

August, 1943, a decision to send the 2nd Battalion of the Palestine Regiment out of Palestine for duty produced considerable unrest among the Jews, who argued that the decision arose from political rather than military reasons, and there is no doubt that this had a further adverse effect on the recruiting figures, which, throughout the period, have remained very low.

325. During November, 1943, the authorised badge for the Palestine Regiment became available for issue, and twenty soldiers of the 1st (Jewish) Battalion, the Palestine Regiment, and forty-nine from the 3rd Battalion refused to accept or to wear the badge. All these men were tried by Court Martial for disobeying a lawful command. In every case the defence took the line that it was against the men's religious principles and their conscience to wear the badge. They were all found guilty and given sentences varying from forty-five to sixty days' field punishment. It was obvious that this wholesale refusal was prompted by political considerations and on investigation it was ascertained that all the accused were members of the Revisionist Party. In an interview with the General Officer Commanding in Palestine, the head of the political branch of the Jewish Agency expressed the view that the incident was a stupid demonstration by a minor group and that their attitude was not supported by the Jewish Agency.

326. Some repercussions in the form of pamphlets and articles in the Hebrew Press were felt, but the official attitude that the men were soldiers who had refused to obey a proper order was unquestionable, and the incident soon lost any public significance.

327. The Arabs in Palestine have given no cause for anxiety from the security aspect. They have continued to acquire arms and have been carefully watching Zionist activities, but, unlike the Jews, they have remained unable to compose their differences sufficiently to allow of organisation in support of their aims.

328. Uneasy though the Palestinian situation remains, it did not assume such proportions as to warrant interference with military training or to cause major military decisions to be taken. The troubles were throughout caused by a minority. In Syria and the Lebanon, on the other hand, I was faced with a majority movement which at one time seemed likely to cause serious trouble.

329. Nineteen hundred and forty-three was the year of long-awaited constitutional changes in the Levant States. The proclamation of Syrian and Lebanese independence in 1942 had left the population expectant, and delay in the holding of elections gave rise to some impatience in the early months of 1943. But a decline in the pro-Axis sympathies of certain political circles, encouraged by the rising tide of Allied success, boded well for our co-operation with whatever government might come into power.

330. In Syria the growth of the National Bloc Party outstripped that of the other political parties, but in the Lebanon the situation was less clear. Some slight political unrest, coupled with a food shortage, led to riots and strikes in Damascus in February and March, and minor disturbances over food were common in other parts of the country during the first six months of the year until a plentiful harvest restored confidence.

331. Appreciating the effect on military requirements of the transfer of powers to these States, whose administrations were ill-equipped to undertake the onus of government amidst the difficulties of wartime economy, the General Officer Commanding Ninth Army suggested an examination of the problems which might arise. Being anxious not to impede in any way the realisation of independence by the States, he approached His Majesty's Minister in Beirut in August with a view to reconciling the minimum requirements of the British authorities with the legitimate aspirations of the States. His Majesty's Minister did not agree with the suggestion; nevertheless, an examination of the military point of view was carried out and was completed in October, 1943.

332. The elections which had been held a few months previously in Syria and the Lebanon had passed off without any serious disorder, but the intensely nationalistic character of both of the governments caused some concern to the French authorities. Nothing of a serious nature occurred, however, until November. On 8th November, despite a request from the French Délégué Générale, the Lebanese Government exercised what it believed to be its rights under the constitution to eliminate all references to the Mandatory Power. The Délégué Générale reacted by arresting, on the morning of 11th November, the President of the Lebanese Republic, the Prime Minister, three other Cabinet Ministers and a leading Sunni Mohammedan Deputy.

333. Large crowds collected in Beirut, demonstrating violently against the French, and similar disturbances were reported from other parts of the country. The General Officer Commanding Ninth Army authorised the provision of British guards on internment camps and the replacement of French patrols, where necessary, by British military police, and he remained throughout the crisis in close touch with the French military commander.

334. The sympathy and moral support of the neighbouring Arab countries greatly encouraged the Lebanese people, who adopted a surprisingly united, calm, but firm, attitude while waiting to see what line His Majesty's Government would take. On 14th November it was reported that the Druze Emir Majed Arslan, Minister of Defence in the Lebanese Government, had collected a small force of armed men in the hills to the south of Beirut; and tribes in South Lebanon were also reported to be gathered in armed bands.

335. In view of the gradual deterioration in the situation it became necessary to make preparations to take action to protect our communications in the Lebanon in the event of French failure to relieve the situation. Accordingly, I instructed Ninth Army to draw up the necessary plans for such an emergency, and a detachment of officers recently trained in civil administrative duties was despatched to the Lebanon. All arrangements were made for feeding the civil population, primarily of Beirut and subsequently of other centres and country districts. All necessary arrangements for the establishment of military control were completed, and arrangements were also made to extend it to Syria if necessary.

336. These plans, however, proved unnecessary, for on 22nd November General Catroux, who had been sent from Algiers with full powers