

The Problem of Civilian Refugees in a European War

Digested by the MILITARY REVIEW from an article by Lieutenant Colonel Oswald Stein in "The Journal of the Royal United Service Institution" (Great Britain) August 1952.

IN A defensive war in Europe, the problem of civilian refugees must be solved quickly by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization countries if chaos is to be avoided on the lines of communication. The memory of the tragic misery on the roads of northern France in the summer of 1940 underlines the importance of this problem. Not only did the congestion caused by the bombing and machine-gunning from the air of the roads filled with refugees cause several divisions of the French Army to arrive in the forward areas too late to stop the gaps through which the Germans were pouring, but some divisions from the center of France failed to get through at all. To all this was added the constant delay and interruption caused to the distribution of supplies, ammunition, gasoline, and oil to the troops already engaged, and to their movement during the course of the battle.

The object of this article is not to provide a complete answer to the question, but rather to attempt to set out the factors bearing on the matter and the points that require detailed study before a viable plan can be formulated.

Three Problems to Study

The problems to be studied can be grouped under three heads, namely:

1. What are the numbers of refugees likely to be involved? On what parts of the front will they be found in the greatest density? In which directions will their unorganized movement most probably be headed?

2. How will this unorganized movement be taken under control? How will it be diverted to, and kept moving along, pre-selected and allocated roads? What measures will be necessary to ensure the

maintenance, health, and safety of the refugees, and for the prevention of disorder likely to embarrass the military authorities in the execution of their plans?

3. To what destination will the refugees finally be directed? How will they be maintained on arrival? How can suitable workers among them be diverted to those areas where their labor is required?

No attempt can be made to find even an approximate answer to these questions until it is clear what countries are likely to be the object of attack, and until some indication of the enemy's plans has been given. It may, however, be assumed that a considerably higher proportion of the population of the invaded or threatened territories will take to flight than was the case during the Nazi invasion in the early stages of the last war. This assumption is based on the belief that, in 1940, many persons of anti-Nazi sympathies were, at the outset, none the less of the opinion that they had nothing to fear personally from German occupation of their homelands and that, once the tide of war had passed, they would be better situated in their own homes than as refugees. This feeling might well have less force in the event of an invasion from Eastern Europe. The fear of deportation for forced labor would be extremely potent, both in the cases of those who, for reasons of class or political leanings, might be considered hostile to the invaders, and also of those whose youth and fitness would make them desirable workers.

Studying Probable Situations

It would be necessary in the early planning stages to study the population figures of those districts or countries which figure in the Supreme Headquar-

ters, Allied Powers in Europe (SHAPE), defensive plans as the probable victims of enemy attack. The main agglomerations of population must be noted and an attempt made to analyze them with the object of dividing those likely to flee from those likely to stay. It is easy to see that many factors would have a bearing on this, and that all these factors would have to be studied and brought into the calculation. The general direction of the movement would almost certainly be a prolongation of the axis of the attack, but would be subject to minor deviations resulting from geographical considerations.

Ultimate Destination for Refugees

Before we can study the allocation of roads, it is self-evident that we must first consider the ultimate destination to which the refugees are to be directed. Half measures would only lead to trouble in the event of withdrawal of the front. For this reason, the refugees must be kept moving until they are well clear of the zone of the armies, and it is suggested as a subject for study that the principal concentration area might well be beyond the Pyrenees, provided this were politically possible. Suitable workers required for the war effort could either be drawn off at staging camps en route or sent forward after arrival at the base.

In the light of the foregoing, and in consultation with the military staff, the necessary roads must then be allocated to refugee traffic. As the armed forces would almost certainly require practically all the first-class roads for the up and down routes of their various formations, good second-class roads should be chosen. Searches should be made for roads having frequent stretches of open country or accessible woodland on either side to enable those needing rest or refreshment to get off the road, and also to facilitate

the removal of broken-down vehicles from the highway. The roads must be kept open at all costs and the traffic on them kept moving. For this purpose, large forces of traffic police on motor bicycles would be required, together with first aid and recovery posts. Police also would be required to round up refugees on unauthorized routes and to direct them to the allocated roads. Ample sign posting should be provided.

Camp Facilities

Staging camps must be established at regular intervals where kitchen accommodations, duly staffed, equipped, and supplied, and hospital and first aid huts, with doctors and nursing staff, must be available, together with bivouac space, supply arrangements, and gasoline points. It is also suggested that a few mobile veterinary sections should be appointed, because, apart from the humanitarian aspect, sick or grossly overloaded animals cause intolerable congestion on the roads. Worn out animals should be slaughtered and butchers should prepare the carcasses for consumption in the camps. In the British zone of Austria, after the end of the last war, the main source of meat supply for the surrendered forces in the early days consisted of the starving or lame horses of the Hungarian and White Russian forces which had been serving with the Germans.

For the maintenance of order, posts of military or armed civilian police should be established at intervals along the routes, in addition to the traffic police mentioned above.

Holding camps must be established of a semi-permanent nature at the destination, served perhaps by reception and dispersal camps at each roadhead. Maintenance, medical care, and welfare must be provided by the authorities of the country of reception under financial arrangements to be made with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Some form

of occupational and rehabilitation training would probably be required for those who are fitted to be drafted into war work in various allied countries. Such drafting must, of course, be on a voluntary basis, but able-bodied men or women refusing work should cease to be eligible for maintenance. Breadwinners of families should be employed in or near the camps. Education and recreational activities should be provided for the young and the unemployable.

Plans Must Be Made in Advance

Doubtless, if and when the emergency arises, the various voluntary societies will be ready, as always, to provide assistance for the relief of distress, by the provision

of teams of skilled workers for the camps—medical units, welfare workers, trained catering staff, and the like—and will, in addition, furnish and distribute such stocks of special foods, medicaments, and clothing as may be available.

However, *post facto* improvisation is not enough; the first few days will be the critical period. It is essential to formulate plans in advance, both to prevent untold suffering among the civilian population and to obviate a breakdown in the mobilization, reinforcement, supply, and other logistic schemes of the armies. Such planning can only be originated and co-ordinated by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

How Effective Is Our Artillery?

Digested by the MILITARY REVIEW from an article by
Lieutenant Colonel F. R. Evans in the "Australian Army Journal" June 1952.

THE doubts that prompt this article arise from the fact that the Australian Military Force for many years has relied almost entirely on the 25-pounder for its artillery support and so has little experience of other equipment. As a result, we may tend to judge artillery on the effect of this weapon alone, rather than on the combined effect of the various equipment available in the British service.

This, in turn, has led to a rather timid employment of artillery on some of our recent tactical exercises. It may, therefore, be appropriate to re-examine the problem in the light of postwar knowledge.

A full analysis of all artillery is, of course, beyond the scope of this article, but the relationship of medium and heavy artillery to the problem is chosen as being of particular interest as such units now figure prominently in our Order of Battle. Reference is also made to pack and self-propelled field artillery as their status in the artillery family is often the subject of discussion.

As a starting point, it may be well to review briefly just how we did employ our artillery in the last war. It is probably true to say that, in the Australian Imperial Forces, not only was our experience limited almost exclusively to the 25-pounder, but even in this field few regiments experienced the changes that were taking place elsewhere as a result of improvements in radio communication which enabled large numbers of guns to be concentrated rapidly on a single target. Never were we called on to fire observed concentrations of divisional, corps, or army artillery. Consequently, it came as a surprise to many to learn, subsequently, of the important changes which had taken place in this respect.

Our enemy in the Southwest Pacific area was a most unenterprising artilleryman. Most of our targets were either troops in the open or in defensive positions. Few tanks or guns were used against us. Thus, the errors of using the 25-pounder as a maid of all work were seldom exposed.