

THE ROYAL ARMY SERVICE CORPS IN THE WESTERN DESERT

Never in the field of human conflict was so little known by so many about so much.

This new version of a famous remark is the modest comment of the staff of the Royal Army Service Corps on what the world knows of their work and achievements. It is to be found as a slogan over the desk of a busy Staff Officer. But if it is still true that little is known about their functions at home, it is not true in General Montgomery's Eighth Army.

That Army knows that the unremitting pursuit of Rommel across the desert was possible because the spearhead of the Eighth Army was driven forward to the battle by the R.A.S.C. The infantry was brought up in "Troop Carrying Companies", composed of standard 3-ton lorries with seats, and the tanks went on large "Tank Transporters" so that they could go into battle fresh.

The R.A.S.C. brings forward everything that is needed in the battle - and they do not go back empty. Out of battle they take the prisoners, and the wounded, besides innumerable "salvaged" articles needing repair and refitting.

One of the great tasks of desert warfare - of supplying water to the fighters - is done by transport companies of water-tank lorries which carry 750 gallons and equipment for purifying the water. Sometimes the water goes up in 4 gallon tins. Petrol, too, is carried from the ports in 4 gallon tins, and all these valuable tins must be brought back again in spite of the enemy.

Enemy attack is an ever-present problem for the R.A.S.C. in the Eighth Army. On some days the percentage of casualties in the R.A.S.C. has been higher than in any other combat service. A convoy of several hundred vehicles cannot prevent their tracks and dust clouds from being spotted, especially in what may be a round trip of some fifteen hundred miles, taking nearly three weeks. They find their way by doing their own desert navigation by map, sun-compass and the stars. They get no special fighter protection, but, since they have been trained to the same fighting standards as the infantry, they are ready to fight with rifles, Bren guns, sub-machine guns, anti-aircraft and anti-tank guns. They are experts in radio-telephony and know also how to detect mines in their path.

COLOURED DRIVERS

Men of the R.A.S.C. come from every corner of the Empire. There are many fine, coloured drivers in the ranks. Few of them could drive or do repairs before they joined up. The Corps has grown so much that the establishment of officers is now over 20 times more than in pre-war and the growth of other ranks is greater.

The assessment, training and planning for the present successes began three years ago, as far as the R.A.S.C. is concerned. Every Infantry Division depends for its necessities upon hundreds of R.A.S.C. lorries. Behind these are desert convoys, whose long and dangerous caravan routes require from five to ten times as many lorries again. All these and many other needs had to be foreseen.

The Corps also plays its part in the smooth working of staffs by providing staff cars and drivers for Generals and their assistants, and by supplying some wonderful men who are much overlooked - the Staff Clerks at all Headquarters throughout the Army. These are the men, trained in a special school, who have changed every Operation Order in the Eighth Army from skeleton form into readable shape and issued it to the correct recipients.