was no difficulty in accumulating large reserves in the initial stage, since distances were short and we had both rail and road transport available to as great an extent as we could require. But it must be remembered that any advance would be into a desert, completely barren of any kind of resources beyond some rather indifferent water, and all supplies would have to come still from the same base. This would mean that very large quantities of motor transport would be needed. In previous campaigns there had never been sufficient third-line transport to support a strong advance over a long distance. We were better off now and by 23rd August Eighth Army was provided with the equivalent of forty-six General Transport companies to carry stores, ammunition, petrol and water, and six tank transporter companies: seven more General Transport companies were held in reserve.* I shall deal with the particular problems of administration as they arose in the course of our advance but I will say at once that, in spite of all difficulties of geography and enemy demolitions, the provisions made were so ample and the problems so well appreciated that the rate of development of ports, roads, railways and pipeline nearly always exceeded estimates and we were never obliged to pause longer than had been calculated for lack of supplies, equipment or reinforcements.

My administrative staff was headed by Lieut.-General (now Sir Wilfred) Lindsell who had an enormous task in the organisation of the Middle East base. At that time the ports of the Middle East were handling four hundred and sixty-six thousand tons of military stores per month; three hundred thousand troops and half a million civilians were employed in all rear services and contracted labour represented about a million and a half more. The vastness of the task was increased by the fact that the great majority of the working force on which we relied for the maintenance of our military effort was not only civilian but oriental, and in large part unskilled, that the countries where our base was formed were not industrialised and that the most important was neutral. In this connection I must express my appreciation of the assistance I received from Mr. Casey, the Resident Minister, and from the British Ambassador in Cairo, Sir Miles Lampson.† On my first arrival, when I stayed at the Embassy, the latter assured me that he regarded it as his principal duty to see that the base on which I relied for my operations should be kept politically tranquil. His skill and understanding were crowned with full and deserved success and I never had any anxieties on this score so long as I was in Egypt. Through Mr. Casey I kept in touch with His Majesty's Government and made sure that there was complete reciprocal comprehension on the military situation. I owe him a great debt for the smoothness and friendliness which he imparted to these relations.

Perhaps the most difficult decision I had to face was the timing of the offensive. Obviously the sooner we could attack the better, for the enemy was strenuously perfecting his defences. When I went down to the desert with the Prime Minister he asked me when I thought I should be ready; I replied, as a most tentative estimate, for at that time I had only been in Middle East a few days and had not had time to study an offensive operation in detail, that I thought the end of September a possible date. He asked General Montgomery the same question when we arrived at Eighth Army Headquarters and the latter replied to the same effect, saying " Not before the first week in October " This estimate now needed revision. We had in any case lost a week as a result of the batle of Alam el Halfa and our losses, though comparatively slight, and the redisposition of troops which that battle had caused had set us back perhaps another week. I was determined that Eighth Army should have all the time necessary for training and the assimilation of its new reinforcements. Above all I wanted the armoured divisions of 10 Corps to have ample time to settle down into a well-drilled and confident whole; we were bringing against the enemy almost double his strength in tanks, it was vital to ensure that we were able to make full use of this superiority. On these grounds, therefore, I decided to wait until as late as possible in October. The actual date was determined by the phases of the moon. The plan must involve a series of infantry attacks against strong defences to gain possession of the enemy's minefields and make gaps in them to pass the armour through. For this a night assault was obviously demanded and if the infantry were to be able to lift the mines quickly and accurately they would need good moonlight. Full moon was on 24th October and in agreement with General Montgomery I therefore decided on 23rd October as D-day.

There was another consideration besides those I have mentioned which affected our timing: the battle of Egypt had to be fitted into the grand strategy of the war, for the Allies were about to assume the strategic offensive. I had been informed before I left England of the decision of the Combined Chiefs of Staff to invade North Africa from the west and clear the whole north shore of the Mediterranean; I had in fact been appointed to command the British First Army which was to be the spearhead of this operation under General Eisenhower. It was a nicely calculated operation, designed to employ our growing resources in a task just within their capabilities, which would, on the firm basis of our command of the sea, extend that command in a tighter ring round the fortress of Europe. It involved political calculations as well, for it was appreciated that if the French Army resisted we might be involved in a long guerilla in the mountains of Algeria and Morocco, which would allow the Germans to get a firm hold on Tunisia. Certain steps were being taken to assure if possible a friendly reception: the landing was to be under United States command and, although the main forces in Tunisia were to be provided by the British First Army and in the Mediterranean by the Royal Navy, the operation was at the outset to be represented as almost entirely American in character. Obviously, however, the most important effect on

* Theoretically one General Transport company can maintain one division fifty miles from railhead or a port i e for every fifty miles of an advance you need one extra company per division This rule of thumb calculation is based on working seven days a week and ten hours a day, over good roads, in the desert it needs modification and on occasions it took six companies to do the work of one

† Now The Right Honourable Lord Killearn, P C , G C M G , C B , M V O