

Lille, Courtrai, and for many miles in front of them bridges had been broken and track torn up or destroyed by mines. Even after the cessation of hostilities delay action mines, which the enemy had laid in the course of his retreat without preserving exact record of their location, went up from time to time, causing serious interruption to traffic. The clearing of these mines was a work of considerable risk, and the fact that comparatively so few mines exploded after trains had begun to run is entirely due to the great courage and skill with which officers, non-commissioned officers and men of the Tunnelling Companies performed the difficult and dangerous task of detecting them and rendering them harmless. The work of reconstruction, therefore, was most arduous, continuing day and night. The speed with which it was completed reflects great credit upon all ranks of the British Railway Companies and the Canadian Railway Troops Corps, as well as on the Railway Construction Engineers who controlled their work. Credit is due also to the personnel of the Railway Operating Division, who were called upon to keep traffic open with scarcely any of the ordinary traffic facilities.

Though roads had been pushed farther ahead, the same general conditions applied to them, while the extraordinary amount of traffic which it was necessary to direct along them made maintenance very difficult. Up to the night of the 25/26th November, on which date the railway was carried across the gap between Valenciennes and Mons, the Corps of the Second Army were still based on the railheads west of the River Scheldt, and supplies had to be brought forward by double and treble echelons of lorries. At the close of this period divisions were being fed by means of narrow one-way roads at distances of from 80 to 100 miles from their railheads. This imposed a great strain on the personnel of the Motor Transport Units and Mobile Repair Shops, who were compelled to work long hours under very trying and anxious conditions. I am glad to express my deep appreciation of the devoted service rendered by all ranks.

Until roads and railways could be got through to the areas which the enemy had not damaged the progress of our troops was necessarily limited by our ability to supply them. Only by the greatest effort on the part of the departments concerned with reconstruction and supply, and at the expense of considerable hardship to the leading troops of the Fourth and Second Armies, and in particular the cavalry, could the programme of our advance be maintained. Troops were denied frequently and for long periods comforts which they had been accustomed to obtain even under battle conditions. Nothing beyond bare necessities could be got forward to them. Even these were at times short in some units, and on more than one occasion the only available supplies of food were the current day's issues carried on the man.

Many other causes conspired to render the problem of supply one of serious difficulty throughout our advance. At the date of the armistice the amount of available rolling stock had been no more than sufficient to meet the requirements of our Armies. The advance to the Rhine added over 200 miles to the distances to be covered, and greatly reduced the amount of rolling stock available by largely increasing the time required for each train to

complete its journey. The necessity for supplying the civil population of the territories through which the Allied Armies were advancing and the resumption of French civilian traffic put an additional strain upon our pooled resources. This strain was not met by rolling stock taken over from the enemy, which came in very slowly, and was much of it unfit for immediate service.

In this connection it is not out of place to refer to the work done by the British Army in providing food and medical attendance for the civil population of the liberated districts through which we passed, a population which in France alone amounted to nearly 800,000 persons. This duty, though very willingly accepted by us, none the less made no small demands upon both rail and road transport. In France it entailed the supply and distribution of more than 5,000,000 rations during a period exceeding six weeks, until the French were able to complete their arrangements for relieving us of the task. The service we were able to render in the name of humanity has been most generously acknowledged by the French Authorities.

The fulfilment of our programme under such conditions would have been impossible without the exercise of great patience and whole-hearted co-operation on the part of the troops. Nor was it less dependent upon the untiring energy and efficiency displayed by commanders and staffs in the methodical arrangement of the details of our advance and the concentration of our resources. I desire to place on record my appreciation of the careful forethought of the Staff and of the excellent conduct of all ranks under very trying conditions.

It will readily be understood from the foregoing that had our advance been conducted against active opposition, even from a beaten and demoralised enemy, our progress must have been greatly delayed. The difficulties of supply would have been enormously increased in many ways, among which would have been the necessity of bringing forward large quantities of ammunition. Bridges, railways and roads would have been destroyed in front of us or blown up after we had passed, by delay-action mines. Immense loss would have been caused to property of all descriptions and incalculable suffering inflicted upon the inhabitants of the invaded districts of Belgium, France and Luxembourg.

Further Re-adjustment of Troops.

(5) Towards the close of the advance to the German frontier, a further re-adjustment was effected in the disposition of my troops.

The sector allotted to the British Forces in the general scheme for the occupation of the Rhine Provinces was too narrow to admit of the employment of more than a single Army Command. I therefore directed that the German territory to be occupied by us should be held by General Plumer's Second Army, which for this purpose should be composed as follows:—The II Corps (9th, 29th and New Zealand Divisions); the VI Corps (Guards, 2nd and 3rd Divisions), the IX Corps (1st, 6th and 62nd Divisions), the Canadian Corps (1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions), and the 1st Cavalry Division. The various changes and transfers necessary to give effect to this arrangement involved the taking over by the Second Army of the whole of the British front of advance, and the gradual withdrawal of the troops of the