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OPERATIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST FROM AUGUST, 1939 TO NOVEMBER, 1940.

The following Despatch was submitted to the Secretary of State for War on 10th December, 1940, by GENERAL SIR ARCHIBALD P. WAVELL, K.C.B., C.M.G., M.C., Commander-in-Chief, in the Middle East.

1. This despatch covers the period from the formation of the Middle East Command in August, 1939, to the middle of November, 1940, when the war with Italy had lasted approximately 5 months.

2. The Middle East Command, with a staff of five officers, was formed at the beginning of August, 1939, as a planning staff for the Middle East. Its original Charter is given as Appendix A. General Headquarters Middle East now comprises over 225 graded staff officers, exclusive of attached officers and non-graded officers.

September, 1939, to April, 1940.

3. On the outbreak of war with Germany on 3rd September, 1939, the Middle East Command assumed operational control over the troops in Egypt, Palestine, Sudan and Cyprus. It was responsible for military plans in British Somaliland, but did not assume full operational control of this theatre till 13th January, 1940. The garrison of these countries at the outbreak of war consisted of the following:—

A. Egypt.

(i) 7th Armoured Division—

Two Armoured Brigades (each of two regts. only).

One Armoured Car Regiment.

One Motor Battalion.

(ii) 4th Indian Division—

One Regiment of Artillery.

One Infantry Brigade.

(iii) R.A. Group—

7th Medium Regiment.

3rd Regiment R.H.A. (A.T.).

4th Regiment R.H.A.

31st Field Regiment R.A.

(iv) Eight British Infantry Battalions.

B. Palestine.

(i) 8th Division—

Two Brigades—each of three British Battalions.

No artillery.

(ii) Two British Cavalry Regiments. . .

(iii) Four additional British Battalions (less one Company of one Battalion in Cyprus).

C. Sudan.

(i) Three British Battalions.

(ii) Sudan Defence Force consisting of 20 Companies in all, of which the greater part were employed on internal security over the vast area of the Sudan.

D. Cyprus.

One Company British Battalion.

E. British Somaliland.

H.Q. and three Companies of Camel Corps.

The fighting forces in the Middle East thus included no complete formation of any kind. There were in all twenty-one battalions of infantry, but only 64 field guns. There were only 48 A/T guns and 8 A.A. guns.

4. The Egyptian Army comprised:

One Light Tank Regiment,

One Light Car Regiment,

One Horsed Cavalry Regiment,

One 2-pdr. Anti-Tank Battery,

Two Fortress Anti-Tank Batteries,

Two Anti-Aircraft Regiments,

One Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment,

Two Searchlight Regiments,

Four Heavy Coast Defence Batteries,

Nine Regular Battalions,

Nine Reserve Battalions,

Two Machine Gun Battalions,

Eight Light Car Squadrons (Frontier Force),

and was in many respects much better equipped than most of the British forces. But Egypt did not declare war on Germany and