

(a) On the highest level there is the Middle East War Council with the Minister of State in the chair. This body is mainly concerned with political matters affecting the Services and other problems of the Middle East.

(b) Then there is the Middle East Defence Committee which met for the first time on the 25th August. It consists of the Minister of State, who presides, and the three Commanders-in-Chief. It deals with major operations and plans.

(c) Next comes the Commanders-in-Chiefs' Committee which is also attended by senior Staff Officers and deals with all important operational and administrative questions. The above normally meet once a week.

(d) Daily liaison is maintained in General Headquarters by an Inter-Service Intelligence Staff Conference and an Inter-Service Operational Staff Conference and by individual officers of all three Services.

(e) The Inter-Service Air Defence Committee makes recommendations for the disposal of available anti-aircraft units and equipment, and has been of great value.

(f) Moreover I myself am in constant personal touch with the Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean and the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief.

It will thus be seen that a firm foundation exists to ensure that the efforts of the Navy, Army and Royal Air Force are co-ordinated.

4. I readily subscribed to my predecessor's policy of concentrating on re-organisation and training, as an essential part of the preparations for driving the enemy out of Libya and for meeting his eventual thrust in Asia. These were my chief preoccupations during the period under review. The paragraphs which follow are, therefore, chiefly concerned with local aspects of these preparations as they arose in the various areas of the Middle East.

SYRIA AND PALESTINE.

5. The Syrian Campaign was drawing to a close when I assumed command. In the north-east the 10th Indian Division, which formed part of the forces under Lieutenant-General E. P. Quinan in Iraq and which the Commander-in-Chief, India, had placed at General Wavell's disposal, had advanced along the River Euphrates as far as Deir ez Zor and along the railway from Tel Kotchek towards Kameschle. In the West the enemy were resisting stubbornly along the line of the River Damour, on the southern slopes of the Lebanon and on the southern and western slopes of the Anti-Lebanon.

In the Euphrates Province the 10th Indian Division made steady progress in the face of heavy air attacks, and by the 8th July, with the capture of Raqqa and Kameschle, they were in control of the key points of the Province. On the line Hama—Homs—Anti-Lebanon the Vichy French were thinning out, until on the 10th July Homs was threatened by the 4th Cavalry Brigade who had cut the railway to the South and now stood before the town. The crossing of the River Damour by the 17th Australian Infantry Brigade on the 7th July, and the capture of the town itself by the 21st Australian Infantry Brigade on the 9th July removed the chief obstacle to our advance on Beirut from the South. The town was also threatened from the direction of Damascus by the 16th Infantry Brigade (6th Division), which

on the 10th July attacked the enemy holding positions astride the road near Dimas.

Having lost control of the Northern Desert and the Euphrates Province, and being threatened with the imminent loss of Beirut General Dentz decided to ask for an armistice.

6. On the evening of the 11th July, I received a wireless message from General Dentz, proposing the suspension of hostilities six hours later, at midnight. General Dentz declared himself ready to engage in talks on the basis of a memorandum presented to him that morning by the United States Consul at Beirut on behalf of the British Government. But he made the reservation that he was empowered by the French Government to treat only with the British representatives to the exclusion of those of the Free French.

General Dentz's proposals were considered at once by the Middle East War Council, which also took into account the opinion of the American Consul at Beirut, that Dentz was entirely insincere and might be playing for time in the hope of a last minute rescue by the Germans. Accordingly his conditions were rejected and he was called on to send his plenipotentiaries to the British outpost on the Beirut—Haifa Road at or before 0900 hrs. on the 12th July, under threat of resuming hostilities at that hour.

The Vichy French Representatives duly appeared and were conducted to Acre, where discussions began at once. We were represented by General Sir Henry Wilson, Air Commodore L. O. Brown and Captain J. A. V. Morse, Royal Navy, the Free French by General Catroux, and the Vichy French by General de Verdillac. At 2200 hrs. on the 12th July the Convention was initialled and was finally signed by General Wilson and General de Verdillac at Acre on the 14th July 1941.

7. The Commission of Control, set up in accordance with Article 21 to supervise the execution of the terms of the Convention, assembled formally for the first time on the 16th July at Ain Sofar in the Lebanon under the presidency of Major-General J. I. Chrystall.

The question of repatriation was difficult, as our desire to clear the country of Vichy French troops and civilians at the earliest possible moment conflicted with the Free French wish to retain them as long as possible, in the hope that after a prolonged period of propaganda a larger number of recruits would be obtained. Events proved the anticipations of the Free French to be over-optimistic, for of 37,736 personnel of the Troupes Français du Levant, who were offered the choice, only 5,668 declared in favour of Free France.

In all eight convoys, three hospital ships and one "gleaner" ship sailed for France between the 7th August and the 27th September 1941. The total number of persons repatriated, both civilian and military was 37,563. It speaks well for the work of the Embarkation Board that these convoys were cleared without any unfortunate incident. After the departure of these ships, nearly all personnel of the Troupes Français du Levant had been repatriated.

The return of British Prisoners of War who had been evacuated from Syria and the Lebanon placed the Troupes Français du Levant in an unfortunate position, particularly when it was established that a number of these prisoners had been sent out of Syria after the