

The services of the following officers were particularly noteworthy:—

Royal Navy.

Acting Rear Admiral G. H. Creswell, Rear Admiral Alexandria, Captain A. L. Poland, Senior Naval Officer, Inshore Squadron; Captain F. M. Smith, Naval Officer in charge, Tobruk, Acting Commander H. R. M. Nicholl who performed the duties of Naval Officer in charge, Tobruk, during the sickness of Captain Smith, Lieutenant Commander J. W. Best, Naval Officer in charge Mersa Matruh.

Royal Air Force.

Wing Commander E. R. E. Black, commanding the Royal Air Force Detachment; Squadron Leader R. D. Williams commanding No. 145 Squadron; Acting Flight Lieutenant C. W. Morle, commanding the Air Ministry Experimental Station; and Pilot Officer W. C. Mackintosh and Pilot Officer H. M. Briscoe, Code and Ciphers Officers.

EGYPT.

31. In Egypt certain problems vitally affected the security of our base. These arose in part directly out of the war and in part out of the circumstance that Egypt herself is not a belligerent.

Apart from political difficulties, the problem of telephonic communications has been pressing. The Egyptian State Telegraphs and Telephones Departments have always given us excellent service, but the use of the civilian system manned by civilian personnel is prejudicial to security. Holding the view that, so long as the country is not at war, military considerations cannot override civilian requirements, the Departments have consistently refused to hand over any part of the system to British Control. Nor will they allow the infiltration of British Military personnel to handle our own traffic and become used to the system so as to be able to take over in an emergency; such might arise if heavy bombing attacks occurred. The difficulty became particularly acute in connection with the projected offensive in Cyrenaica; but in October I was able to arrange to take over the working of the lines in the forward area.

32. There has also been an agitation for the declaration of Cairo, as well as other Egyptian cities, as an "open city." As the bombing of Alexandria increased, so did the Cairo "open city" movement gain impetus. In mid-September the Egyptian Prime Minister was handed a Memorandum stating that it was entirely out of the question to move British troops and military depots from Cairo: an end should, therefore, be put to the agitation. The recent diminution of enemy air raids on Egyptian towns has automatically put this question into the background; but it is bound to reappear with its attendant dangers to internal security as soon as heavy scale bombing is resumed. Against that day an elaborate air raid precautions scheme has been prepared, to which His Majesty's Government have given considerable financial assistance.

33. The worst result of the air raids was that they seriously threatened shipping in the Suez Canal and in the Gulf of Suez. Incidentally they also caused a reduction in the amount of Egyptian casual labour; but this was speedily remedied by improving the

arrangements for air raid precautions and importing labour from Upper Egypt. The threat to shipping demanded that immediate and effective measures be taken, and they were the more urgent in that air raids coincided with the arrival of important convoys carrying large numbers of men and vehicles. Moreover it was essential to give adequate protection to American ships which had just begun to arrive. I therefore took every possible precaution. Several anti-aircraft batteries were moved from other areas to Suez during moonlight periods, and anti-aircraft crews were placed aboard American ships, while the Royal Navy stationed an anti-aircraft cruiser in Suez Roads. In addition it was decided to provide two defended anchorages in the Gulf of Suez, at Abu Zenima and at Ras Ghemsa, for use in the event of Port Tewfik becoming unusable.

34. The help given us by the Egyptian Army is an earnest of the friendly intentions of the Government. In addition to finding internal security guards in the Delta and on the land, they found a garrison for Siwa at a time when it was necessary for us to leave as few of our own troops as possible in the Western Desert. The services of the Egyptian Army have been particularly valuable. Providing as they have a complete and efficient observer system as well as searchlight and anti-aircraft units at Cairo, Alexandria and in the Canal area, they have relieved the strain on our resources to a very great extent.

PART II—ADMINISTRATION.

35. During this period I was chiefly concerned with the problems of administration. The comparatively peaceful conditions prevailing gave me the opportunity of carrying out the large amount of reorganisation and development rendered necessary by the increasing strength of the Middle East Forces.

GENERAL ORGANISATION.

Formation of Eighth and Ninth Armies.

36. The conclusion of the Balkan and East African Campaigns caused our forces to be concentrated in Egypt, Palestine and Syria, and narrowed the potential theatres of operations. It was therefore certain that in future the strength of the forces engaged in operations could be reckoned, not in Brigades and Divisions as heretofore but in Corps. The existing small headquarters were obviously inadequate to control operations on this scale. I therefore determined that the basic organisation should comprise two Army Headquarters to command all the troops in the two principal theatres of operations, with two Base and Line of Communication Areas directly administered by G.H.Q. relieving the armies of the administration of these areas.

Accordingly on the 26th September the Headquarters of the Eighth Army, commanded by Lieutenant-General Sir Alan Cunningham, assumed command of all troops in the Western Desert forward of Bahig, with the exception of those in Tobruk who came under command on the 30th October. Headquarters, British Troops in Egypt, became in effect a large Base and Lines of Communication Area Command operationally responsible only for the internal security and anti-aircraft defence of the Egyptian base.