

To continue the blockade was the only solution. At the beginning of July, prospects of an early capitulation seemed good, but dhows from the Yemen and French submarines from Madagascar succeeded in running the blockade; and, in spite of a considerable tightening of the blockade, the colony was still holding out at the time the East African Command took over and was seemingly no nearer capitulation.

20. It had been suggested earlier that the dividing line between Europe and Africa was not the Mediterranean but the Sahara and the Sudd, and that a second Command should be formed to include the Sudan and all territories south of it as far as and including Southern Rhodesia. Apart from economic and political considerations, it was clearly not true from a strategic point of view, so long as there remained in East Africa large enemy forces able to operate on interior lines against Kenya, Egypt and the Sudan. The suggestion was therefore rejected for the time being.

With the defeat and capture of the greater part of the Italian forces in East Africa, the threat to the Middle East was removed, and military and all other considerations made it desirable to remove the Central and East African areas from the Middle East command. The Belgian Congo as a "sphere of interest" had been transferred to the West African Command on 1st July, and the transfer of the remainder of the territories was considered by a Conference which assembled at Nairobi on the 1st August under the presidency of Lieutenant-General Sir Alan Cunningham, G.O.C. East Africa.

Representatives of Air Headquarters East Africa, Middle East, the 203rd Mission, Southern and Northern Rhodesia, West African Command and the Sudan attended. The representative of the Union of South Africa was absent, because the Conference was finally held at very short notice. The recommendations of the Conference, however, were submitted to Field Marshal Smuts for approval.

The Conference recommended that the new Command should come directly under the War Office and comprise Eritrea, Ethiopia, the Somalilands, Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika, Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia. It considered that the Commander in the southern territories of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland should advise the Southern Rhodesian Governor on defence matters, and co-ordinate plans in which the three territories and the Union of South Africa were concerned; and that in concerted operations he should command not only his own forces, but any forces Southern Rhodesia might contribute. The Conference agreed that Portuguese East Africa, the Katanga Province of the Belgian Congo, and Angola should be included in the Commander's spheres of influence in co-operation with the Union of South Africa. The recommendations of the Conference were accepted with a few modifications.

On the 15th September, 1941, all the territories with the exception of Eritrea passed to the East African Command. Eritrea passed under command on the 11th October, 1941.

21. Before the East African Command was formed I had arranged for the transfer of considerable quantities of captured arms, ammunition and other material. This arrangement was

confirmed and the equipment is being brought to the Middle East as quickly as transport facilities permit. Middle East have also retained a lien on Eritrea for the purpose of siting certain base installations and hospitals in a safe area.

SUDAN.

22. The Sudan was not included in the East African Command for political and strategic reasons. The Anglo-Egyptian condominium in the country made it desirable that the military authority should be exercised by the Commander-in-Chief in Cairo, as also did the importance of the Sudan as a base for operations in the Western Desert from the south and for possible operations in the Chad.

23. On the 4th October, 1941, Lieutenant-General Sir N. M. de la P. Beresford-Peirse assumed command in the Sudan in place of Lieutenant-General Sir William Platt, who became General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, East Africa Command.

WESTERN DESERT.

24. While the other areas under my command were the scenes of consolidation and reorganisation, the chief theatre of activity was the Western Desert. Here my policy was dictated by two main considerations. Advantage must be taken of the favourable conditions created by the Russian campaign to resume the offensive at the earliest possible moment. Meanwhile it was necessary to remain on the defensive, employing only a minimum of troops. The maximum effort could then be devoted to organising, training and equipping the forces destined for the invasion of Cyrenaica and to completing the vast administrative preparations. This will receive full treatment in a later despatch.

The situation in the Western Desert from mid-June until mid-September corresponded to that envisaged in my General Instruction of the 26th July laying down the principles of defence in areas in which the attackers might be expected to be considerably stronger in armoured force than the defenders. This was undoubtedly the case in the Western Desert, where our armoured forces were appreciably inferior to those of the enemy. Moreover three of the areas essential to this system of defence already existed, namely, Tobruk, Matruh and Bagush; and General Wavell had already given the order to prepare a fourth situated in the defile between the Qattara Depression and the sea at El Alamein.

Accordingly, on the 21st July, I issued an Instruction (Appendix "A") to Lieutenant-General Sir Noel Beresford-Peirse, commanding the Western Desert Forces, informing him of my decision that in the event of an enemy advance his armoured forces were to be brought to battle in the area south of Matruh, whither the Headquarters and Armoured Brigades of the 7th Armoured Division had already been withdrawn. This decision entailed the surrender of our forward landing grounds in the Sidi Barrani area, which would mean that our ability to provide fighter protection to our shipping engaged in maintaining Tobruk would be greatly impaired. As our armoured forces were relatively weak, this risk had to be accepted.

On the 30th July I issued a further Instruction (Appendix "B") to the Commanders of the Western Desert Forces and of the British