

Supplying a Modern Army

A Single Field Army needs 10,000 tons of supplies every day as well as tremendous quantities of Petrol.

It was easy for Adolf Hitler to call a secretary and dictate a memorandum for his commander-in-chief: "Transfer seventy divisions from Poland to the Western Front immediately."

It wasn't so very difficult to relay the order to the commanding general of the group of armies concerned, or even for him to pass it on to the chief of each field army.

The latter began to wrestle with problems of supply and transportation, however, problems much more detailed than those which troubled the commander-in-chief or the army group commander. And written orders were beginning to appear.

Transmitted to the corps commanders, and by them to the division commanders, the written orders began to multiply like mushrooms. March tables, train tables, supply tables, requisitions, drafts and credits blossomed in every headquarters. Men struggled with unit priorities and rates of shipment. Staff officers laboured far into the night, making up march tables. They leafed through reference tables and books on all possible problems of army transportation and supply.

Moving modern armies and handling their supplies is an almost unbelievably complicated task. It involves dispatching hundreds of trains and routing thousands of trucks. It means building up great depots and filling myriads of warehouses with supplies.

The movement of the armies themselves is a sufficiently bewildering progress. Huge masses of men and trucks crawl along in an endless procession. A single reinforced American corps stretches out for eighty-four miles—and if it is composed of four-regimental national guard divisions the total is more than a hundred miles.

Each of the three infantry divisions in a corps must have 74 one-and-a-half-tons trucks available for distribution of supplies, each cavalry division 125, and the rest of the corps troops 63. That's a minimum of 410 trucks for each corps.

And this is for the handling of food—of something which vanishes every day. Thus, every American as well as eat. The ammunition must be freighted in and it weighs more. Each of the corps referred to must also receive 81 tons of chemical mortar shells, 177 tons of large field gun shells, 715 tons of small field gun shells, 834 tons of cartridges and 1,025 tons of howitzer shells.

The size of the problem is beginning to become apparent.

Each corps requires 540 tons of food and wood plus 2,832 tons of ammunition, or a total of almost 3,400

tons of supplies and it requires them every day. Thus, every American field army has to have more than 10,000 tons of such supplies laid down every 24 hours—and the figures given do not include the daily rations of petrol.

Armies require vast quantities of petrol, but the formula for determining them like that for the estimating of train movements, is so complicated that it is impossible to resolve it to an average figure.

In addition, there are other kinds of supplies which must be continually flowing to the troops. They include such items as gas masks, shoes, uniforms, tools, lubricating oil, machinery and rifle and cannon repair parts.

Furthermore the totals change continually with the kind of action in which the troops are engaged. Consider for instance the requirements for our reinforced corps on the first day of an attack on a position. The totals are much greater than ordinarily would be the case. The men will need 1,133 tons of bullets, the artillery must have 3,768 tons of shells and there must be 1,257 tons of supplies. That is 6,158 tons for the corps—more than 18,000 tons for the field army.

The system which provides these supplies is carefully organized. They flow in a steady stream, day after day from the Zone of the Interior through the Communications Zone to the Combat Zone. There is a reverse stream, too. It consists of ill and wounded men and animals, and they follow the same routes. The stream flowing in is supply. The stream flowing out is evacuation.

The key to the whole supply system is the establishment of huge depots in the Communications Zone. Great stocks of reserve supplies are kept there and shipped, usually by rail, up to the Combat Zone as needed. The great general depots are organized into sections, each devoted to one form of supplies which is furnished as the Medical Section, the Quartermaster Section, the Ordnance Section, etc.

In addition to the general depots, there are branch depots, each devoted to a certain service. And the whole business is a distinctly military organization. The commander of the Communications Zone supervises all the depots, appointing a commanding officer of each one. The depot commander has full charge within his organization. There are hospitals as well as depots in the Communications Zone.

The army supply establishments are mammoth affairs in themselves. In addition to the depots they include

dozens of necessary institutions which the civilian seldom realizes are a part of army life.

The field army is a community of something like 300,000 people, and that is a fair-sized city. So it comes to pass that the establishments back in the army service area will be found to include laundries, bakeries, big bath houses that will serve a thousand men at a time, motor vehicle repair shops, laboratories, surgical and convalescent hospitals, animal hospitals, clothing repair shops, horse and mule corrals, aerodromes and the almost innumerable supply depots of the various services and branches. There must be water-works and sewage systems as well.

On the first day of an attack on a position an army corps will ask headquarters for facilities to ship back 3,400 men and 260 animals to evacuation hospitals. It will also arrange to bury 600 dead men and 135 animals. At the same time it will requisition 2,950 men and 280 animals as replacements. (The author doesn't know why the disparities between casualties and replacements occur. He only knows they are there.)

—(Condensed from a chapter of 'Twentieth Century Warfare' by Lowell M. Limpus).



"Have a care, George—remember what the Government said about picking up dangerous things on the beaches!"
"Daily Mirror"

TO ANY YOUNG GIRL.

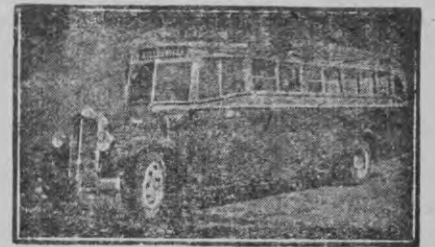
Dance, my lovely girl
While you may.
Mother says it's wicked
If you bring Love to bay.

But show her, my child,
How stupid she is:
Press tight your lover,
Explore his kiss.

So dance, my lovely girl
While you may.
Mother says it's naughty
But the world needs love to-day.

—Robert Solway.

17th February, 1942.



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