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SOUTH EAST ASIA COMMAND (HISTORY & PERSONNEL)

A concise history of South East Asia Command, a supreme headquarters in existence between 1943 and 1946. In addition, details of known appointments are included.

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A Concise History of South Asia Command (S.E.A.C.)

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South East Asia Command (S.E.A.C.)

The 'Trident' Conference held in Washington in May 1943 discussed the Allied plans for the reconquest of Burma. The Combined Chiefs of Staff could not agree on a consensus, the Americans wished to expand the air route into China and open up land communications between Burma and China; whilst the British wished to contain the Japanese forces until a major amphibious operation could be launched. In a compromise, the British agreed to the expansion of the air bridge to China.

The failure of the First Arakan Campaign led to concerns about the command structure in the region, and an agreement in principle was reached to form an Inter-Allied South East Asia Command. On 18 June 1943, it was announced that Field Marshal WAVELL was to succeed the Marquess of Linlithgow as the Viceroy of India who was due to leave India in the October of that year. General Sir Claude AUCHINLECK was appointed the Commander-in-Chief of the Army in India, a post he assumed on 20 June 1943. During July and August 1943, it was decided that the new South East Asia Command was to be a joint Anglo-American formation, with a British Supreme Commander and an American Deputy. India was to remain a separate and independent command of equal status retaining responsibility for the development of the Indian base, internal security, and the North West Frontier.

A further conference followed in August 1943, called Quadrant, which was held in Quebec in Canada. At this conference, it was agreed to capture northern Burma and to make plans for amphibious landings to capture Akyab and Ramree islands. On 25 August, the day after the conference finished, Acting Admiral The Lord Louis MOUNTBATTEN was appointed the Supreme Commander of the new South East Asia Command. The new command did not start to function until November 1943, and officially came into being on 1 November. It was responsible for the:

- Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet (SOMERVILLE),
- Commander-in-Chief, 11th Army Group (GIFFARD),
- Allied Air Commander-in-Chief, Air Command South East Asia (PEIRSE).

Planning for operations was complicated by the command structure and lack of resources in the theatre. Various plans were drawn up, and then dropped as being impractical to implement. These included:

- The capture of the Andaman Islands by XXXIII Indian Corps by amphibious landings as a precursor to landing in Sumatra,
- An advance by XV Indian Corps supported by 224 Group, R.A.F. down the Mayu peninsula to take Akyab Island,
- An advance by IV Corps, supported by 221 Group R.A.F. to and across the Chindwin River,
- An advance by N.C.A.C. down to Myitkyina and Mogaung,
- An advance by the Chinese to secure the China end of the Ledo road,
- Operations by Special Force (Chindits) on the Central (Assam) front,
- The capture of Indaw airfield by parachute troops, to allow the fly-in of the 26th Indian Division.

The situation in early 1944 was that the Allies were preparing for a limited offensive in northern Burma. There were plans for amphibious operations in the Arakan but the problem was the lack of suitable shipping, in particular landing ships and craft. The plans also consisted of sending a Long-Range Penetration Brigade into Burma. Before serious offensive action could be undertaken, there was also the need to build additional airfields in the Imphal and Tamu areas.

Because Lieutenant General STILWELL of the U.S. Army refused to work under General GIFFARD, the Northern Combat Area Command (N.C.A.C.) (a joint American and Chinese force in northern Burma) came under direct command of the Supreme Commander with effect from 20 June 1944; with STILWELL also acting as Deputy Supreme Commander South East Asia.

Plans were made in July 1944 to convert the 11th Army Group into a joint American and British formation, called Allied Land Forces South East Asia. The reorganisation did not formally take place until General STILWELL was recalled to the United States in October 1944. The new formation became effective on 12 November 1944, with Lieutenant General LEESE taking over command from General GIFFARD.

South East Asia Command

Supreme Allied Commander

October 1943 – 31 May 1946

Admiral The Right Honourable Louis Francis Albert Victor Nicholas MOUNTBATTEN, 1st Earl Mountbatten of Burma, G.C.V.O., K.C.B., D.S.O., A.D.C.

Acting Supreme Allied Commander

1 June 1946 – 30 November 1946

Lieutenant General STOPFORD

Deputy Supreme Allied Commander

October 1943 – 12th November 1944

General Joseph Warren STILWELL, U.S. Army

12th November 1944 – November 1946

Lieutenant General R. A. WHEELER, U.S. Army

Supreme Allied Commander's Representative in Chungking, China

9th October 1943 – November 1946

Lieutenant General Adrian CARTON DE-WIART, V.C., C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.¹

Supreme Allied Commander's Representative, S. W. Pacific Command

1944 – 6th January 1945 (Killed in Action)

Lieutenant General (Temporary) Herbert LUMSDEN, D.S.O., M.C., *p.s.c.*

16th March 1945 – 31st May 1946

Lieutenant General Charles Henry GAIRDNER, C.B.E.²

Supreme Allied Commander's Representative in Delhi and General Officer Commander Rear Headquarters, South East Asia Command

November 1944 – November 1946

Major General Charles Reginald Cambridge LANE, C.B., C.B.E., M.C., Indian Army, *p.s.c.*³

Chief of Staff

16th November 1943 – 26th December 1944

Lieutenant General Sir Henry Royds POWNALL, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O.* , M.C., *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.*⁴

¹ Created K.B.E. and knighted on 1 January 1945.

² Awarded the C.B. in 1946.

³ Created K.C.I.E. and knighted on 23 May 1946.

⁴ Appointed to post on 16 September 1943.

26th December 1944 – 12th July 1946

Lieutenant General Frederick A. M. BROWNING,

Major General REDMAN

Deputy Director of Military Operations (Plans)

October 1944 (Transferred from G.H.Q. India) – 16th December 1944)

Brigadier (Temporary) Edwyn Harland Wolstenholme COBB, R.E., *p.s.c.*⁵

December 1944 – 30th March 1945

Brigadier (Temporary) Brian Charles Hannam KIMMINS,

Deputy Director of Military Operations (B)

October 1944 (Transferred from G.H.Q. India – 1945/6)

Brigadier (Acting) George Francis BUNBURY, O.B.E., Special Unemployed List, Indian Army, *p.s.c.*

Director of Military Intelligence

7th December 1943 – 16th May 1945

Major General C. R. W. LAMPLOUGH, C.B.E., D.S.C., Royal Marines

16th May 1945 – 28th November 1945

Major General William Ronald Campbell PENNEY, C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C., *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.*

28th November 1945 – 31st May 1946

Air Vice Marshal L. F. PENDRED, M.B.E., D.F.C.

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

1944 – 1945

Brigadier (Temporary) James Francis BENOY, C.B.E.⁶

Deputy Chief of Staff (Information and Civil Affairs)

1943 – 1946

Air Marshal Sir Philip Joubert De la FERTE,

⁵ Actual appointment as Brigadier General Staff (Plans). Promoted Acting Brigadier on 16 July 1943 and Temporary Brigadier on 16 January 1944.

⁶ In 1945, became the Chief S.E.A.C Representative in Australia

Principal Administrative Officer

1943 – 1946

Lieutenant General R. A. WHEELER, U.S. Army

Deputy Principal Administrative Officer

28th July 1944 – 1946

Major General (Temporary) Reginald Francis Stewart DENNING, *p.s.c.*

Brigadier General Staff – (B.G.S.)

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

Brigadier, Royal Artillery – (B.R.A.)

1st January 1945 – 16th July 1945

Brigadier (Temporary) Lionel Charles MANNERS-SMITH, C.B.E., *p.s.c.*

Engineer in Chief – (Eng. in Chief)

16th November 1943 – 15th March 1946

Major General D. HARRISON, C.B., D.S.O.

Signal Officer in Chief – (C.S.O.)

16th November 1943 – 6th October 1944

Captain M. HODGES, R.N.

1946 – 1947

Brigadier (Temporary) William Charles Vernon GALWEY, O.B.E., M.C.*

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

1944 – 1945

Brigadier

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

1944 – 1945

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

1944 – 1945

Brigadier

Brigadier, Indian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers – (Brig I.E.M.E.)

1944 – 1945

Brigadier

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Author: Ronald LEWIN (1976)

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