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A CONCISE HISTORY OF:

BRITISH TROOPS IN THE SUDAN (HISTORY & PERSONNEL)

A short history of the British Troops in The Sudan from 1930 until 1950, and details of the key appointments held within British Troops in The Sudan during that period.

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A Concise History of the British Troops in The Sudan (History & Personnel)

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British Troops in the Sudan

British Troops in the Sudan was a pre-war command in the British Army. In 1898, the country was made a protectorate of the United Kingdom. This was a response to the increasing power of the Mahdi in the Sudan, and the perceived threat to the Suez Canal. The Mahdists had seized Khartoum in 1885 resulting in the death of General GORDON, and the British had responded militarily leading the Mahdist war between 1881 and 1899. The United Kingdom took control of the Sudan in 1899 following the Battle of Omdurman on 2 September 1898 establishing Anglo-Egyptian Sudan as a condominium whereby both Egypt and United Kingdom shared political administration. In effect, as the United Kingdom dominated Egyptian politics, the United Kingdom ruled the Sudan as a British colony. The Sudan contained two main ethnic groups, the Muslim Arab population in the north of the country and the Christian south. The British effectively administered the country as two separate states from 1924 onwards.

After the Great War (First World War), British Troops in The Sudan was a subsidiary command from British Troops in Egypt for the purposes of administration. The period immediately after the First World War was characterized by a significant rise in Egyptian and Sudanese independence movements, with rioting in both countries. On 19 November 1924, the Governor-General of Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, Sir Lee Oliver Fitzmaurice STACK was assassinated in Cairo. The assassination of STACK led to increased tension between the British government and the Egyptian government. One of the demands of the British government was the withdrawal of all Egyptian officers and Egyptian Army units from the Sudan. This withdraw of Egyptian personnel from the Sudan took place in 1924 and 1925. In January 1925, Geoffrey Francis ARCHER a civilian governor was appointed as the Governor-General of the Sudan.

To replace the Egyptian officers and armed forces in the Sudan, a locally recruited armed police or militia, the Sudan Defence Force was formed in 1925. The officers and senior non-commissioned officers were British personnel seconded from their regiments or corps to the Sudan Defence Force (S.D.F.). To form the S.D.F., about one-hundred and forty British personnel transferred from the Egyptian Army to the S.D.F.. The Sudan Defence Force was recruited and maintained to ensure internal security in the country, which itself was a protectorate of Egypt.

In addition, some British infantry battalions were posted to the Sudan. The General Officer Commanding The Sudan also held the post as Commandant of The Sudan Defence Force, known locally as 'The Kaid'. In the 1930's, the commandant of the Sudan Defence Force was a Temporary Brigadier, who held the rank of Local Major General. He had a Colonel as General Staff Officer 1st Grade and fourteen other staff officers, which had reduced to nine by 1937. The British Troops in The Sudan had a staff of only one Brigade Major and a Staff Captain. Two infantry battalions were stationed in Khartoum, the capital of The Sudan, with small detachments from the supporting arms and services.

The staff of the Sudan Defence Force was slightly larger, with the following officers:

- General Staff Officer 2nd Grade;
- General Staff Officer 3rd Grade for Weapons Training;
- General Staff Officer 3rd Grade (Intelligence);
- Staff Captain;
- Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quarter-Master-General;
- Deputy Assistant Adjutant General;
- Deputy Assistant Quarter-Master-General;
- Deputy Assistant Director of Supplies and Transport;
- Director of Pay and Records

At the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939, there were three British Regular Army battalions stationed in The Sudan. These were;

- 1st Bn. The Worcestershire Regiment;
- 2nd Bn. The Cheshire Regiment (a machine gun battalion);
- 2nd Bn. The York and Lancaster Regiment.

By January 1940, the 2nd Cheshires and 2nd Y & L Regiment had both moved to the Delta region of Egypt, to be replaced by the 2nd Bn. The West Yorkshire Regiment from Palestine and the 1st Bn. The Essex Regiment from Egypt. The declaration of war by Italy on the United Kingdom placed General WAVELL, General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Middle East Command, under pressure from the Prime Minister Winston CHURCHILL for offensive action decided to attack and secure Eritrea and Abyssinia to remove the threat Italian East Africa posed, both on land and to the shipping lanes down the Red Sea.

The 5th Indian Division arrived by sea from India in September 1940, arriving at Port Sudan. It deployed to the border region, and series of probing attacks took place. As this division only had two brigades, the three British battalions in the Sudan were absorbed into that formation. The 4th Indian Division arrived from Egypt in early January 1941. The 5th and 11th Brigades were deployed in the border region, but the 7th Indian Infantry Brigade was detached to advance down the coast into Eritrea. With the increase in troops deployed in The Sudan, and the presence of two divisional formations, the General Officer Commanding The Sudan was raised in status to that of Commander-in-Chief and the incumbent, Major General PLATT, was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant General.

The advance into Eritrea commenced on 19 January 1941, and rapid progress was made initially. On 2 February 1941, Gazelle Force reached the Keren heights, where the Italians made formed a strong defensive position guarding the route through the pass. The battle for Keren opened on 4 February 1941, but the Indian and British troops met fierce and determined resistance. The Keren position was not captured until 27 March 1941, when the pass through the mountains was forced and the Italians withdrew.

The 4th Indian Division returned to Egypt in mid-April 1941, but the 5th Indian Division remained to drive southwards to meet up with the South Africans. The Indians, British and South Africans launched a coordinated attack on the Toselli Pass on 13 May 1941 that resulted in the surrender of the main elements of the Italian Army in East Africa on 19 May. Following the defeat of the Italian Army in East Africa, the British Troops in the Sudan reverted to that of a backwater. Immediately after the defeat of the Italian Army, a separate military area was created called the Eritrea District in order to administer the former Italian territory. The Commander-in-Chief post was downgraded with the departure of Lieutenant General BERESFORD-PEIRSE for India. His replacement, Major General ERSKINE had the title of General Officer Commanding British Troops in The Sudan and Eritrea and Commandant of the Sudan Defence Force.

A garrison was maintained in the Sudan and also the occupied territory of Eritrea. Eritrea remained under the mandate of the United Kingdom until 1951, when it was federated with the neighbouring country of Ethiopia. The Sudan, which for so long had been politically linked to Egypt as a Protectorate gained full independence in 1956. The last British Troops, the 1st Bn. The Royal Leicestershire Regiment, left The Sudan on 16 August 1955.

Major General Commanding the Troops and Commandant of the Sudan Defence Force

?? – 10th November 1938

Major General Harold E FRANKLYN, D.S.O., M.C.

11th November 1938 – 6th January 1941

Major General William PLATT, C.B., D.S.O., *p.s.c.*

Assistant Commandant

20th May 1938 – 1940

Brigadier (Local) R. G. W. H. STONE, D.S.O., M.C., *p.s.c.*

General Officer Commanding-in-Chief

7th January 1941 – 4th October 1941

Lieutenant General William PLATT, C.B., D.S.O.

4th October 1941 – 3rd April 1942

Lieutenant General (Acting) Sir Noel Monson De La Poer BERESFORD-PEIRSE, K.B.E., D.S.O., *p.s.c.*

General Officer Commanding The Sudan and Eritrea, and Commandant the Sudan Defence Force

4th April 1942 – 4th May 1942 (Temporary)

Major General (Acting) Ian David ERSKINE, D.S.O., *p.s.c.*

11th May 1942 – 23 November 1943

Major General Balfour Oliphant HUTCHINSON, C.B., C.B.E., *p.s.c.*

24 November 1943 – 24 January 1944 (Temporary)

[Major General \(Acting\) Alec Wellesley HOLBROOK, M.C., *p.s.c.*](#)

25 January 1944 – 14th May 1945

Major General William Havelock Chaplin RAMSDEN, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C.

15th May 1945 – 1948

Major General William Donovan STAMER, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C.

General Officer Commanding The Sudan and Commandant the Sudan Defence Force

1st June 1948 - 9th May 1950

Major General Lashmer Gordon WHISTLER, C.B., D.S.O. **

9th May 1950 – 1954

Major General Sir Reginald Laurence SCOONES, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O.

General Officer Commanding Eritrea11th October 1941 – January 1942

Major General Reginald Arthur SAVORY, D.S.O., M.C., Indian Army

Eritrea Area5th May 1942 – 31st July 1943Brigadier (Temporary) Cyrus GREENSLADE, C.B.E., *p.s.c.***19 Area & Commanding Officer, 2nd Brigade Sudan Defence Force**1st August 1943 – 18th May 1944Brigadier (Temporary) Cyrus GREENSLADE, C.B.E., *p.s.c.*31st May 1944 – 1946

Brigadier Hector Robert Hume GREENFIELD

Officer Commanding Eritrea District1946 – 1947

Brigadier Nigel Prior Henson TAPP, D.S.O.

Brigadier General Staff – (B.G.S.)

18th August 1940 – 16th October 1941

Brigadier (Local) Ronald MacKenzie SCOBIE, M.C., *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.*

1941 – 12th March 1942

Brigadier (Temporary) James Wilfred Lang Stanley HOBART, D.S.O., M.C., *p.s.c.*

13th March 1942 – 3rd April 1942

Brigadier (Temporary) Ian David ERSKINE, D.S.O., *p.s.c.*

4th April 1942 – 4th May 1942

5th May 1942 – 18th February 1943

Brigadier (Temporary) Ian David ERSKINE, D.S.O., *p.s.c.*

General Staff Officer 2nd Grade

1st July 1939 – 1940

Lieutenant Colonel (Local) G. F. H. STAYNER, Leicester R., *p.s.c.*

Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quarter-Master-General

20th January 1938 – 1940

Lieutenant Colonel (Local) N. F. PENRUDDOCKE, R.A.S.C.

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

12th February 1941 – 15th March 1942

Brigadier (Acting) George SURTEES, C.B.E., M.C., *p.s.c.*¹

16th March 1942 – 4th May 1942

Brigadier (Temporary) Cyrus GREENSLADE, C.B.E., *p.s.c.*

Assistant Quarter-Master-General

1941 – 1942

Colonel Charles Edward Francis TURNER,

Chief Engineer – (C.Eng.)

6th October 1940 – 25th February 1942

Brigadier (Acting) George Frederick Hill ALMS, O.B.E., *p.s.c.*

Deputy Chief Engineer

5th November 1940 – 3rd November 1941

Colonel (Acting) Eric Estberg READ, M.C., R.E.

Deputy Director of Works

5th October 1940 – 19th April 1942

Colonel Serald John ARMSTRONG, O.B.E., M.C.

¹ Awarded the C.B.E. on 30th December 1941

Chief Signal Officer – (C.S.O.)16th September 1940 – 6th June 1942

Colonel (Acting) Ralph JEE, M.C., R.Signals

1st April 1942 – 20th June 1943

Colonel (Temporary) Harold Mayris SYLVESTER, M.C., R.Signals.

Deputy Assistant Director of Supplies and Transport9th March 1938 – 30th August 1940

Lieutenant Colonel (Local) C. O. HENFREY, A.M.I.Mech.E., R.A.S.C.

Assistant Director of Supplies and Transport – (A.D.S.T.)31st August 1940 – 22nd December 1941Lieutenant Colonel (Temporary) James Knox GILLESPIE, R.A.S.C.²

² Promoted Acting Colonel in post on the 20th January 1941. Absent serving in Palestine between the 26th April and 27th August 1941.

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