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DESPATCH ON OPERATIONS IN IRAQ, EAST SYRIA AND IRAN, FROM 10TH APRIL, 1941 TO 12TH JANUARY, 1942.

The following Despatch was submitted to the Secretary of State for War, on 18th October, 1942, by GENERAL SIR ARCHIBALD P. WAVELL, G.C.B., C.M.G., M.C., Commander-in-Chief, India.

DESPATCH OF TROOPS TO IRAQ.

1. Events in Iraq, in early April, 1941, led to a decision by His Majesty's Government to despatch a force to Iraq as rapidly as possible, and on 8th April a telegram from the Secretary of State for India was received enquiring if the Government of India could make available a suitable force to occupy Basra as early as possible.

2. Detailed plans for the despatch of a force to Iraq had been under preparation at Army Headquarters, India, for some time but on account of commitments elsewhere it had not been found possible to provide the necessary troops before July, 1941.

In order to meet the request of His Majesty's Government, and in view of the urgency of the situation, it was therefore decided to divert to Iraq a convoy which was at that time in the process of embarking at Karachi prior to sailing for Malaya. It was hoped at the same time that the diversion of this convoy would conceal the fact that troops were being despatched to Iraq.

This proposal was communicated to His Majesty's Government on 9th April and accepted by them on 10th April. The force in this convoy, which was under the command of Major-General W. A. K. Fraser, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., M.V.O., M.C., Commander 10th Indian Division, consisted of two senior Staff Officers, Headquarters 10th Indian Division Artillery, 3rd Field Regiment, 20th Indian Infantry Brigade and certain ancillary troops.

3. Instructions were given to Major-General Fraser to the following effect:—

(i) The object of his force was to occupy the Basra-Shaiba area in order to ensure the safe disembarkation of further reinforcements and to enable a base to be established in that area.

(ii) The attitude of the Iraq Army and local authorities was still uncertain and it was possible that attempts might be made to oppose the disembarkation of his force. In framing his plan for disembarkation, he was, therefore, to act in the closest concert with the officer commanding the Naval Forces.

(iii) Should the disembarkation be opposed, he was to overcome the Iraqi forces by force and occupy suitable defensive positions ashore as quickly as possible.

(iv) The greatest care was to be taken not to infringe the neutrality of Iran.

4. The force sailed from Karachi on 12th April and a period of considerable anxiety ensued as to whether the landing would be opposed or not. As the force had originally been prepared for despatch to Malaya it had not been specially embarked with a view to immediate tactical employment on arrival at destination, and consequently a risk was accepted in diverting it to Iraq where an opposed landing was by no means impossible. In view of the necessity for speed there was no time to readjust the loading of units, which would have caused a delay of some days.

5. In addition to the troops proceeding by sea, 400 personnel of the 1st Bn. King's Own Royal Regiment were flown from Karachi to Shaiba. The arrival of the first air party was timed to synchronise with the arrival of the