

There were also deficiencies in technical apparatus for light anti-aircraft requirements, such as Kerrison Predictors, signal lights, technical and specialised vehicles of many types and a number of smaller items. The same difficulties in provision of equipment were no doubt the cause of delays in the despatch of new units to the B.E.F., particularly armoured and anti-aircraft units, and while it is to some extent true that the shortness of the campaign prevented the full effect of the shortages being felt, it is I think, justifiable to assume that the presence of the Armoured Division and of a complete Army Tank Brigade would have been an invaluable aid in the difficulties with which we were faced in meeting enemy armoured formations.

The Administrative Situation.

11. The development of the rearward installations had been proceeding systematically.

The medical base installations had been extended and a hospital area was in course of rapid development near Boulogne in addition to the original medical base sub-area at Dieppe.

The British Army requirements in the port of Brest, a French naval base, had been substantially reduced by the use of other ports such as St. Malo and Caen; by May, seventeen ports in all were being operated and 2,500 tons of stores were being despatched to railheads daily.

At the same time, the construction of semi-permanent depôts of all kinds in the neighbourhood of Nantes, Rennes and Rouen was in progress; this would later on have led to more efficient and economical working than was possible in the temporary accommodation taken up in September, 1939. By 10th May, seven ammunition depôts were open, in addition to railhead dumps; all these were intended, in time, to be rail served; while the construction of the regulating station at Abancourt, by French railway troops on behalf of the B.E.F., was well advanced. It opened on a limited scale in the first week of May. A supply depôt was being constructed close by so as to relieve the dangerous congestion at the ports of Rouen and Havre.

The progress of all these undertakings was adversely affected by the shortage of labour, to which I referred in my first despatch, and it was decided, in March, to send three Divisions to France to undertake labour duties and at the same time continue their training, albeit slowly. The Divisions selected were 12th (Major-General R. L. Petre), 23rd (Major-General W. N. Herbert) and 46th (Major-General H. O. Curtis). These arrived in April; 23rd Division was allotted for work on aerodromes in the forward area, and the remaining two to the Lines of Communication area.

Organisation.

12. The absence of actual operations up to 10th May gave opportunities to make a number of changes in organisation.

Divisional cavalry regiments were grouped into Armoured Reconnaissance Brigades and the Lines of Communication area was re-organised into two districts.

Infantry battalions were filled up to the new and higher establishments, and action was initiated to raise the establishment of artillery

units, including anti-aircraft. My Adjutant-General's branch, in conjunction with the Adjutant-General's branch at the War Office, had in hand plans for the more economical use of man-power, the elimination of fit men from sedentary or base duties and the reduction of tradesmen in War Establishments. Investigations made by the War Office, which had my full co-operation, were directed towards a more economical and more flexible system of replacement and repair of vehicles and equipment in the Force.

The Royal Air Force.

13. On 15th January, 1940, Air Marshal A. S. Barratt had assumed command of the British Air Force in France, including the Air Component which, however, was to remain under my operational control. Under this arrangement, in my opinion, the control of available air forces was better allocated to meet the needs not only of the British but also of the French Army for whom considerable aerial reconnaissance was being carried out. The development of the Allied Central Air Bureau and of its communications to the headquarters of higher formations in France and to the Royal Air Force at home, was likewise to prove its worth in the days to come as an organisation for co-ordinating information and requests for air action.

At the same time I felt that the resources of the Air Component would prove insufficient for the requirements of the Force during operations; so long, therefore, as this state of affairs existed it was of prime importance that the machinery for obtaining the allotment of additional bomber and fighter support should be as simple and as swift in operation as it could be made.

Throughout the period, construction of new aerodromes, landing grounds and communications for the British Air Force in France was proceeding as fast as resources would permit, concrete runways being constructed in the early part of the year until the season allowed for the sowing of grass. Upwards of 10,000 men were employed on this work, and forty-seven aerodromes and satellites (including 19 new aerodromes) were under development or construction. By 15th May eight of the nineteen new aerodromes were capable of use, and at least 50,000 tons of concrete had been laid. Constructional work was also undertaken on behalf of the Air Ministry at other R.A.F. installations in central France.

The Dyle and Escourt Plans.

14. Very shortly after the arrival of the B.E.F. in their positions on the Belgian frontier I had been invited by General Georges, commanding the French Front of the North East, under whose Command I was, to study the part to be played by the B.E.F. in the event of an advance into Holland and Belgium, or into Belgium alone. The question of such an advance was one of high policy with a political as well as a military aspect; it was therefore not for me to comment on it. My responsibilities were confined to ensuring that the orders issued by the French for the employment of the British Expeditionary Force were capable of being carried out; and indeed events proved that the orders issued for this operation were well within the capacity of the Force.

The subject presented difficulties greatly complicated by the policy of neutrality to which