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A CONCISE BIOGRAPHY OF:

BRIGADIER

H. C. WHITAKER

A concise biography of Brigadier Harry Colwell WHITAKER, C.B.E., *o.*, an officer in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, who served with the British Army between 1914 and 1949.
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A Concise Biography of Brigadier Harry Colwell WHITAKER, C.B.E.

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Brigadier Harry Colwell WHITAKER, C.B.E., o.

Introduction

Usually, in terms of the senior officers who served during the Second World War, the focus is on the operational commanders of formations. The nature of any army however, is that there are a large number of people required to ensure that the front-line soldiers are in a position to fight successfully. Often, these people are neglected, yet their contribution to the overall achievement of an Army is vital. The fighting soldiers of the British Army are in the Arms (ie, Cavalry, Infantry, Artillery, Engineers and Signals), with the supporting personnel in the Services. One of the services of the British Army during the Second World War was the Royal Army Ordnance Corps.

One of the senior officers of the Royal Army Ordnance Corps during the Second World War was Brigadier Harry Colwell WHITAKER, C.B.E., o. He joined the British Army in August 1914 in the ranks as a Private, but he was soon identified as having leadership qualities and commissioned as an officer in 1915. He served throughout the First World War, but he resigned his commission in 1920. He re-joined the Army, going on to serve on Malta and in the United Kingdom, where he was involved in the establishment of the new Central Ordnance Depot at Chilwell in Nottinghamshire. During the Second World War, the key appointment he held was as head of the Provision Section within Middle East Command, responsible for ensuring that the 8th Army and 9th Army got the equipment it required when it was needed. This was not without its challenges. Brigadier WHITAKER continued to serve in the British Army until 1949.

The Royal Army Ordnance Corps

The Royal Army Ordnance Corps can claim to be the oldest corps of the British Army, which dates back to the Office of Ordnance established in 1414. In 1683, it became known as the Board of Ordnance, but was disbanded in 1855, because of the Army's logistical failures in the Crimean War, with its responsibilities transferred to the War Office, the Royal Artillery and the Royal Engineers.¹

Further changes occurred during the late 1800's, resulting in the formation of the Army Ordnance Department in 1896. The First World War saw a massive expansion of the department, in particular to supply the guns and ammunition required by the British Army in all its theatres of operation. On 28 November 1918, the Department amalgamated with another branch to form the new Army Ordnance Corps, which was granted the prefix 'Royal' in 1922. Between the wars, its responsibilities grew as it took on much of the repair of Army equipment and vehicles until that task became the responsibility of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers in 1942.

¹ See: <http://www.nam.ac.uk/research/famous-units/royal-army-ordnance-corps>

By the outbreak of the Second World War, the Royal Army Ordnance Corps (R.A.O.C.) was the branch of the British Army responsible for the procurement, storage and issue of materiel classified as 'Ordnance Stores'.² The British Army defined Ordnance Stores to include:

- Personal and unit equipment,
- Armaments,
- Small arms ammunition,
- Explosives,
- Signals stores,
- Armoured fighting vehicles,
- Motor transport (except vehicles used by the R.A.S.C.),
- Tractors,
- Clothing,
- Personal accessories,
- Workshop tools,
- Motor transport stores, spare and replacement parts,
- Medical and veterinary stores.

Expendable supplies, such as food, animal fodder, petrol, oil and lubricants (P.O.L.), were the responsibility of the R.A.S.C. and R.I.A.S.C..

Following the Great War, the establishment of the R.A.O.C. settled to about one-thousand, four-hundred officers. There were four categories of officers within the Corps, the first being Directing Staff Officers. These men filled the higher appointments in formations and static headquarters, and in stores and ordnance depots. Most of these officers had transferred in from other Corps after several years' service, so they had experience of being a front-end user of ordnance services. These officers had to complete successfully the Ordnance Course, held at the Artillery College at Woolwich, moving later to the Royal Military College of Science at Shrivenham. This qualified the holder as an Inspecting Ordnance Officer, meaning they could inspect, proof and repair ammunition held by the R.A.O.C.. These officers were distinguished in the Army List by the addition of the letter 'o' after their names. The designation of these officers was by class as well as rank, for example, a Major was usually an Ordnance Officer 3rd Class.

Family Background

Harry Colwell WHITAKER was born on 30 September 1892, in Tooting, Surrey, England.³ His father was Harry WHITAKER, who manufactured umbrellas and walking sticks for a living; his mother was Rose, who was three years younger than her husband. Harry was the eldest child, with his brother Brian born two years later.

² Ibid

³ Date of birth – *The Half Yearly Army List February 1947* (U.K., H.M.S.O., 1947) p.53 – Place of birth *1911 Census* via www.Ancestry.co.uk

The two youngest sons were Douglas, who was born five years after Harry, and Bernard seven years. In 1901, the family lived at 29, Boswell Road, Croydon, Surrey.⁴ By 1911, the family had moved across London and were living at 1, Canonbury Park North, Canonbury in north London. The family had grown, with Harry having two younger sisters, Rosa Miriam and Mary Edith. In between his two sisters, Harry had another brother, Angus. Now aged eighteen years, Harry worked as a Bank Clerk, but still lived at home with his parents and the rest of his family. Brian was aged sixteen years, and had started work as an insurance clerk, but also lived at home.⁵

The Great War (First World War)

With the outbreak of the Great War (otherwise known as the First World War) on 4 August 1914, WHITAKER enlisted in the British Army and joined the Honourable Artillery Company, Territorial Force. The Honourable Artillery Company (H.A.C.) is a long-standing component of the Territorial Army, and is based at Armoury House, City Road, London EC1. It claims to be the second oldest military organisation in the world, gaining its Royal Charter in 1537 from King Henry VIII. In spite of its title, the H.A.C. comprised both an infantry battalion and an artillery regiment. Harry joined the H.A.C. Infantry Battalion, receiving the Regimental number 1182.⁶

In September 1914, the H.A.C. formed a second infantry battalion, but Harry WHITAKER remained with the 1st/1st Battalion.⁷ The 1st/1st Battalion was attached as Army Troops to the 1st London Division, and began mobilising at Finsbury. On 12 September 1914, the battalion moved to Belhus Park in Essex. The battalion then came under orders to move to France, landing at St. Nazaire on 30 September 1914.⁸ Although initially posted to Lines of Communication duties, on 10 November 1914, the battalion joined the 8th Infantry Brigade in the 3rd Division. On 9 December 1914, the battalion transferred to the 7th Infantry Brigade in the same division.⁹

The 3rd Division was a pre-war, Regular Army formation, and had seen much fighting during the early exchanges between the British and the Germans that resulted in the British retreat to Ypres. During the First Battle of Ypres, the division suffered about 8,000 casualties in just a few days, so reinforcements were needed to bring the formation back up to strength. The first battle that Harry would have participated in was the attack on Wytschaete on 14 December 1914. This was a joint British and French operation, but it stalled in the face of entrenched German positions, with heavy loss of life for the British and French. The division did not take part in the Battle of Neuve Chappelle in early 1914, but it saw action again in June 1915 with the attack on Bellewaarde.¹⁰

⁴ 1901 Census via www.Ancestry.co.uk

⁵ 1911 Census via www.Ancestry.co.uk

⁶ The date of his enlistment is not confirmed, but he served in the ranks for one year and one-hundred days.

⁷ H.A.C. First World War Service Medal and Award Roll: via www.Ancestry.co.uk

⁸ The H.A.C. First World War Service Medal and Award Roll states 29 December 1914, the *Half-Yearly Army List February 1947* and *British Army First World War Medal Rolls Index Card* give 30 December 1914.

⁹ See: <http://www.1914-1918.net/hac.htm>

¹⁰ See: <http://www.1914-1918.net/3div.htm>

During his service with the H.A.C., Harry WHITAKER gained promotion to the rank of Corporal, thereby placing him in command of a section of men. As with several men from the H.A.C., the Regiment identified him as a suitable soldier to be commissioned, so on 15 November 1915, WHITAKER returned to the United Kingdom where he attended an Officer Cadet Training Unit. The War Office granted him an Emergency Commission with effect from 16 November 1915, in the rank of Temporary Lieutenant, in the Army Ordnance Department.¹¹

WHITAKER returned to France on 1 February 1916, and shortly afterwards, on 16 May 1916, he was promoted to the rank of Acting Captain. Promotion to the rank of Temporary Captain came with effect from 1 October 1917. He served in France and Belgium until 17 May 1918, being mentioned in despatches on 4 January 1917, 11 December 1917, and 20 May 1918. Towards the end of the war, he was promoted to the rank of Brevet Major on 3 June 1918, and Acting Major on 7 July 1918. In recognition of his war service, the War Office granted him the 1914 – 15 Star, the British War Medal and Victory Medal.¹²

Post First World War Service

In 1919, Major WHITAKER served on the North-West Frontier of India, and in Afghanistan, during the Third Afghan War against the Pathan tribesmen of the region. He held an appointment as Deputy Assistant Director of Ordnance Services in India between May and 6 December 1919 in the rank of Acting Major. On relinquishing that appointment, he reverted to the rank of Temporary Captain the next day. He received the Afghanistan campaign medal with a clasp for his service in the Third Afghan War.¹³

On 25 January 1920, WHITAKER relinquished his commission on completion of his service on an Emergency Commission and left the British Army. The Army granted him the rank of Major upon his retirement.¹⁴ However, it was difficult to find employment following the First World War, so WHITAKER decided to re-join the British Army. The War Office granted him a permanent commission with effect from 22 February 1921 in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, in the rank of Captain. Having passed the Ordnance Course, in addition, he was granted the classification as an Ordnance Officer 4th Class. The Army required him to relinquish the rank of Major granted to him on his retirement, and the rank of Brevet Major awarded during the war.¹⁵

¹¹ *Half-Yearly Army List February 1947* p.53 and [The London Gazette, Issue 29405, Page 12563](#) N.B. The entry in the London Gazette gives his rank in the H.A.C. as Lance Corporal, while the *H.A.C. First World War Service Medal and Award Roll* gives his rank as Corporal.

¹² *Half-Yearly Army List February 1947* p.53. Award of Medals confirmed by *H.A.C. First World War Service Medal and Award Roll* and *British Army First World War Medal Rolls Index Card*

¹³ *Half-Yearly Army List February 1947* p.53.

¹⁴ [The London Gazette, Supplement 32087, Page 10053](#)

¹⁵ *Ibid*, and [The London Gazette, Supplement 32267, Page 2381](#) On rejoining the Army, WHITAKER's Army Number was 15488 and his seniority was back-dated to 1 January 1919.

Shortly after re-joining, he was promoted to the rank of Acting Major on 22 March 1921, as an Ordnance Officer 3rd Class. Having held this acting rank for just short of twelve months, on 11 February 1922 he reverted to the rank of Captain.¹⁶ It was during this period that Harry WHITAKER married Mary Wetherall HEMMANDS at St. Augustine Church, South Croydon. The ceremony took place on 1 June 1920, with Harry aged twenty-seven years and his wife twenty-six.¹⁷

On 13 July 1928, WHITAKER took up an appointment on Malta, and was promoted to the rank of Temporary Major. He received substantive promotion to the rank of Major (Ordnance Officer 3rd Class) on 21 August 1928. Returning to the U.K., his next appointment was to the new Ordnance Depot at Chilwell, in Nottinghamshire. He moved there with effect from 24 August 1935 to coincide with his promotion to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and Ordnance Officer 2nd Class.¹⁸

Central Ordnance Depot, Chilwell

Chilwell is now a suburb of the City of Nottingham, but during the First World War, it was an area of farmland between Nottingham and Long Eaton. The National Shell Filling Factory was built on the site during the war, mainly staffed by women and girls. By 1918, it was apparently the largest such munitions factory in Europe, but it suffered a large explosion on 1 July 1918 killing one-hundred and thirty-four people. After the First World War, it became an Ordnance depot from 1919 until 1925, when it closed.¹⁹

As the British Army modernised and developed mechanical transport during the 1930's, a need arose for a large storage depot to house vehicles and their spares. The existing site at Farnborough was too small, so in late 1934, Major L. H. WILLIAMS was chosen to be the Chief Ordnance Officer for the new M. T. Depot. At the time, Chilwell was a large site, with empty buildings in various states of decay, overgrown railway lines and roads overgrown with weeds. An advance party arrived on 1 May 1935 to open the depot, with vehicles arriving from Farnborough and Woolwich soon afterwards. Lieutenant Colonel WHITAKER arrived at Chilwell during this period of opening the new depot, which was both challenging and exciting for the staff concerned. Life was not easy, with living conditions for the officers and men rudimentary in the beginning. In addition, there was much building work taking place, with dislocation of people and units as the establishment grew rapidly. Chilwell was described as being a place with a sense of urgency about it, as new ideas and methods were developed and implemented. Money appeared not to be a constraining factor, a problem all too apparent in other depots.²⁰

¹⁶ Ibid and [The London Gazette, Supplement 32312, Page 3630](#)

¹⁷ *Surrey, England, Marriage Register* via www.Ancestry.co.uk

¹⁸ *Half-Yearly Army List February 1947* p.53.

¹⁹ FERNYHOUGH, Brigadier A. H., C.B.E., M.C. *History of the Royal Army Ordnance Corps 1920 – 1945*, (u/k, Royal Army Ordnance Corps, n.d.) p.39

²⁰ Ibid

Chilwell introduced new concepts such as floor conveyors and machine accounting, applying knowledge from commercial industry. The depot employed male and female staff, with morale being assisted by the opening of a Social Club in March 1936, and a Serjeant's Mess in March 1937. By the outbreak of the Second World War, Chilwell had over 50,000 items of motor transport spares in stock. By September 1939, the British Army had about 22,500 motor vehicles of various types; all of which had passed through Chilwell to be inspected, serviced, kitted out, and accepted into Army service.²¹

The Second World War – Early Days

Having served at Chilwell for four years, when the post of Commandant of the depot became vacant, WHITAKER was promoted to the rank of Colonel (Ordnance Officer 1st Class), and assumed the role of Commandant with effect from 31 August 1939.²² The depot at Chilwell became extremely busy as the British Army mobilised in anticipation of war. The Territorial Army commenced mobilisation on 24 August 1939, and then came the German invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939. Two days later, the United Kingdom and France declared war on Germany, so just twenty-one years after the end of the previous major conflict, Britain was at war again.

Colonel WHITAKER did not see active service in France, remaining in the important post at Chilwell. The withdrawal of the British Expeditionary Force from France in June 1940 left the British Army perilously short of vehicles and equipment, as so many were abandoned in France. The expansion of the R.A.O.C. was only just commencing in 1940, under the Headquarters, Central Ordnance Depots, which was located at Caxton House, Toothill Street, London SW1. The Principal Ordnance Officer at this time was Brigadier (Temporary) G. GRILLS, O.B.E., R.A.O.C., *p.a.c.*

In April 1940, there were just two Ammunition Depots in the United Kingdom; one at Corsham in Wiltshire, and the other at Bramley, near Basingstoke in Hampshire. The sole Mechanical Transport Vehicles depot was at Chilwell (with Colonel WHITAKER in command) and the last location was the Small Arms Depot at Weedon in Northamptonshire.²³

On 20 October 1940, the War Office appointed WHITAKER as a Deputy Director of Ordnance Services within Home Forces. He was destined not to remain in this post for long, as he travelled to Egypt in March 1941 to assist with the large-scale build-up of British forces in the Middle East. WHITAKER went to No. 5 Base Ordnance Depot, which was being established in Egypt.

²¹ Ibid

²² [Services of British Army Officers & cc 1939 – 1945 \(London, Savanna Publications 1999 as reprint of the Half-Yearly Army List January 1946\) and The London Gazette, Issue 34684, Page 6332](#)

²³ [Quarterly Army List April 1940 p.1997/1998](#)

Egypt

As British forces grew in scale and complexity in the Middle East, so the demands on the R.A.O.C. grew in consequence. At the outbreak of the Second World War, the provision office of the R.A.O.C. in Egypt was located at the Ordnance Depot at Abbassia, near Cairo, and it comprised two officers and twenty-five clerks; two-thirds of whom were locally employed Egyptians. As the depot at Abbassia grew, separate sub-depots were opened for motor transport, clothing and general stores, with each having their own provision arrangements. The depot at Abbassia became 4 Base Ordnance Depot and eventually covered seven different sites, with 458,000 square feet of covered accommodation and 72,000 sq. ft. in the open.²⁴

The need for further expansion led to the opening of another depot located at Tel-el-Kebir between Cairo and Ismailia. The depot opened in late 1940, and by March 1941 it had its own provision branch, which coincided with the arrival of Colonel WHITAKER who became responsible for provision arrangements at the depot. In the early days, there was a shortage of suitable staff, both from the Army and from locally employed personnel, a shortage of storage accommodation, but the demands to issue stores urgently to operational units as and when they were needed remained. No. 5 Base Ordnance Depot expanded through late 1941 and into 1942, as the campaign in Egypt and Libya ebbed and flowed. By 1943, it comprised 1,060,000 square feet of covered accommodation; with two-thousand four-hundred military personnel, nine-thousand locally employed civilian personnel, some Basuto pioneers and prisoners of war.²⁵

Colonel WHITAKER had responsibility for provision at 5 Base Ordnance Depot from his arrival in March 1941, working in conjunction with his opposite number from 4 Base Ordnance Depot. The intention was for the two different depots to have separate areas, but in practice, an element of confusion and cross-supply built up. Stores arriving in Egypt could be sent to one or other depot, and often the paperwork that went with them became lost. The opening of No. 2 Base Ordnance Depot in Palestine in September 1941 only added to the confusion.²⁶

The Director of Ordnance services addressed this issue by establishing a new Central Provision Office in November 1941, with Colonel WHITAKER being appointed its commanding officer. The provision elements of all three ordnance depots were concentrated at Mena, about eight miles west of Cairo. The establishment for the new Central Provision Office was forty-eight officers and three-hundred and eighty R.A.O.C. clerks, but it never reached that staffing level. Instead, the British Army recruited some five-hundred Egyptian clerks who were trained in the systems and processes. All items received and issued had to be accounted for, so the provision system relied on the Central Stock Record, which enabled one inventory to be held for Middle East Command.²⁷

²⁴ FERNYHOUGH, Brigadier A. H., C.B.E., M.C. *History of the Royal Army Ordnance Corps 1920 – 1945*, (u/k, Royal Army Ordnance Corps, n.d.) p.39

²⁵ *Ibid* p.190

²⁶ *Ibid* p.186

²⁷ *Ibid* p.182

In June 1942, the Axis Forces broke through the British lines on the Libya – Egypt border, and they advanced towards Cairo. A degree of panic spread throughout the vast Army base located in and around Cairo, at Alexandria, and along the Suez Canal. G.H.Q. Middle East Command decided to move the Central Provision Office to Haifa in Palestine. This move dislocated the work of the R.A.O.C. in the Middle East, as all the trained Egyptian staff had to be left behind, with records and equipment disappearing in the haste of the move. Colonel WHITAKER had to manage this move, including recruiting and training new Palestinian staff. On 3 August 1942, he was promoted to the rank of Acting Brigadier upon the post of Deputy Director of Ordnance Services (Provision) (D.D.O.S.(P)) Middle East Command being upgraded to that of a Brigadier's appointment.²⁸ However, A/Brigadier WHITAKER had more problems to surmount, as he was ordered to move the Central Provision Office from Haifa to Tel Aviv, some seventy-five miles away. Some of the new staff were unable to move to Tel Aviv, so the same process of recruitment and training had to be organised again. These moves caused administrative problems for him, which were compounded when General Headquarters Middle East Command directed that the Central Provision Office move back to Egypt following the British victory at El Alamein in November 1942, although this did not take place until January 1943.²⁹

Brigadier (Acting) William Watson RICHARDS, C.B.E., M.C., became the first Director of Ordnance Services for Middle East Command on 15 April 1940. On 1 August 1942, the role was designated as the Deputy Quarter-Master-General (Army Equipment) (D.Q.M.G., (A.E.)), with RICHARDS being promoted to the rank of Acting Major General. By late 1942, the size of the British Army deployed in the Middle East had grown considerably. In October and November 1942, the German and Italian forces in Egypt were defeated at the Battle of El Alamein, with the British advancing from Egypt, through Libya to Tunisia.

Meanwhile, British and United States forces had landed in Morocco, and Algeria, and were advancing into Tunisia. The military base in Egypt continued to be responsible for the supply of 8th Army, while 1st Army was supplied through Algiers. In light of this, the Commander-in-Chief Middle East decided to reactivate the role of Director of Ordnance Services, to work alongside that of Deputy Quarter-Master-General (Army Equipment). On 14 December 1942, Brigadier WHITAKER was promoted to the rank of Acting Major General to assume the role as Director of Ordnance Services on a temporary basis.

In early 1943, The War Office decided to transfer two of the most senior officers of the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, so Major General Clifford GEAKE left his post as Director of Clothing and Stores at the War Office to travel out to Egypt to assume the role as Director of Ordnance Services in place of Major General WHITAKER.

²⁸ *Services of British Army Officers & cc 1939 – 1945* (London, Savanna Publications 1999 as reprint of the Half-Yearly Army List January 1946) p.53

²⁹ FERNYHOUGH, Brigadier A. H., C.B.E., M.C. *History of the Royal Army Ordnance Corps 1920 – 1945*, (u/k, Royal Army Ordnance Corps, n.d.) p.181

Major General RICHARDS replaced Major General GEAKE as Director of Clothing and Stores at the War Office in London, with Major General Cecil SMITH becoming the D.Q.M.G. (A.E.) based in Cairo, Egypt. These changes all occurred in February 1943, and they left WHITAKER having to relinquish his rank of Acting Major General. He did so on 2 February 1943 and reverted to the rank of Temporary Brigadier, as he had completed six months in the acting rank.³⁰ He then continued in his role as D.D.O.S. (P) Middle East Command for the rest of the war.

The Central Provision Office was now located back at Mena, having moved back in phases. Challenges remained back in Egypt, as Cairo was now a large military base; overcrowded, with transport overwhelmed. Special trains were arranged to convey staff the seven miles from Cairo to the nearest station at the Pyramids, but this still left a two and half mile walk to the depot. Women were conveyed in lorries from the station to the depot. All staff were expected to arrive at 08.00 hours, and did not finish work until 18.00 hours, by which time it was dark. These conditions affected the morale of the staff adversely, with absenteeism rates high, and it was difficult to retain staff. WHITAKER realised that the location of the depot at Mena was unsuitable, so he searched for alternative locations and found an old infantry barracks at the Citadel in Cairo. The decision to move was reinforced by the depot at Mena being flooded, which stopped work for forty-eight hours. He accelerated the move, which the staff completed by the end of March 1943. This move proved to be a good decision, with the depot remaining here until the end of the war.

On 18 February 1943, The War Office appointed him Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, in recognition of his military service in the Middle East. Major General W. W. RICHARDS, a colleague of his in the R.A.O.C., wrote his citation on 31 October 1942 in his capacity as Deputy Quarter-Master-General (Army Equipment) for Middle East Command. It states:

This officer arrived in the Middle East in March 1941, and then carried out the duties of A.D.O.S. Provision, No. 2 Base Ord. Depot.³¹ On formation of the Central Provision Office, M.E.F., he was appointed D.D.O.S. (Provision), M.E.F., and he has been responsible for provision of all Army Equipment in the Middle East.

His foresight, keenness and technical ability have produced the many varied requirements of a modern mechanised Army, in spite of the difficulty of lack of equipment. The necessity for initiating local production and manufacture to fill the gaps and delays in supply from India, U.K. and U.S.A. has further complicated the work of provision.

No serious shortage has occurred, although over 250,000 items are listed in Equipment Scales today.³²

³⁰ Services of British Army Officers & cc 1939 – 1945 (London, Savanna Publications 1999 as reprint of the Half-Yearly Army List January 1946) p.53

³¹ Note: This citation states that WHITAKER served at 2 B.O.D., but FERNYHOUGH, Brigadier A. H., C.B.E., M.C. *History of the Royal Army Ordnance Corps 1920 – 1945*, (u/k, Royal Army Ordnance Corps, n.d.) states it was 5 B.O.D.

³² WO/373/76

In early 1944, the post of D.D.O.S. (P) was redesignated as the Commandant, Central Ordnance Provision Office (C.O.P.O.) Middle East. The provision arrangements for Allied Force Headquarters in North Africa and Middle East Command were merged to supply Allied forces in Sicily and Italy. Over time, the depots in Algeria and Tunisia were run down, until they closed in late 1944. By this time, the Central Ordnance Provision Office now comprised the following personnel:

- Officers = 79;
- R.A.O.C. Other Ranks = 457;
- Attached Other Ranks (R.E.M.E.) = 91;
- Palestinian A.T.S. = 268;
- Civilians = 369;
- Local Enlisted Clerks = 400 (approx.);

In addition, there were about one-hundred casual labourers employed as the need required. The C.O.P.O. managed about 402,000 items held by the ordnance depots in the Middle East, with about 38,000 transactions every day in 1944.

Post Second World War

In mid-1945, as the post-war run down of military facilities in the Middle East commenced, the War Office posted WHITAKER back to the United Kingdom. On 29 September 1945, he assumed the post of Commandant of the Central Ordnance Depot at Feltham in Middlesex. This depot, located to the west of London, dealt with 'B' vehicle spares. On 1 July 1946, he was transferred to become the Commandant of the Central Ordnance Depot, Branston. Located near Burton-upon-Trent in Staffordshire, this depot was the main clothing depot for the British Army during the Second World War and afterwards.

His last appointment before retirement was as Commandant of the Central Ordnance Depot at Didcot in Oxfordshire, which he assumed on 12 May 1947 on transferring from Branston. Didcot was a large, general stores depot in Oxfordshire. During this period, the Army appointed Brigadier WHITAKER an Aide-de-Camp to the King between 15 August 1948 and 24 October 1949. He relinquished the post as Commandant at Didcot on 24 October 1949, the day that he retired from the British Army.³³ Having attained the age limit for retirement, he was placed on retired pay and was granted the honorary rank of Brigadier. He remained a member of the Reserve of Officers until 30 September 1952, when he reached sixty years of age.

Brigadier Harry Colwell WHITAKER, C.B.E., died in Winchester, Hampshire, in 1975; aged eighty-three years.

³³ [The London Gazette, Supplement 38742, Page 5066](#)

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