

it into practice. I informed the Minister of State and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff accordingly.*

Before I was aware of the decision to relieve me of my command I had arranged with the Chief of the Imperial General Staff that Lieutenant-General B. L. Montgomery should come out from England to take over the Eighth Army as its permanent commander, as it was obviously impossible for me to continue indefinitely in the dual role of Commander-in-Chief and Army Commander. General Montgomery arrived before I handed over to General Alexander and I explained the situation to him and my plans for the future.

In accordance with the Prime Minister's instructions, I handed over my command to General Alexander on the 15th August.

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I wish to take this opportunity of recording my gratitude and appreciation of the unfailing help and ready co-operation I received throughout my tenure of command of the Middle East Forces from my colleagues in chief command, Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, Admiral Sir Henry Pridham Whippell and Admiral Sir Henry Harwood, who successively held the post of Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean; and Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder with whom I worked in the closest possible accord throughout the whole period.

I am deeply indebted also to the Ministers of State who by their assumption of great political and economic responsibilities made it possible for me to devote much more attention to strategical matters than I could otherwise have done. These were successively Captain Oliver Lyttelton, Sir Walter Monckton and Mr. Richard Casey.

My Army Commanders and I owe much to the consistent support and wise counsel of Sir Harold MacMichael, High Commissioner for Palestine and Trans-Jordan, Sir Kinahan Cornwallis, His Majesty's Ambassador in Baghdad, and Sir Reader Bullard, His Majesty's Minister in Teheran. I wish to acknowledge also the great help and encouragement I received from the visits of Field Marshal Smuts to my command. His profound knowledge of the world in general and of war in particular made his comments and advice on matters of higher strategy of great value.

In my first Despatch, I alluded to the great help I had received from the Egyptian Government and the Egyptian Army. This support was continued in full measure throughout the period under review and was greatly enhanced by the calm and generally courageous behaviour of the civil population of the country during the prolonged struggle at El Alamein, when the enemy was at their gates. The absence of panic and disorder made the task of those charged with organising the ultimate defence of the Delta immeasurably lighter than it might otherwise have been. To His Excellency Nahas Pasha, Prime Minister of Egypt, and to his predecessor, His Excellency Hussain Sirry Pasha, I gratefully acknowledge my indebtedness.

PART II.

THE CAMPAIGNS IN CYRENAICA AND THE WESTERN DESERT.

THE INVASION OF CYRENAICA.

On the 2nd September, 1941, after consulting the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, and the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, I told Lieutenant-General Sir Alan Cunningham, commander designate of the Eighth Army, in a personal letter that I intended to drive the enemy out of North Africa.*

The offensive was to be carried out in two phases, the first being the capture of Cyrenaica and the second the capture of Tripolitania. The immediate object was to destroy the enemy's armoured forces.

At that time two courses seemed possible. We might base our main striking force on Giarabub and advance through Gialo to cut the enemy's line of supply from Tripoli, leaving sufficient forces to contain him in front and prevent his trying to turn the tables on us by advancing on Alexandria, in the hope that he would then be caught between two fires and forced to fight at a disadvantage. Or we might make a direct attack towards Tobruk with our main force, while feinting from the centre and south to distract the enemy's attention and cause him to disperse his strength. I instructed General Cunningham to prepare detailed plans for both courses by the 1st October.

The plan must be flexible, since the enemy might modify his dispositions when he saw our preparations or received information about the growing strength of our forces in the Desert. For this reason and to deceive the enemy as to the direction of our main blow, the original deployment must be on a wide front and our depots of supplies in the forward area disposed to allow of this.

The forces available for the offensive were two corps headquarters, one armoured division, an armoured brigade group, four infantry divisions, two infantry brigades and an army tank brigade. There was also the Tobruk garrison consisting of four infantry brigade groups, a mixed armoured force of about a hundred tanks, and a considerable amount of artillery—anti-aircraft, field and medium.

The campaign would require the closest possible co-operation between the three services. The land and air forces would depend on the Royal Navy not only for direct support, but to a large extent for maintenance. Arrangements would be made to land a brigade group behind the enemy lines, if General Cunningham so wished, but the success or failure of the general plan was not to depend on whether this operation was feasible or not.

Maintenance and mobility would be vital factors, and I directed that formations must be made fully mobile and trained to operate on a strictly limited allowance of baggage, food and water.

I estimated that the forces could be trained and concentrated, and the maintenance arrangements completed by the beginning of November. I asked General Cunningham to make every effort to avoid having to postpone the operation, and to begin building up forward magazines of supplies and munitions as

* Letter to C.I.G.S., 14th August 1942—Appendix 22.

* Letter to Lt.-Gen. Sir Alan Cunningham, 2nd September 1941—Appendix 1.