

push a force by the line of the railway from Shaibah towards Baghdad as rapidly as possible. It was decided that India would send reinforcements to complete a total of two divisions in Iraq.

83. After repulsing the Iraqi counter attack at Fallujah, General Clark's small force moved on Baghdad in two columns. After overcoming the delays due to floods and the enemy's destruction of communications, he arrived within a short distance of Baghdad on 30th May. His strength was 1,200 men with eight guns and a few armoured cars.

Although there was practically the whole of a division of the Iraqi army in Baghdad and a further force at Ramadi on the Euphrates, in rear of General Clark's force, Rashid Ali and his supporters had lost heart and fled; and the Mayor of Baghdad sent out a white flag and asked for terms for capitulation. After discussion with the Ambassador, who had been confined to the Embassy for the past four weeks, satisfactory terms were arranged. The Regent of Iraq and some of his ministers, who had escaped to Transjordan at the time of Rashid Ali's *coup d'état*, returned to Baghdad on 1st June and formed a legitimate Government.

A small force of the Household Cavalry regiment and one battery with some armoured cars was at once sent on to Mosul to secure the landing ground there, which had been used by German air forces during the revolt. A Gurkha battalion was then flown up from Baghdad.

84. We may consider ourselves exceedingly fortunate to have liquidated what might have been a very serious commitment with such small forces and with little trouble. Rashid Ali and his adherents seem to have lost heart at the weakness of the support accorded to them by the Germans. The gallant defence of Habbaniyah and the bold advance of Habforce discouraged the Iraqi army, while the Germans in their turn were prevented from sending further reinforcements by the desperate resistance of our troops in Crete, and their crippling losses in men and aircraft. The majority of the Iraq population, especially the tribesmen outside the principal towns, did not give any active support to the revolutionary government but had the Germans sent sufficient forces to enable the Iraqi rebels to score a success, the whole country might well have risen against us.

The Iraqi army admitted to losses of 1,750, including 500 killed. Our own losses were slight.

The Syrian Problem.

85. Early in May, while Middle East was busily engaged with the problems of Crete, the Western Desert, and Iraq, a fresh commitment arose from the German infiltration into Syria. At the end of April the Chiefs of Staff pointed out the danger of the Germans establishing a footing in Syria and instructed me to be prepared to send a force into Syria if necessary to support any French resistance to the Germans. I replied that my information was to the effect that General Dentz, High Commissioner in Syria, was completely subservient to Vichy and was most unlikely to resist German penetration; and that the largest force I could make available in Palestine was one incomplete cavalry brigade group. I advised against an approach to Dentz, which had been

suggested by the Chiefs of Staff, as I considered it would only result in our strength, or rather weakness, becoming known to the enemy.

At this time the question of the use of the Free French forces in Syria came to the front. Some battalions of the Free French had been sent to the Middle East early in 1941 and had been used in the Sudan in operations against Eritrea. After the capture of Massawa, General de Gaulle requested that all the Free French forces in the Middle East should be concentrated in Egypt to be formed into a division under General Legentilhomme. Some additional units were on their way to Egypt. I arranged for the formation of the division in Egypt, and later agreed to transfer the French troops to Palestine on General de Gaulle's representations that he would like them to be readily available for use in Syria if the French in Syria resisted German penetration. By about the middle of May the Free French forces in Palestine consisted of six battalions, a battery and a company of about 20 tanks. They were located near Qastima, to the south of Jaffa. They were incomplete in transport, and in some instances in weapons.

86. Early in May, as already related, I was instructed to send the only mobile force available in Palestine to Iraq. When this had departed, the whole of the troops in Palestine were practically immobile and a great proportion of the civil transport available had been hired to make up Habforce. Nevertheless I was still being urged to enter Syria to expel the Germans from it.

87. Late on the evening of 18th May General Catroux, the Free French Commissioner in Middle East, came to me and said he had certain information that the French in Syria were withdrawing the whole of their troops into the Lebanon and were handing over the remainder of Syria to the Germans. He declared that the road to Damascus was open and that it was urgently necessary to take advantage of the opportunity and to send a force into Syria immediately. He was most insistent that I should issue orders to this effect there and then. Previous experience had taught me to regard the information produced by the Free French from Syria with caution, and what General Catroux stated was not confirmed by intelligence I had received from other sources. Quite apart from this, as stated above, I had not the troops or the transport available to send a force into Syria. I therefore refused to take any immediate action but summoned a meeting for the following morning to consider the whole question. At this meeting there was general agreement as to the desirability of forestalling the Germans in Syria, but the only means available was by weakening the defence of Egypt in the Western Desert. In the meantime, I insisted on verification of the Free French information before acting on it.

88. I reported General Catroux's request to the Chiefs of Staff, who again urged me to take immediate action in Syria, and, if I was unable to provide a force, to allow the Free French to enter Syria alone. I pointed out that the Free French could not move without transport which I was unable to supply and that they were unwilling to move without the support of some British artillery. I gave my opinion that nothing smaller than a corps with an armoured