

## Chronology of Events – Iraq & Persia

### 1941

- 3 April Coup d'état staged in Iraq by the Prime Minister, Raschid Ali el Gailani deposing the pro-British Regent. Raschid Ali was strongly pro-Italian and pro-German.
- 17 April 20<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Brigade lands at Basra.
- 30<sup>th</sup> April 1941 News breaks at the R.A.F. base in the cantonment of Habbiniya that Iraqi troops were en-route to attack and seize the base. Base garrison consisted of about 1,000 R.A.F. personnel, 1,200 local levies, 300 men of the King's Own Royal Regiment, and 9,000 civilians.
- 1<sup>st</sup> May Reconnaissance by the R.A.F. reveals Iraqi troops of about two battalions in strength outside the base.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> May Planes from the R.A.F. base launch bombing attacks of the Iraqi troops.
- 6<sup>th</sup> May Patrols by the King's Own Royal Regiment indicate that the Iraqi troops have withdrawn.
- 7<sup>th</sup> May Lieutenant General Sir Edward QUINAN, lands at Basra and assumes command of Allies Forces in Iraq.
- 13<sup>th</sup> May 1941 Relief column enters Iraq from Palestine to relieve Habbiniya and British Embassy in Baghdad. Allied units attacked by German fighter planes.
- 19<sup>th</sup> May 1941 Units from the 10<sup>th</sup> Indian Division secure Basra having landed there after travelling from Palestine by sea.
- 19<sup>th</sup> May 1941 Relief column reaches Fallujah having relieved Habbiniya Base.
- 31<sup>st</sup> May 1941 Allied troops enter Baghdad. Armistice signed with Raschid Ali standing down to be replaced by the Pro-British Regent, Amir Abdul Illah.
- 8<sup>th</sup> June 1941 British, Australian, Indian and Free French troops from Palestine invade the Vichy French held country of Syria, garrisoned by about 35,000 soldiers of the French Army of the Levant.
- 9<sup>th</sup> June 1941 Allied troops from Iraq invade Syria from the east towards Palmyra.
- 21<sup>st</sup> June 1941 Allied troops capture Damascus.

3 <sup>rd</sup> July 1941	10 <sup>th</sup> Indian Division captures Deir ez Zor and continues advance down the Euphrates valley. Palmyra captured by Allied troops on same date.
7 <sup>th</sup> July 1941	Town of Al Qamishliye in the north of Syria captured by Allied troops.
8 <sup>th</sup> July 1941	Another northern Syrian town, El Haseke captured.
9 <sup>th</sup> July 1941	Allied troops from 'Habforce' attack and secure the town of Homs, thereby encircling Vichy French troops in the coastal areas of Lebanon.
10 <sup>th</sup> July 1941	Allied troops breakthrough into outskirts of southern Beirut.
12 <sup>th</sup> July 1941	Vichy French commander surrendered troops in Syria and Lebanon.
25 <sup>th</sup> August 1941	In order to secure supply routes to Russia and the oilfields of the region, Allied and Russian troops invade Persia; the Russians from the north and the Allied troops from the west near Kermanshah. The Allied troops are commanded by Major General SLIM.
26 <sup>th</sup> August 1941	Allied troops invade Persia from the south near Basra.
28 <sup>th</sup> August 1941	Allied troops reach outskirts of Kermanshah after meeting sporadic and sometimes fierce resistance.
28 <sup>th</sup> August 1941	Persian premier, Reza Shah, orders end of resistance, however, senior military commanders continue to fight invasion.
31 <sup>st</sup> August 1941	Allied troops reach Hamadan and split northwards and southwards. Indian troops advancing north from Basra area secure the southern oilfields around Masjid-I-Suleiman.
1 <sup>st</sup> September 1941	Allied column meets Russian forces at Sinneh.
17 <sup>th</sup> September 1941	Allied troops enter and secure Teheran. Reza Shah replaced as head of state by Pro-British Prince Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, who was western educated. Official resistance ceases but deployment of troops required to secure country against Kurdish and Luri tribesmen.
21 <sup>st</sup> November 1941	H.Q. 50 <sup>th</sup> (Northumbrian) Infantry Division (Major General W. H. C. RAMSDEN) arrives in Iraq by land having travelled by sea and land from Cyprus. Comes under command of British Troops Iraq.

**1942**

- 19<sup>th</sup> January 1942 50<sup>th</sup> (Northumbrian) Infantry Division leaves Iraq bound for Egypt to join XIII Corps.
- 1<sup>st</sup> February 1942 Tenth Army formed in Iraq under the command of G.H.Q. Middle East Forces. General Officer Commanding Lieutenant General E. P. QUINAN.
- 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1942 34<sup>th</sup> Indian States Force Infantry Brigade reformed at Basra, with one battalion under command. Brigade moved to Abadan to come under command of Abadan Sub-Area.
- August 1942 H.Q. III British Corps arrives under the command of Lieutenant General ANDERSON.
- 15<sup>th</sup> August 1942 Reorganisation of administrative functions introduced to free Tenth Army from Bases and Lines of Communication with appointment of Inspector General of Communications.
- 21<sup>st</sup> August 1942 General Sir Henry Maitland WILSON, G.C.B., G.B.E., D.S.O. appointed as General Officer Commanding Paiforce.
- 28<sup>th</sup> August 1942 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division arrives in Iraq from India. Comes under command of III Corps.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1942 G.H.Q. Persia and Iraq (Paiforce) created. Comprises:  
North Iraq Area;  
South Iraq Area;  
Persia Area (Kermanshah Sub-Area, Ahwaz Sub-Area and Abadan Sub-Area).
- 15<sup>th</sup> September 1942 Headquarters, Persia and Iraq Command opened in Baghdad, reporting direct to the War Office. Inspector General of Communications merged with G.H.Q. at Baghdad. D.Q.M.G. Bases and Lines of Communication, Major General C. R. C. LANE, C.B., M.C. appointed located at Basra.
- 28<sup>th</sup> September 1942 British 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (Major General H. P. M. BERNEY-FICKLIN) transfers from Iraq to Persia, still under command of III Corps.  
  
British 7<sup>th</sup> Armoured Brigade arrives.
- October 1942 H.Q. XXI Indian Corps arrives under the command of Lieutenant General MAYNE.
- October 1942 5<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Division arrives from Egypt.
- October 1942 Polish 3<sup>rd</sup> Carpathian Division arrives from Middle East.

- October 1942                      Commanding General United States Persian Gulf Service Command, Major General D. H. CONNELLY appointed to assume responsibility for ports and railway facilities in Persia to transport Allied aid to Russia.
- 4<sup>th</sup> November 1942              British 56<sup>th</sup> (London) Infantry Division (Major General E. G. MILES) arrives direct from the United Kingdom. Comes under command of XXI Indian Corps.
- 8<sup>th</sup> December 1942              Rioting in Teheran broke out, due to shortages of food. British Infantry battalion deployed to Teheran and rioting brought under control by the 10<sup>th</sup> December.

**1943**

- 31<sup>st</sup> January 1943 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division leaves Persia bound for Syria to join XIII Corps in preparation for invasion of Sicily.
- 17<sup>th</sup> February 1943 General Sir H. M. WILSON left PAIForce to assume appointment as Commander-in-Chief, Middle East Command.
- 24<sup>th</sup> March 1943 56<sup>th</sup> (London) Infantry Division leaves Iraq overland bound for Egypt and then onward to join 8<sup>th</sup> Army in Tunisia. Total journey of about 2,300 miles.
- March 1943 Lieutenant General Sir Henry POWNALL appointed as G.O.C.
- 12<sup>th</sup> April 1943 Tenth Army comes under India Command.
- May 1943 5<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Division (less 7<sup>th</sup> Armoured Brigade) leaves Iraq to return to India.

**1944**

- 15<sup>th</sup> October 1944 12<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Division disbanded and redesignated as Persia and South Iraq Area.
- October 1944 34<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Brigade absorbed by South Persia Area.

**1945**

- 15<sup>th</sup> February 1945 H.Q. Persia and Iraq Command transferred from War Office control to come under the command of G.H.Q. M.E.F. British interests are maintained by the establishment of a garrison of British Indian Troops, which in April 1946 comprised:
- 7<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Sikh Regiment;
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. The Sikh Light Infantry;
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. The Mahar Regiment.

**1946**

- April A series of strikes at the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's refineries at Abadan escalate tension in the region. These are seen as a threat to British interests, with loss of control of the refineries leading to major issues with the supply of oil to the U.K., and Europe.
- July Force 401 raised as an Extended Brigade Group in India. Major General F. J. LOFTUS-TOTTENHAM, D.S.O. commanded the Force, which comprised the 19<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Brigade and supporting arms and services.
- August Force 401 arrives in Basra. By this time, the issues surrounding the strikes had been resolved, and the crisis ended before it became necessary to

deploy British and Indian troops. Force 401 focuses on training and liaison with Iranian forces.

**1947**

June

Force 401 withdrawn from Iraq, and returned to India.

August

Final elements of the Basra Garrison left Iraq.