

111. The operations in Italian East Africa are being described in a separate despatch.

*Co-operation of other Services.*

112. The Army in the Middle East owes a deep debt of gratitude to the Royal Navy in the Mediterranean, and to Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham in particular, not only for its magnificent work in twice embarking large forces from open beaches in circumstances of great difficulty and danger, but also for its day to day co-operation in protecting convoys, in carrying stores, in attacking enemy lines of communication and in assisting military operations by every possible means. In particular, the successful defence of Tobruk has only been possible by reason of the Navy's work in keeping the port open and the garrison supplied in spite of continual enemy air attack. The successful occupation of Syria also owed much to naval co-operation.

113. The Royal Air Force has suffered throughout the operations described from possibly an even greater paucity of adequate means than the Army. So far as their resources allowed they have given to the Army the most self-sacrificing support. The forms of Army co-operation known and practised before the war, such as artillery observation and close tactical reconnaissance, have for all practical purposes ceased, since the machines designed for these tasks can no longer be flown in the presence of the enemy, and the supply of pilots trained for army co-operation is almost exhausted. Means of photographic reconnaissance have also never been sufficient for army requirements. The technique of close support of the Army by the Air Force on the battlefield, such as the Germans have put into practice with such effect, has hardly yet begun to be studied in our forces and the necessary machines and technical equipment are lacking. Over the opposing air forces the Royal Air Force have shown throughout the period their usual superiority in skill and efficiency; and subject to their numbers, and the limitations mentioned above, have always co-operated most whole-heartedly with the operations of the army in the Middle East, on whose behalf I desire to express my grateful thanks to Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Longmore and to his successor Air Marshal A. W. Tedder.

*Appreciation of Services.*

114. I should like to take this opportunity to bring to notice a small body of men who have for a year past done inconspicuous but invaluable service, the Long Range Desert Group. It was formed under Major (now Colonel) R. A. Bagnold in July, 1940, to reconnoitre the great Libyan desert on the western borders of Egypt and the Sudan. Operating in small independent columns, the

group has penetrated into nearly every part of desert Libya, an area comparable in size with that of India. Not only have the patrols brought back much information, but they have attacked enemy forts, captured personnel, transport and grounded aircraft as far as 800 miles inside hostile territory. They have protected Egypt and the Sudan from any possibility of raids and have caused the enemy, in a lively apprehension of their activities, to tie up considerable forces in the defence of distant outposts. Their journeys across vast regions of unexplored desert have entailed the crossing of physical obstacles and the endurance of extreme summer temperatures, both of which would a year ago have been deemed impossible. Their exploits have been achieved only by careful organization, and a very high standard of enterprise, discipline, mechanical maintenance and desert navigation. The personnel of these patrols was originally drawn almost entirely from the New Zealand forces; later, officers and men of British units and from Southern Rhodesia joined the group. A special word of praise must be added for the R.A.O.C. fitters whose work contributed so much to the mechanical endurance of the vehicles in such unprecedented conditions.

115. As will be gathered from the facts related, the staff of the Middle East Command has had to work under continual severe pressure. I owe much to my two principal staff officers, Lieut.-General A. F. Smith and Major-General B. O. Hutchison, whose example of hard work and efficiency combined with cheerfulness and tact has inspired the whole staff. I wish here to express my deep appreciation of the work and spirit of all who have served me so loyally in G.H.Q., Middle East.

116. Lieut.-General Sir Thomas Blamey was appointed Deputy Commander-in-Chief in May, 1941. His sound advice and ready assistance did much to lighten the burden on my shoulders.

117. The Middle East Command owes a deep debt of gratitude to India. During the period of nearly two years while I was Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, I never made any request on India for men or material that was not instantly met if it was within India's resources to do so. I desire to express my thanks to the Government of India, to General Sir Robert Cassels, Commander-in-Chief, India, and to his successor, General Sir Claude Auchinleck, who now succeeds me in the Middle East Command.

118. I should like to express my thanks to the large body of voluntary workers who by organising Service Men's clubs and in many other ways have done so much to improve the amenities for the men in the various theatres under my command.

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