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**A CONCISE HISTORY OF:**

# **WEST AFRICA COMMAND HISTORY & PERSONNEL**

A concise history of West Africa Command of the British Army between 1939 and 1958, and a list of the key personnel of the command and staff who served in this command between the dates shown.  
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**A Concise History of West Africa Command (History & Personnel)**

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# West Africa Command

The United Kingdom had four colonies in West Africa, namely:

- Nigeria;
- The Gold Coast (now known as Ghana);
- Sierra Leone;
- The Gambia.

The Armed Forces in the British West African colonies were under the control of the individual colonies following the First World War. An Inspector General of African Colonial Forces was appointed to oversee their training and act as military adviser to the colonial governments. H.Q. Military Forces West Africa was formed on 7 July 1940 with the arrival of Lieutenant General GIFFARD and one staff officer. The headquarters were established on 15 July near Accra. His task was the defence of all West African territories and co-ordination of all Military resources in these Colonies.

G.H.Q. West Africa Command was formed in Nigeria with effect from 10 December 1941. It had under command the:

- Nigeria Area;
- Gold Coast Area;
- Sierra Leone Area;
- Gambia Area.

During the war, the main role of the command was to defend the British colonies against possible incursion from the neighbouring Vichy French states, and to raise two infantry divisions to be deployed in Burma. The 81<sup>st</sup> (West Africa) Infantry Division was raised on 1 March 1943, leaving for India on 9 July. The 82<sup>nd</sup> (West Africa) Infantry Division was raised on 1 August 1943 and left for India on 27 May 1944. Both fought with distinction in the Arakan under command of XV Indian Corps, confirming General GIFFARD's belief in the value of West African soldiers in combat.

With the cessation of hostilities in the Far East, neither division was deployed in Malaya or the Netherland East Indies, with the 81<sup>st</sup> Division remaining in India and the 82<sup>nd</sup> Division in Burma. A shortage of shipping delayed their return home, so it was not until May 1946 that the 81<sup>st</sup> (W.A.) Division returned to West Africa. It was disbanded formally soon afterwards. The 82<sup>nd</sup> (W.A.) Division followed shortly afterwards also disbanding on its arrival back home.

West Africa Command continued in existence after the war until the four colonies were granted independence. The Gold Coast was the first West African colony to gain independence on 6 March 1957, when it was renamed Ghana. Nigeria gained independence on 1 October 1960, Sierra Leone on 27 April 1961 and Gambia on 18 February 1965.

**General Officer Commanding**7<sup>th</sup> July 1940 – 9<sup>th</sup> December 1941

Lieutenant General Sir George James GIFFARD, K.C.B., D.S.O.

**General Officer Commanding-in-Chief**10<sup>th</sup> December 1941 – 25<sup>th</sup> March 1943

Lieutenant General Sir George James GIFFARD, K.C.B., D.S.O.

26<sup>th</sup> March 1943 – 4<sup>th</sup> January 1945Lieutenant General Francis Poitier NOSWORTHY, C.B., D.S.O.\*, M.C.\*, *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.*<sup>1</sup>5<sup>th</sup> January 1945 – July 1946Lieutenant General (Temporary) Montagu Brocas BURROWS, C.B., D.S.O., M.C., *p.s.c.*July 1946 – 16<sup>th</sup> July 1948Lieutenant General (Temporary) Noel Mackintosh Stuart IRWIN, C.B., D.S.O.\*\*, M.C., *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.*17<sup>th</sup> June 1948 – 9<sup>th</sup> May 1951

Lieutenant General Cameron Gordon Graham NICHOLSON, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O.\*, M.C.

10<sup>th</sup> May 1951 – 25<sup>th</sup> November 1953

Lieutenant General Lashmer Gordon WHISTLER, C.B., D.S.O.

25<sup>th</sup> November 1953 – 30<sup>th</sup> June 1956Lieutenant General Edwin Otway HERBERT, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O.<sup>2</sup>**Military Advisor, West Africa**1<sup>st</sup> August 1956 – 25<sup>th</sup> February 1958

Lieutenant General Charles Douglas PACKARD, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O.

**Chief of Staff (or Major General, General Staff)**9<sup>th</sup> May 1941 – 19<sup>th</sup> February 1943

Major General (Acting) Edward Brian Berkley HAWKINS, D.S.O., O.B.E.

23<sup>rd</sup> April 1943 – 1944

Major General (Temporary) Edward Brian Berkley HAWKINS, D.S.O., O.B.E.

HINDLEY

24/03/45 – 20/04/45      Acting Major General.

<sup>1</sup> On 1 January 1944, NOSWORTHY was created K.C.B. and knighted.

<sup>2</sup> Promoted Lieutenant General on 16 April 1954, created K.B.E. and knighted in 1955.

**Brigadier General Staff – (B.G.S.)**1941 – 1942

Brigadier J. Y. WHITFIELD

1944

Brigadier Philip Geoffrey WHITEFOORD, O.B.E., M.C.

**Deputy Adjutant and Quarter-Master-General – (D.A. & Q.M.G.)**19<sup>th</sup> July 1940 – 1<sup>st</sup> February 1941

Brigadier (Acting) Frederick Arthur Stanley CLARKE, D.S.O.

2<sup>nd</sup> February 1941 – 31<sup>st</sup> July 1942

Brigadier (Acting) William Henry Alexander BISHOP, O.B.E.

19<sup>th</sup> June 1942 – 17<sup>th</sup> September 1942

Brigadier (Acting) James Francis BENOY, S.Staffs.R.

**Chief Administration Officer (or Brigadier in charge of Administration)**18<sup>th</sup> September 1942 – 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1943

Brigadier (Acting) James Francis BENOY, S.Staffs.R.

1<sup>st</sup> November 1943 – 31<sup>st</sup> December 1943

Brigadier (Temporary) James Francis BENOY, S.Staffs.R.

14<sup>th</sup> October 1943 – 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1945Brigadier (Acting) Geoffrey Bernard Sylvester HINDLEY, O.B.E., *p.s.c.***Assistant Adjutant-General**30<sup>th</sup> October 1940 – 27<sup>th</sup> April 1942Lieutenant Colonel (Acting) Rupert Lionel BROWN, R.E., *p.s.c.***Commander Royal Artillery – (C.R.A.)**17<sup>th</sup> December 1940 – 9<sup>th</sup> August 1941

Colonel (Acting) Henry Wynn DEACON, D.F.C., R.A.

**Brigadier Royal Artillery – (B.R.A.)**19<sup>th</sup> June 1942 – 8<sup>th</sup> April 1943

Brigadier (Acting) Rockingham Conyers GILL, R.A.

9 April 1943 – 13 November 1943*Not known*13 November 1943 – 18 September 1944Colonel (Acting) John BARRON, M.C., *p.s.c.***Fortress Commander**10<sup>th</sup> August 1941 – 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1942

Brigadier (Acting) Henry Wynn DEACON, D.F.C., R.A.

**Chief Engineer – (C.Eng)**

12<sup>th</sup> August 1940 – 24<sup>th</sup> April 1941

Lieutenant Colonel (Acting) William McMahon KEANE, R.E.<sup>3</sup>

17<sup>th</sup> March 1941 – 4<sup>th</sup> July 1942

Colonel (Acting) Cecil John FEARFIELD, M.C., R.E.<sup>4</sup>

2<sup>nd</sup> July 1942 – 5<sup>th</sup> June 1943

Brigadier (Temporary) Thomas Wagstaffe Richard HAYCRAFT, R.E.

14 October 1943 – 27 August 1945

Colonel (Temporary) Hugh Arthur BAKER, M.C., R.E.

1948 – 1950

Brigadier Leslie James JACQUES, C.B.E., M.C.

**Chief Signal Officer – (C.S.O.)****Deputy Director of Medical Services – (D.D.M.S.)**

25<sup>th</sup> August 1940 – 9<sup>th</sup> October 1941

Colonel Robert Bernard PRICE, D.S.O., M.B.

1943 – 20<sup>th</sup> July 1945

Brigadier (Temporary) James Buckley Aquilla WIGMORE, M.D.

**Assistant Director Medical Services, Nigeria.**

30<sup>th</sup> October 1940 – 8<sup>th</sup> October 1941

Colonel Robert Alexander HEPPLER, M.C., M.B.

**Consulting Physician, West African Forces**

1942 – 1946

Brigadier (Acting) George William Marshall FINDLEY, C.B.E., M.D., D.Sc., F.R.C.P.

**Assistant Director of Ordnance Services – (A.D.O.S.)****Deputy Director of Mechanical Engineering**

Colonel CLARKE

**Deputy Director of Movements and Transportation**

13<sup>th</sup> November 1942 – 17<sup>th</sup> March 1943

Colonel (Acting) John Chrysostom Barabas WAKEFORD, A.M.I.Mech.E, R.E.

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<sup>3</sup> Post redesignated from Commander Royal Engineers to Chief Engineer on 18 November 1940.

<sup>4</sup> Promoted Acting Brigadier on 17 March 1942.

**Commandant Nigeria Regiment**

26 August 1936 – 1 July 1939

Temporary Brigadier Douglas Povah DICKINSON,

2<sup>nd</sup> July 1939 – 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1939<sup>5</sup>

Brigadier (Temporary) Gerald Russell SMALLWOOD, M.C., *p.s.c.*

**General Officer Commanding Nigeria Area**

24<sup>th</sup> September 1940 – 8<sup>th</sup> May 1941

Major General (Acting) Edward Brian Barkley HAWKINS, D.S.O., O.B.E.

9<sup>th</sup> May 1941 – 16<sup>th</sup> January 1943

*Not known*

17<sup>th</sup> January 1943 – 28<sup>th</sup> June 1943

Major General (Temporary) Eric Charles HAYES, *p.s.c.*

29<sup>th</sup> June 1943 – 1<sup>st</sup> August 1943 (27<sup>th</sup> May 1944)<sup>6</sup>

Major General (Acting) George McIlree Stanton BRUCE, O.B.E., M.C.

**General Officer Commanding Nigeria District**

June 1946 – 27<sup>th</sup> June 1949

Major General Charles Roger Alan SWYNNERTON, D.S.O.

1949 – 1952

Major General Cecil Benfield FAIRBANKS, C.B., C.B.E.

1952 – 24<sup>th</sup> February 1956

Major General J. H. INGLIS, C.B. C.B.E.

24<sup>th</sup> February 1956 – 13<sup>th</sup> June 1959<sup>7</sup>

Major General Kenneth Godfrey EXHAM, C.B., D.S.O.

**General Officer Commanding Nigerian Military Forces**

13<sup>th</sup> June 1959 – 5<sup>th</sup> June 1962

Temporary Major General N. L. FOSTER, D.S.O.

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<sup>5</sup> On 3 September 1939, the Headquarters Nigeria Regiment formed the 1<sup>st</sup> (Nigeria) Infantry Brigade with Brigadier SMALLWOOD becoming the brigade commander.

<sup>6</sup> On 1 August 1943, the Nigeria Area formed the H.Q. for the 82<sup>nd</sup> (West Africa) Infantry Division. The area commander became the divisional commander. On 1 November 1943, the division assumed responsibility for all formations and units in Nigeria. It left Nigeria on 27 May 1944 bound for India and then Burma.

<sup>7</sup> From 1 April 1958, this appointment was remunerated by Nigeria and known as GOC Nigerian Military Forces.



**Commandant Gold Coast Regiment**

1936 – 1937

Lieutenant Colonel D. S. MARCHANT, M.C.

13<sup>th</sup> October 1936 – 31<sup>st</sup> July 1939

Colonel (Local) Michael Arthur GREEN, O.B.E., M.C.

14<sup>th</sup> June 1939 – September 1940<sup>8</sup>

Brigadier Collen Edward Melville RICHARDS, C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C.

**Commanding Officer Gold Coast Area**

16<sup>th</sup> July 1940 – 1<sup>st</sup> February 1941

Brigadier (Acting) Thomas Reginald PRICE, D.S.O., M.C.

2<sup>nd</sup> February 1941 – 9<sup>th</sup> October 1941

Brigadier (Temporary) Frederick Arthur Stanley CLARKE, D.S.O.

29<sup>th</sup> December 1941 – 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1942<sup>9</sup>

Brigadier (Acting) Neil Dewar RICE.<sup>10</sup>

1945 – 1946

Brigadier James Alfred DANIEL, C.I.E., D.S.O., M.C.

1946 – 1947

Brigadier Peter John JEFFREYS, D.S.O., O.B.E.

1947 – 1949

Brigadier Geoffrey Bernard Sylvester HINDLEY, O.B.E.

**Commanding Officer Sierra Leone Area**

19<sup>th</sup> July 1940 – 30<sup>th</sup> November 1940 (3<sup>rd</sup> April 1941)<sup>11</sup>

Brigadier (Temporary) Michael Arthur GREEN, O.B.E., M.C.

**General Officer Commanding Sierra Leone**

30<sup>th</sup> November 1940 – 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1943<sup>12</sup>

Major General (Acting) Christopher Geoffrey WOOLNER, C.B., M.C.

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<sup>8</sup> Redesignated as the 4<sup>th</sup> (Gold Coast) Infantry Brigade in September 1939. The brigade left the Gold Coast on 1 June 1940 by sea for East Africa. It was redesignated as the 24<sup>th</sup> (Gold Coast) Brigade on 18 October 1940.

<sup>9</sup> On 3 March 1942, the Area formed the 5<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Infantry Brigade, with the Area Commander becoming the first Commanding Officer. The brigade moved to Nigeria in March 1943 and left for India on 6 August 1943.

<sup>10</sup> RICE was promoted to the rank of Acting Brigadier on 22 August 1941. On 3 March 1942, he assumed command of the 5<sup>th</sup> (W.A.) Infantry Brigade. He relinquished command on 8 October 1942. It is not known whether he resumed command of the Gold Coast Area.

<sup>11</sup> On 3 April 1941, it was redesignated as 6<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Infantry Brigade. Brigadier GREEN remained in command until 25 November 1941.

<sup>12</sup> The H.Q. of 81<sup>st</sup> (West Africa) Infantry Division was formed in Nigeria on 3 March 1943. Area Commander became the GOC of the new infantry division. The 81<sup>st</sup> (W.A.) Division left West Africa by sea on 9 July 1943 bound for India and then Burma.

**Commanding Officer Gambia Area**19<sup>th</sup> December 1940 – 28<sup>th</sup> December 1941Colonel (Acting) Neil Dewar RICE<sup>13</sup>**General Officer Commanding The Gambia**29<sup>th</sup> December 1941 – 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1943

Major General (Temporary) Charles George PHILLIPS, D.S.O.\*, M.C.

**General Officer Commanding The Gambia and Sierra Leone**4<sup>th</sup> March 1943 – 1944

Major General (Temporary) Charles George PHILLIPS, D.S.O.\*, M.C.

1944 – 1946Major General Richard Lawrence BOND, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C., *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.*

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<sup>13</sup> RICE was promoted to the rank of Acting Brigadier on the 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1941. He moved to the Gold Coast in late 1941.

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

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#### **Services of British Army Officers & cc 1939 – 1945**

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#### **Orders of Battle Second World War 1939-1945**

Prepared by Lieut-Col H. F. JOSLEN

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[ISBN 0 948130 03 2]

#### **The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force**

Authors: Colonel A. HAYWOOD, C.M.G., C.B.E., D.S.O. and Brigadier F. A. S. CLARKE, D.S.O.

Published: Gale and Polden, Aldershot 1964