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Author: Robert PALMER

**A CONCISE HISTORY OF:**

**ALLIED LAND FORCES  
SOUTH EAST ASIA  
(HISTORY & PERSONNEL)**

A short biography of Major General Arthur Hugh Jay SNELLING, C.B., C.B.E., an officer in the British Indian Army between 1915 and 1948.

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## Far East Command

### Allied Land Forces South East Asia

Prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, the British Army in the Far East comprised three independent commands;

- Malaya Command;
- Burma Command;
- British Troops in China (which included Hong Kong).

The Royal Navy and Royal Air Force had separate command structures.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> November 1940, the three independent commands came under the newly established Far East Command based in Singapore, and the R.A.F. Far East Command was incorporated into the new command. The Royal Navy, however, remained independent. Far East Command comprised:

- Malaya Command;
- Burma Command;
- British Forces in China;
- R.A.F. Far East Command.

The Japanese declared war on the United States and the United Kingdom on the 7<sup>th</sup> December 1941 and invaded Malaya, Burma, the Dutch East Indies and the Philippines.

In response to the Japanese aggression, it was decided to bring the commands of the American, British, Dutch and Australian Forces in the Far East under one unified command. On the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1942, General WAVELL, the then Commander in Chief India was appointed the new Commander in Chief of South West Pacific Command. He arrived in Singapore on the 7<sup>th</sup> January and Far East Command was subsumed into the new ABDA Command. General WAVELL then flew onto Bandung in Java and the new command officially came into effect on the 15<sup>th</sup> January 1942.

South West Pacific Command comprised:

- Malaya Command;
- Burma Command;
- Australian 7<sup>th</sup> Military District;
- U.S. Army Forces in the Philippines;
- ABDA Sea;
- ABDA Air.

Hong Kong (British Forces in China) had surrendered on the 25<sup>th</sup> December 1941. In reality, the new command did not have time to properly establish and function effectively, and with the surrender of Singapore on the 15<sup>th</sup> February 1942, ABDA Command was seriously dislocated. It was dissolved about a week later.

WAVELL resigned as Commander in Chief on the 25<sup>th</sup> February 1942 and resumed his role as Commander in Chief, India. With the end of the Battle of the Java Sea in March 1942, the ABDA Command ceased to exist.

In October 1943, a new command was formed, South East Asia Command. The Supreme Allied Commander, Admiral the Lord Louis Mountbatten, arrived in Delhi with staff on the 7<sup>th</sup> October 1943. The Headquarters became operational at Delhi on the 16<sup>th</sup> November 1943 and moved to Kandy in Ceylon on the 15<sup>th</sup> April 1944. The command comprised:

- Eastern Fleet;
- 11<sup>th</sup> Army Group;
  - Ceylon Command;
  - 14<sup>th</sup> Army;
- Indian Ocean Air Headquarters;
- Commanding General China-Burma Theater (U.S. Forces).

With the cessation of hostilities, the H.Q. moved to Singapore on the 5<sup>th</sup> November 1945 to co-locate with the Headquarters of Allied Land Forces, South East Asia. H.Q. South East Asia Command was absorbed by its subordinate command A.L.F.S.E.A. on the 31<sup>st</sup> May 1946.

Allied Land Forces South East Asia (A.L.F.S.E.A.) came into being on the 12<sup>th</sup> November 1944, assuming responsibility from the 11<sup>th</sup> Army Group which then ceased to exist. It had under direct command the:

- 14<sup>th</sup> Army;
- XV Indian Corps;
- Lines of Communication Command;
- Ceylon Command;
- 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (deployed in northern Burma).

A.L.F.S.E.A. was also assigned other formations, although they were not under direct command. These were:

- Special Force;
- 50<sup>th</sup> Indian Parachute Brigade.

The General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of A.L.F.S.E.A. also had operational control through Lieutenant General SULTAN, General Officer Commanding Northern Combat Area Command, of the American, Chinese and British forces in northern Burma.

The Main Headquarters were based at Kandy, near to the H.Q. of the Supreme Allied Commander, with the Advance Headquarters located at Barrackpore. The Main Headquarters transferred to Barrackpore on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 1944.

After reviewing four different options for offensive operations in late 1944 and early 1945, the Supreme Allied Commander decided to recommend Plan 'Y' (Operation Capital) which envisaged an offensive by 14<sup>th</sup> Army across the Chindwin River towards Mandalay; and Plan 'Z' (Operation Dracula) which was a plan to capture Rangoon by sea and air assault.

With the cessation of hostilities with Japan on the 15<sup>th</sup> August 1945, the area of command was expanded to include Malaya, Hong Kong, the Netherlands East Indies and French Indo China.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> November 1945, the Headquarters, South East Asia Command moved to Singapore, where it closed on the 30<sup>th</sup> November 1946. On the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1947, the British element of the former A.L.F.S.E.A. was reconstituted as South East Asia Land Forces (S.E.A.L.F.). In August 1947, this was again redesignated to become Far East Land Forces (F.E.L.F.).

F.E.L.F. comprised the:

- Malaya District;
- Singapore District (formed in February 1946 from No. 2 Area);
- British Troops in Hong Kong (redesignated in 1949 as Land Forces Hong Kong).

In April 1953, Ceylon District was added to the Command. In 1963, it was reorganised as an inter-service command, and eventually closed on the 1<sup>st</sup> November 1971.

## Far East Command

### Commander in Chief

18<sup>th</sup> November 1940 – 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1941

Air Chief Marshall Sir Henry Robert Moore BROOKE-POPHAM, G.C.V.O., K.C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., A.F.C.

23<sup>rd</sup> December 1941 – 15<sup>th</sup> January 1942

Lieutenant General (Temporary) Sir Henry Royds POWNALL, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O.\*, M.C., *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.*

1. With the establishment of ABDA Command, Lt Gen Pownall became the Chief of Staff of South West Pacific Command.

### Chief of Staff

DEWING hospital 08/04/41

PLAYFAIR arrived 21/06/41

### Colonel General Staff

8<sup>th</sup> November 1940 – May 1941

Colonel Walter Lindley FAWCETT, M.C., Indian Army, *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.*

Thomas SCOTT sick 08/12/41

## South West Pacific Command

(also known as American – British – Dutch – Australian (ABDA) Command)

### **Supreme Commander (Commander in Chief)**

15<sup>th</sup> January 1942 – March 1942

General Sir Archibald WAVELL,

### **Deputy Commander in Chief**

15<sup>th</sup> January 1942 – 25<sup>th</sup> February 1942

Lieutenant General George H. BRETT, U.S. Army Air Force

### **Chief of Staff**

15<sup>th</sup> January 1942 – 25<sup>th</sup> February 1942

Lieutenant General (Temporary) Sir Henry Royds POWNALL, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O.\*,  
M.C., *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.*

## Allied Land Forces South East Asia

### **General Officer Commanding-in-Chief**

12<sup>th</sup> November 1944 – 6<sup>th</sup> July 1945

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

6<sup>th</sup> July 1945 – 15<sup>th</sup> August 1945

Lieutenant General (Temporary) Sir Alexander Frank Philip CHRISTISON, K.B.E., D.S.O., M.C.\*, *p.s.c.*

16<sup>th</sup> August 1945 – 8<sup>th</sup> December 1945

General Sir William Joseph SLIM, G.B.E., K.C.B, D.S.O., M.C.

8<sup>th</sup> December 1945 – 19<sup>th</sup> April 1946

Lieutenant General Sir Miles Christopher DEMPSEY, K.C.B., K.B.E., D.S.O., M.C.

19<sup>th</sup> April 1946 – 30<sup>th</sup> November 1946

Lieutenant General Sir Montagu George North STOPFORD, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., M.C.

### **Chief of the General Staff**

12<sup>th</sup> November 1944 – 1945

Major General George Peregrine WALSH, C.B., D.S.O., M.C.

1945 – 1946

Major General (Acting) Harold English PYMAN,

### **Major General, General Staff**

12<sup>th</sup> November 1944 – 1946

Major General Ian Stanley Ord PLAYFAIR, C.B., D.S.O., M.C.\*

### **Major General in charge of Administration**

12<sup>th</sup> November 1944 – 1945

Major General Erick Montague BASTYAN, C.B., C.B.E.

### **Deputy Adjutant-General (Movements and Transportation)**

14<sup>th</sup> December 1943 – 1945.

Brigadier (Temporary) Charles Ardagh LANGLEY, M.C.\* , R.E.



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

12<sup>th</sup> November 1944 – 1945

Brigadier Lionel Charles MANNERS-SMITH,

1945 – 1946

Brigadier G De Vere WELCHMAN,

1946 – 1946

Brigadier G. G. MEARS,

**Engineer-in-Chief**

12<sup>th</sup> November 1944 – September 1945

Major General (Acting) Kenneth RAY, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O. \*, South African Engineer Corps<sup>1</sup>

**Chief Signal Officer**

Major General D. H. STEWARD

**Director of Medical Services**

12<sup>th</sup> November 1944 – 7<sup>th</sup> April 1945

Major General T O THOMPSON

7<sup>th</sup> April 1945 – November 1946

Major General W E TYNDALL,

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

1944 – 1946

Brigadier CAPE

1946 – 1948

Brigadier Cyril William BACON

1948 – 1950

Brigadier H. F. S. KING

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<sup>1</sup> Promoted to the rank of Acting Major General on the 13<sup>th</sup> January 1945. This may be the formal date that RAY actually assumed the appointment with A.L.F.S.E.A.

## Far East Land Forces

### General Officer Commanding-in-Chief

February 1947 – 28<sup>th</sup> June 1949

General Sir Neil Methuen RITCHIE,

28<sup>th</sup> June 1949 – 11<sup>th</sup> June 1951

General Sir John HARDING,

11<sup>th</sup> June 1951 – September 1953

General Sir Charles Frederick KEIGHTLEY,

September 1953 – 10<sup>th</sup> August 1956

General Sir Charles Falkland LOEWEN,

10<sup>th</sup> August 1956 – 24<sup>th</sup> June 1958

Lieutenant General Sir Francis Wogan FESTING, K.C.B., K.B.E., D.S.O.<sup>2</sup>

June 1958 – June 1961

General Sir Richard Amyatt HULL,

June 1961 – 1962

Lieutenant General Sir Nigel POETT,

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<sup>2</sup> Promoted General on the 29<sup>th</sup> November 1956 and created G.C.B. on the 13<sup>th</sup> June 1957.

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[Accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2011]

### **The War Against Japan**

By: Major General S Woodburn KIRBY, C.B., C.M.G., C.I.E., O.B.E., M.C. and others

Volume I – The Loss of Singapore

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Part II Brigades

Part III

By Chris KEMPTON

Published by the Military Press (2003)

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### **Defeat into Victory**

Author: Field Marshal Sir William SLIM, G.C.B., G.C.M.G., G.C.V.O., G.B.E., D.S.O., M.C.  
(1955)

Published by Cassell & Co Ltd, London – First Edition March 1956 Second Edition May 1956

### **Slim, Master of War**

Author: Robert LYMAN

Published by Constable, London (2004)

[ISBN 1-84119-811-0]

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Author: Ronald LEWIN (1976)

First Published by Leo Cooper Limited (1976), This Edition Published by Wordsworth Editions  
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