

2020

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Author: Robert PALMER, M.A.



**A CONCISE HISTORY OF:**

**8 ARMY**

**(HISTORY & PERSONNEL)**

A concise history of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, a higher level formation in the British Army in existence from 1941 until 1945. In addition, known details of the senior appointments held in that period are included.

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## **A Concise History of 8<sup>th</sup> Army (History & Personnel)**

Version: 1\_1  
This edition dated: 2 May 2020  
ISBN: Not yet allocated.

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Author: Robert PALMER, M.A. (copyright held by author)  
Assisted by: Stephen HEAL  
Published privately by: The Author – Publishing as:  
[www.BritishMilitaryHistory.co.uk](http://www.BritishMilitaryHistory.co.uk)

## 8<sup>th</sup> Army

With the build-up of British Forces in Egypt and Libya to counter the arrival of German Forces in North Africa, the C in C Middle East (General AUCHINLECK) decided to create the establishment of an Army with two Corps under command for the campaign. On 9 September 1941, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army came into being, with elements of its new headquarters coming from the H.Q. Western Desert Force. It had under command:

- XIII Corps (the former Western Desert Force);
- XXX Corps (newly formed).

8<sup>th</sup> Army was the formation that fought throughout the rest of the campaign in Libya and Egypt. Operation Crusader was the first main battle the army fought, commencing on 18 November 1941, which eventually forced the Africa Corps to withdraw to El Agheila by 6 January 1942. The Africa Corps attacked again on 21 January 1942 and drove the 8<sup>th</sup> Army back to Gazala. On 11 June 1942, the Axis forces broke out of 'The Cauldron', surrounding and capturing Tobruk. X Corps was brought forward from the Canal area to garrison Mersa Matruh and came under command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army.

The Axis forces attacked on 26 June (the day after AUCHINLECK relieved RITCHIE of command of 8<sup>th</sup> Army and took personal control), and by 28 June, X Corps was surrounded and forced to break out to escape. 8<sup>th</sup> Army fell back to the El Alamein position. The Axis forces attacked on 1 July 1942, but by 22 July, they had failed to gain their objectives and the attack was called off. The Axis forces attacked again on 30 August 1942, just after Lieutenant General MONTGOMERY had arrived to assume command. The battle of Alam Halfa was the last attempt by the Axis forces to reach the Nile Delta, but by 4 September 1942 their offensive had ground to a halt, and they dug into defensive positions.

It was now the turn of 8<sup>th</sup> Army to move onto the offensive, having been reorganised, reinforced and re-equipped. The Second Battle of El Alamein started on 23 October 1942. The 8<sup>th</sup> Army had under command:

- X Corps (LUMSDEN);
- XIII Corps (HORROCKS);
- XXX Corps (LEESE).

Intense fighting took place until 4 November 1942, when X Corps finally broke through the Axis defences. The Axis forces retreated, with Tobruk being taken on 12 November, and El Agheila on 17 December 1942. X Corps and XXX Corps were now under command, with XIII Corps left behind in Egypt. Two defence lines in Libya were outflanked, and it was not until the 8<sup>th</sup> Army entered Tunisia on 4 February 1943 that resistance increased. On 6 March 1943, the Axis forces counter-attacked at Medenine, but were repulsed.

The Mareth Line was reached on 24 February 1943. This was a former defence line constructed by the French to guard against an invasion by the Italians. 8<sup>th</sup> Army attacked on 20 March 1943, but met fierce and determined defence. The New Zealand Corps was formed to outflank the defence line, with the 4<sup>th</sup> Indian Division performing a left hook around the Mareth Line. On 27 March, the New Zealand Corps broke through the Tebaga Gap, but, the bulk of the Axis forces escaped encirclement and retreated in good order towards Tunis.

8<sup>th</sup> Army was given the task of breaking into the final Tunisian bastion of the Axis forces, but the offensive on 5 and 6 April 1943 was unsuccessful. The main thrust into Tunisia now passed to 1<sup>st</sup> Army, with the 7<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division and 4<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Division transferring from 8<sup>th</sup> Army to 1<sup>st</sup> Army for the final offensive. 8<sup>th</sup> Army played a subsidiary role, as planning had now commenced for the invasion of Sicily.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Army was one of two armies that formed the 15<sup>th</sup> Army Group for the invasion of Sicily on 10 July 1943. During the landings on Sicily, it had under command:

- XIII Corps,
  - 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division;
  - 50<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division);
- XXX Corps
  - 51<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division;
  - 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Division).

The 8<sup>th</sup> Army also had under command the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, which undertook parachute and glider borne landings in Sicily and the 78<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division came under command. The latter acted as a reserve formation and landed in Sicily during the campaign to join XXX Corps. The Sicilian campaign ended on 17 August 1943 with the completion of the evacuation of German forces from the island.

The Italian campaign commenced on 3 September 1943, when units from XIII Corps crossed the Straits of Messina to the Italian mainland. Troops from the 8<sup>th</sup> Army started landing at Taranto on 9 September 1943. The 8<sup>th</sup> Army also had under command V Corps, as XXX Corps was designated to return to the United Kingdom in preparation for the invasion of Normandy.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Army advanced up the toe of Italy to join up with the U.S. 5<sup>th</sup> Army which had landed at Salerno. The 8<sup>th</sup> Army also secured the heel of Italy where there were a number of airfields needed by the Allies. The 8<sup>th</sup> Army was deployed on the Adriatic side of the Italy throughout the campaign. At various times during the Italian campaign, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army had under command V Corps, X Corps (initially under command of U.S. 5<sup>th</sup> Army), XIII Corps, I Canadian Corps and II Polish Corps.

During the second and third battles for Cassino, the New Zealand Corps was formed, and the 8<sup>th</sup> Army took over the sector that had previously been under the U.S. 5<sup>th</sup> Army. For the fourth battle of Cassino, XIII Corps, I Canadian Corps and II Polish Corps were all moved from the Adriatic side to the western side of the country.

Following the breaking of the Gustav Line and the capture of Rome, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army advanced up the centre and Adriatic coast of Italy. The Allies assaulted the 'Gothic Line' in September 1944, but despite nearly breaking through, the advance ground to a halt in December 1944. The final offensive involved 8<sup>th</sup> Army and the U.S. 5<sup>th</sup> Army in a two pronged assault, V Corps leading the assault for 8<sup>th</sup> Army. The German forces gave way, with hostilities ending on 2 May 1945.

8<sup>th</sup> Army moved into Austria, where it was redesignated as H.Q. British Troops in Austria on 31 May 1945. Germany had annexed Austria prior to the Second World War, and was no longer an independent nation at the time of liberation. In the same manner as Germany, the four Allied powers (France, Soviet Union, United Kingdom and United States of America) were all granted areas of Austria to govern post hostilities. The British forces were concentrated in the southern Austria, including the city of Vienna.

British forces in Austria were reduced as peace returned, but with about 40,000 Soviet troops in their occupation zone, tensions continued throughout the late 1940's and early 1950's. By 1952, the British garrison was reduced to two infantry battalions, namely:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Bn. The West Yorkshire Regiment;
- 1<sup>st</sup> Bn. The Dorsetshire Regiment.

There was also supporting arms and services based in Austria. The final treaty was signed on the 15 May 1955 after much negotiation. British forces had withdrawn from the now independent country by October 1955.

### Army Commander

10 September 1941 – 26 November 1941

Lieutenant General Sir Alan Gordon CUNNINGHAM, K.C.B., D.S.O., M.C., *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.*<sup>1</sup>

27 November 1941 – 13 July 1942

Lieutenant General (Acting) Neil Methuen RITCHIE, C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C, *p.s.c.*

14 July 1942 – 15 August 1942

General Sir Claude John Ayre AUCHINLECK, G.C.I.E., C.B., C.S.I., D.S.O., O.B.E., Indian Army, *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.*<sup>2</sup>

13 August 1942 – 1 January 1944

Lieutenant General (Temporary) Bernard Law MONTGOMERY, C.B., D.S.O., *p.s.c.*

29 December 1943 – 30 September 1944

Lieutenant General Sir Oliver William Hargreaves LEESE, K.C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O.

3 November 1944 – 31 May 1945

Lieutenant General Sir Richard Loudon McCREERY, K.C.B., D.S.O., M.B.E.

### British High Commissioner, Austria and Commander-in-Chief, British Troops in Austria

1 June 1945 – March 1946

Lieutenant General Sir Richard Loudon McCREERY, K.C.B., D.S.O., M.B.E.

14 May 1946 – September 1947

Lieutenant General James Stuart STEELE, C.B., D.S.O., M.C.<sup>3</sup>

October 1947 – 1 January 1950

Lieutenant General Alexander GALLOWAY, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C., *p.s.c.*<sup>4</sup>

1 January 1950 – 12 August 1950

Major General Thomas John Willoughby WINTERTON, C.B., C.B.E., *p.s.c.*

### Commander-in-Chief, British Troops in Austria

23 July 1952 – 25 October 1955

Major General Robert Elliott URQUART, C.B., D.S.O.\*

<sup>1</sup> Relieved of command by General AUCHINLECK on 26 November for apparent failure of Operation 'Battleaxe' and perceived command failings. Sent on convalescent leave.

<sup>2</sup> Was C-in-C Middle East Command, but assumed command of 8<sup>th</sup> Army in addition to role as C-in-C.

<sup>3</sup> Created K.B.E. and knighted on 13 June 1946.

<sup>4</sup> Created K.B.E. and knighted on 9 June 1949.

**Brigadier General Staff – (B.G.S.)**

10 September 1941 – 26 November 1941

Brigadier (Temporary) Alexander GALLOWAY, C.B.E., M.C., *p.s.c.*

13 December 1941 – 27 March 1942

Brigadier (Temporary) Harold REDMAN, *p.s.c.*

28 March 1942 – 16 August 1942

Brigadier (Temporary) John Francis Martin WHITELEY, C.B.E., M.C., *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.*

27 July 1942 – 19 April 1943

Brigadier (Temporary) Francis Wilfred De GUINGAND, O.B.E., W. Yorks R., *p.s.c.*<sup>5</sup>

1 May 1943 – 23 August 1943 (Officiating)

Brigadier (Acting) Charles Leslie RICHARDSON, O.B.E., R.E., *p.s.c.*

24 August 1943 – 30 November 1943

Brigadier (Temporary) Francis Wilfred De GUINGAND, D.S.O., O.B.E., W. Yorks R., *p.s.c.*<sup>6</sup>

**Major General, General Staff**

1 December 1943 – 14 January 1944<sup>7</sup>

Major General (Acting) Francis Wilfred De GUINGAND, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., W. Yorks R., *p.s.c.*

29 December 1943 – 18 December 1944

Major General (Acting) George Peregrine WALSH, C.B.E., D.S.O., *p.s.c.*

18 December 1944 – 1945

Major General Sir Henry Robert Kincaid FLOYD, C.B.E., Baronet

**Brigadier General Staff (Operations and Plans)**

1 May 1943 – 24 August 1943

Brigadier (Acting) Charles Leslie RICHARDSON, O.B.E., R.E., *p.s.c.*

25 August 1943 – 9 January 1944

Brigadier (Acting) Ronald Frederick King (David) BELCHEM, D.S.O., O.B.E., R.T.R.

9 January 1944 – 29 March 1944

Brigadier (Acting) Gerald William DUKE, O.B.E., B.A., *p.s.c.*

18 March 1944 – 15 September 1944

Brigadier (Temporary) William Henry STRATTON, C.B.E., R.E., *p.s.c.*

28 July 1944 – 6 September 1945

Brigadier (Acting) George Arthur THOMAS, O.B.E., R.A., *y.*

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<sup>5</sup> Promoted Temporary Brigadier, Temporary Colonel and War Substantive Lieutenant Colonel on 26 August 1942; awarded the D.S.O. on 5 November 1942.

<sup>6</sup> Awarded the C.B.E. on 26 February 1943. He left that role on 19 April 1943 to assume planning role with the Eastern Task Force for the invasion of Sicily handing over to RICHARDSON.

<sup>7</sup> De GUINGAND records that the actual handover from MONTGOMERY to LEESE, and from De GUINGAND to WALSH took place on 30 December 1943, with MONTGOMERY, De GUINGAND, GRAHAM and WILLIAMS all flying out of Vasto in Italy on 31 December 1943. The dates shown are the official dates contained in the Army List.

June 1945 – 1947

Brigadier (Temporary) Reginald Hackett HEWETSON, C.B.E., D.S.O., *p.s.c.*

**Major General in charge of Administration**

5 February 1943 – 20 February 1943

Major General (Acting) Charles Harvey MILLER, C.B., C.B.E., *p.s.c.*

**Deputy Adjutant and Quarter-Master-General – (D.A. & Q.M.G.)**

10 September 1941 – 27 June 1942

Brigadier (Temporary) Charles Harvey MILLER, C.B.E., *p.s.c.*

28 June 1942 – 27 January 1943

Brigadier (Acting) Brian Herbert ROBERTSON, Bt., *p.s.c.*

28 February 1943 – 14 January 1944

Brigadier (Acting) Miles William Arthur Peel GRAHAM, O.B.E., Life Guards (Reserve of Officers)

9 January 1944 – 2 December 1944

Brigadier Edric Montague BASTYAN, C.B.E.

18 December 1944 – 1945

Brigadier (Temporary) Gerrard Francis Hood STAYNER, C.B.E., Leicesters, *p.s.c.*

**Brigadier, Royal Armoured Corps**

23 July 1943 – 14 January 1944

Brigadier (Temporary) George Warren RICHARDS, D.S.O.\*, M.C., R.T.R., *p.s.c.*

1944 – 1945

Brigadier (Temporary) Thomas IVOR-MOORE,

**Brigadier Royal Artillery – (B.R.A.)**

10 September 1941 – 3 July 1942

Brigadier (Temporary) Edgar Julius MEDLEY, D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C., *p.s.c.*

10<sup>th</sup> September 1941 – 5<sup>th</sup> September 1942 (Relieved by MONTGOMERY)

Brigadier (Temporary) George Noel Chadwick MARTIN, D.S.O., M.C., *p.s.c.*

6 September 1942 – 8 February 1943

Brigadier (Temporary) Sidney Chevalier KIRKMAN, O.B.E., M.C., *p.s.c.*

15 February 1943 – 31 May 1944

Brigadier (Temporary) Alan Hugh HORNBY, C.B.E., M.C., *p.s.c.*

1 June 1944 – 25 November 1945

Brigadier (Temporary) Francis Stanley SIGGERS, M.C., *p.s.c.*

**Brigadier Anti-Aircraft – (B.A.A.)**

16 September 1941 – 14 March 1942

Brigadier (Temporary) John Nuttall SLATER, M.C., *g*<sup>8</sup>

15 March 1942 – 14 March 1943

Brigadier (Temporary) Edmund George CAMPBELL, R.A., *p.s.c.*

**Chief Engineer – (C. Eng)**

10 September 1941 – 7 April 1943 (Killed in Action)

Brigadier (Temporary) Frederick Hermann KISCH, C.B.E., D.S.O., Reserve of Officers

8 April 1943 – 1 November 1944

Brigadier (Temporary) Kenneth RAY, D.S.O.\*; South African Engineer Corps<sup>9</sup>

2 November 1944 – 19 March 1945

20 March 1945 – 20 November 1946

Brigadier (Temporary) Basil Charles DAVEY, C.B.E., R.E.<sup>10</sup>

**Chief Signal Officer – (C.S.O.)**

September 1941 – January 1944

Brigadier Cecil Meadows Frith WHITE, O.B.E., D.S.O.<sup>11</sup>

1944 – 1944

Brigadier STRAIGHT

November 1944 – 31 May 1945

Brigadier (Temporary) William Arthur SCOTT, C.B.E., R Signals.

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<sup>8</sup> Awarded the C.B.E. on 30 December 1941.

<sup>9</sup> Awarded the C.B.E. on 24 August 1944, and the C.B. on 19 October 1944.

<sup>10</sup> Promoted Colonel on 4 December 1945.

<sup>11</sup> Awarded the C.B.E. in 1943.

**Deputy Director of Supplies and Transport – (D.D.S.T.)**

25 September 1941 – 30 November 1941

Brigadier (Acting) Wilfred d’Auvergne COLLINGS, R.A.S.C.

2 December 1941 –

Brigadier (Acting) Frederick Sherwood CLOVER, A.M.I.Mech.E.

18 December 1942 – 11 October 1943

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12 October 1943 – 29<sup>th</sup> May 1944

Brigadier (Temporary) Hugh Ainsworth KELSALL, O.B.E., M.C., R.A.S.C.

7<sup>th</sup> March 1944 – November 1944

Brigadier (Acting) Horace James GILMAN, D.S.O., O.B.E., R.A.S.C.

November 1944 – 31 May 1945

Brigadier (Temporary) Sydney Thomas DIVERS, C.B.E., D.S.O., T.D., R.A.S.C. (T.A.)

**Deputy Director of Medical Services – (D.D.M.S.)**

10 September 1941 (24 February 1941) – 22 February 1943

Brigadier (Acting) Joseph WALKER, M.C., M.B.

1943 – January 1944

Brigadier (Temporary) Edward PHILLIPS, D.S.O., M.C., M.B.

January 1944 – 7<sup>th</sup> May 1944

Brigadier (Temporary) John Cecil Alexander DOWSE, M.C. \*, M.B.

1944

Brigadier Stanley ARNOTT, D.S.O.

**Consultant Surgeon**

**Consultant Physician**

**Deputy Director of Ordnance Services – (D.D.O.S.)**

1941 – 1942

Brigadier (Acting) Harold Francis Sylvester KING, M.B.E., R.A.O.C.

11 December 1942 – 1 May 1943

Brigadier (Acting) George Arthur VINER, O.B.E., R.A.O.C., o

2 May 1943 – 9 August 1944

Brigadier (Acting) Cecil Hebert COOPER, O.B.E., R.A.O.C.

**Deputy Director of Mechanical Engineering – (D.D.M.E.)**

16 October 1942 – 15 April 1943

Brigadier (Acting) Leonard Hamilton HOWARD-JONES, O.B.E., B.Sc. (Eng), A.M.I.Mech.E., R.E.M.E.  
1943 – 1943

Brigadier (Temporary) Edward Roy CAFFYN, O.B.E.

26 May 1943 – 19 February 1945

Brigadier (Acting) Gerald Richard TAYLOR, O.B.E., M.I.Mech.E., R.E.M.E.

20 February 1945 – 1945

Brigadier (Acting) Geoffrey Howard HUNTER-BROWN, M.A., A.M.Inst.C.E., R.E.M.E.

**Army Paymaster**

**Assistant Director of Dental Services**

**Deputy Director of Labour**

**Deputy Provost Marshal – (D.P.M.)**

25 September 1941 – 29 September 1942

Lieutenant Colonel (Acting) Alexander Ronald FORBES, K.O.Y.L.I.

**Army Education Officer**

**Army Welfare Officer**

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Author: T. F. MILLS

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