigade (later 231st) from the garrison was taken for this operation, and the 2nd Malta Brigade (later 234th) for the operation in the Aegean. Reconstruction and administration in the island have proceeded without major incident since the completion of the programme for the invasion of Sicily.

347. The opening of the Mediterranean decreased the importance of the line of communication through West Africa from the Belgian Congo. In consequence, the movement of military stores on the Nile route declined to negligible proportions, and in Sudan and Eritrea dumps and installations left over from the Eritrean operations, as well as from Africa lines of communication and as reserves for Egypt (accumulated during the period before Alamein), have been disposed of. This has released many troops for other operations.

348. Throughout the period, the Sudan Defence Force troops have been employed in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania on line of communication and garrison duties. The 12th Division, which consisted of the 4th Motor Battalion, 7th and 8th Infantry Battalions and ancillary units, was established in the Tripoli area by mid-February, 1943. The 9th Motor Battalion moved to Benghazi in May and the 12th Infantry Battalion to Tobruk in August, 1943, and until the end of the year there were always considerable numbers of Sudan Defence Force troops in Libya. A regular system of reliefs was carried out.

349. No problems likely to provide a threat to internal security have arisen in Sudan or Eritrea, and the Sudan has continued to provide large quantities of supplies for Middle

East. The principal items have been cattle and sheep (145,000 head in the year), cotton seed (60,000 tons) and beans (6,000 tons).

New Directive.

350. This very satisfactory internal security situation enabled the resources of Middle East Command to be used to the full for the base and training role, subordinate to the demands of the general operations in the Mediterranean theatre, to which the Command had been allotted under me. This role produced excellent results in Tunisia, Sicily and Italy, but it also resulted in the operations in the Aegean being denied the support necessary for success. Despite this setback, the security achieved in Middle East, and the need to place all available resources at the disposal of a unified Mediterranean Command for operations in Italy, and of 21 Army Group for a major planned attack on Western Europe, were such weighty considerations that towards the end of my period in command the role of Middle East was under consideration with a view to diverting from the Command the maximum possible support for these operations.

351. Early in September the Deputy Chief of the Imperial General Staff and the Quartermaster-General visited Cairo and held a number of conferences of which the object was to reduce the resources available in Middle East to the minimum compatible with security, and to make available the maximum contribution for the Mediterranean Command and 21 Army Group; a heavy contribution from Middle East was needed for these purposes.

352. My commitment, as laid down after these conferences in an Aide Memoire of 11th September, was, therefore, to maintain internal security, and to prepare for an unopposed occupation of Crete and Rhodes when the German garrisons should be withdrawn. For this, I was to have under my command at least two armoured divisions, one infantry division, and the equivalent of three further divisions of unbrigaded troops. I was to hold reserves and reinforcements for these six divisions and, in addition, for troops awaiting transfer to Italy, and I was to maintain permanent transit arrangements for New Zealand, Australian, Indian and African troops anywhere in the Mediterranean theatre. The maintenance of British troops in Italy was to be progressively undertaken by bases in Italy as they were developed during the ensuing six to nine months, and Middle East was to maintain its own "garrison", including services for the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force, to provide Eastern Group Supplies for the Mediterranean theatre, to maintain any forces extra to the six divisions of "garrison" troops which might be in the Middle East, and to continue production for local consumption and to meet the requirements of the other Mediterranean theatres. No provision was made for sending troops to Turkey or to the Aegean.

353. With this new brief, I was to review the organisation of command in the Middle East, to achieve economy in staff and personnel, and was to prepare to transfer to Italy, or elsewhere, the base and line of communication units which would become redundant with the transfer of formations to Italy or with the achievement of more economic organisation.

354. The only serious novelty in this Aide Memoire was the plan to cut Middle East Base and administrative services so that Italy could build up an organisation capable of administering the forces there. This plan caused remonstrance from Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, Supreme Commander South-east Asia, when he attended a meeting of the Middle East Defence Committee on 4th October. The argument was advanced that the Middle East Base was a vast and complex organisation which could not be cut without loss of efficiency, and that the retention of the Middle East Base, in its existing form, was an integral necessity for the development of our strategy in South-east Asia.

355. The guidance of the Chiefs of Staff was sought on this clash of principles, and meantime Middle East continued to meet *ad hoc* demands for units in Italy, and lists and plans were prepared for reducing the establishment to the minimum scale to deal with the permanent commitment of maintaining internal security on the basis of six divisions. Pending a further directive from the Chiefs of Staff, a temporary embargo on the release of administrative units was imposed.

356. On 25th October, the Chiefs of Staff directed that my forces should not be reduced below the minimum required for the maintenance of internal security and for the fulfilment of the condition, which was now accepted, that Middle East Base would ultimately be required to support operations in South-east Asia. This decision was clarified on 17th November, when the Chiefs of Staff decided that the primary function of Middle East Base was to support operations in the Mediterranean; units and personnel not required for that commitment must be released. We should eventually be required as a subsidiary base for South-east Asia Command, but this should not be allowed to influence the drafting away of units and personnel for Italy and 21 Army Group, since we should only be involved gradually in the commitment for Asia, and additional troops would be returned as the commitment became heavier. Nevertheless, no base installation or organisation was to be completely closed, but they were to be kept on a care and maintenance basis, and the army base was not to be reduced so as to prejudice present or future requirements of the Royal Navy, Royal Air Force, or Merchant Navy. On the basis of this directive, Middle East continued until the end of my period in command.

357. The operational counterpart of this subordination of Middle East to the Mediterranean Command and Italy came when, on 26th November, 1943, the Chiefs of Staff decided that there should, in future, be a unified command in the Mediterranean. To carry out this policy, the Commander-in-Chief, Allied Forces, North Africa, took over responsibility for operations in the Balkans, the Aegean and Turkey, but I remained directly responsible to the Chiefs of Staff for internal security within Middle East Command.

358. In fact, these directives had no effect on events in Middle East during the remainder of my tenure of command, for the programme for drafting troops to Italy and the United Kingdom had already been drawn up and was

being acted on, and although no major operations took place in the Middle East during the latter months of the period of my command, administrative commitments continued on a large scale, and in some respects were greater than during the North African campaign. The administrative effort involved in the continued maintenance of our forces established in Sicily and Italy remained unaffected, and that the importance of the Middle East Base was enhanced and not diminished by the opening of the Mediterranean is shown by the fact that our military imports for August and September, 1943, reached the record figures of 305,000 and 297,000 tons respectively, whilst military exports throughout the year averaged over 200,000 tons per month.

359. The increased activity of the Middle East Base at this time is illustrated by the following statistics. During the period, February, 1943, to January, 1944, Royal Engineer workshops produced *inter alia* 2,660,000 forty-gallon petrol drums and, including Jerricans, 5,400,000 four-gallon returnable petrol containers. The output of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers' base workshops was greater in December than in February, 1943, and included over 300 tanks, 600 armoured cars, scout cars or carriers, 3,500 "B" vehicles and 6,000 "B" vehicle engines. Similarly, the activity in ordnance installations during the quarter ending 31st December, 1943, was greater than during the quarter ending 31st March, 1943. Nearly 150,000 tons of ammunition were received compared with 135,000 tons; 113,000 tons of ammunition were issued compared with 102,000 tons; while 173,000 tons of stores were received compared with 148,000 tons.

360. In the same way as the changed role of the Command has not affected the volume of administrative effort, it has left the number of men under command largely unaffected. Like the administrative commitment, they showed a slight increase, rather than a fall in numbers. When I took over command I had 520,000 officers and men under command; when I handed over, there were 635,000 troops in the Command, and of these the large proportion of 113,000 were allies under training.

361. The change of role could not have taken place, and Middle East Command could not have maintained Eighth Army and mounted the forces for Sicily and Italy, without close co-operation with the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force, an excellent administrative system, and confidence in internal security. For the last requisite, the uniformly good conduct of officers and men has been an invaluable contributory cause.

362. I wish to bring to notice the services of the undermentioned officers during my period of command: Lieut.-General Sir W. Lindsell, Lieut.-General in Charge of Administration, Middle East Forces. It was due to his outstanding capacity for administration and organisation that the Eighth Army in North Africa was maintained and the expeditions against Italy launched. In addition, as Chairman of the Middle East Supply Board and Civil Affairs Committee, he was responsible for the build-up and efficiency of these and other paramilitary organisations concerned with post-

hostility problems. In his work he was assisted in a most hearty and able manner by:—

Major-General G. Surtees—D.Q.M.G., G.H.Q., M.E.F.

Major-General R. K. Hewer—D.Q.M.G. (Mov. & Tn.), G.H.Q., M.E.F.

Major-General C. M. Smith—D.Q.M.G. (A.E.), G.H.Q., M.E.F.

Major-General C. le B. Goldney—D.S.T., G.H.Q., M.E.F.

Major-General C. H. Geake—D.O.S., G.H.Q., M.E.F.

Major-General W. S. Tope—D.M.E., G.H.Q., M.E.F.

Major-General Sir P. S. Tomlinson, Director of Medical Services, by his foresight and initial planning produced successful results in the hospitalisation and evacuation of casualties in the Central Mediterranean campaign.

Lieut.-General R. W. G. H. Stone, Commanding British Troops in Egypt, was responsible for the local administration and movement of the various formations and units during the concentration period, which proved of invaluable assistance to the staffs concerned. He has paid particular attention to the welfare of the troops in the Command and is responsible for raising it to a high standard of efficiency and popularity. He was responsible, throughout the period, for the maintenance of good relations with the Egyptian Government, a difficult and exacting task which he executed with tact.

Lieut.-General W. G. Holmes, Commanding Ninth Army, established firm and good relations with the French authorities in Syria and the Lebanon, in spite of great difficulties and provocation. He maintained throughout an attitude which enhanced the prestige of the army and avoided friction. He was responsible for the training of British and Allied formations; he produced good results and also dealt with certain political troubles that arose with the Greek Force with acumen and tact.

Major-General D. F. McConnell, Commanding Palestine Area, carried out a difficult task with commendable firmness and tact. He is responsible for the excellent relations existing with the Civil Government for dealing with disturbances.

A list of recommendations and awards has been forwarded under separate cover.

APPENDIX I.

ORDER OF BATTLE, MIDDLE EAST, 14TH FEBRUARY, 1943.

* Denotes under command G.H.Q.

I. British Troops in Egypt (Lt.-Gen. R. G. W. H. Stone):—

*4 Airborne Division.

10 Bn. Parachute Regt., Army Air Corps.

156 Bn. Parachute Regt., Army Air Corps.

*6 N.Z. Division.

32 N.Z. Field Regt.

9 N.Z. Infantry Brigade.

31 N.Z. Bn.

32 N.Z. Bn.

33 N.Z. Bn.

*24 Armoured Brigade.

45 Royal Tank Regt.

- *74 Armoured Brigade.
 - 101 Royal Tank Regt.
- *4 N.Z. Armoured Brigade.
 - 18 N.Z. Armoured Regt.
 - 19 N.Z. Armoured Regt.
 - 20 N.Z. Armoured Regt.
 - 22 N.Z. Motorised Bn.
- *17 Infantry Brigade.
 - 156 Field Regt.
 - 2 Royal Scots Fusiliers.
 - 2 Northamptons.
 - 6 Seaforth.
- Unbrigaded—
 - *Yorks. Hussars.
 - *3 County of London Yeomanry.
 - *46 Royal Tank Regiment.
 - *118 Royal Tank Regt.
 - *124 Royal Tank Regt.
 - “K” Regt..
 - 44 Recce. Regt.
 - *2 Fighting French Armoured Car Squadron.
 - *1 Greek Armoured Car Squadron.
 - *4 Field Regt.
 - *24 Field Regt.
 - *98 Field Regt.
 - *165 Field Regt.
 - *2 Field Regt., Fighting French.
 - *95 Anti-tank Regt.
 - *105 Anti-tank Regt.
 - 2 Highland Light Infantry.
 - *14 Highland Light Infantry.
 - *2 Royal Sussex.
 - *4 Royal Sussex.
 - 1 Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.
 - 1/2 Punjab.
 - 1/9 Gurkha Rifles.
 - 3 Baluch.
 - 1 Rajputana Rifles.
 - 3 Frontier Force Regt.
 - Jaipur Guards.
 - Jodhpur.
 - 1 Rampur.
 - *1 Bataillon de Marche, Fighting French Forces.
 - *4 Bataillon de Marche, Fighting French Forces.
 - 4 Greek Guard Bn.
 - 2 Bn. Libyan Arab Force.
 - Two Companies, 2/7 Gurkha Rifles.
- 2. Ninth Army (Lt.-Gen. W. G. Holmes):—
 - Headquarters, 13 Corps (Lt.-Gen. M. C. Dempsey).
 - 10 British Armoured Division.
 - 1 Royal Horse Artillery.
 - 104 Royal Horse Artillery.
 - 84 Anti-tank Regiment.
 - 9 Armoured Brigade.
 - 3 Hussars.
 - Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry.
 - Warwickshire Yeomanry.
 - 11 King's Royal Rifle Corps.
 - Headquarters, 5 British Infantry Division.
 - 7 Cheshire (M.G.).
 - 8 Division.
 - Transjordan Frontier Force Mechanised Regt.
 - 3 Fighting French Infantry Brigade (forming).
 - Recce. Group, Fighting French Forces.
 - 6 Bataillon de Marche.
 - 7 Bataillon de Marche.
- 1 Greek Independent Brigade.
 - 1 Greek Field Regt.
 - 1 Greek Bn.
 - 2 Greek Bn.
 - 3 Greek Bn.
- 2 Greek Independent Brigade.
 - 2 Greek Field Regt.
 - 5 Greek Bn.
 - 6 Greek Bn.
 - 7 Greek Bn.
- Unbrigaded—
 - Household Cavalry Regt.
 - 102 Royal Tank Regt.
 - 1 Jaipur.
 - 2/7 Gurkha Rifles.
 - Transjordan Frontier Force Cavalry Regt.
 - Druze Regt.
- 25 Corps (Lt.-Gen. I. T. P. Hughes), Cyprus, under command Ninth Army.
 - 10 Indian Infantry Division.
 - 97 Field Regt.
 - 10 Indian Infantry Brigade.
 - 4 Baluch.
 - 3 Royal Garhwal Rifles.
 - 2/4 Gurkha Rifles.
 - 20 Indian Infantry Brigade.
 - 4 Hussars.
 - 39 Royal Tank Regt.
 - 2/3 Gurkha Rifles.
 - 25 Indian Infantry Brigade.
 - 1 King's Own.
 - 3 Mahrattas.
 - 2 Sikh.
 - Unbrigaded—
 - 8 Hussars.
 - 4 Frontier Force Rifles.
 - Nabha.
 - Bhopal.
- 3. Palestine (Maj.-Gen. D. F. McConnell):—
 - *1 Army Tank Brigade.
 - 8 Royal Tank Regt.
 - 11 Royal Tank Regt.
 - 42 Royal Tank Regt.
 - 44 Royal Tank Regt.
 - One company Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.
 - Arab Legion.
 - 2 Mechanised Regt.
 - 3 Mechanised Regt.
 - One Infantry company.
 - Unbrigaded—
 - 4 Sikh.
 - 4 Gwalior Infantry.
 - 1 Bn. Royal Yugoslav Guards.
 - One company 1/2 Punjabs.
- 4. Cyrenaica District (Maj.-Gen. A. L. Collier):—
 - *1 Fighting French Infantry Division.
 - 1 Field Regt., Fighting French.
 - 21 North Africa Anti-tank Company, Fighting French.
 - 22 North Africa Anti-tank Company, Fighting French.
 - 1 Fighting French Infantry Brigade.
 - 1 Bn. Foreign Legion.
 - 2 Bn. Foreign Legion.
 - 2 Fighting French Infantry Brigade.
 - 4 Bataillon de Marche.
 - 5 Bataillon de Marche.
 - 11 Bataillon de Marche.
 - Unbrigaded—
 - 1 Bn. Libyan Arab Force.
 - 4 Bn. Libyan Arab Force.

5. Malta (Field Marshal The Viscount Gort, Governor and C.-in-C.; Maj.-Gen. R. MacK. Scobie, G.O.C.):—
- 1 Infantry Brigade.
 - 2 Devons.
 - 1 Hampshire.
 - 1 Dorsets.
 - 2 King's Own Malta Regt.
 - 3 King's Own Malta Regt.
 - 2 Infantry Brigade.
 - 8 King's Own.
 - 8 Manchesters.
 - 2 Royal Irish Fusiliers.
 - 1 King's Own Malta Regt.
 - 3 Infantry Brigade.
 - 11 Lancashire Fusiliers.
 - 2 Royal West Kents.
 - 10 King's Own Malta Regt.
 - 4 Infantry Brigade.
 - 4 Buffs.
 - 1 Durham Light Infantry.
 - 1 Cheshire (M.G.).
- Unbrigaded—
- " X " Squadron, Royal Tanks.
 - One independent troop, Royal Tanks.
 - 12 Field Regt.
6. Sudan (Maj.-Gen. B. O. Hutchison):—
- Sudan Defence Force.
 - 1 Motorised Bn.
 - 9 Motorised Bn.
 - 5 Equatorial Bn.
 - 3 Infantry Bn.
 - 12 Infantry Bn.
 - 13 Infantry Bn.
 - 14 Infantry Bn.
 - Unbrigaded—
 - Sudan Artillery Regt.
 - 1 Welch.
 - Alwar.
 - One company, 3 Frontier Force Regt
7. Aden (R.A.F. Command):—
- 3/1 Punjab.
 - 3 Rajput.
 - Mewar.

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