

his troops to the high ground to the east. Minor actions still continue between the main positions.

44. I should like to call special attention to the behaviour of the personnel of "B" Squadron of the 6th Royal Tank Regiment in this action. The attack on Gallabat was made with great dash and the way in which the men of the squadron stuck to their task of trying to get their tanks which were broken down into action again under extremely heavy bombing was admirable.

45. Our losses on 6th and 7th November in killed, wounded and missing were 86 British and 88 Indian, of which only about 20 were incurred in the original attack and most of the remainder were due to air bombing. The action showed again how necessary protection against air attack is for all forward troops. Owing to the general shortage of anti-aircraft guns in the Middle East, none were available for the support of the 10th Brigade, and after our fighter aircraft had been put out of action the enemy bombers were unopposed.

46. It is known that casualties of well over 600 were inflicted on the enemy. Two guns and much material were captured in Gallabat Fort.

47. During the month of October and the first half of November our mobile troops in the Kassala sector fought many successful patrol actions and inflicted heavy losses on the enemy at small cost to themselves. The largest of these small engagements was in the area north of Kassala, in which over 300 of the enemy were taken prisoner.

Occupation of Crete—November, 1940.

48. On 28th October, Italy made an unprovoked attack on Greece. To enable more effective control of the Aegean to be exercised by the Navy, it was decided to establish a naval base at Suda Bay at the north-western end of Crete. With the full approval of the Greek Government, the British forces in the Middle East assumed responsibility for the defence of Crete. The 1st battalion York and Lancaster Regiment, some A.A. artillery and a Field Company were despatched on 31st October to Suda Bay. On 17th November another battalion, 2nd The Black Watch, was sent.

Visit of Secretary of State.

49. At the end of October the Secretary of State for War, Mr. Anthony Eden, paid a visit to the Middle East, in the course of which he went to the Western Desert, Palestine, Trans-Jordan, and the Sudan, and saw many of the troops. His visit was of the greatest value for the discussion of future plans and was a source of much encouragement to the troops. At Khartoum he met General Smuts who had flown up from South Africa to visit the East African front.

Summary.

50. From the above brief account of events it can be seen that the Middle East Command has passed through three stages during the period of some 15 months under review. The first period, from the outbreak of war with Germany till Italy entered the war in June, 1940, was one of comparative inactivity. Plans in the Middle East were directed mainly towards the support of Turkey against a German advance in S.E. Europe. Italy was assumed

to be neutral and if she did enter the war could be neutralised by the French forces. Little equipment of any kind was received during this period and the reinforcements sent (1st Cavalry Division and the Australian and New Zealand contingents) were not equipped for modern war and were only partially trained.

Therefore the second stage, after the entry of Italy into the war and the collapse of France, was one of considerable danger, during which the frontiers of Egypt, the Sudan, Kenya, and British Somaliland were threatened by vastly superior forces, and the communications between the United Kingdom and the Middle East were long and doubtful. That the Italians failed to take advantage of their opportunities was due firstly to our Air Force, who in spite of inferior numbers everywhere took and kept the initiative; and to the stout action of the small covering forces in Egypt, Sudan and East Africa; and finally to the enemy's lack of preparation or desire for hard fighting. We thus escaped these dangerous months with the loss only of British Somaliland—where our small garrison of a few battalions was driven to withdraw, after a short but gallant resistance, by an Italian force of seven brigade groups—and a few unimportant frontier posts in the Sudan and Kenya. During this period all available equipment and troops were being retained in the United Kingdom against the threat of invasion; and it was not until the second half of September that reinforcements in men and material began to reach the Middle East in any quantity.

The third stage has now begun, when the defence of our positions in the Middle East is reasonably assured and offensive operations are being planned and undertaken.

51. The Middle East Command has to keep in close touch with the political situation in the countries included in the Command, particularly in Egypt, Palestine and Iraq. The work of the Middle East Intelligence Centre, under the able direction of Colonel W. J. Cawthorn, has been of the greatest value in this respect. The situation in Egypt has often been difficult, since it is the main base of operations for the Middle East, yet the country is not at war, and has still large numbers of enemy subjects at large. Close touch with the Embassy is maintained by weekly meetings of the Ambassador and the Commander-in-Chief, while the Embassy staff, the staff of Headquarters British Troops in Egypt, and my staff are in daily consultation on matters of common interest. There has been no serious difference of opinion on any matter of importance.

Co-operation of other Services.

52. I desire to acknowledge the indebtedness of the Middle East Command to the work of the Royal Navy in the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean Fleet, Admiral Sir Andrew B. Cunningham, K.C.B., D.S.O., has always afforded the Army the closest support both in planning and in actual operations.

The work of H.M. ships in the East Indies Command under Vice-Admiral R. Leatham, C.B., in bringing the convoys for the Middle East across the Indian Ocean and through the Red Sea without the loss of a ship has earned the gratitude and admiration of the large numbers from all parts of the Empire who have