



SUPPLEMENT

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The War Office,
July, 1946OPERATIONS OF EAST AFRICA COMMAND, 12TH JULY, 1941
TO 8TH JANUARY, 1943

The following Despatch was submitted on 31st March, 1943, to the Secretary of State for War by LIEUT.-GENERAL SIR WILLIAM PLATT, G.B.E., K.C.B., D.S.O., General Officer Commanding in Chief, East Africa Command.

On 15th September, 1941, East Africa Force as part of Middle East Forces was abolished and replaced by East Africa Command directly under the War Office, covering the territories from Eritrea in the North to the Zambesi in the South. My predecessor Lieut.-General Sir Alan Cunningham, K.C.B., D.S.O., M.C., left East Africa on 29th August, 1941, to assume command of the Eighth Army in Middle East. Until my arrival on 5th December, 1941, Major-General H. E. de R. Wetherall, C.B., D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C., acted in command and was responsible for the operations against Gondar.

The Command was divided into four areas. Eritrea as an administrative area in the North: 12th (African) Division under Major-General C. C. Fowkes, C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C., covered Ethiopia and British Somaliland: 11th (African) Division, transformed into Central Area, covered Italian Somaliland, Uganda, Kenya, Zanzibar and Tanganyika: Southern Area comprising Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia under Major-General G. R. Smallwood, D.S.O., M.C., with Headquarters at Salisbury in Southern Rhodesia, had also an advisory brief in the last named.

West African formations which had taken part in the operations against Italian East Africa from the South, were due to return to their own countries. The 23rd (Nigerian) Infantry Brigade left in August, 1941, and was followed in October by the 24th (Gold Coast) Infantry Brigade. Owing to shortage of artillery and engineer units in East Africa, 51st Battery and 53rd Field Company, both of the Gold Coast, were retained temporarily to take part in the reduction of the last remaining Italian stronghold at Gondar. Except in that

area where General Nasi's forces were still holding out, organised resistance in Ethiopia had ceased prior to my predecessor's last despatch which dealt with operations up to the 11th of July, 1941.

Although military opposition by Italian forces had been almost eliminated, the maintenance of law and order over more than half a million square miles of conquered territory presented no small problem. The country was armed from North to South and from East to West, with rifles, ammunition, grenades and many automatics. More than 20,000 rifles, with over 20 million rounds of ammunition had been pumped into Ethiopia from the Sudan alone to aid the Patriots in their revolt against the Italian oppressor. The Italians issued arms in the unfulfilled hope that they would be used against British forces. Many thousands more were gleaned from deserted battlefields, and looted from hidden reserve dumps. None of these have yet been returned to us. None will be. Few have even been collected for use by the Regular Ethiopian Army. They are in the hands of Territorials, Irregulars, and ordinary brigands. Theft of rifles still continues in a manner worthy of the North-West frontier of India.

Many of these arms were in the hands of Patriot bands owing some form of allegiance and obedience to numerous Chiefs, who, in their turn, owed little allegiance or obedience to anyone. After action, on the elementary principle of living on the country, brigandage against local inhabitants was frequent. Despite this, the general desire of the Ethiopian to rid his country of the Italian, ensured a reasonable degree of security to the roads used by our troops as lines of communication. In attaining this our Occupied Territories Administration and the edicts of His Imperial Majesty The Emperor contributed their full share.

The number and variety of responsible administrators, civil and military, with whom Command Headquarters had to deal, often