

# WAR DIARIES

## 1939–1945

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Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke

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### **1 December Jerusalem**

We had an early rise, said goodbye to Mr Trott, who had been putting us up in his house. He is the Oriental Secretary and very interested in birds so I made the most of him and got him to show me all the bird skins he had been collecting. We left the Legation at 7.30 am and by 8 am were roaring down the runway taking off for Jerusalem. We had a very good journey and landed on an aerodrome some 35 miles from Jerusalem [Lydda]. There we were joined by Marshall, King, Somervell and Arnold. We then drove to the King David Hotel, where we are being done quite exceptionally well. This was intended as returning the Williamsburg hospitality [15-16 May 1943].

After lunch we did a tour of Jerusalem with a monk guide and were shown all the usual sights. I was very interested in it all, but cannot help feeling that it is all so far detached from real events that I would sooner retain my own conceptions of all those episodes. However, from the historical point of view of all the various events that have occurred since the Crucifixion and their vast influence on the whole destiny of Europe it is quite enthralling. We returned to tea, and afterwards went to call on the Governor, or whatever he calls himself [High Commissioner]. We finished up the day with a banquet for the American Chiefs, a band and a dance in the hall. On the whole the show so far has been a success. We presented all Chiefs of Staff with a small olive wood cigarette box with silver plate on it with their names inscribed.

### **2 December Cairo**

We left hotel at 8.30 and returned to Jerusalem city to visit the Dome of the Rock or Dome of Omar. I was fascinated by it and thought it quite one of the most attractive sights we had seen. Then we went on to the Garden of Gethsemane which finished our tour. We returned to the hotel, said goodbye to the St Franciscan monk who had acted as our guide, and then motored back to Lydda aerodrome. Then we took off for Cairo where we arrived in time for a late lunch. On arriving on the aerodrome we were informed that the PM and President were expected in a few minutes having changed their plans. They are now all safely back here, including PM and President. Afternoon getting hair cut and going through papers. In the evening we had Jumbo Wilson, Sholto Douglas and Wedemeyer to dine.

### **3 December Cairo**

Started with a COS to try and sort matters out. Then at 12.30 went round for a meeting with PM. Found him in a poor temper having just completed

inspection of 4<sup>th</sup> Hussars. Also discovered that he had been queering our pitch by suggesting to Leahy that if we did not attack Rhodes we might at any rate starve the place out. We then lunched with the PM and at 2.30 went back for our meeting with the Combined Chiefs of Staff. We were dumbfounded by being informed that the meeting must finish on Sunday at the latest (in 48 hours) as the President was off! No apologies, nothing. They have completely upset the whole meeting by wasting our time with Chiang Kai-shek and Stalin before we had settled any points with them. And now with nothing settled they propose to disappear into the blue and leave all the main points connected with the Mediterranean unsettled! It all looks like some of the worst sharp practice that I have seen for some time. The rest of the meeting was quite hopeless and we settled little else. Attended Jumbo Wilson's cocktail party for Scobie prior to his departure for III Corps.

*I am afraid I was unnecessarily bitter with the American Chiefs of Staff then, and evidently at the end of my tether! I withdraw every word connected with 'sharp practice' and am quite certain that the one thing that Marshall would never have tolerated was anything connected with 'sharp practice'. I have seldom met a straighter or more reliable man in my life and thank heaven for these qualities of his. It was only in his lack of strategic vision that my patience with him used to become frayed.*

#### 4 December

A difficult day! First a COS meeting to try and decide how best to tackle our American friends, this lasted from 9.45 to 10.15 when we went to the PM. He was not in a good temper, and upset by Dickie Mountbatten's latest telegram asking for more forces for capture of Andaman Isles! Poor Monty Stopford [XXXIII Corps, Burma] came in for a bad passage.

Then at 11 am round for interview with President and Americans. PM gave long discourse and then called on me to express my views. I said that this conference had been most unsatisfactory. Usually at these meetings we discussed matters till we arrived at a policy which we put before the PM and President for approval and amendment, and that we subsequently examined whether ways and means admitted of this policy being carried out. Finally putting up a paper for approval which formed our policy for future conduct of the war. This time such a procedure had been impossible. We had straight away been thrown into high level conference with the Chinese. These had hardly been finished when we were rushed off to Teheran for similar conferences with Stalin, and now that we were back we were only given two days to arrive at any concerted policy. We then proceeded with the desirability to give up the Andaman Islands in order to concentrate on the European front. Here at once we came up against political difficulties. The President had made promises to Generalissimo [Chiang Kai-shek] of an amphibious operation and did not like to go back on him. We made no progress!! Dashed back to house where I had Sosnkowski and Anders lunching with me. Then back for 2.30 pm conference with Americans where we did not get much further.

Finally asked to dine alone with Winston to discuss questions of command. President had today decided that Eisenhower was to command Overlord whilst Marshall remained as Chief of Staff [of US Army as a whole]. I argued with PM that Alexander was not of sufficiently high calibre to take on the new centralized Mediterranean Command. I suggested Jumbo Wilson as Supreme Commander for Mediterranean, Alexander as Commander in Chief Italian Land Forces, Paget for Middle East, Montgomery *vice* Paget, and Oliver Leese *vice* Montgomery. He was inclined to agree. He said that he had at one time thought of me for Supreme Commander of Mediterranean, and Wilson as Chief of [Imperial General] Staff, but that it would be better if I remained where I was. I agreed that it would be best. Jumbo Wilson would have a great deal to pick up to become CIGS, whereas he knew  $\frac{1}{2}$  Mediterranean intimately. I hope he does not change his mind again!

*I found him very tired that evening, and it was with difficulty that I could get him to absorb all the intricate points connected with it. I had devoted a great deal of thought to this problem, had found it hard to solve, but was now perfectly clear in my own mind. First of all the selection of Eisenhower rather than Marshall was a good one. Eisenhower had now a certain amount of experience as a Commander and was beginning to find his feet. The combination of Eisenhower and Bedell Smith [as his Chief of Staff] had much to be said for it. On the other hand Marshall had never commanded anything in war except, I believe, a company in the First World War.*

*The removal of Ike from the Mediterranean left a difficult gap to fill. I did not want to touch either Alex or Monty for this job as I required them for the Italian campaign and for the British contingent of Overlord. Had I had my own way I would select Monty for Overlord and Alex for Italy, but I knew that I might well have difficulties with this preference of mine, first with Winston and secondly with Eisenhower. I therefore introduced Jumbo Wilson for the Supreme Command Mediterranean, and to take over from Ike. For the rest I banked on Alex for Italy, Monty for Overlord and to relieve Paget, who could then take over Middle East, whilst Oliver Leese relieved Monty in the 8<sup>th</sup> Army.*

## 5 December

A very difficult day filled with a series of meetings from COS to Plenary Meetings, but negotiations remained at a deadlock as we were holding out for cancelling the Andaman Island attack, whilst the President having made promises to Chiang Kai-shek would not cancel. It all proved too clearly that we had been quite right in insisting that Chiang Kai-shek should only come at the end instead of the start of the meeting.

We lunched at the Embassy, large lunch with Mohammed Ali, Egyptian Prime Minister, Winston, Eden, American Chiefs etc. In afternoon another CCS meeting at which we called in Stopford and Troubridge [Force Commanders for Andaman operation] to discuss the Andaman Islands and whether any alternative small operation could not be found to 'save face' with Chiang. Finally dined with American Chiefs of Staff.