

## CHAPTER XIII

### PALESTINE

THE account which follows is taken from a narrative compiled by Brigadier General P. A. Bainbridge, Director of Ordnance Services with the Egyptian Expeditionary Force who, in a prefatory note, states that "acknowledgments are due to Major R. J. L. Bashford, O.B.E., R.A.O.C., who, since 1917, has been engaged in the task of collecting and classifying information, and who is therefore largely responsible for the text."<sup>1</sup> Subject to slight abridgments and rearrangements which, by preserving the chronological sequence, make it easier for one who was not present to follow the flow of events, the original text has been preserved.

The campaign had three phases. In the first attention was concentrated on the Suez Canal itself, a factor both of weakness and strength. Its weakness lay in the necessity of defending it at almost any price owing to its immense importance as a channel of communication with India and the East. Its strength lay in its serving as a natural obstacle to an attack on Egypt. The year 1915 was occupied in defensive measures; in warding off attacks across the Sinai Peninsula against the Canal by Turkey aided by German efficiency, and in opposing raids by tribesmen on the Western frontier of Egypt. For this stage the ordinary peace depots of our Army of Occupation in Egypt, at Cairo and Alexandria, sufficed.

During the second defensive-offensive period in 1916 the defence of the Canal was carried out from its far side, the Turks in the neighbourhood were defeated at the battle of Romani, and our outposts pushed across the Sinai Peninsula, over which a railway and water supply was laid. At this time the new war depot installed at Alexandria became the base for Ordnance services through a chain of depots on the Canal.

<sup>1</sup> Major Lindsay Bashford had served on the staff of the *New York Sun* and as literary editor for Lord Northcliffe. His death soon after the war cut short a promising journalistic career.

In 1917 the operations assumed a thoroughly offensive character. During the spring were fought the first and second battles of Gaza which we failed to capture largely owing to transport and water difficulties. Then, in June, Sir Edmund Allenby was appointed Commander-in-Chief and the force increased to seven divisions and three mounted divisions. In the autumn Gaza was taken, Jerusalem fell and, a year later, the whole of Syria was over-run and the remaining Turkish forces routed. During this third phase the large and important new depot at Kantara, on the east bank of the canal, with Alexandria to support it, served as the base for Ordnance supplies.

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The Suez Canal was the scene, in the early weeks of 1916, of a notable military expansion.

To this desert area, admirably suited for the purpose—with a sparse population, wide empty spaces, healthy and dry climate and a lateral railway system from one end of the Canal to the other—troops thronged in the beginning of 1916 from the Gallipoli Expedition to be reorganized and re-equipped. They were joined by new drafts from Australia and India, together with other units destined to carry out the plan, soon decided on, of invading Palestine. Over and above this process of reorganization, an elaborate system of Canal defences was completed along a line roughly seven miles distant from the Canal itself; and various mobile columns were equipped for strategic enterprises in the Sinai Desert, among them the force that undertook, in August 1916, the Romani-Katia operations, the first stage in the advance towards Palestine.

These developments involved the re-organization of the older, and the equipping and moulding together of the newer, Australian and New Zealand troops. To cope with the situation, a chain of closely cooperating Ordnance depots was established at Port Said, Ferry Post (Ismailia), Suez and Tel-el-Kebir. Manned chiefly by A.O.C. personnel who had been through arduous months in Gallipoli, these Canal depots got quickly to work and did

good service during their career. The depot at Ferry Post may be held the first attempt at the construction of a workable field depot when the only available assets were a patch of sand, an existing or projected railway siding and a length of road ; when, too, the length of life of a field depot, and its expansion after establishment, could not by the very nature of the circumstances be estimated.

As autumn approached the situation rapidly changed. The fighting force moved eastwards steadily towards Palestine, to ensure the defence of Egypt from the Palestine frontier rather than from the Canal. The Ordnance Canal organization sufficed to meet the requirements of this advance. The battle of Romani was fought in August. After a period of further preparation, and to admit of the development of the desert railway, a further advance was made against somewhat spasmodic opposition. El Arish and Rafa fell. The Turks fell back on a chain of strong positions based on Gaza and Beer-sheba. The desert railway pushed steadily onwards to Khan Yunus and thence to Deir-el-Belah. The line of communications was steadily lengthening and it had become evident that an expansion of Ordnance organization was urgently necessary. This was provided for by the establishment of a depot on the east bank of the Suez Canal at Kantara, the starting point of the desert railway.

It may be fairly said that the scope and method of Ordnance activity with the invading forces of Palestine and Syria were focused and reflected in the uninterrupted development of the depot at Kantara, of which Lt. Colonel Hay was in charge. There each fresh demand made on the resources of the Ordnance with the Egyptian Expeditionary Force was, in one way or another, recorded. A bare patch of sand in 1916, in a particularly ugly and desolate place, this highly organized depot before long covered over sixty-five acres.

One of the most remarkable developments in this theatre of war was indeed that of the purely military station of Kantara, equivalent by December 1918 to

a town with a floating population of over 100,000—with wharves on the Suez Canal capable of receiving ocean-craft, with an elaborate and admirably arranged terminus to the desert railway, with many broad and well-laid roads, with a busy organization of hospitals, camps, depots, canteens, institutions, administrative offices, by-product factories—and finally the Canal bridge which now, through Kantara, links up directly Egypt with Palestine, Cairo with Jerusalem, Africa with the East.

In this big busy city the spacious Ordnance depot played no small part. Its personnel increased steadily until in 1918 it exceeded 3000, and its responsibilities were increased when stores from England began to arrive direct, instead of all coming from the base at Alexandria.

From Kantara, throughout the spring months of 1917, there came a steady flow of stores to a chain of Ordnance railhead posts where stores were taken over by Ordnance representatives with the troops for distribution. With this development, and as troops were concentrating on, and eastwards of, Kantara, so did the importance of the original Canal depots diminish. The war had left the Canal behind. Effort was now centred on Palestine. The depots at Suez and Port Said became little more than transit stations, although the former continued the shipment of stores to the Hedjaz. The depot at Ferry Post continued to equip fresh units but on a much smaller scale. Kantara absorbed personnel from every available source.

The chief difficulty had always been the Canal itself. In earlier days, stores coming to Kantara by rail had necessarily been off-loaded on the west bank of the Canal and transferred to the Ordnance depot on the other bank by motor lorry or wagon. This involved labour, delay, and danger of loss or damage. It now became imperative to relieve the Egyptian State railways of the very great strain upon their resources in the carriage of Government stores, so as to release more rolling stock for use on the Palestine railway. Arrangements were therefore made to send Ordnance stores from Alexandria to Kantara by water in ships or lighters. This involved many

changes at Kantara. Wharves had to be constructed on the east bank of the Canal; railway sidings had to be considerably extended. The transport of stores from the base by sea was begun in August and was working well by the late autumn despite some difficulties.

The summer of 1917 was a period of expansion in men, arms, guns, transport, aeroplanes, ammunition, hospitals, and indeed, in all the varied organization of a mobile fighting force. The line of communications was longer and there was an increase in every branch of Ordnance work. New A.O.C. Companies arrived, new mobile workshops were formed, and by the end of the year the strength of the Corps was double what it had been at the beginning.

At this time the Turkish army in Southern Palestine was holding a strong series of positions, extending from the sea at Gaza roughly along the main Gaza-Beersheba road to Beersheba. The enemy's force was on a wide front, the distance from Gaza to Beersheba being about 30 miles, but his lateral communications were good and any threatened point of the line could be very quickly reinforced. The channel of Ordnance supply was now through Kantara by the desert railway to El Arish and Deir-el-Belah, and on the Beersheba branch line through Rafa to Shellal.

In the beginning of May the small railhead post at El Arish had been expanded into an advanced depot and workshop. The plan was that it should hold a month's stock of those stores which Ordnance officers attached to divisions were entitled to demand "in bulk"; that is the principal items most urgently and often required by troops during operations. During this summer the scale of bulk stores received some useful additions. It seems indeed advisable, on Egyptian experience, where advances were rapid and units apt to become widely separated, to make the scale on which Ordnance officers with formations may demand stores in this way as generous as possible.

From this depot, too, were outfitted various small but none the less useful expeditions which, during the

period, went out into the desert for various purposes. Important reserves of stores were assembled in view of impending operations, more especially in connection with the large expansion of hospitals which took place in the late summer. The construction of a Mobile Composite Force in August is an interesting illustration of the variety of Ordnance work. This Force consisted of an Indian cavalry squadron, Indian infantry and French and Italian contingents. The signal company was formed from Indian units, and the field ambulances were a French, Indian and Italian combination.

But, as the autumn approached and the demands on the railway increased, it was decided to forward stores direct from Kantara to railheads. The depot at El Arish was then closed down and the greater part of its personnel sent forward to form emergency stocks at Deir-el-Belah, the terminus of the light railway which carried supplies to our troops holding the position confronting Gaza.

Hand in hand with the general expansion during this summer went that of ammunition supply. In the spring, the chief ammunition magazines were on the Suez Canal. Gradually stocks were concentrated nearer the scene of operations and extensive magazines were constructed at Rafa and El Arish. These advanced magazines were designed in splinter-proof bays, constructed of timber and sandbags; and, as regards storage capacity and level of temperature in a hot climate, they proved satisfactory. Among other services the Royal Flying Corps were provided with 4.5-inch shell specially adapted for dropping from aeroplanes.

Arrangements for the supply of Ordnance stores for the initial stages of operations were now complete. Simplified by the elimination of the El Arish depot, the current of supply passed directly from Kantara to Deir-el-Belah, covering the left wing, and to Shellal covering the right wing; certain stores which it was judged might be urgently needed during operation being held at each place. The bifurcation of the railway was at Rafa, where further reserves of various kinds were held and

where large quantities of stores were daily handled in transit.

In pursuance of the policy of carrying out as many repairs as possible, as near as possible to the troops, Ordnance mobile workshops had been duly allocated. On the left wing, confronting Gaza, a medium workshop was placed capable of dealing with heavier calibre guns; and here also were posted light workshops, a corps armoury and many tradesmen, such as tinsmiths who repaired large numbers of fanatis (portable water tanks). Other shops and armouries were stationed to cover the line as far as Shellal. Behind all stood the big workshop at Kantara. It is safe to say that throughout the first stages of the campaign in Palestine no battery had a single gun out of action through mechanical defects.

The fighting force, at the commencement of the autumn operations of 1917, had reached a strength of some 249,000 British and 18,400 Indian troops, with 80,000 Egyptians and 140,000 horses, mules and camels.

The bombardment of the Gaza defences commenced on October 27th, 1917. The attack on Beersheba began on October 31st. Jaffa fell on November 16th. Jerusalem surrendered on December 9th.

The dates and the map show the rapidity of the advance. Nor did operations stop at these successes. Action was at once taken to establish a front line well to the north of these places, in order to secure lateral communications from east to west, to work into and across the Jordan valley, and to establish contact with the Sherifian troops—Arab tribes who had revolted, and with Lawrence's guidance, were raiding Turkish posts on the railway to Mecca on our right flank.

A period of extreme strain on the Ordnance organization followed upon this rapid advance. The troops had moved far more quickly than the broad-gauge rails could be laid down, and difficulties were increased by the fact that the weather had finally broken. The hint of rains which had caused forebodings at Gaza was borne out by a succession of storms of increasing severity in December

and January. The bad weather caught the troops, largely fresh from the heat and dryness of the Egyptian desert, either upon the moist foot-hills of the Judæan mountains, where torrential rains speedily converted whole areas into swamps, or amongst the arid and bitterly cold mountains themselves. It is difficult to conceive more exacting contrasts for an army, of climate and country, than those imposed by this rapid advance with its extended line of communications from Egypt to, let us say, Jerusalem. The operations added, too, to the wear and tear of many stores—for example, boots, clothing and wheels; the needs of the army were in fact most pressing just at the time when it was most difficult for supplies to reach it. For instance, one division started in the desert with khaki drill and ended up in the mountains similarly clad. Its winter clothing had to be left behind and considerable delay was inevitable before it could be sent forward once more.

To cope as promptly as possible with this difficult situation an Ordnance depot was established in December at Deir Sineid, where the broad-gauge railway linked up with a section of the narrow-gauge Turkish line running northwards to Junction Station.

Immediately afterwards a railhead Ordnance post was placed at Junction Station whence the captured Turkish railway system extended northwards to Ludd and eastwards to Jerusalem. The Turkish system was not, of course, immediately available, but every effort was made to bring it into action as soon as possible. Meanwhile the broad-gauge railway was pushing steadily forwards towards Ludd, where an important centre was to be formed.

The channel of Ordnance supply had thus been very simply adjusted. Stores were forwarded by broad-gauge to Deir Sineid and thence by the Turkish line, or they would be fetched by convoys of various kinds sent in direct from formations.

The life of the depot at Deir Sineid, though busy, was however but short; for it soon became evident that the real pressure would come well to the north. Steps were taken to obtain a spacious site for a depot at Ludd



and to arrange for the necessary railway accommodation. As soon as the broad-gauge railway reached Ludd the transfer of the Deir Sineid depot to that place was taken in hand. On January 29th, 1918, the laying out of the Ludd depot was begun. The transfer was carried out in carefully planned stages in order to avoid, so far as possible, dislocation of work at this very difficult time. On March 17th the Deir Sineid depot closed down and on the following day the Ludd depot opened.

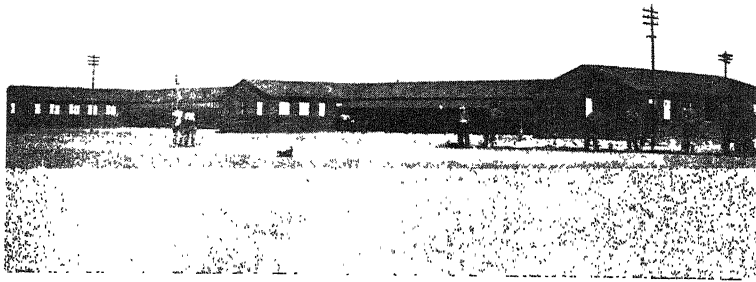
No sooner were these operations over than a salvage organization was set to work in the area over which the troops had advanced, where large quantities of stores, enemy and other, had accumulated at various points.

Salvage increased rapidly and many thousands of sacks of sorted stores were sent down the line. During December and January over 10,000 rifles were collected, while old boots were retained for repair by advanced parties of bootmakers, whose work was very valuable owing to heavy wear of boots in the bad weather and hilly country.

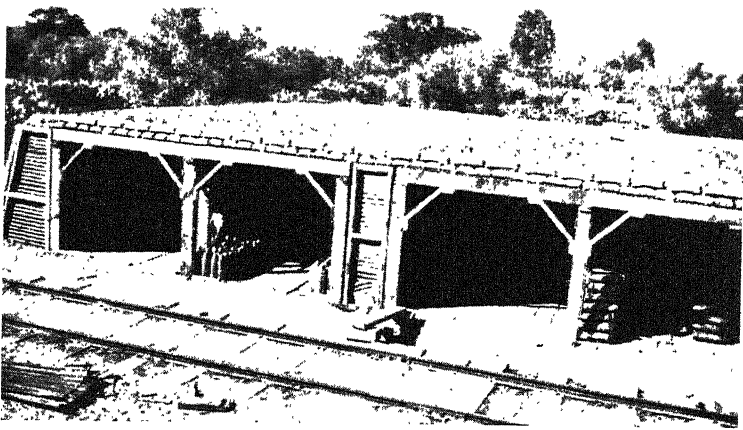
On the occupation of Jerusalem, the railway station was found to be very roomy and in fairly good condition, whilst the section of the line between Jerusalem and Junction Station was the best constructed portion of the Turkish system. A quantity of technical stores was found, plant, tools and metal of various kinds. In the goods shed the Ordnance railhead post was established, and sidings duly repaired.

Those who saw Jerusalem in the first weeks after the flight of the Turks will not soon forget the appearance of the liberated city with its closed shops, the utter absence of industrial and social life, and its pallid and furtive population. The change began immediately. On the railway, busy forces were at work repairing crippled rolling stock, laying down sidings, cleaning buildings, overhauling plant. In the city, order and safety of life and property were established, sanitation and a water system were begun. Ordnance workshops in various places were taking over factories and plant, and drawing in skilled and unskilled labour. Food was poured into the





ORDNANCE DEPOT, KANTARA



LUDD AMMUNITION STORE



city for free distribution through the Syria and Palestine relief fund to the hungry and poverty-stricken population.

The year which elapsed between the occupation of Jerusalem by the British and the end of the war brought about a revival in that city in every branch of social and economic life, which will always remain a tribute to the energy and justice of British administration. It is satisfactory to reflect that in this the Ordnance organization was able to help. Before long the greater part of the Ordnance coolie work in Palestine was done by the inhabitants of the district; and there can be no doubt that the remunerative employment of local labour by army departments and others contributed materially to the improvement in stamina and the increase in content which became so generally noticeable in Jerusalem during March and April 1918.

With a railhead depot at Jerusalem it was possible to meet the requirements of the right wing, while the organization at Ludd was rapidly developing. Finally plans were laid down to carry the broad-gauge up the mountains to Jerusalem itself, thus enabling the last fragment of the Turkish system to be dispensed with.

Already in 1916 Ordnance stores, including guns and ammunition, had been sent from Alexandria to the Hedjaz through Suez. During the following year the quantities of stores sent to this destination increased until they assumed considerable value. Not only were captured Turkish mountain guns, German machine guns, Mauser rifles, and ammunition sent down the Red Sea to the various sea ports feeding this campaign, but also considerable quantities of our own equipment; in fact everything necessary for the prosecution of a desert campaign.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> When Yenbo, a Red Sea port opposite Medina and the base of the Arab revolt until it moved northwards, was abandoned, "two armourer sergeants were left behind with some heaps of broken weapons and thirty sick and wounded Arabs. The armourer sergeants, finding things boring had dosed and healed the men and mended the machine-guns and combined them into a company. The sergeants knew no Arabic, but trained the men so well by dumb show that they were as good as the best company in the Arab army." *Lawrence and the Arabs*.—Graves.

The spring of 1918 brought changes which profoundly modified the general situation and led to a complete re-organization of the fighting force. The strained situation that was developing in France, owing to the collapse of Russia, made it necessary to reinforce the Armies there as heavily and quickly as possible. For the time being all forward movement ceased in Palestine, British divisions were sent to France and replaced by units drawn from India and other theatres. An extensive re-organization of this nature, introducing large numbers of troops of a different nationality, with different scales of equipment, different clothing, different methods of transport—a hundred differences of detail in fact—had to be arranged for ; and temporary depots were established where the equipment of units leaving the country was adjusted to the French scale, and that of those arriving in Palestine to the scales found to be best suited for work in that country and climate.

It was to meet the requirements of Indian units arriving in Egypt that a depot had been opened at Tel-el-Kebir. The work was sufficiently onerous, for it must be recollected that not only were Indian line battalions arriving from Aden, Mesopotamia and India, and Indian cavalry from France, but the reconstruction of the fighting force involved the equipment of units of very varying character. Moreover, many of the units from India arrived without camp equipment or rifles and the job had to be at once undertaken of equipping and preparing them for a campaign under Egyptian conditions.

As time went on, however, it became clear that the utility of the depot at Tel-el-Kebir had passed. The back of the work was broken. The machinery was working smoothly up the line. It was therefore decided to close down Tel-el-Kebir depot and to concentrate upon Kantara the work of supplying the needs of these Indian units. Some Indian Ordnance personnel was available for this task and did much useful work.

The stately advance of the broad-gauge railway from Kantara was throughout a controlling factor of Ordnance policy in the Palestine and Syrian campaigns. It led

in the first place to the siting of a depot at El Arish, then to its abolition and replacement by one at Deir Sineid, next to the opening of a depot at Ludd, which was enabled to start life on March 18th 1918, fully fledged, by taking over the stocks and staff of Deir Sineid. We may picture this field depot in its grove of olive trees, with its lengthy sidings and extensive compound working at full pressure throughout the spring and feeding the right wing at Jerusalem. The staff of native labourers at Ludd depot exceeded 1000, including women engaged for tent repairing.

The Ordnance depot at Ludd was also linked up with a small Turkish light railway system working westwards and northwards to Jaffa, where the XXIst Corps had established baths for troops, a clothing disinfecting station, and a laundry and repair shop.

At this time however, owing to the complete change in the general military policy (and partly to the fact that the enemy had brought up long range guns), it was decided that military commitments in the Ludd organization were too heavy. One of the steps resolved upon was drastic reduction in the Ordnance depot. In order to avoid dislocation of supply the breaking up process was necessarily slow, and later on a good deal of work devolved upon Ludd in connection with transit of stores and the handling of salvage, whilst the workshops remained busy, and it was not until February 1919 that it was found possible to bring Ludd down to the scale of a railhead post only and to evacuate the last of its workshops.

Meanwhile, significant developments of the broad-gauge railway had taken place. On June 15th 1918 the first through train ran from Jerusalem to Cairo. The broad-gauge railway had thus climbed the mountains to Jerusalem itself and the Suez Canal had been bridged.

Thus it happened that for the final operations the Ordnance organization had been still further simplified. Kantara was now the only Ordnance depot feeding the fighting force, and the channel of supply passed from there direct to railhead posts at Ludd and Jerusalem. Although the distance from the depot to the troops it

was supplying was so great, the increasing efficiency of the railway and the elasticity of the Kantara organization enabled a steady supply of stores to be maintained.

The change of policy of the spring practically establishing, at least for a time, a stationary front, coupled with the fact that as a source of urgent supply Kantara was far away, made it advisable to arrange a new grouping and strengthening of the Ordnance mobile workshops. To simplify provision, distribution of spare parts, materials, etc., three chief groups of shops were formed, focused upon Jaffa, Jerusalem and Ludd. All indents for stores required by outlying shops were sent to these centres where considerable reserves were established and large quantities of stores for exchange against unserviceable—such as gun and vehicle parts, fanatis, etc. Boot-makers were brought up to deal with the very heavy repairs which the conditions of weather and country rendered urgently necessary. Thus these shops became in a sense technical depots, and under this arrangement repair work of many kinds was kept up to date and carried out with the minimum of delay.

The autumn operations of 1918 commenced on the night of September 18–19. On the night of September 30–October 1st Damascus was occupied. Beirut fell on October 6th, Tripoli on October 13th, Aleppo on October 26th. Four days after the occupation of Aleppo the Armistice with Turkey was signed. The Armistice with Bulgaria had been signed on September 30th, that with Austria was signed on November 4th and that with Germany on November 11th.

In 47 days the fighting force in Palestine had advanced 300 miles, had destroyed three Turkish Armies, and had captured 75,000 prisoners and 360 guns. The workshop groups at Jaffa and Jerusalem broke up directly the rapid advance of the troops made it necessary to send mobile workshops forward, and Jaffa and Jerusalem passed out of the picture.

Again, as in the Jerusalem campaign, so in that of Syria, the troops ran away from the railway and the same difficulties of supply speedily presented themselves,

These operations, indeed, had begun a month earlier than those of the previous year and in consequence the weather held fine and wear and tear of clothing was notably less. But, on the other hand, the advance was more rapid, and covered much more ground. It soon became necessary to establish connection with the advancing troops by sea working through the various ports—Haifa, Beirut, Alexandretta, Mersina—as they were successively occupied. This system was set in motion as expeditiously as possible. For some time, however, the problem, especially for divisional Ordnance staffs, was no easy one; they were left with quantities of important stores in the middle of Palestine, and quite out of touch with their troops; these stores had to be returned down the line to Kantara, and it had to be decided which should be sent up by sea to Syria.

In this ticklish business the Kantara depot co-operated and, with its outpost at Port Said, organized shipping. In September, 7300 tons of stores were sent forward by water. Until the cessation of hostilities shipment to the coast ports took place from Kantara direct. Later, to avoid the heavy Canal dues, stores were sent from Kantara to Port Said by barge and forwarded on to Syria by steamer, a regular service being established.

Considerable difficulties were encountered during this process. Having regard to the necessary preference given to foodstuffs and forage, there was generally insufficient room for Ordnance stores. On the other hand, when cargo space became available, it was found unavoidable to send up quantities too large to be conveniently handled at these crowded advanced posts by the small Ordnance organizations. If a system of this nature is to work well frequent small shipments are essential; but in this case it was many months before this could be arranged. Moreover losses on shipboard were excessively heavy as no responsibility was accepted by the shipping authorities.

Salvage in the Syrian campaign was more fully organized than had been the case in the previous autumn, and despite the fact that the quantities of captured



stores of all kinds were enormously in excess of all anticipation, the arrangements proved capable of coping with all emergencies. Advanced areas were at first under Corps administration and it was under Corps orders that the preliminary search for and collection of salvage took place. Divisions sent out parties to search areas allotted to them and these parties marked their discoveries on the 1/40,000 map, which, when completed, was sent up to Corps headquarters. Thus a blue circle indicated a discovery of gun ammunition, a red circle of small arm ammunition, a green circle of bombs and a yellow circle of other war material. An approximate estimate of the size of the discovery was given by figures within the indicating circle. These discoveries were then brought together and concentrated in central dumps for subsequent disposal. It thus became possible gradually to obtain some idea of the immense quantity of captured stores which would have to be handled.

As the advance continued the Corps areas were pushed forward and the areas thus left behind passed under the administration of Palestine line of communications, whose authority by the beginning of 1919 extended as far as Haifa and Damascus. The authority administering the area sent in salvaged stores to railhead posts where salvage was sorted out under Ordnance supervision and forwarded to Kantara or Alexandria.

Concurrently with this organization over the immense area of enemy territory now occupied, went the work of collecting and caring for prisoners of war and refugees. Transit camps up the line had to be furnished, and difficulties were increased by the poor physical condition of the majority, so that very extensive hospitals had to be equipped, for it is no exaggeration to say that 75 per cent of those captured had to be given medical attention.

The rapidity of the advance into Syria and the exceptionally difficult conditions of transport and supply have already been indicated ; but a recapitulation of the situation must be given here in order to explain the work undertaken in Syria itself. Our view must now pass beyond the initial battlefield and salvage areas to the wide

front in Syria along which, following a policy of incessant movement, the cavalry divisions were quickly advancing. It became increasingly difficult to know where to send stores. Transport had been left behind, units had shed nearly everything, and many of them may fairly be said for some considerable time to have been living on the country.

Yet certain Ordnance services for these troops became urgently necessary ; as, for example, the supply of winter clothing, blankets and tentage. At first, indeed, it seemed as if, before one such service could be completed, others would become equally urgent, and that, with units covering the entire area along the coast and inland from Damascus to Aleppo, it would only be possible to serve conveniently such troops as happened to be in reach of sea ports. Only very limited quantities of Ordnance stores could be sent up in the supply ships, priority must be given to the most urgent of these and it was by no means easy to decide what, under widely different conditions, might be most needed. Close co-operation was necessary at this time between general headquarters and Kantara, the latter reporting shipments daily and receiving detailed instructions as to what and where to send. On one occasion a consignment of horse-shoe nails was despatched by aeroplane.

Gradually the situation became clearer and a chain of Ordnance posts, extending from Haifa as far as Mersina, was established. These posts speedily got to work and before long were being fairly well supplied by means of a fleet of eight vessels plying regularly from Port Said. The Ordnance post at Haifa was opened on October 1st 1918, Damascus having been occupied during the preceding night. Soon unserviceable stores were being poured into the sheds which had been allotted for Ordnance services at Haifa from units moving still further northwards and to these were soon added captured guns and limbers. Haifa was of importance as being the terminus of a Turkish light railway system leading to Damascus. At Damascus connection was made with a line passing through Rayak to Beirut. This narrow-

gauge system covering a very wide area was of considerable value. At Beirut shipping difficulties were encountered owing to the limitations of the harbour and the shortage of lighters, but the Navy gave valuable assistance, especially in providing drifters for dumping derelict ammunition at sea. At Alexandretta, on the other hand, there was a plentiful supply of surf boats. This post was established on December 1st 1918, working hand in hand with the Ordnance staff of the Fifth Cavalry Division and employing Egyptian Labour Corps coolies. Amongst the jobs undertaken at Alexandretta was the distribution of camp equipment and clothing for over 4000 repatriated prisoners of war, British, Indian and Serb; whilst the French and Italians sent up clothing for repatriated prisoners of their own nationality. At Mersina work was carried out on lines similar to those of the other advanced posts.

The area of supply had become extremely wide and the means of access to it still remained very slender. In this respect, and in relation to the great distance of the most advanced distribution posts from their bases of supply, probably the only parallel during the war has been Mesopotamia. There, however, a channel of supply by river offered different problems, technical and other, to those of a service across three countries, differing greatly in nature and climate, fed mainly by one slim line of rails.

With the small advanced Syrian posts, resting on Kantara for their supply by rail or sea, and in good working order in the early weeks of 1919, we may fairly consider that the expansion of the Ordnance organization with the Egyptian Expeditionary Force during the war had reached its climax.

Although certain forward movements continued to take place in the northern area, this period was one of concentration rather than expansion. Troops were returning to their bases; the processes of disbandment and demobilization had begun and were soon to present an array of new and complicated problems. Decisions had to be arrived at as to the size, nature and distribution

of the forces to remain in this theatre of war and the organization necessary to meet their requirements. But while the future of Syria and Palestine, and the distribution of control between the French, British and Arabs remained uncertain, it was difficult to push forward with fresh arrangements, and these matters of high policy remained to be decided at the Peace Conference to be held at Paris.

Moreover, when considerable progress had been made and the scope of the Army of Occupation was more or less fixed, the work of rearranging the military organization was rudely interrupted by violent revolutionary disturbances which broke out throughout Egypt in the spring of 1919. Confronting these events, it was clearly impossible to work down at once to the scale of the proposed Army of Occupation. The measures taken to cope with the emergency practically involved the establishment of an Interim Army. Troops had to be distributed throughout the whole of Egypt. Railways had to be patrolled. Demobilization was stopped. Many urgent issues of equipment, arms, tentage, etc., had to be made. Mounted columns had to be got ready at practically a moment's notice. Units which had already handed in stores preparatory to embarkation for home had to be re-equipped for their new tasks, in some cases—and even by night—taking off the dump the actual stores they had just handed in. Amongst emergency work done at this time was the mounting of Stokes mortars on motor-lorries and in Nile boats for use against revolutionaries.

The military administration of Egypt and the occupied territories was now re-organized. G.H.Q. returned to Cairo, and in the beginning of May, Palestine lines of communication died a natural death. 'Northforce' was formed with its headquarters at Haifa to exercise military administration over Palestine, Syria and Cilicia. In Egypt military administration was similarly centralized and 'Headquarters Egypt' were established at Heliopolis, near Cairo. Each of these two main commands was divided into divisional areas, to conform with which Ordnance services were reorganized also. Kantara

continued to meet the needs of Palestine and the forward areas, and also of a part of Egypt, having Suez as a subsidiary depot. Cairo supplied its own district and Upper Egypt, while the resources of Alexandria were available for that area. With a view to establishing a peace organization that might lead to the reduction and ultimate abolition of the war depots, and particularly to the evacuation of Kantara—that extremely undesirable place of residence—a beginning was made by opening a small depot at Mustapha, near Alexandria. It must be remembered that the ultimate political policy as regards garrisoning Egypt and the conquered territories was not yet known. It was only possible, therefore, to open the Mustapha depot on a small scale, but everything pointed to the desirability of the peace organization having its centre at Alexandria, the seaport at which stores from home would arrive, and where the great Ordnance base, now being closed down, had proved so useful during the War.

Demobilization, which had been stopped during the Egyptian disturbances, recommenced afterwards at a greatly accelerated pace. The drain on Ordnance personnel had amounted to a drop from approximately 2000 on November 18th, 1918, to 1350 by September 1919 with, in addition, some 250 away on or due for leave. Every effort was made to meet this situation by the introduction of civilians of various nationalities, men from other units, prisoners of war, Germans, Turks and others. But at every point the lack of experienced staff became increasingly felt, for the area to be administered was greater on the day the Peace Treaty was signed than at the cessation of hostilities.

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With these words this account of the war work of the Ordnance in this theatre comes to a close. From a departmental point of view a feature is the number of small depots that were opened, many of them in the forward area, although in each case direct supply from Kantara ultimately won the day. It is undisputable

that every extra link in the chain tends to dissipate stocks and staff and that each time a depot in being is closed down there must be some disturbance of work.

To call attention to this fact implies no criticism. The results achieved must be held to have justified the means adopted; and even with their aid refitment was at times a matter of great difficulty with a single line of rails, constantly lengthening, as the sole means of communication. Moreover that this point of view was not overlooked can be judged from the following remarks which occur in the narrative: "In general it is safe to assume that the fewer depots the better the organization. It is both an easy and attractive policy to have many depots. As operations develop there will always be many to urge the opening up of new depots on the assumption that quicker distribution of stores to units can thus be made. That is, of course, a very important consideration, but when practicable it profits more to improve an existing depot than to start another. To have few depots means economy in personnel. To multiply depots increases the danger—a very real one—of holding up stores in places where they may not be especially wanted and from which it may not be easy to get them quickly away on an emergency. The more depots there are the more difficult it is to know where the stores are."

In conclusion the remarks of Field Marshal Lord Allenby, Commander-in-Chief, may be quoted. "I have read with great interest and warm appreciation the lucid record of sound organization and untiring hard work, productive of brilliant results, on which I congratulate all ranks of the Army Ordnance Services."