

reserves the attack might have succeeded, but these were not available.

For a month now the Eighth Army had been launching repeated attacks and it was evident that it could undertake no more until it had been thoroughly reorganised and greatly reinforced. The enemy had so strengthened his position that it was beyond the power of the Eighth Army in its existing state to evict him either by manoeuvre or direct attack. The Eighth Army was also strongly posted and well disposed for a defensive battle. The enemy was obviously trying to build up his army sufficiently to renew his efforts to seize the Delta, but was unlikely to be able to make the attempt before the end of August.

By mid-September the Eighth Army might expect to be reinforced by two armoured and two infantry divisions, and might then be able to make a frontal attack against what was likely to be a highly organised defensive position. Our immediate task was to reorganise and rearrange our forces, so as to provide an adequate reserve in the hands of the Army Commander, and to train the new divisions intensively for the offensive which I hoped might begin at the end of September. I informed the Chief of the Imperial General Staff of these conclusions.* Meanwhile, in case the enemy should attack first, I gave orders for the El Alamein position to be strengthened and developed in great depth.

During July, the Eighth Army took over 7,000 prisoners; and, though it had lost in battle some 700 officers and 12,000 men during that period, by supreme efforts it had stopped the enemy's drive on Egypt and laid firm foundations on which to build our future counterstroke.

Conclusion.

On the 6th August I flew to Cairo from my advanced headquarters with the Eighth Army and met the Prime Minister, Mr. Churchill, and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Sir Alan Brooke, who had just arrived by air from England, and discussed the situation with them. Later the Prime Minister held a conference, at which Field Marshal Smuts, the Minister of State, General Sir Archibald Wavell and the three Commanders in Chief were among those present. The next day I accompanied the Prime Minister on a visit to the Eighth Army. After a short tour of the 30th Corps area the Prime Minister came to my advanced headquarters, where I explained to him the tactical situation in detail and my future plans, after which he met General Gott and other officers of the 13th Corps and then went back to Cairo. General Gott was killed the next day when the aircraft in which he was flying to Cairo on a few days leave was shot down. His death at an early age was a great loss to the Army, as he was an officer of much promise, whom I had already marked down as a possible Army Commander.

On the 8th August, Colonel Jacob brought to Eighth Army Headquarters a letter from the Prime Minister from which I learned that the War Cabinet had decided that the moment had come to make a change in the Middle East Command and that I was to be relieved by General Sir Harold Alexander.

The Prime Minister went on to say that it was proposed to form Iraq and Persia into a new Command, independent of the Middle East Command. He offered me this new Command and hoped I would accept it.

For some time previously, I had been closely examining the possibility of freeing General Quinan from the heavy administrative and political responsibilities he was discharging as commander of the Tenth Army. Since his appointment to command the forces sent to Iraq from India early in 1941, he had carried out these responsibilities with ability and thoroughness, but I considered it essential to free him from them so that he could concentrate on the strategical problem of the defence of Persia.

After prolonged and thorough examination of the administrative considerations involved, which were not easy to reconcile with the simpler needs of a sound system of operational control, we reached a solution which, though possibly not ideal, was workable in practice. My Lieutenant-General in charge of Administration, General Riddell-Webster, was of the greatest help to me in solving this problem to which he gave much time and thought.

The new system, consisted in the formation of a base area in Southern Iraq and South-western Persia under a commander directly responsible to General Headquarters in Cairo; the appointment of an Inspector-General of Communications for Persia and Iraq, working directly under my Lieutenant-General in charge of Administration; and the transfer of Mosul and Northern Iraq from the Tenth to the Ninth Army. The transfer of Northern Iraq I considered essential in order to ensure unity of control of all land and air forces along the whole length of the Anatolian frontier, the defence of which was one problem to be handled by a single commander. Moreover, General Quinan would thus be freed from all responsibility for the defence of Iraq from the north and could devote his whole attention to the protection of Northern Persia. These changes also facilitated co-operation between the various army and air force commanders, which had previously been somewhat complicated, as the boundaries of their several Commands did not coincide.

This transfer of responsibility, which I looked on as highly important and necessary, was put into effect shortly before I gave up my command but was never fully tested, as soon afterwards Iraq and Persia and the Tenth Army were divorced from the Middle East Command and given a Commander-in-Chief of their own. It seems likely, however, that the changes described smoothed the way for the formation of the new command.

I handed over my direct command of the Eighth Army temporarily to General Ramsden and went to Cairo the next day and did not return to the Desert. The same day I had an interview with the Prime Minister and told him that I thought it would be difficult for me to accept his offer of the new command, but that I would like to have time to examine thoroughly the probable strategical and administrative effects of the proposal. After careful consideration, I concluded that the arrangement was likely to break down in the event of a serious threat from the north and that, therefore, I could not accept the responsibility of putting

* Appreciation of Situation in the Western Desert, 27th July 1942—Appendix 21.