PART II
OTHER ARENAS

INTRODUCTION

THE author served in France in several capacities, during which he had occasion to visit every type of Ordnance establishment and to see something of every phase of Ordnance life; and, besides profiting from a perusal of war diaries, narratives and statistical records compiled by officers of the R.A.O.C., he has been aided by his own experience in writing the preceding pages.

But, except for a year in Mesopotamia at the tail-end of the war, his services were confined to France; and the chapters that follow are almost solely based on the contributions of others—chiefly narratives written by senior officers present with each expedition who, with the best first-hand knowledge, recorded their experiences with the express purpose of compiling an Ordnance history of the war.

The author's rôle has been confined mainly to editing these narratives, chiefly with a view to avoiding the repetition of matter already described under the Western Front. The reader of the preceding pages, it is thought, should have no difficulty in picturing Ordnance establishments at a base, similar though less in magnitude to those in France; and in the same way it may be taken for granted that Ordnance services at the front were organized on the same general principles though modified to suit different conditions.

Descriptions of these establishments have therefore been omitted, unless there has been some special reason to refer to them; and the author's aim has been rather to bring into relief the special features of each campaign in their bearing on Ordnance work, to show how the organization differed in each, and to enshrine in the pages of its history such important or picturesque episodes in the life of the Corps in these different arenas as seem worthy of permanent record.

Each campaign had its special characteristics, due mainly to the physical features of the country, its climate and the amount and nature of the opposition encountered; and these characteristics were invariably reflected in the

system of supply, which had to be plastically moulded to meet very varied conditions, with expansion here or contraction there. Nothing, for instance, could be more different than the conditions in France, where every branch of Ordnance work was highly systematized and specialized, and those in Gallipoli where a purely hand-to-mouth existence was led. There could not well be a greater contrast than between the type of warfare in Macedonia with lines of trenches situated 50 miles from the base at Salonika, and that in Palestine or Mesopotamia where advances were made over hundreds of miles of territory and where, in one case, over 1000 miles separated the troops from their sea base. And, even though there was this similarity between Palestine and Mesopotamia, the nature of the line of communications made it necessary to adopt an entirely different type of organization in each country. In East Africa, again, guerilla warfare made the problems very different, and in Russia and Siberia Ordnance work, though on a lower plane, was conducted in peculiar and, in their way, unique circumstances.

At the same time certain features were common to all; and, again to avoid repetition, these can be conveniently generalized here.

One common factor was anxiety lest stocks should run short, the greatest bug-bear of a D.O.S.'s life. France always had the first call, and any temporary shortage there could be quickly remedied. But it was a very different matter where months would elapse between the date when a demand was despatched and that on which it was fulfilled; and when the torpedoing, or even the delay, of some anxiously awaited store-ship was liable to have serious consequences. The War Office, with calls from so many directions, always pressed that stock margins overseas be confined within the narrowest possible limits, making it difficult to ensure that there should never be a shortage among the many thousand items dealt with by the Ordnance, the expenditure of which was apt to fluctuate so violently. Nevertheless, all things considered, the War Office managed to meet de-

mands from every source with wonderful efficiency; and there was never any real ground for complaining that it had overlooked some minor theatre.

Another point is that nowhere was ammunition expended on such a colossal scale as on the Western Front, and nowhere did the problem of keeping guns in action or of ammunition supply present such difficulty. Ordnance Gun Parks were not to be found in these campaigns, and ammunition dumps were on a small scale. There were no heavy guns and howitzers and fewer of medium calibre. Heavy mobile workshops did not exist in frontal areas, the proportion of medium to light shops was smaller; and the repair and examination of gun equipments figured less in their work, though it was by no means a negligible quantity. On the other hand, owing to the time taken in replacing an artillery equipment sent home, a heavier class of repair was sometimes undertaken in the base workshop; and, in tropical and semi-tropical climates, ammunition needed even more attention than in France, to guard against deterioration.

Again, nowhere outside of France were huge reserves of battle stores accumulated at the front. Except at Salonika, where lines of communication were short, and at Gallipoli, where they did not exist at all on shore, warfare was usually of a far more open type, mobility more essential, and in either pursuit or retreat large reserves would have proved an incubus.

The regimental transport of our army, four-wheeled general service wagons for baggage and rations designed for use on good, or at any rate respectably level roads, and lighter limbered wagons, travelling kitchens and water-carts capable of moving across country on any fairly hard and even surface, answered on the whole excellently in France; though even there they had to be supplemented by various forms of pack carrier in the trenches and shell-pitted areas.

But elsewhere the type and scale of transport had to be modified to suit the country, chiefly so as to eliminate the general service wagon, unfitted for mountainous regions without any sort of highway or for desert tracts

traversed by nullahs. Seeing that every unit was equipped in the first place as for France, and that there were numerous exchanges of divisions and individual units between the different war theatres, the task of re-equipping them to local scales was unending and involved a great deal of work in every subsidiary campaign.

The variety of forms of pack-transport in particular was very great, for each Force evolved its own patterns. There was mule and camel pack-saddlery for machine guns or mortars, for ammunition or miscellaneous equipment and for litters—the latter placed in pairs on a camel, carried tandem between two mules, or trailed behind one mule with the rear ends of the poles supporting the litter dragging on the ground. Rafts, from which to fire guns, were even extemporized in North Russia. Water again had often to be carried for both man and beast in special receptacles—either canvas bags (chaguls) or portable tanks (fanatis and pakals) which were of many sorts and sizes; while porous earthen water-jars and canvas troughs were wanted in camp or billet.

It is no exaggeration to say that plans of operation might depend more on transport and water supply than on guns, ammunition or even men.

All this involved a great deal of inventive genius. Improvisation in fact had to be resorted to very generally in these distant campaigns, where the only way of satisfying a call of an unexpected nature was by making something to answer the purpose in Ordnance workshops.

The last feature common to all these campaigns was the extremes of temperature experienced, which ranged from 130 degrees in the shade in Mesopotamia to 40 degrees below zero in Siberia, with far greater seasonal variations than in France and Flanders.

This affected the Ordnance in a variety of ways. Besides the most obvious—that the soldier had to be provided with clothes suited to his environment—disease was more prevalent, mosquito nets and other forms of protection from malaria being required. Not only had the number of hospital beds to be increased, but the

staff of the Corps available to equip them was diminished through sickness. The usual single circular tent was replaced by one of double canvas or by Indian tentage—rectangular with high double walls and roof and far more airy and cool than home patterns. The ordinary lubricating oil proved too thin in great heat and too viscous in great cold; special liquids had to be devised for gun-buffers and the stability of cordite and other explosives was affected by either extreme of temperature. Altogether, in one way or another, the influence of climate on the work of the Ordnance was very marked in all these subsidiary theatres.

Before coming to these campaigns, however, an account must be given of the organization of the main base in the United Kingdom and the subsidiary base created in Egypt during the progress of the war specially to serve several of them.