

The British Army 1939–45 (2)

Middle East & Mediterranean



Martin J Brayley • Illustrated by Mike Chappell

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Series editor Martin Windrow

First published in Great Britain in 2002 by Osprey Publishing
Elms Court, Chapel Way, Botley, Oxford OX2 9LP, United Kingdom.
Email: info@ospreypublishing.com

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ISBN 1 84176 237 7

Editor: Martin Windrow
Design: Alan Hamp
Index by Alan Rutter
Originated by Magnet Harlequin, Uxbridge, UK
Printed in China through World Print Ltd.

02 03 04 05 06 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

FOR A CATALOGUE OF ALL BOOKS PUBLISHED BY
OSPREY MILITARY AND AVIATION PLEASE CONTACT:

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Wellingborough, Northants, NN8 2FA, United Kingdom.**
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www.ospreypublishing.com

Author's Note

For brevity and to avoid repetition, where formations were composed of British, Commonwealth and Allied forces the term 'British' has been used. Where Commonwealth units operated independently or require specific mention the national identity is used. 'British' can therefore be understood in context as including Canadian, Australian, Indian, New Zealand, South African, Greek, French, Polish and attached units under British command, but is in no way meant to detract from the individual contributions made by these nations.

While this volume gives much space to a summary of the operations undertaken in the theatre, it is part of a three-volume set, the whole being designed as a concise reference to the British Army of World War II. Readers should refer to the first volume, MAA 354 *The British Army 1939-45 (1): North-West Europe* for material on basic formation and unit organisation; arms and services; Service Dress, Battledress and Denim uniform; personal equipment; and a range of weapons. More detail on insignia will be found in MAA 187, *British Battle Insignia (2): 1939-45*, and on personal equipment in MAA 108 (Revised), *British Infantry Equipments (2): 1908-2000*.

Acknowledgements

Captain Marco Belogi, Italian Geographical Military Institute; Toby Brayley; Mike Chappell; Robert F. Stedman; WO Storey, Royal Canadian Engineers; Brian Schultz & estate of TSgt V.P. Shultz; Martin Windrow.

THE BRITISH ARMY 1939-45 (2)

MIDDLE EAST AND MEDITERRANEAN



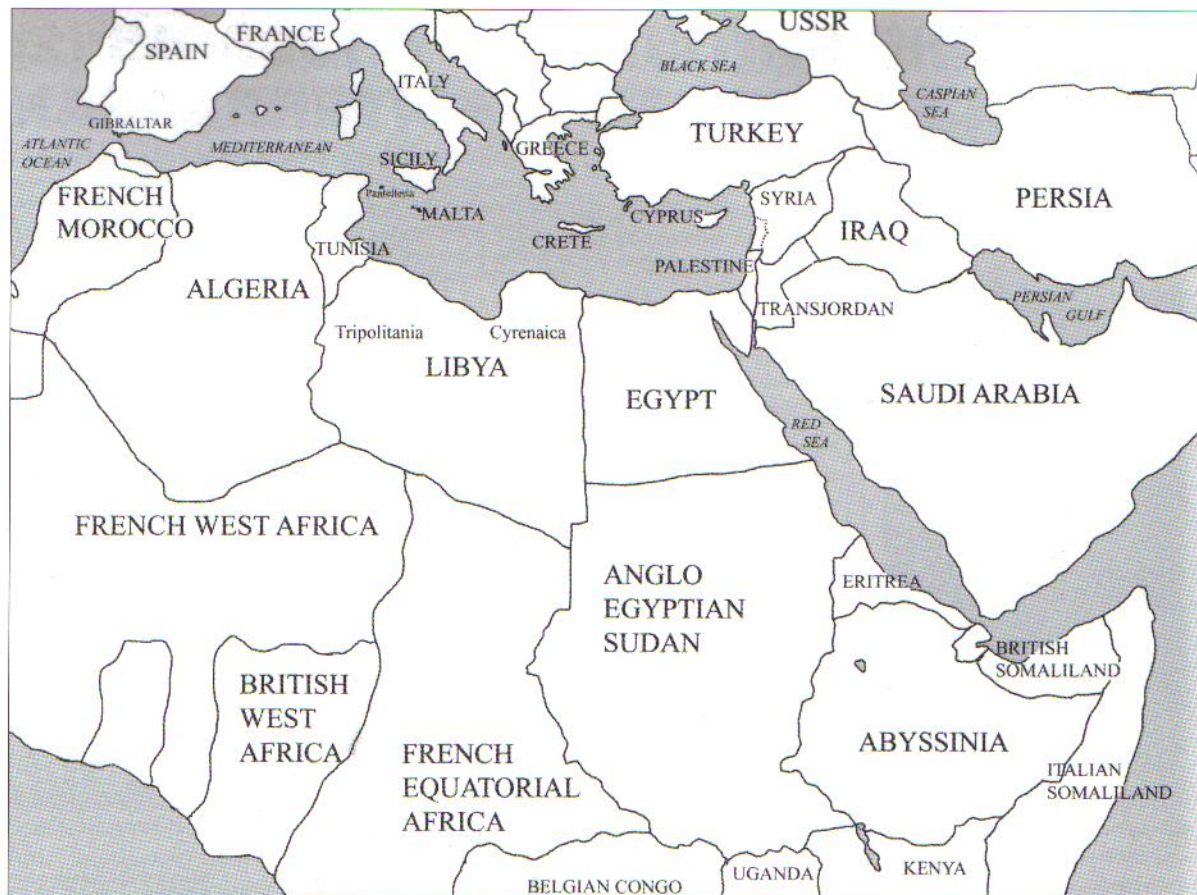
'Gideon Force' was responsible for a daring guerrilla campaign which re-established Emperor Haile Selassie as ruler of Abyssinia in 1940. It was made up of 800 local troops along with 800 from the Sudan Frontier Force and 70 British officers and NCOs. Here Lt.Col.Orde Wingate inspects a 'patriot' of the 2nd Ethiopian Bn armed with a .30-06 P17 rifle. Of note is the lightweight pullover with suede reinforcement on the shoulder - a garment normally associated with the Royal West African Frontier Force, but seen in use with many African regiments by both British and native personnel. Wingate wears a Woiseley sun helmet adorned with the RA red-and-blue diamond.

INTRODUCTION

FROM JUNE 1940 TO JUNE 1944 the Middle East and Mediterranean theatres were the only arena in which British armies could take the ground war to the German Wehrmacht. Despite the relatively modest size of the forces initially committed, the strategic importance of the campaigns was considerable: these troops knocked Italy out of the war, and barred Germany's path to the Suez Canal, the Middle East oilfields, and a new southern front in the USSR via Persia (Iran) and Turkey. These campaigns were also the furnace in which the British Army was tempered for the final decisive campaign in NW Europe in 1944-45.

In August 1939 **Middle East Command** was activated in Cairo, with Gen.Wavell as Commander-in-Chief Middle East. The command was to become massive, sprawling across the Mediterranean, Middle East and Africa to include Egypt, the Sudan, Aden, Transjordan, Palestine and Cyprus, and later Abyssinia, British Somaliland, Libya (Cyrenaica and Tripolitania), the Dodecanese, Kenya, Tanganyika, Nyasaland, and Northern Rhodesia. The command was also responsible for forces operating in Greece, Syria, Persia and Iraq; and during spring 1942 Malta also came under temporary command. These vast responsibilities were undertaken with only limited resources. Wavell received little material support for his operations, which in spring 1941 covered three simultaneous campaigns in the Western Desert, Greece and East Africa. Early victories were later marred by defeats due to the shortage of troops, who had been dispersed to mount operations in Greece and Crete and later Iraq and Syria.

Following the replacement of Wavell by Gen.Auchinleck in July 1941 the material and manpower situation was partially resolved, and the responsibility lightened by restructuring of the command; political support was also more forthcoming than it had been under Wavell, since on a personal level he and Prime Minister Winston Churchill had failed to achieve much more than mutual detestation. Auchinleck's period of command was marked by the mixture of achievement and disappointment which was to be expected in any theatre of war. His planning and execution of Operation 'Crusader' in November 1941 relieved Tobruk; but this was soon followed by defeat at Gazala in January-February 1942. He repulsed Rommel, but did not drive him back, on the El Alamein line in July and August. Churchill regretfully replaced 'the Auk' with Gen.Alexander in August 1942. Alexander saw the campaign through to its victorious conclusion; he received the admiration and respect of Churchill, who failed to acknowledge fully the important contributions of Wavell and Auchinleck. General Maitland



Map of Middle East Command and Headquarters Allied Land Forces areas. At various times during its campaigns MEC had responsibility for operations in much of the Mediterranean, North Africa and Middle East from Libya in the west to Somaliland in the east and Persia in the north. The invasion of North Africa in November 1942 saw HQ Allied Land Forces assume responsibility for the newly liberated Vichy territories of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia and later Sicily and Italy.

Wilson replaced Alexander in February 1943 when the latter was made Deputy Supreme Allied Commander and commander of land forces under Eisenhower. Wilson was himself replaced in January 1944 by Gen. Paget; by this stage the importance of MEC as a combat command had greatly declined.

The Allied landings in French North Africa in November 1942 (Operation 'Torch') came under the command of **Allied Forces HQ**, headed by the American Gen. Eisenhower, which controlled forces in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. British troops who had fought across the Western Desert under MEC transferred to AFHQ control when they crossed into Tunisia. Later AFHQ was responsible for the invasion of Sicily and operations on the Italian mainland.

British Armies involved in Middle East & Mediterranean operations

1st Army Formed in Britain for the invasion of French North Africa in 1942; composed of V and IX Corps; fought in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, under command of Gen. Anderson.

8th Army Formed in 1941 from the Army of the Nile; composed of XIII and XXX Corps plus Commonwealth formations; fought in the Western Desert, Tunisia, Sicily and Italy, progressively augmented by X & V British, I Canadian, II New Zealand and II Polish Corps; originally commanded by Gen. Cunningham, from November 1941 by Gen. Ritchie, from June

1942 by Gen.Auchinleck in person, from August 1942 by Gen.Montgomery, from January 1944 by Gen.Leese, and from October 1944 by Gen.McCreery.

9th Army Formed in 1941 in the Middle East in anticipation of German attacks; supplied replacements to 8th Army.

10th Army Formed in 1941 in the Middle East; composed of British and Indian troops; quelled the Iraqi rebellion, before moving against the Axis in Persia; provided the bulk of 'PAIFORCE' units with responsibility for Persia, Iraq and Syria.

12th Army Originally formed in the Middle East from British IV Corps and Indian XXXIII Corps, for operations in the Mediterranean and Operation 'Husky'. Re-formed in May 1945 for operations in Burma.

* * *

The campaigns covered by this book were fought in diverse terrain and climates, from arid desert to snow-clad mountains, from searing hot to icy cold and wet.

The Western Desert generally lacked major features, with even small rises in ground level being named 'hills' and used for navigation; elsewhere hills and even mountain ranges were classified as desert due to their poor water retention. The ground itself could vary from soft sand to rock-strewn dust and gravel, and the bedrock was often so close beneath the surface that 'digging in' was virtually impossible. These extremes of terrain could present problems of movement off designated and cleared routes; boulder fields or soft sand were almost, and sometimes completely impassable, although movement was generally good and obstacles normally negotiable. Cover and concealment in flat desert terrain could be very limited, generally restricted to low depressions, *wadis* (dry water courses) and purpose-built defensive positions. Apart from camelthorn, vegetation was almost non-existent except in the immediate vicinity of the limited water sources. The greatest problems associated with desert campaigning were, obviously, the heat, lack of water, and dust. Heat affected personnel and equipment; sunburn, dehydration and heat exhaustion were constant threats to the troops, while equipment was susceptible to damage from extremes of temperature and the ever-present grit which abraded machinery and jammed weapons.

It may be surprising to learn that torrential rain is in some regions of North Africa a feature of the winter months, which are frequently cold and subject to occasional snowfall even on low-lying areas; however, this does little to improve the terrain, merely providing short-term obstacles in the form of flooded *wadis* and mud. Cold rain and clogging mud were



A classic view of the terrain of Egypt's Western Desert, 1940, with a troop of British light tanks keeping a rendezvous with a troop of A9 Cruisers. (Imperial War Museum E438)



'After a blizzard': an image that could have been taken during the European winter of 1944/45 – but these tanned Tommies, well wrapped against the cold, are in the Western Desert, c.1942. Wool BD is worn with a mix of leather jerkins and greatcoats, cap comforters and FS caps. The blown snow against the building suggests that a decent wind accompanied this fall. (R.F.Stedman Collection)

Italian Somaliland, 1941. In the village of Kismayu a British officer examines part of a huge haul of arms and ammunition left behind by the retreating Italians. Such losses were hard to make up; wherever possible weapons and munitions were destroyed rather than being allowed to fall into enemy hands. This haul would have helped to arm Somali irregulars.



particularly characteristic of the Tunisian winter campaign of 1942/43, fought in a Mediterranean rather than a desert geography and climate.

With the move to Italy the open expanses of the Western Desert were replaced by narrow coastal plains flanking the Apennine Mountains, which were baking hot and shrouded in choking dust in summer, but were deluged with rain in winter. The rain turned unmetalled roads into impassable mud which brought to a halt any major offensives. In the mountains themselves the troops faced appalling conditions, clinging to the bare rock under lashing, icy rain, and crawling up and down precipitous tracks which were soon reduced to mud-slides.

List of campaigns & key battles

Abyssinia 1940–41: Keren, Amba Alagi, The Juba, Gondar

British Somaliland 1940

Iraq 1941

Syria 1941: Damascus, Damour

North Africa 1940–43: Sidi Barrani, Bardia 1941, Capture of Tobruk, Beda Fomm, Defence of Tobruk 1941, Gazala, Mersah Matruh, Defence of Alamein Line, Alam El Halfa, El Alamein, Medenine, Mareth, Tebaga Gap, Wadi Akarit, Enfidaville, Tebourba Gap, Bou Aradi, Kasserine, Fondouk, Oued Zarga, El Kourzia, Medjez Plain, Tunis

Sicily 1943: Landing in Sicily, Adrano

Italy 1943–45: The Sangro, Salerno, Capture of Naples, Volturno Crossing, Monte Camino, Garagliano Crossing, Anzio, Cassino 1 & 2, Liri Valley, Rome, Trasimene Line, Arezzo, Advance to Florence, Gothic Line, Coriano, Lamone Crossing, Rimini Line, The Senio, Argenta Gap, Bologna

Greece 1941: Mount Olympus

Greece 1944–45

Middle East 1941–44: Crete 1941, Malta 1940–42

CAMPAIGN SUMMARY

This summary provides a brief account of the areas of conflict in alphabetical order, including the lesser-known regions which came within the sphere of control of Middle East Command or were otherwise involved in operations.

Aden A British protectorate and coaling port covering the Gulf of Aden linking the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, it figured in operations only as a staging area from which troops were despatched to Somaliland in 1941.

Abyssinia, Eritrea & Somaliland Operations in this region, collectively termed the East African campaign, were a direct result of Italy's entry into

the war on 10 June 1940. Italian territories in East Africa consisted of Abyssinia (Ethiopia), which had been invaded and annexed in 1936, Eritrea, and Italian Somaliland¹.

Enclosed by these Axis countries on the Gulf of Aden lay British Somaliland and French Somaliland, the latter undefended. To the south and west of the Italian territories lay British-garrisoned Kenya and Sudan. On 4 August 1940, 26 battalions of Italian troops, from an available force totalling over 200,000 men, invaded British and French Somaliland. Heavily outnumbered British units (including African and Indian troops and the Somaliland Camel Corps) fought a five-day delaying action, during which the Black Watch put up a spirited defence at Barkasan; most of the 1,500 defenders were then evacuated by sea. This gave the Italians a dominant position on the Red Sea coast and, despite a strong Royal Navy presence, further endangered shipping routes from the Mediterranean to the Middle East and Indian Ocean. This success seemed to fulfil Mussolini's need for conquest in the region.

Regaining lost ground and strengthening the British presence on the Red Sea became a prime objective for the British C-in-C Middle East, Gen. Wavell. Due to the limited resources available the minor offensive operations undertaken during the latter part of 1940 did not produce any significant results; it was not until early 1941 that sufficient troops (mainly of 4th & 5th Indian, 11th & 12th African and 1st South African Divs) had been mustered for a significant thrust into Italian territory. In January Eritrea was invaded, followed by Italian Somaliland in February. Italian troops in Eritrea put up a good defence under Gen. Frusci, but despite holding out at Keren for most of February and March they were eventually defeated at Massawa on 8 April. In the south, forces advancing from Kenya into Italian Somaliland met less resistance and by mid-March had advanced into Abyssinia almost as far as the border with British Somaliland, taking the capital Addis Ababa on 6 April. The governor-general of Italian East Africa, the Duke of Aosta, held the north-west of Abyssinia until, surrounded, he was defeated on 17 May. It was not until 28 November that the gallant resistance of isolated Italian units was finally crushed.

Cyprus The island lies at the far eastern end of the Mediterranean, and this location denied it a major role; although the Axis made plans for its invasion they were never implemented. It was reinforced by an infantry battalion in May 1941 at the time of the Syria-Lebanon operations, but was essentially used only as a training, reserve and rest area for troops. The RAF established bases for covering convoy routes

Looking remarkably orderly, troops line up ready for embarkation during the debacle of spring 1941 which saw Allied soldiers evacuated first from the Greek mainland, only to be evacuated once again from Crete following the overwhelming German airborne invasion. General Wavell was forced to transfer these troops from the Western Desert at a time when he could ill spare them; yet higher authorities were quick to lay blame when his operations against the Afrika Korps consequently faltered due to lack of manpower and armour.



¹ See also MAA 309, *The Italian Invasion of Abyssinia 1935-36*, and MAA 349, *The Italian Army 1940-45 (2): Africa 1940-43*.

in the eastern Mediterranean, but geography limited their effective area of coverage. Limited operations against the Aegean were mounted from Cyprus.

Gibraltar A vast outcrop of rock situated on the southern tip of Spain, Gibraltar had been a British fortress guarding the narrow gateway to the Mediterranean since 1704. From the outbreak of war Axis-sympathising Spain was a constant threat to its security, less as a military power than as a base for German agents who could monitor all shipping movements. Had Spain joined the Axis Gibraltar would have been indefensible, and its subsequent loss would have been catastrophic for operations in the Mediterranean. The Axis made many air raids on the port installations; a number of attacks by Italian divers were also mounted from neutral Spain; and following the British attack on the French fleet at Mers-el-Kebir in July 1940, the French Armée de l'Air made reprisal attacks. Although geographically tiny Gibraltar provided an important air and naval base, as well as a platform for large coastal guns which covered the narrows between 'the Rock' and Spanish Morocco. A vast storage and barracks area including fuel tanks and a communications centre was constructed within the rock, linking and enlarging many of the natural caves. The debris from these works was used to extend the runway which lay across the narrow promontory between Gibraltar and Spain; this later provided a base for over 600 aircraft during Operation 'Torch'. These Allied landings in November 1942 added considerably to the security of Gibraltar, and the capitulation of Italy in September 1943 ensured its invulnerability. Until the Allies landed in Italy Gibraltar was their only foothold on mainland Western Europe.

Greece & Crete On 19 October 1940 Mussolini attacked Greece in an effort to occupy the mainland and Greek islands as a base for operations in the Middle East. The Italian forces were surprised by the tenacity of the small Greek army, which first held and then pushed back the invaders. The Germans were soon embarrassed into committing forces in support

of the Italians, assisted to some degree by Hungary and Bulgaria – which allowed German divisions to cross their borders – by Romania, and by the then pro-Axis regime in Yugoslavia. Under this overwhelming threat Greece called for British assistance, but troops were not realistically available: those in Britain were guarding against a possible German invasion, and those in Egypt were exhausted after their recent triumphs over the Italians in the Western Desert. In February 1941, however, the War Cabinet decided, as a gesture of

Men of 2nd Independent Para Bde man a Vickers MMG during Operation 'Manna', Athens, January 1945; to judge by the amount of 7.92mm ammunition and the MG34 saddle magazines lying about in this position, it had previously been used by ELAS guerrillas. The trooper at left wears the issue khaki pullover; 'Trousers, Parachutist', identified by their distinctive expanding left thigh pocket, and worn over 'ammo boots' without web anklets or puttees; and a scarf made from camouflaged parachute fabric. Under magnification a diamond-shaped tartan patch can be seen behind the silver Parachute Regt badge on his maroon beret, identifying 5th (Scottish) Battalion.



solidarity, to detach an armoured brigade (from 2nd Armd Div) and two infantry divisions (6th Australian and the New Zealand Div) as an expeditionary force from the Army of the Nile, sending them to Greece during March and April (Operation 'Lustre').

On 6 April 1941 German motorised forces invaded both Greece and Yugoslavia, where an anti-Axis government had recently taken over. The token Commonwealth expeditionary force of 57,000 men was doomed to failure, and a few weeks after their arrival over 43,000 men were evacuated (Operation 'Demon') under skies largely ruled by the Luftwaffe.

As their country fell to the Axis the Greek government and many of these troops withdrew to the Greek island of Crete, which had been occupied by the British in October 1940 as a possible base for operations in the Balkans and bombing missions against Romanian oilfields. On 20 May an all-out German airborne invasion began, protected by Axis air superiority; despite determined resistance led by the NZ Gen. Freyberg, Maleme airfield and other important targets soon fell, and further enemy troops were flown and shipped in with supporting armour and artillery. Some 9,530 troops had landed by the first night and a total of over 35,000 were eventually committed – of whom well over 12,000 became casualties (these losses dissuading the Germans from ever again attempting a large-scale airborne operation). Evacuation again became inevitable; of the original British force just over half were shipped out by 1 June; 1,742 were killed and 11,370 captured. Operations around Crete cost the Royal Navy nine ships sunk and 17 damaged, which led to the curtailment of the half-completed evacuation.

It was later argued that the defence of Greece and Crete had delayed 'Barbarossa' (Germany's invasion of Russia) by as much as three months, and that it had other useful deterrent results. Be that as it may, it had certainly depleted British forces in North Africa, ensuring that any further offensives against the Axis were for the time being impossible, and that defence against any major enemy operations would be seriously weakened.

The Germans abandoned Crete in 1944, beginning the initial pull-out from Greece that September and leaving a political vacuum which the powerful Communist ELAS partisan movement was eager to fill, in rivalry with the pro-Allied royalist government and other factions. In October the British implemented Operation 'Manna', despatching 2nd Parachute Bde and 23rd Armd Bde to Greece, followed by 4th Indian Div in November. The Greek Civil War erupted in early December when ELAS forces moved on Athens. The strict rules of engagement imposed



For AA defence of convoys, vehicles could be fitted with the spring-balanced 'Motley' mounting which allowed a seated 'No.1' to train the Bren gun with the rapid sweeps of traverse and elevation needed for gaining a lead on low-flying aircraft. An adapter could be fitted to the magazine housing allowing use of a 100-round drum magazine – this was specifically for AA use, due to the high expenditure of ammunition. This crew use standard 30-round magazines on this weapon mounted in a 15cwt truck. Uniform consists of Indian shirts with brass epaulette titles, KD shorts, and Pattern 08 web equipment.

on British troops ('defensive, small arms fire only') favoured ELAS, who soon took control of the capital. A spirited counter-attack was launched; with reinforcement from the British 4th Div in mid-December and a relaxation of the rules of engagement, the city was retaken by early January 1945, and ELAS laid down their arms on the 11th.

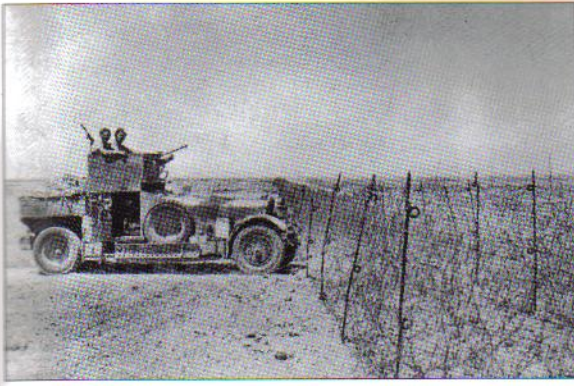
Iraq Part of the Ottoman Empire until the end of the Great War, Iraq was under British mandate until its independence in 1932, although the British retained political and commercial interests including air bases at Habbaniya and Basra. This involvement in the nation's affairs led to some resentment; the neutral but pro-Allied government of the regent Emir Abdullah was overthrown by Gen.Rashid Ali, supported by Muslim sentiment roused by Amin el Husseini (who until fleeing from Palestine had been the Muslim Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, and had organised the Arab revolt of 1936). Rashid Ali was openly pro-Axis; at the end of April 1941 his troops surrounded the British base at Habbaniya, 25 miles west of Baghdad, where men of the King's Own Royal Regt (Lancaster) held back the Iraqis when fighting broke out on 2 May. The Iraqis expected support from both Germany and Vichy France; while the French supplied equipment the Luftwaffe only made a few sorties from Syria before they withdrew. The 10th Indian Div moved up in support from Basra, and a British relief force ('HABFORCE') including men of the Arab Legion left Transjordan on 13 May. By the end of May, Habbaniya had been relieved and Baghdad surrounded; Rashid Ali fled, leaving the the country in the hands of Emir Abdullah.

Syria & Lebanon After the fall of France the French protectorates of Lebanon and Syria ('the Levant') became Vichy satellites. The commander, Gen.Dentz, was openly pro-Axis, allowing German forces the use of Syrian airfields to support the Iraqi uprising as well as supplying French equipment to the rebel forces. The Levant was invaded by a joint Free French and British Commonwealth force from Palestine on 8 June 1941. The garrison resisted strongly, leading to some engagements between countrymen on land and at sea - Vichy against Free French - as well as the surrender of one British and two Indian battalions. HABFORCE invaded in late June having completed its mission in Iraq; on 21 June the Syrian capital Damacus was taken, and by mid-July the Lebanese capital Beirut was also about to fall. Gen.Dentz sued for terms; a ceasefire came into effect on 12 July and an armistice two days later. The Free French leader Gen.de Gaulle appealed to the 38,000

OPPOSITE At the outbreak of war a Rolls Royce 1924 pattern Phantom I armoured car of the 11th Hussars guards 'the Wire' - the Egyptian/Libyan frontier, marked by multiple lanes of barbed wire which in some places reached as high as 12 feet. A .55in Boyes A/Tk rifle, .303in Bren and 4in smoke discharger were mounted in the 1939 pattern turret, as used on the Morris light reconnaissance car.

Persia 1941, on the road to Kazvin: the brigadier of a British armoured column steps forward to greet a Russian officer as Allied and Soviet troops link up for the first time during the war - an important but almost unnoticed event. Persia offered a vital route by which matériel was provided for the Soviet war effort - supplies that would otherwise have had to be shipped via the perilous and already over-burdened North Russian convoys; 4,159,117 tons, representing 23.8 per cent of the total Western aid to the USSR, was sent through Persia.





Vichy troops to rally to the Allied cause, but only 5,700 chose to join him, the rest being repatriated. Allied casualties totalled 2,400 men, and Vichy, 3,350.

Two days after the armistice, in view of the British habit of occasionally failing to recognise neutrality under pressure of the greater cause, a Turkish infantry division was mobilised along the Syrian border. **Turkey** was in a difficult position; a treaty with Britain and France had obliged her to join the Allies in the event of war in the Mediterranean, but after the fall of France the British did not pursue its ratification, later

accepting a treaty of territorial integrity signed between the Turks and the Axis. The Germans put immense pressure on Turkey to join the Axis, but she declined, eventually accepting Allied military equipment and supplies, and belatedly declaring war on Germany in February 1945.

Although short-lived, the Syrian campaign was costly – the Australians lost more men than in the Greek and Cretan campaigns combined, and Indian troops suffered heavy casualties attempting to take Damascus.

Malta The only British base in the central Mediterranean and the only major harbour between Gibraltar and Alexandria, Malta lay only 60 miles south of Sicily. Its position was considered untenable, but nonetheless vital to Allied efforts in the Mediterranean and North Africa, and as a point of interdiction for Axis supply routes. An Axis invasion was planned, but enthusiasm was low given the murderous casualties suffered on Crete. It was hoped that an intense aerial bombardment would force submission; to this end the island was laid under siege and bombed mercilessly and almost without respite for over two years. During the months of March and April 1942 alone, over twice the tonnage of bombs that had been dropped on London during the 1940–41 Blitz were dropped on Malta. Although the bombing did force the cessation of offensive operations for a time, the island later resumed its main role as

a base for naval and air operations; aircraft and submarines from Malta regularly sank a high proportion of Rommel's supply ships between Italy and North Africa. The Malta garrison were employed on anti-aircraft duties or in otherwise ensuring the survival of the tiny island, providing a pool of labour for whatever duties were required of them by the RAF, RN and civilian authorities. The Axis defeat in North Africa relieved the pressure on Malta, which was to become a major base

Tobruk, November 1941: a cheerful Tommy (wearing a pullover and KD trousers) gives the thumbs-up as he marches a column of Afrika Korps POWs to the rear – just a few of the 36,000 taken during Gen. Auchinleck's 'Crusader' offensive, which opened in November and by January 1942 had succeeded in pushing Rommel back 500 miles, losing much of his armour in the process.



in the operations against Italy. Uniquely, the whole island was granted the George Cross, Britain's highest civilian decoration for gallantry, by King George VI, becoming known thereafter as Malta GC.

Palestine Until the end of the Great War part of the Ottoman Empire, Palestine became a British protectorate in 1920, forming a northern defence for the vital Suez Canal. The allegiance of the Palestinian Arabs was threatened by resentment over the ever-increasing number of Jewish refugees who arrived from Europe after the Nazis came to power in 1933. Immigration was stopped in 1939 to help stabilise the situation. Like Cyprus, Palestine played no part in military operations other than as a rear base for personnel and equipment, although troops from Palestine and Transjordan were used in Iraq and Syria.

Persia Renamed Iran in 1935, Persia continued to be known by its old name. Vital to the overall Allied strategy from June 1941 when the USSR became an ally, Persia provided a vital physical link between Soviet forces and the British in the Middle East. Although Persia was neutral, German agents and technicians were known to be operating there, and Germany was Persia's greatest trading partner. The annual oil output of over 8,400,000 tons prompted the Allies to despatch an ultimatum to expel all German nationals; this was understandably rejected, giving the Allies a flimsy pretext to invade Persia on 25 August 1941. Resistance was easily overcome and the country was occupied; Shah Reza Pahlavi was deposed in favour of his pro-Allied son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. A treaty was signed in January 1942 and ratified at the Tehran conference of 1943, to the effect that the Allies would withdraw from the country within six months of the cessation of hostilities. The British garrison was 'PAIFORCE' (Persia and Iraq Command), which was formed in August 1942 under Gen.Maitland Wilson, replaced by Gen.Pownall in 1943 following Wilson's appointment as C-in-C Middle East.

Transjordan Prior to 1928 Transjordan (today's Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan) had been administered as part of Palestine, but in that year Emir Abdullah came to the throne and the nation became independent under a British mandate. British-officered troops of the Arab Legion supported operations in Iraq as a part of HABFORCE and, with the Transjordan Frontier Force, were involved in the operations against Vichy Syria.

The Western Desert (Egypt & Libya), & North Africa (Morocco, Algeria & Tunisia)

The fall of France in June of 1940 seriously affected British plans for the defence of North Africa. Italy had entered the war; the French colonies



El Duda, 27 November 1941: Brig. Willison holds an 'O-group' ('orders group') for 1st RTR commanders against a backdrop of Matilda tanks – the armour had broken out of besieged Tobruk and linked up with New Zealand troops advancing from the east as part of Operation 'Crusader'. The tank men wear a typical mix of BD, KD overalls, greatcoats and leather jerkins, with black berets, balaclavas and helmets; and note the RTR's white tank badge worn on the upper right sleeve.

OPPOSITE A Canadian-built, New Zealand-manned 30cwt Chevrolet truck of the Long Range Desert Group's 'R' Patrol, March 1941. These vehicles carried an exceptional load, which enabled the desert reconnaissance patrols to operate behind enemy lines wholly unsupported. This truck, named 'Rotowhero', mounts a .303in Lewis gun and a .55in Boyes A/Tk rifle; it also carries a No.11 radio set.

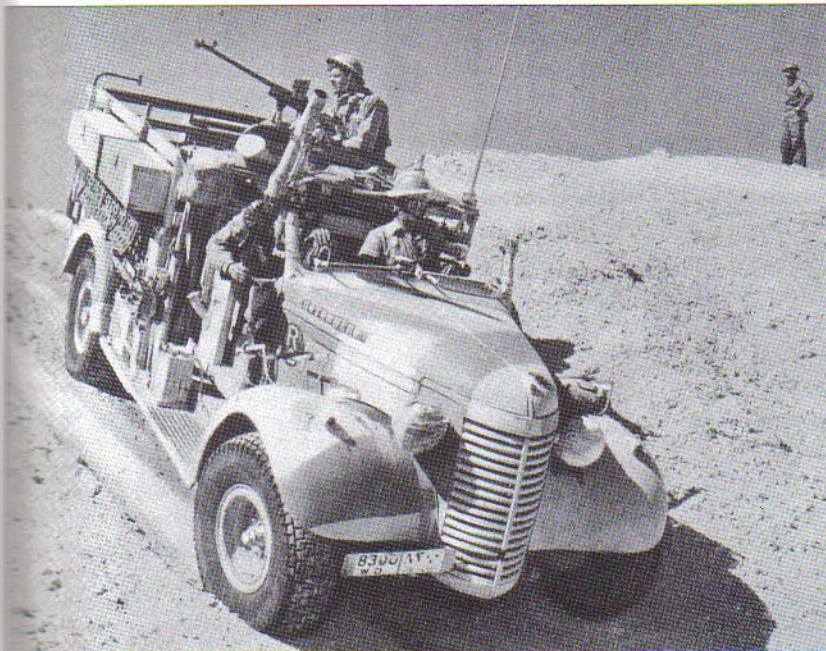


A Vickers MMG crew in action. A cloud of steam billows from the condenser can during sustained fire; despite this obvious fluid loss the condenser did save some of the precious water, which was then poured back into the gun's cooling jacket. Each of the three brigades of an infantry division usually had one company of the divisional MG battalion attached in support.

in North Africa and the Levant were no longer allied and could not be considered in the defensive equation – indeed, they might pose a direct or indirect threat. The Italians in Libya and East Africa, numbering some 415,000 men, could now concentrate their strength against Egypt. A woefully inadequate British force of fewer than 118,000 men was scattered as far afield as Aden, British Somaliland and Palestine. With insufficient troops to defend Britain's widespread interests, British Somaliland was soon abandoned to the Italians.

In the immediate aftermath of Italy's declaration of war the British had insufficient strength to mount a major offensive, but harassing patrols frequently operated behind Italian lines in Libya to disrupt supply columns, destroy frontier posts and occupy vital oases. On **13 September 1940** Marshal Graziani began his advance into Egypt. Sollum was soon taken, but an effective defensive withdrawal by the British meant that after four days the Italians had only reached as far as the small coastal town of Sidi Barrani. Here the Italians dug in, with an advance post at Maktila 15 miles east; they were to advance no further. The British were mystified by Graziani's unwillingness to exploit his opportunity of reaching the prize

of the Suez Canal. Wavell seized upon Graziani's inactivity as an opportunity to strengthen his forces. Reinforcements and supplies were limited, but by December it was felt that, although considerably outnumbered, the British were ready to mount an attack based upon the 'Blitzkrieg' tactics the Germans had used in France. This had to be attempted before the Italians returned to the offensive, as it was considered that the available British forces would not be able to hold any further assault on Egypt west of the Nile.





Definitely a staged shot, supposedly showing tank crewmen removing a casualty from the turret assisted by an RAMC orderly. This difficult operation inevitably entailed a lot of rough manhandling; under perfect conditions, with a medic present, the casualty might be knocked out with chloroform so that he could be extricated with less pain and stress. In the real conditions of tank warfare such niceties were rare; injured crewmen of disabled tanks who were unable to 'bail out' under their own power, or could not be dragged out immediately by luckier comrades, often perished in the ensuing fire and explosion of stowed ammunition. One way or another, it was all over long before a medic could arrive.

The offensive (Operation 'Compass')¹ began on the night of **7/8 December 1940**. The RAF attacked airfields at Binini and Sidi Barrani, effectively grounding the Regia Aeronautica; and the RN bombarded Sidi Barrani and Maktilla, the latter being evacuated by the Italians. Sidi Barrani fell after a brief defence, as did Buq Buq and Sollum, and the Italian incursion into Egypt had been reversed. The first phase of operations netted over 38,000 prisoners – more than the strength of Gen.O'Connor's whole attacking force of British, Australian and Indian troops. This initial phase was followed up by the encirclement of Bardia, an important Libyan port; the attack commenced on

New Year's Day 1941, and by 5 January Bardia had succumbed and another 45,000 prisoners had been added to the already overflowing POW cages.

Wavell's offensive continued towards Tobruk, the Italian Navy's well-fortified main port in Libya. The assault was launched on 21 January, and by nightfall on the 22nd Tobruk was in British hands, along with another 30,000 POWs. Australian troops now headed for Benghazi, while an armoured force pushed across the desert towards Beda Fomm to cut off the Italians' line of retreat. The Italians fought hard to break out but were held; Benghazi and Beda Fomm were overrun; and by early February the British had pushed as far as El Agheila and Agedabia – where the German advance parties of the Deutsches Afrika Korps were arriving to shore up the crumbling Italian defence.

The British troops were tired, supply lines were stretched, and vehicles, weapons and armour were in need of essential maintenance; but rather than being rested and strengthened, Wavell's inadequate manpower was to be depleted by the need for troops in Greece, Crete, Syria and Iraq. The War Cabinet had decided the risk to the Middle East was too great to allow the Germans access through the Balkans and possibly Turkey; Libya would have to wait. While Wavell's manpower was being drawn away the Axis poured troops and tanks into Africa. The DAK was commanded by a respected veteran of the campaign in France, Gen. Erwin Rommel; quick to recognise the weakness of the British position, Rommel attacked in late **March 1941**. While the British were receiving reinforcements from the UK and India these were insufficient to hold Rommel, who by the end of April was at the gates of Egypt. The retreat had been well executed, however; every effort was made to disrupt the enemy advance, and Tobruk was fortified and garrisoned by the Australians – bypassed by the enemy, it was to prove a continuing threat to their lines of communication. On the Egyptian border Rommel paused, preparing his forces for the big push to the Suez Canal, which gave Wavell the opportunity to counter-attack.

On **15 June 1941** a limited counter-offensive was launched (Operation 'Battleaxe'); despite a 4:1 advantage in armour it failed in its objective of reaching Tobruk. As a result of this failure, on 1 July Gen.Wavell was replaced as C-in-C Middle East by Gen.Auchinleck – a straight

¹ See Campaign 73, Operation Compass 1940

exchange of appointments, with Wavell taking up Auchinleck's previous post as C-in-C India. A period of stalemate followed, enabling Auchinleck to reorganise his forces in the now-sprawling Middle East Command. In September 1941 Abyssinia, Somaliland, Kenya, Tanganyika, Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia were removed from MEC, and placed under Gen.Platt as C-in-C East Africa Command; this relieved the MEC of responsibility for over 1,500,000 square miles of territory, and able to concentrate on operations in the Western Desert. November saw the Western Desert Army, which had started life as the Army of the Nile, renamed as 8th Army.

On **18 November 1941** Auchinleck's offensive, Operation 'Crusader', opened on a 50-mile front between Sollum and Jarabub, supported by offensive operations from Tobruk. By January 1942, after some of the greatest tank battles of the war, Rommel had been driven back 500 miles with heavy losses. However, although the British mistake of deploying armour in small, dispersed units rather than massed as a manoeuvre force had been costly during Operation 'Battleaxe', the lesson was ignored; despite victory the cost to the 8th Army's tank units had again been heavy. The defeat of Rommel's forces went almost unnoticed at home, as on 7 December Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor, and the USA and Japan had entered the war.

The pendulum of desert warfare now reversed its swing yet again. At the end of January Rommel made a tentative push as far as Gazala, where the British held. His all-out attack at the end of **May 1942** swung his tanks round the southern end of the British line and, after confused fighting, eventually breached it; troops on both sides fought to exhaustion in 'The Cauldron'; Tobruk was surrendered by its South African garrison on **20 June** with 28,000 men; Sollum and Sidi Omar were evacuated; and by **30 June** the 8th Army had been forced back all the way to a prepared stop line at El Alamein, only 60 miles short of Alexandria – which the Mediterranean Fleet left that day.

Auchinleck had chosen his position carefully; it was a natural choke point some 35 miles wide between the sea to the north and the impassable Qattara Depression to the south. If it were to be breached there would be nothing to stop the Afrika Korps reaching Alexandria and the Suez Canal. On **1 July 1942** Rommel began a series of attacks; both sides fought themselves to a standstill throughout July, but Rommel failed to break through.

In August, with Alexandria and the Canal apparently safe, changes to the command were again



A Ford WOT2 15cwt truck narrowly avoids destruction by enemy artillery. The desert surface occasionally allowed shells to bury themselves to some depth before exploding, sending much of the blast upwards; but the ground was often rocky, which increased the number of lethal projectiles thrown up by the blast. The WOT2 was one of a series of similar utility vehicles used in a multitude of roles, including troop carrier, water bowser, wireless van and 2pdr A/Tk gun portee.

Winter 1942/43: Gen.Eisenhower visits 1st Derbyshire Yeomanry, the armoured car regiment of the newly arrived 6th Armd Div. The camouflaged Humber Mk.II at left is armed with a 15mm Besa and a co-axial 7.92mm Besa; the Daimler armoured car at right (partially obscured by the 8th Army Commander's Humber Snipe Mk II 'tourer'), with a 2pdr gun and co-ax 7.92mm Besa. The troopers wear BD and overalls, some with long-strap pistol holsters.



implemented. General Auchinleck was replaced as C-in-C Middle East by Gen.Alexander, and returned to the Indian command. General Gott was to succeed to the vacant command of the 8th Army, but was killed when the aircraft taking him to Cairo was shot down; he was replaced by Gen.Montgomery on 13 August. At the end of that month Rommel again attacked the El Alamein line, breaching it at Ruweisat Ridge, but was unable to successfully exploit the breach; his dwindling armour was driven back from Alam El Halfa Ridge with heavy losses.

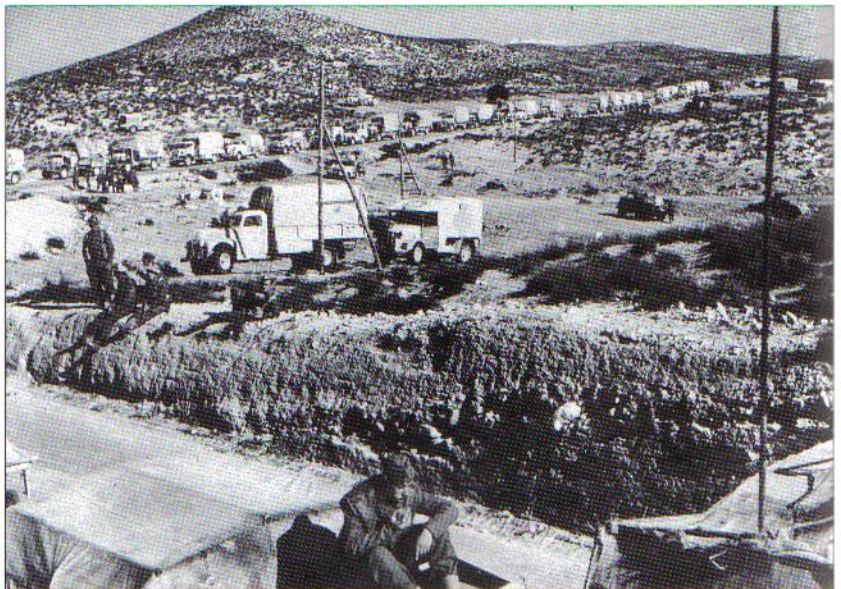
Both sides then paused to build up their strength. Now it was the Axis divisions which were exhausted, at the end of precarious supply lines, and facing superior airpower. Montgomery received fresh divisions from the UK, and new equipment – particularly the 6pdr anti-tank gun and the US M4 Sherman tank – began to arrive in quantity. Known for his meticulous preparation, Montgomery stubbornly resisted attempts to persuade him to launch his offensive until he was convinced that he would succeed, and concentrated on training and planning.

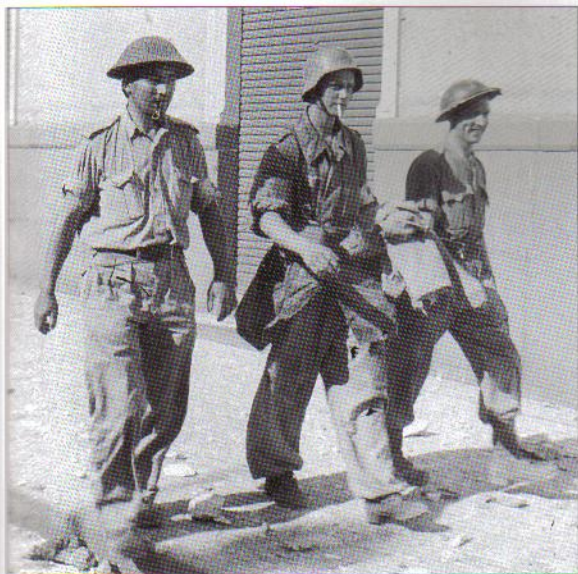
At 9.30pm, **23 October 1942**, Montgomery's Operation 'Lightfoot' opened at the north of the El Alamein line, against the strongest German defences, with an intense creeping barrage followed by infantry assaults. The offensive bogged down in enemy minefields, prompting the opening on 2 November of Operation 'Supercharge' in the south. By 4 November the breakthrough had been achieved. By 12 November, despite severe rain hampering movement, the last enemy had been pushed out of Egypt with losses of nearly 80,000 prisoners, 1,000 artillery pieces and 500 tanks. Rommel retreated across the whole of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania.

* * *

At the beginning of November 1942 there was no friendly territory in the Mediterranean west of Malta. On Sunday **8 November 1942** 100,000 American and British troops under the command of Gen.Eisenhower landed in French Morocco and Algeria (Operation 'Torch'). There was brief but determined opposition by Vichy French garrisons at Casablanca and Algiers; others welcomed the Allies with open arms. Eventually, and following more losses than had been anticipated, the French forces laid down their arms.

It was hoped that an immediate push could be made eastward before the enemy could reinforce Tunisia; but the sensitive political situation in the French territories needed careful handling if the former Vichy troops were to rally to the Allied cause, and the ensuing delay cost the Allies their momentum. German troops were soon





Tunisia 1943: a Luftwaffe medic, probably from the 'Hermann Göring' Div, flanked by British stretcher bearers. Captured medical personnel were often temporarily retained by Allied and Axis medical units to treat wounded of both sides during major engagements, when the number of casualties sometimes overwhelmed the available medical staff.

OPPOSITE February 1943: a convoy made up of a multitude of different vehicle types winds its way westwards through Tripolitania. The huge logistical problems of providing a continuous supply of everything needed to enable the 8th Army to continue the fight into Tunisia bedevilled Allied planners. There was only a single metalled road – the pre-war Italian Via Balbia – along the whole coastline of Libya. In Gen.Montgomery's words, 'From Cairo to Tripoli is 1,600 miles by road: with GHQ at the former and leading troops at the latter, it was as if GHQ were in London and the leading troops in Moscow, with only one road adjoining them'.

pouring into Tunisia where, in some instances, French garrisons calmly handed over their positions. This initial collaboration soon ceased; under the orders of Gen.Barré the French forces in Tunisia turned against the Germans, and fought their way towards British 1st Army units which were pushing east towards the vital ports of Tunis and Bizerta. General Anderson took the initiative; there were commando and parachute landings in eastern Algeria, and an infantry brigade made a determined dash towards the ports, reaching Tebourba, only ten miles from Tunis, on 27 November; but here the 1st Army was stalled.

The 1st Army tried doggedly to continue the advance, but each day that the ports remained in Axis hands tons of supplies and hundreds of fresh troops were arriving, along with tanks and dive bombers which were to wreak havoc along the British lines. The enemy launched a counter-

attack on 1 December, gaining 20 miles; there was savage fighting for Longstop Hill in Christmas week; but thereafter most offensive operations on both sides wound down in appalling weather. The winter of 1942/43 – cold and very wet – was spent trying to gain vantage points from which to mount the final assaults on Tunis, in mountainous terrain so difficult that pack mules became as important to the logistic effort as motor transport.

In the east, the 8th Army occupied Tripoli by **23 January 1943**, and within two weeks its partially demolished port facilities were receiving convoys. This harbour was essential to the continued advance, as the supply lines were now stretched to their limits. The 8th Army now took a pause, resting the troops and building up supplies for the next objective – Tunis. Although the Anglo-US landings had greatly damaged Axis morale, by early February 1943, driven out of Libya, they were preparing to hold Tunisia at all costs against both the 8th Army to their east, and 1st Army, US II Corps and the weak French XIX Corps to the west.

To ensure co-ordination between the two Allied fronts the 8th Army came under the supreme command of Gen.Eisenhower on 18 February 1943, the day it moved from Libya into Tunisia; this united all Allied troops under 18th Army Group, with Eisenhower at its head and Gen.Alexander controlling operations as deputy C-in-C. American leadership went a long way towards placating the former Vichy French forces, most of whom had refused to fight under British command – the destruction of the French fleet was still a raw memory.

The latter half of February saw a dual Axis effort by Gen.Von Arnim's 5.Panzerarmee and Rommel's Panzerarmee Afrika against the French and US sectors; they inflicted many casualties on US II Corps when they broke through at Kasserine Pass, but the Allies held. The most serious consequence of the temporary German breakthrough was the withdrawal of several USAAF units, which gave the hard-pressed Axis air forces and ports some respite.

In the south-east an attempt by Rommel on the 8th Army's leading units at Medenine was repulsed on 6 March, and Montgomery opened

Operation 'Supercharge II' against the Mareth line on **20 March 1943**. Within two days the Wadi Zigzaou defences had been breached, but further exploitation was initially limited due to the failure of the brushwood fascines used to fill in the *wadis* – sodden with rain, they failed to support the weight of the tanks. A New Zealand left flanking attack through the Tebaga Gap got the advance moving again, and by the end of March the Mareth Line had fallen.



An infantry A/Tk gun crew haul their 6pdr up a mountainside overlooking the Medjez-el-Bab in Tunisia. At around 2,500lb, manhandling even a relatively small piece such as this needed a concerted effort. The 6pdr had a range of 5,500yds and a muzzle velocity of up to 2,700fps; an experienced crew could fire ten rounds a minute. The A/Tk platoon of a battalion's support company had six guns.

On 6 April the 8th Army

broke through Axis positions at the Wadi Akarit, and the next day linked up with troops from the US II Corps on the Gabes-Gafsa road, finally closing the noose around the Axis. The Allies now pushed forward on all fronts, the emphasis shifting to the 1st Army in late April. On 6 May the final ground assaults went in (Operation 'Vulcan'); Tunis and Bizerta fell the next day; and on **11 May 1943** Axis resistance in the Cape Bon peninsula ceased. General Alexander informed Churchill that 'It is my duty to report that the Tunisian campaign is over. All enemy resistance has ended. We are masters of North Africa.'

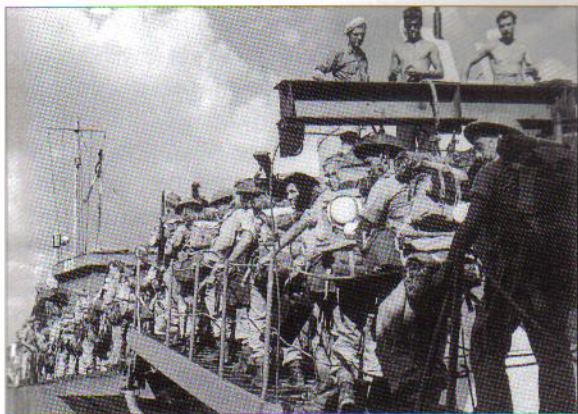
Sicily

Most of the Mediterranean was now open to Allied shipping, greatly increasing the possibilities for further exploitation; the underbelly of the Axis was open to attack. The opening of a second front by an invasion of Italy via Sicily would ensure that up to 20 German divisions would be engaged in the theatre, reducing both the pressure on the USSR and the assets available to resist the eventual invasion of France. It was rightly believed that the Italians would soon capitulate, putting virtually the whole Mediterranean in Allied hands.

Before any attempt could be made to cross the narrow straits between Tunisia and Sicily stores needed to be built up, troops rested and trained for a seaborne assault, and specialised equipment assembled. Landing craft and shipping were at a premium; plans for the invasion of NW Europe were already underway, and Gen. Alexander came under pressure to execute an invasion with all haste so that resources could be diverted elsewhere. The task was to prove far less straightforward than the politicians and deskbound leaders hoped.

Midway between Tunisia and Sicily lay the Italian island stronghold of Pantelleria and its satellites, Lampedusa and Linosa. To prevent the Regia Aeronautica from launching attacks from this base against the Sicily invasion force, Pantelleria was bombed into submission, capitulating on 10 June before a planned landing (Operation 'Corkscrew') could take place.

OPPOSITE **July 1943**: a heavily loaded Universal carrier, stalled on a Sicilian beach, is being towed from the sea, much to the embarrassed amusement of the crew. Vision slits and Bren gun port are noticeably waterproofed for the landings, using a glutinous mixture containing asbestos. The carrier was a highly versatile light vehicle used within and beyond the infantry division in various support roles, from the basic Bren carrier to a mortar and MMG platform.



Sicily, September 1943: Scottish infantry of 5th Inf Div board a Landing Ship Infantry (LSI) to cross the Straits of Messina to the Italian mainland; they wear KD trousers with ankle puttees. Operation 'Baytown' on 3 September put troops of XIII Corps ashore near Reggio Calabria in the 'toe' of Italy.



The Sicilian landings (Operation 'Husky') took place on **10 July 1943**, the British 8th and US 7th Armies coming ashore in the south-east and south of the island respectively as airborne troops dropped on inland objectives. In the sheer numbers involved this operation was comparable with the D-Day landings: 160,000 men for the initial assault alone – eight infantry divisions, 600 tanks, 1,800 guns, 24,000 vehicles, over 4,000 aircraft and 3,500 vessels. The 8th Army units committed were 5th & 50th Inf Divs under XIII Corps and 51st Highland, 1st Canadian and 78th Inf Divs under XXX Corps, plus airborne and commando elements. Bad

weather reduced enemy air activity and increased the element of surprise. The seaborne landings went exceptionally well. The airborne assault was a near disaster; inexperienced transport pilots and nervous AA gunners on the ships led to many troops being dropped too soon, to drown helplessly, and others being badly scattered on land. German response was swift, but with limited air support they were unable to exploit any successes; within 24 hours the vital port of Syracuse was occupied, reducing the amount of stores that had to be brought in over the beaches. Before long the British and US forces joined up to form a continuous beachhead between Licata and Syracuse. Most Italians welcomed the Allies, and on 25 July Mussolini was deposed; the king was reinstated and peace terms were sought.

The 8th Army saw some hard fighting as it moved north up the eastern side of the island, while the US forces hooked to the north and west, then turned east along the north coast; both were aiming for Messina on the narrow straits dividing Sicily from the mainland. Most Italian units

collapsed, but German troops including the crack 'Hermann Göring' Div made a skilful fighting withdrawal. Although all resistance ceased on 17 August many German units were successfully evacuated to Italy, leaving 20,000 dead and 7,000 prisoners behind. (Of British casualties totalling 19,396 men, no fewer than 11,598 were due to malaria.) On 3 September the new Italian government surrendered unconditionally to the Allies.

Italy

Fifteen German divisions were already in place and many more troops were

Italy, October 1943: a British Sherman III (M4A2) advances toward Aversa, passing an ox-cart. With a staggering 49,234 of all marks manufactured during the war, the Sherman was by far the most important Allied tank. It was first supplied to the British in September 1942, and 270 fought at El Alamein; in 1943–45 it far outnumbered the Churchill and Cromwell in British service, equipping 32 armoured regiments at its peak. While not without its drawbacks, it was generally praised by its five-man British crews for its speed, simplicity, reliability, (relative) roominess – and above all for its high-mounted 75mm gun, with both HE and AP ammunition.



pouring into Italy daily. The fall of the Italian Fascists did not open up the country to easy Allied occupation, as some had hoped; it gave the very able German C-in-C, Gen.Kesselring, the opportunity to plan a cohesive defence without having to rely on the uncertain loyalties and abilities of Italian troops. A daring raid by Otto Skorzeny freed Mussolini from his mountaintop detention at Gran Sasso on 12 September, rekindling hard-line Fascist morale and dividing the loyalties of the Italian Army; a minority would fight on beside the Germans in the name of the 'Italian Socialist Republic' based in the north, though few would confront Allied troops¹.

Italy's terrain was ideally suited to defence against an invader moving northwards: narrow coastal plains in the east and west, cut by many rivers, flanked the central north-south Appenine Mountains up almost the whole spine of the country. Fighting the length of Italy against such natural obstacles, expertly exploited by the Germans, would be costly and slow. It was decided that the only way to overcome these defences was to outflank them in depth, landing troops as far up the coast as air cover would allow. On 3 September the British XIII Corps crossed the straits of Messina (Operation 'Baytown'), landing near Reggio Calabria in an attempt to draw German defenders south; but they had already moved inland. From **9 September 1943**, US Gen.Mark Clark's 5th Army, commanding US VI and British X Corps (46th & 56th Inf Divs, 7th Armd Div & 23rd Armd Bde) landed at Salerno (Operation 'Avalanche') only 35 miles south of Naples, to face fierce German opposition. In the south the 8th Army took Taranto, Brindisi and Bari and pushed on towards Salerno, linking up with the 5th Army on 17 September. By the end of the month Naples had also fallen to the Allies, but the prize of its port facilities was denied by demolitions carried out by the retreating Germans.

Rome was to be the next objective, but the formidable German 'Gustav Line' defences had first to be breached; this system ran across the breadth of Italy, roughly from Gaeta in the west to Ortona in the east. The 8th Army were to push up the eastern flank of the mountains

and the US/British 5th Army up the west; both approaches proved costly – the British 56th Inf Div (5th Army) saw particularly hard fighting at Monte Camino on the River Volturno in November, while 8th Army crossed the Sangro. On 27 December Gen. Montgomery's Canadians drove the Germans back from the far eastern end of the Gustav Line at Ortona, but winter weather and heavy losses prevented exploitation.

¹ See MAA 353, *The Italian Army 1940–45* (3) Italy 1943–45.

It was decided to defeat the Gustav Line, anchored on Monte Cassino, by outflanking it in force: the Allies would land Gen.Lucas' US/British VI Corps on the west coast at Anzio (Operation 'Shingle'), only 30 miles south of Rome. The plan was to push rapidly inland to cut the enemy's lines of communication between Rome and the Gustav Line, drawing forces north. The US 3rd and British 1st Inf Divs went ashore virtually unopposed on **22 January 1944**; but Gen.Lucas then dug in to wait for a build-up of resources, rather than dashing inland. The Germans quickly took advantage of this delay, sealing off the beachhead, where men and assets badly needed elsewhere were bottled up for four months, with damaging results. The British 5th & 56th Inf Divs from X Corps were shipped in to join the 1st Div during February and March.

The Gustav Line, with its western strongpoint of Monte Cassino blocking any advance up the Liri Valley towards Rome, would have to be taken by frontal assault. Anzio had been intended to draw German forces away from Cassino: now it became essential to draw them away from beleaguered Anzio by pushing hard at Cassino. Between January and May 1944, in atrocious weather, some of the bitterest fighting of the war took place during four separate and costly battles to take Cassino. British divisions involved were 5th, 46th & 56th on the Garigliano in January/February; 2nd NZ & 4th Indian, mid-February and mid-March; 78th British, 3rd & 5th Polish Divs, mid-May. The pulverised ruins of Cassino town and the infamous monastery eventually fell in **mid-May 1944**, with 8th Army formations switched to the west flank to join the US 5th Army and the Free French Corps in the drive up the Liri (Operation 'Diadem' – 4th & 78th British, 8th Indian & 1st Canadian Inf Divs of XIII Corps). Simultaneously the defenders of the Anzio beachhead broke out.

The Germans pulled back to their prepared 'Hitler' and 'Dora' lines, but despite hard rearguard fighting Gen.Alexander's advance prevented them from consolidating and they were soon pushed north. The glory of taking Rome – an undefended 'open city' – proved too much of a lure for Gen.Clark; he diverged from his agreed axis of advance, opening a gap between the US and British armies through which the retreating German 10th Army escaped. He achieved his ambition of liberating Rome on 5 June; but by a

Command strengths of formations, units & sub-units

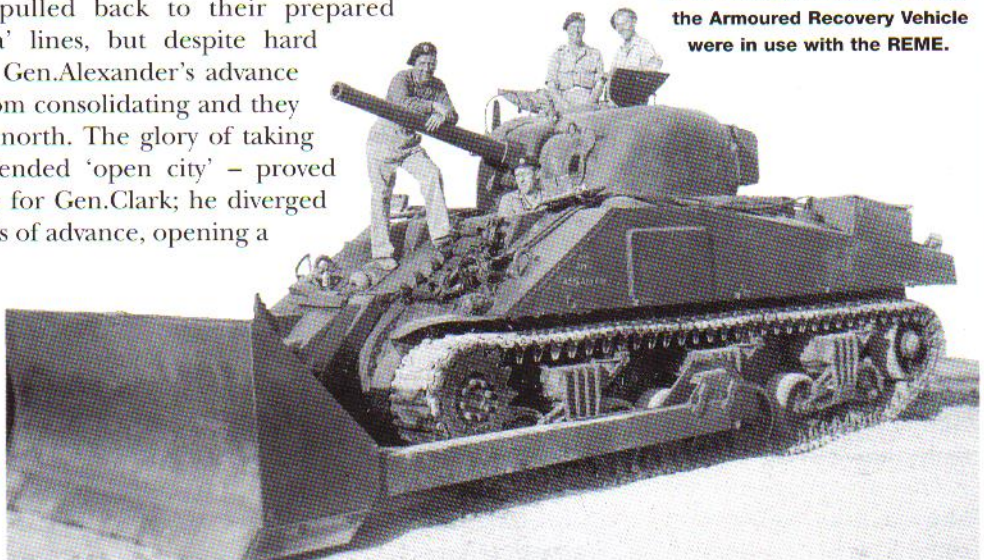
Ranks held by unit commanders and – particularly – unit strengths could vary. Many were undermanned, particularly smaller combat units whose manpower was under constant attrition. These figures show *average* manning levels for British formations and units.

Formation	Commander	Manning level
Army Group	Field Marshal	400,000–600,000
Army	General	150,000
Corps	Lt.Gen.	40,000–60,000
Division	Maj.Gen.	13,000–18,000
Brigade	Brigadier	2,500–3,500
Battalion*	Lt.Colonel	750–850
Company**	Major or Captain	125
Platoon***	Lieutenant or 2nd Lt.	37
Section	Corporal	10

Notes:

- * = in cavalry & artillery, Regiment
- ** = in cavalry, Squadron; in artillery, Battery
- *** = in cavalry & artillery, Troop

Not all tanks belonged to the 'tankies': this Sherman M4A2 bulldozer is manned by a Royal Engineer field squadron crew, with an RTR driver. During the long slog up Italy in the face of German delaying tactics, the obstacle-clearing capabilities of the RE were in constant demand. Other Sherman variants such as the Armoured Recovery Vehicle were in use with the REME.





At the outbreak of the war Britain had largely succeeded in its aim of fielding a mechanised army – unlike the Germans, who still relied heavily on horse-drawn transport. However, there were always regions where motor transport just could not go. Mules were used to some extent in the Middle East, but were to come into their own in Italy; they could still get through where winter rains made roads and tracks impassable to vehicles. Here muleteers guide their heavily laden beasts along a mountain track typical of those encountered in the Apennines.

'Green Line', it was known to the Allies as the Pisa–Rimini Line). Allied forces in Italy now took on a secondary role to those fighting in France; their numbers were reduced in July, but although six divisions were withdrawn ready for the invasion of the south of France the Gothic Line was soon reached. Although breached in places it had not been taken before the onset of the winter rains in early September, allowing German reinforcement by eight divisions from Russia. The carefully sited defences and the weather forced the Allies to spend a second wretched winter bogged down in the Apennine Mountains.

After the Yalta conference in February 1945, Gen. Alexander (from 24 November 1944, Supreme Allied Commander Mediterranean) was informed that his task in Italy was merely to pin down as many enemy forces as possible while the major effort was made in NW Europe. Typically, Alexander interpreted this directive as being best implemented by annihilating the enemy.

On **9 April 1945** the final offensive opened; the US 5th Army advanced on the western flank, and the 8th Army (V, X & XIII British & II Polish Corps) broke out past the centre and east of the Gothic Line, overrunning the 'Genghis Khan' line and into the plains of northern Italy and the Po Valley. Bologna, Ferrara, Argenta, the Po and Adige (Venetian) lines all fell to the 8th Army as the Allies attacked relentlessly, trying to destroy the German Army Group C before it could withdraw into the Alps. By the end of April the German forces in Italy had collapsed, and a cease-fire was implemented on **2 May 1945**. During operations in Italy the 8th Army had suffered 123,254 casualties; US 5th Army losses were 188,746; and Axis casualties, an estimated 434,646.

South of France

Operation 'Dragoon' was first conceived as a feint to pull German forces away from Normandy, a result achieved by the Anzio landings; but despite British arguments against further depleting the forces in Italy the US VI Corps landed on the French Riviera on **15 August 1944**, supported by strong Free French units on the flanks. British involvement was limited to

twist of fate he was denied much of the fame he had no doubt expected – the following day the Allied landings in Normandy reduced his parade to a sideshow in the world's news media.

Summer 1944 saw the Allies pushing north from Rome against stubborn rearguard actions along the 'Caesar', Viterbo, Trasimene and Arno defensive lines, designed to delay them while the Germans prepared their last major defence, the 'Gothic Line' (later renamed the



The town of Cassino was subjected to intense bombardment, reducing it to rubble; the tenacious German defenders exploited this, preparing concealed positions in the cellars and ruins which defied many Allied attacks in January–May 1944. These troops advancing in May wear a mix of clothing: the Thompson-armed NCO wears US 'War Aid' BD trousers with a wool pullover; the man immediately behind him has a denim blouse with WA trousers – and appears to have a Mk IV light mine detector in his pack; the third man wears US WA blouse and trousers, while those bringing up the rear are dressed the same as the NCO.

ARTILLERY

As most space was given in the first book in this sequence (MAA 354, ... *North-West Europe*) to the organisation of infantry formations and units, this seems a logical place for a glance at the artillery – an arm in which the British 8th Army came to excel, as freely admitted by German witnesses.

The Royal Regiment of Artillery was the largest British Army organisation of World War II (this whole arm of service kept the historic title of 'regiment', within which its units were numbered tactical regiments of specified types, e.g. 107th Medium Regt RA. The Royal Horse Artillery (RHA) was a component part of the RA, with its own numbered tactical regiments; often, but not invariably, they would provide the regiments with self-propelled, as opposed to towed guns.

The main role of the artillery was to support infantry and armoured formations; to this end medium and heavy artillery units were assigned at Army level, with field artillery regiments providing support at Corps and Division level. During the war mixed AGRAs (Army Groups Royal Artillery) were formed; each provided one field, four medium and one heavy regiment under a single command, attached at Corps level and deployed as needed. The principal types of artillery in use by the RA were:

Anti-Tank

Tank armour during the inter-war years had been light, and thus development of anti-tank weapons had been in line with the targets' protection. The QF (Quick Firing) 2pdr A/Tk gun was a satisfactory weapon when it entered service in 1938; it proved adequate in France in 1940, but thereafter tank development soon made it obsolescent. Though it could penetrate 50mm of armour at 1,000 yards, it had only armour-piercing ammunition, and could be knocked out with high explosive rounds by Panzers which stayed outside its effective range.

In 1941 the 6pdr A/Tk gun appeared, with improved performance and greater penetrative power. This pre-war design was also used as a turret

paratroopers of the joint US/British 1st Airborne Task Force, which landed inland of the assault area. Men of the 2nd Independent Parachute Bde were dropped around the village of Le Muy; despite the troops being scattered over 25 miles all objectives had been taken by mid-morning, and two days later the paratroopers linked up with the units which had come ashore over the beaches. The paratroops were pulled out on 26 August, returning to Italy.



A 6pdr anti-tank gun photographed on the outskirts of Toreya Annunziata, just short of the vital port of Naples and Mount Vesuvius; Naples fell on 1 October 1943. The crew wear KD trousers and shirts, and three of them, including the bombardier (note rank brassard on right sleeve) also wear the issue woollen pullover.

gun in tanks, as well as being adopted by the Americans as the 57mm M1. The introduction of the 6pdr by the RA regiments saw the 2pdr re-issued to the A/Tk platoons of infantry battalions only. The 6pdr was itself relegated to infantry A/Tk platoons when the 17pdr gun entered service with RA A/Tk regiments.

The first 17pdrs were ready before their carriages, and as a stop-gap were mated with 25pdr field gun carriages and sent to North Africa to counter German

armour in 1942. With a muzzle velocity of 2,980fps, the 17pdr was extremely effective against even the German Panther and Tiger tanks, and was later mounted in the Sherman 'Firefly' tank and the 'Achilles' tank-destroyer to provide A/Tk cover to armoured regiments. At 1944 strengths the A/Tk regiment of an armoured division comprised four batteries, two of 12x towed 17pdrs and two of 12x Achilles SP tank destroyers; these were later augmented by the Archer SP A/Tk gun, which also saw service with A/Tk regiments serving with infantry divisions. Each infantry division had one A/Tk regiment consisting of four batteries, each of three troops, each with three guns.

Anti-Aircraft

AA defence was divided between light and medium guns. Light guns included the 20mm Polsten and 40mm Bofors automatic cannon

(continued on page 33)

Italy, 1943: bringing a 3.7in anti-aircraft gun into action. The heavy 3.7 proved a versatile weapon on its mobile mounting; like the German 8.8cm Flak, it was also capable of use against ground targets, firing up to 25 rounds a minute out to a range of 20,600 yards.



1940-41

1: Private, 2nd Bn, King's Regt (Liverpool); Gibraltar, 1940

2: Guardsman, 3rd Bn, Coldstream Guards; Libya, December 1940

3: Subaltern, 9th Bn, King's Royal Rifle Corps,
1st Armd Bde; Greece, April 1941



1941

1: Private, 1st Bn, King's Own Royal Regt (Lancaster); Iraq, June 1941

2: Officer, 60th Field Regt, RA; Libya, November 1941

3: Private, 2nd Bn, Devonshire Regt; Malta, 1941



1941-42

1: Corporal, CMP; Lebanon, August 1941

2: NCO, 5th Royal Tank Regt, 7th Armd Div; El Alamein, October 1942

3: Trooper, 1st SAS Regt; Western Desert, November 1942



1942-43

1: CSM, 1/5th Bn, Queen's Royal Regt, 7th Armd Div; Tobruk, November 1942

2: Lieutenant, No.1 Commando; Algiers, November 1942

3: Private, 1/6th Bn, Queen's Royal Regt, 7th Armd Div; Djebel Tarhuna, January 1943



1943

1: Trooper, 11th Hussars, 7th Armd Div; Tripoli, January 1943

2: Captain, 5th Bn, Cameron Highlanders, 51st Div; Tunisia, March 1943

3: Private, 2/4th Bn, KOYLI, 46th Div; Tunisia, March 1943



1943

1: Captain, Field Survey Company, RE; HQ 8th Army, Tunisia, 1943

2: Corporal, 1st Provost Co, CMP, 1st Div;
Pantelleria, June 1943

3: Corporal, 1st Bn, Black Watch,
51st Div; Sicily, 1943





1943-44

1: Fusilier, 6th Bn, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, 78th Div; Sicily, July 1943

2: Stretcher-bearer, 1st Bn, London Scottish, 56th Div; Monte Camino, Italy, December 1943

3: Corporal, 1/6th Bn, East Surrey Regt, 4th Div; Cassino, Italy, May 1944

1944-45

1: Trooper, 2nd SAS Regt; Castino, Italy, April 1945

2: Private, 2nd Independent Para Bde; Le Muy, France, August 1944

3: Bombardier, 138th Field Regt RA, 78th Div; Naples, spring 1945



AIRBORNE

deployed at divisional level'. Heavy AA guns included the 3.7in, 4.5in and 5.2in, of which the most numerous was the 3.7in – an impressive weapon which, like the German '88', was also used in the ground role. The Heavy AA regiments (HAA), deployed at Army level, had three batteries of two troops, each having four guns. A Light AA regiment (LAA) consisted of three batteries each of three troops, each of six Bofors guns. In armoured regiments one battery of the three was equipped with 20mm or 40mm guns mounted on Crusader tank chassis.

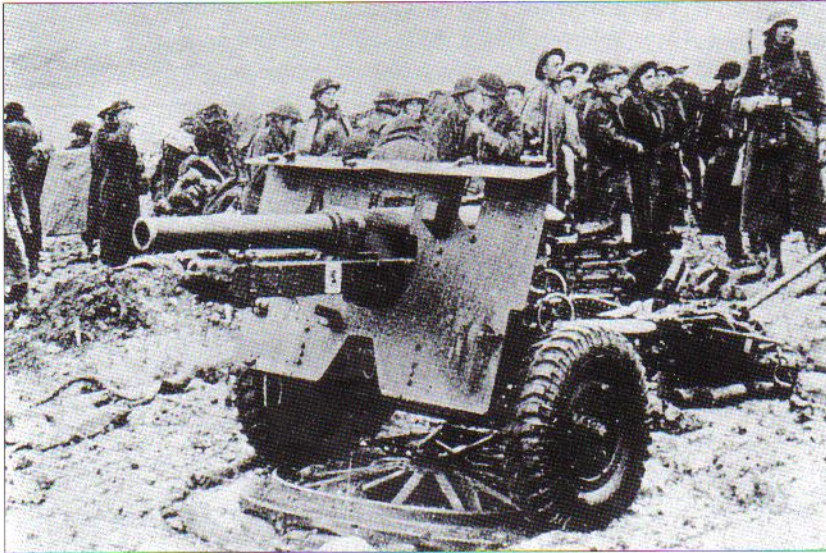
Field

At the outbreak of war the old but reliable World War I 18pdr (83.8mm) was still in use on an upgraded carriage with rubber tyres, although it was being replaced by the 'gun howitzer, quick firing 25pdr Mk I' (87.6mm). Many 18pdrs were lost in France in 1940. The 25pdr Mk I was replaced by the Mk II which had a marginally greater muzzle velocity and range

¹ In winter 1944/45 some infantry units – e.g. those of the 52nd (Lowland) Div – were issued 2x 20mm Polsten AA cannon in their support companies, transported in Universal carriers.



ABOVE The business end of a 3.7in HAA gun. The gun's axles were removable, but if retained they made rapid redeployment easier during the fluid engagements that typified the campaign in the desert. This piece is manned by gunners of the Malta Artillery, who were normally only required to serve within their home islands, although a small number of volunteers served overseas.



Tunisia, March 1943: captured British soldiers stand around aimlessly, alongside a 25pdr Mk I gun taken by the enemy; note its integral traversing platform. Such images were widely published in German propaganda to reassure any of their own civilians who may have had doubts whether the war in Africa was being won by the Axis; it is unlikely that many were convinced. Within a few weeks the final Allied victory would be referred to as 'Tunisgrad' by cynical Germans.

The 25pdr had a useful anti-tank round, and before the arrival of the 6pdr A/Tk gun field regiments in the Western Desert were often overstretched – and exposed to direct attack – by being required to thicken up the A/Tk screen in the front line.



Italy 1943: from a position masked with camouflage netting, a 5.5in gun of an RA medium regiment fires upon German positions. The crew wear a relaxed dress consisting of KD shorts, steel helmet, basic web equipment with cartridge carriers and water bottle, with the shoulder braces worn hanging loose at the sides.

Royal Artillery anti-aircraft defence relied on detection in time to align the guns – without detection equipment the arrival of bombs would follow the noise of engines too closely for there to be time to do anything other than dive into a slit trench. In 1940 radar was only available to the home defences; this rather medieval looking 'Acoustic Unit' was pretty much the state of the art in mobile aircraft detection apparatus. Normally operated by a crew of two, it had a one-degree detection arc and a range of seven miles; unlike visual apparatus, it could be used at night or in low visibility. The drawback was the relatively low speed of sound waves; triangulation with these units gave the position of the aircraft at the time of transmission, not in 'real time'.

(7.7 miles, 12.25km); this gun/howitzer became the standard equipment of the field regiments throughout the war and long afterwards. The 3.7in pack or mountain howitzer (94mm) was used in the Far East, and initially provided artillery support to airborne forces as it was easily broken down into readily portable loads. It was replaced by the equivalent but superior US 75mm M1A1.

Three RA field regiments were integral to an infantry division, each consisting of three batteries, each with 8x 25pdr towed

guns, in two troops. In armoured divisions there were two RHA or RA field regiments, one equipped with self-propelled guns (25pdr Sexton or 105mm Priest on US M3 medium tank chassis), and one of towed 25pdrs.

Medium

The 6in howitzer was the main medium artillery weapon deployed with the BEF in 1939/40, but due to massive losses during the Dunkirk withdrawal it was relegated to a home defence weapon. The 4.5in gun and similar 4.5in QF howitzer were also veterans of the Great War: the gun soon reverted to a training role, while the howitzer remained in





Within visual range accurate tracking of aerial targets was made simple by the use of the height-finder; this gave an accurate range which, combined with the angle of elevation, gave the target altitude. Information was fed into a predictor unit which calculated where an AA barrage had to be placed in order to intercept the moving target. The sergeant at left wears a tie-on brassard with tropical rank chevrons in KD fabric; the gunner at centre has adorned his Mk I* helmet with the red-and-blue RA diamond flash.

Accurate registration of range was required by many troops; here a Barr & Stroud range-finder is seen in use at the HQ of 154th Bde, 51st (Highland) Div during the battle of El Alamein. At infantry level range-finders were important in accurate target registration when using mortars and MMGs such as the Vickers, or providing target information for supporting artillery.

service. Both the 4.5in and 6in howitzers were progressively replaced by the heavier 5.5in (140mm) gun/howitzer from 1941. Medium regiments consisted of two batteries of two troops, each with four guns.

Heavy

Defeat in France in 1940 saw the Heavy Regiments RA leave their twelve 8in howitzers behind; the few left in the UK had their barrels converted to 7.2in to provide improved performance. From 1943 American 8in howitzers were also bought and converted, the calibre being reduced but the carriage retained. The 7.2in howitzer conversions appeared from April 1941 in Mks I-V, and from December 1943 in the purpose-built Mk VI; they remained in service throughout the war. The US 155mm 'Long Tom' was also purchased from 1943; this 6.1in gun had a greater rate of fire and maximum range of 23,000 metres, compared to the 16,000 metres of the 7.2in howitzer. The 7.2in was deployed in four batteries each of four guns to each heavy regiment.

Super-Heavy

A few Super-Heavy Regiments RA were equipped with American weapons: either the M1 8in, which with super-charge could throw a 108kg (238lb) shell to a range of 32,584 metres once every 20 seconds; or the M1 240mm howitzer. These were organised into two-gun batteries, with between three and five batteries to a super-heavy regiment.



This 3in mortar crew, probably from a unit newly arrived from India, wear Indian-made wool shirts with brass epaulette titles, KD shorts, woollen hosetops (here with unit garter flashes) and ankle puttees. They still have the old Pattern 08 web equipment, and the bayonet scabbard has a fabric cover to protect the leather from sand; at right, note the mortar's leather sight case.

The 3in mortar was a man-portable weapon breaking down into three loads – baseplate (38lbs), mounting (45lbs) and mortar tube (43lbs), totalling 129lbs (57.15kg) – although in practice it was generally transported by vehicle. It had a range of up to 2,800 yards, and a good crew could accurately discharge five bombs per minute. Ammunition was packed in triple heavy cardboard tubes with carrying handles. Six weapons equipped the mortar platoon of an infantry battalion's support company.



Coastal

Had Operation 'Sealion' been launched by the Germans in 1940 they would have faced a coast protected by a defensive belt of guns ranging from mobile 6in weapons, to 15in guns in concrete emplacements with a range of up to 24 miles – thus bringing some of the French embarkation ports within reach. The heaviest concentration was naturally along the Channel coast in the south-east, particularly covering the narrows between Dover and the Pas de Calais. After 1941 the fear of invasion disappeared, but coastal weapons in the critical sector were still important to British control of ship movements in the Dover Straits. Although it was occasionally outwitted, this control usually forced Kriegsmarine units in German ports to circumnavigate the whole of Great Britain in order to reach the Atlantic and beyond.

UNIFORMS

Although such uniforms were often worn in the Middle East and Mediterranean depending on location, season and weather, we do not duplicate here the details of wool serge Service Dress (SD) and Battledress (BD) uniforms, and the Overalls, Denim, issued concurrently with the latter. These, with basic information on headgear, footwear and web equipment, will be found in the first book in this study, MAA 354, ... *North-West Europe*. In this volume we cover in detail only the tropical and Khaki Drill (KD) clothing produced specifically for hot-weather theatres of operations.

The British Army had a long history of fighting in hot climates, and an empire that stretched around the globe gave a good insight into operations in many types of terrain. This had led to the introduction, in tropical climates, of a lightweight, dust-coloured uniform which both

provided some camouflage and was reasonably practical and comfortable. This 'khaki' uniform (named from the Urdu word *khak*, 'dust') had been in limited local use since the mid-1800s, but was not introduced for general issue until the 1890s. Its colour and its 'cotton drill' fabric (from the German *drillich*, 'ticking', a three-threaded weave) led to its being called 'khaki drill'.

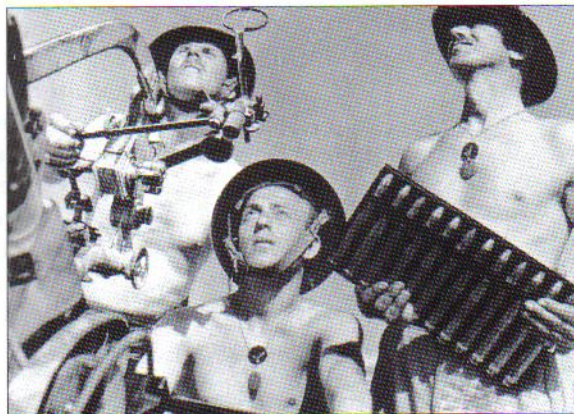
The KD Service Dress uniform of the Victorian era differed only in details from that worn during the early part of World War II. Since the early 1900s a stand-and-fall tunic collar had replaced the old stand collar. Pocket flaps could be either pointed, scalloped or straight; despite being made to sealed patterns, procurement in both Britain and many overseas stations did lead to differences in detail. The tunic, embellished with highly polished brass buttons and badges to warm a sergeant-major's heart, was worn with matching trousers, puttees and 'ammunition boots'. (We may recall that well into the 1930s the heavy woollen 'blues' uniform was still

authorised for church parades and walking-out in tropical locations).

In the mid-1930s the KD SD was supplemented with the issue of KD shorts and tropical shirts, these loose-fitting items being far more comfortable in tropical heat. The shirt and shorts combination was soon to replace the SD; general issue of the latter ceased in 1941, although available stocks led to the uniform remaining in limited use for some time thereafter. The new shirts were manufactured from a soft, open-weave 'aertex' fabric which offered both good ventilation and protection from the sun. They were of pullover type, with a four-button placket reaching down the chest level with the bottom of the two pleated, flapped pockets; detachable doubled epaulettes were usually fixed with a button and loop; all buttons were brown plastic. Although made with long sleeves, by regulation worn rolled most of the time, examples with shortened sleeves were quite commonly seen. The accompanying shorts were made from the harder-wearing drill fabric; details of waistbands, belt loops, and the placing of dressing pockets varied. As well as shorts, KD long trousers, riding breeches, and the so-called 'Bombay Bloomers' were issued. The 'bloomers' were a pattern with legs which turned and buttoned up at the bottom, to form rather voluminous shorts, but which could be turned down over the lower leg and confined when required – e.g. as protection against mosquitoes.

A slightly more formal uniform appeared in the form of a bush shirt ('bush jacket' for officers) with long KD trousers. The bush shirt was a loose-cut, four-pocket garment similar to the old KD SD but with an open collar; it was produced in drill, aertex and herringbone twill (HBT) fabrics. Although designed to be worn loose over the trousers it was often seen tucked into the waistband. The officers' bush jacket was similar to their formal khaki drill service dress tunic but lighter and of a looser and more casual cut; small details varied widely due to private purchase. Features common to most bush shirts and jackets were epaulettes, and matching belts of the same material, though the latter were often discarded. The trousers showed a number of minor variations but were generally loose-fitting and straight-legged, with two side pockets, and with or without a field dressing pocket.

N.Africa or Palestine, winter 1943/44: a South African captain (note orange strip at the end of his epaulette slip-on) chats with a captain of the 14/20th Hussars beside an M3 Grant tank. The SA captain wears 'Overalls, Denim' over a wool pullover and 37 web equipment pistol order. The Hussar officer wears a well-cut officer's greatcoat, with regimental yellow piping to the shoulder straps, collar and cuff turnback. Both wear the tank soldier's black beret. The 14/20th were then part of 252nd Indian Armd Bde; the SA armoured car regiments had been withdrawn after Alamein, but in April 1944 the newly raised 6th SA Armd Div arrived in Italy to rejoin 8th Army.



May 1941: a trio of British gunners man a light AA gun within the besieged garrison of Tobruk. This image gives a good view of the two-part red and green compressed fibre identity disc set worn by all servicemen; stamped upon both discs were the surname, initials, religion and service number – if a man was killed, one was left with the body and one removed for unit records. Note also the untidy-looking chinstrap of the Mk II helmet; a central web strap was attached to two sections of elasticated fabric anchored to the steel shell.



The extremes of climate encountered in the theatre saw the use of a diverse mix of uniform items; wool Battledress and greatcoats were often worn in colder weather, and various mixtures of BD, KD items and the issue woollen pullover were commonplace. Even the heavy 'Coats, Tropol' issued for the Norwegian campaign were resurrected for use during the cold desert nights. By the closing stages of the war in North Africa US War Aid clothing was arriving in theatre, and US-made HBT bush shirts, cotton trousers and shorts as well as wool BD were being issued to British troops. The War Aid BD was well received as it was of a finer wool than British or Commonwealth items; in immediate appearance it was a hybrid of BD Serge and the austerity pattern, the blouse having a concealed fly front but unpleated pockets with visible buttons. (The US also provided WA No.4 rifles and bayonets.)

In tropical climates regimental headgear – normally the khaki wool Field Service and, from 1944, General Service caps – were supplemented by sun helmets. The tropical pith hat or 'solar topee' was well suited to the conditions in much of India and Africa, although it was officially worn only on Indian service; the similar Wolseley pattern helmet was worn in other locations including the Middle East and Africa. Neither of these types offered any ballistic protection, and the Mk I* and later Mk II steel helmets were worn in action. The use of the sun helmets gradually diminished; by spring 1943 they were only to be seen in use by garrison troops in isolated and rear areas, and they were soon to disappear altogether.

Web equipment

The outbreak of war in 1939 found the majority of troops in the Middle East and Africa still equipped with the old but adequate Pattern 08 web equipment. All production of the new 1937 pattern set and of weapons such as the .303in Bren light machine gun was channelled to the BEF in France, the Mediterranean being a low priority. After the fall of France supplies were shipped to tropical theatres, and troops in Egypt gradually received the 37 Pattern equipment, with infantry enjoying priority. India provided a vast manufacturing pool and was to be the source of much of the 37 web and other equipment issued in North Africa. Webbing issued in Africa was of standard 37 Pattern, though it was normally worn 'unblancoed' and with brasswork allowed to dull.

Insignia

The wealth of insignia worn by the British Army during the war is a study in its own right (see MAA 187, *British Battle Insignia (2): 1939-45*). Briefly, however: the most important insignia worn on the shoulder and sleeve were shoulder designations ('titles'), formation badges, arm-of-service strips, and regimental flashes. Seen in combination by an educated observer, even without a visible cap badge, these could identify an individual's regiment, battalion seniority, and any higher formation. The badges used were intended to

Tunisia 1943: 'Mongerear – Grub up!' A Seaforth Highlander has his hands full with two messtins and a mug of char, so the CQMS is kindly stuffing his shirtfront with a box of matches and five ten-smoke packets of the ubiquitous and horrible 'V' cigarettes, made in India and conveyed to the Western Desert in vast quantities. This image provides a good view of the 'tam o' shanter' which in Scottish regiments replaced the FS and later GS caps as out-of-battle headgear; note the relatively pale tone of the khaki fabric, the darker khaki woollen 'tourie' or pompon on the crown, and the regimental badge with tartan backing. In typical Tommy fashion, the top buttons of the collarless wool shirt are left open with material turned inwards at the front.



display this information to informed fellow-countrymen; since it was likely that the enemy also appreciated the usefulness of this display, there was an (often ignored) ruling that all insignia were to be removed by combat units on active service.

With the introduction of Battledress immediately before the war the British Army had subdued its uniforms to such an extent that the only insignia seen were badges of rank and trade qualifications. Regimental and corps epaulette titles were not authorised; however, the brass type previously worn on SD were increasingly added to BD and – in an effort to economise on vital metals – were officially replaced by cloth slip-on titles bearing the same designations. These were initially produced in khaki wool with black woven lettering; an economy version was introduced, printed in black on khaki; and other variants included black on KD for tropical wear and black on JG for jungle uniforms (although the black-on-khaki-wool type were to be seen in all theatres).

The Guards and Household Cavalry continued to wear their pre-war coloured cloth regimental designations with full titles at the top of the sleeve. This style was also adopted by the Airborne Forces and, despite War Office instructions to the contrary, by a number of other units. Their use became so widespread by 1942 that in order to standardise the situation an ACI was published in June 1943, which introduced a list of shoulder designations and colours for all units. All infantry, other than Rifles, were officially to wear white lettering on scarlet backing; typically, some units ignored the ACI and continued to wear designations which reflected regimental traditions, such as the yellow-on-black worn by the battalions of the Hampshire Regt which served in Italy, and the Royal Norfolks' black-on-yellow. These titles were not worn by Scottish units, which favoured instead a patch of the regimental tartan cut to various dimensions and shapes.

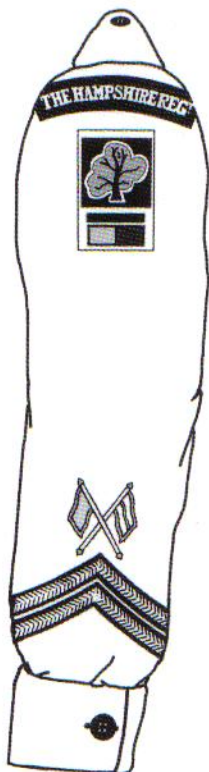
Despite initial orders that no divisional insignia were to be worn during the war, *esprit de corps* soon gave birth to a wealth of signs, many based on those worn by formations during the Great War. In a situation that was little short of total contempt for orders regarding the wearing of insignia, formation badges were officially authorised in 1940, to be worn at the top of the BD blouse sleeve below any shoulder designation. These included the insignia of all higher formations such as Districts, Commands, Armies, Corps, Divisions and similar units, including Independent Brigades.

In September 1940 coloured 'arm-of-service' strips had been introduced for wear on BD and greatcoats. These were strips of cloth measuring 2in x 2½in, using single colours and colour combinations to identify all arms and services, and worn below any formation badge or alone if none was authorised. Infantry grouped in brigades identified their seniority within divisions by the use of multiple strips – one for the senior brigade, two for the intermediate and three for the junior.

Below the arm-of-service strips were worn any regimental flashes. Given that the battalions of a single British regiment might be serving in

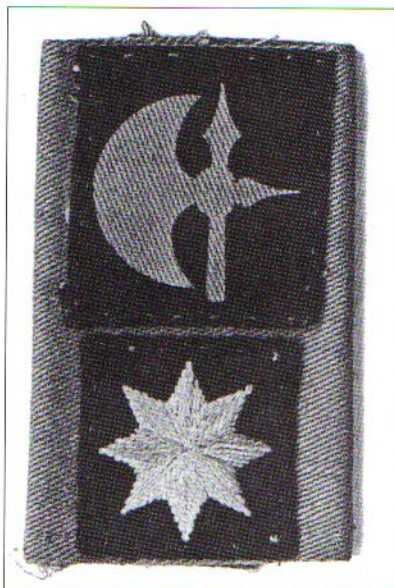


Italy, late May 1944: men of the 1st Bn, Green Howards (15th Bde, 5th Inf Div) cautiously move forward during the attack on the Moletta River, a diversionary assault which formed part of the break-out from the Anzio beachhead into the Alban Hills – Operation 'Buffalo'. This engagement saw the battalion heavily mauled, with 155 casualties; such a rate of loss – 20 to 25 per cent of the battalion strength – was not unusual in World War II attacks, although today any Western army (and the media) would consider it a disaster. The sergeant, top right, has a white tape cross on his small pack, an identifying mark for following troops. (R.F. Stedman Collection)



During the course of the war the bland appearance of BD and KD uniform was gradually brightened up by the emergence of a multitude of coloured formation and other badges; to the informed observer these indicated the arm or service, higher formation, rank, qualifications, and in some instances the individual battalion. A typical example is this arrangement worn on BD by a signaller of 5th Bn, Hampshire Regt, in Italy in 1945.

(Top to bottom) Regimental shoulder designation or 'title', in the non-regulation yellow-on-black used by this, the 1/4th & 2nd Bns of the regiment, who unusually served together as 128th Bde. Formation badge of 46th Inf Div (see Plate E). Single scarlet infantry arm-of-service strip identifying the senior brigade in the division, 128th Bde. Yellow-and-black regimental flash. At the base of the sleeve are the crossed flags of a qualified signaller in white and blue; and two inverted chevrons - good conduct badges - in white-on-khaki 'herringbone', signifying five years of 'undetected crime'.

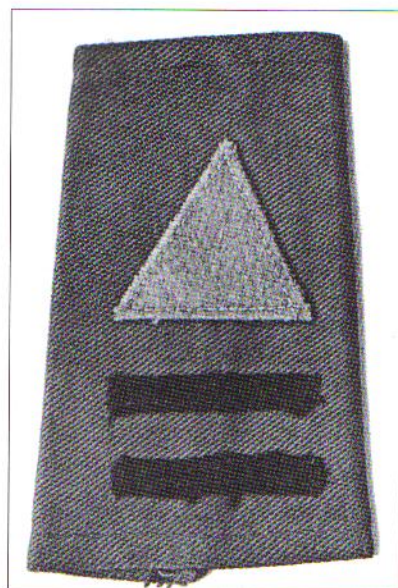


As tropical shirts had to be washed frequently, all insignia were detachable. While formation signs were sometimes worn attached to the sleeves with small press-fasteners ('poppers'), it was also common for insignia to be displayed on epaulettes - either sewn directly to the straps, or more often to slip-on loops of KD cloth. The display of insignia varied from unit to unit, from none whatsoever through to full battalion, brigade, regimental and divisional insignia.

ABOVE LEFT The yellow-on-black printed battleaxe of 78th Div, above a regimental flash - the white-on-black embroidered star of the 1st Bn, East Surrey Regt.

ABOVE RIGHT The white triangle of 1st Div, above the two red arm-of-service strips of 2nd Bde - 1st Loyals, 2nd North Staffords, 6th Gordons.

A few photos - e.g 51st Highland Div, Tunisia and Sicily - alternatively show either an extra epaulette, with a slip-on loop, sewn and buttoned upwards to the upper left sleeve; or a cloth tab bearing insignia hanging down from the end of the left epaulette.



different brigades, divisions, or even theatres, these could vary in style from battalion to battalion. They ranged from simple coloured patches to multi-colour geometric designs and other devices.

Despite attempts to prohibit the use of cloth insignia which might give away a unit's identity, no attempt was made to conceal the metal badges worn on headdress, which identified the wearer's arm, service, corps or individual regiment. The quantity of metal being used in badges did cause concern at a time of shortage, and in an effort to ease the use of brass and other metals plastic badges were gradually introduced. These were not particularly well received and were often discarded when a metal badge could be acquired. The large RA cannon badge was replaced by the much smaller grenade device previously worn on the collar of the SD uniform, although the original badge continued in use by those ranks still wearing the stiff SD cap.

The marking of helmets was popular with some units in the Western Desert. The regimental cap badge was sometimes reproduced, and/or the regimental flash or tartan patch. Subsequently the practice all but disappeared except for a few exceptions - notably the Royal Artillery, of which some units continued to mark their helmets with the red-and-blue divided diamond.

THE PLATES

A: 1940-41

A1: Private, 2nd Bn, King's Regiment (Liverpool); Gibraltar Command, 1940

Following the fall of France the colony of Gibraltar remained the only British stronghold on mainland Europe, guarding the strategic western entrance to the Mediterranean Sea. During the war 'the Rock's' honeycomb of tunnel systems were expanded to over 25 miles of tunnels and caverns used for offices, accommodation, stores and ammo dumps. This sentry of the 2nd King's guarding the entrance to one of the many complexes wears the odd mix of KD shorts with woollen SD tunic, hosetops, puttees, darkened 1937 pattern web equipment and Mk II steel helmet. The SMLE rifle has a 'war economy' sling made up from a double thickness of fabric similar to that used for the waterproof groundsheet/cape, rather than the normal webbing sling.

A2: Guardsman, 3rd Bn, Coldstream Guards, 'SELBYFORCE'; Sidi Barrani, Libya, December 1940

The 3rd Battalion of the Coldstream were under the command of Brig.A.R.Selby for Operation 'Compass', the first major British assault against Italian troops in North Africa. As part of his detached force they supported the Western Desert Force (renamed XIII Corps in January 1941) in its attack, which commenced on 8 December; within eight weeks the greatly outnumbered British had advanced 500 miles and taken 130,000 prisoners. The appearance of this Guardsman is somewhat different from the stereotype 'Tommy' of the desert campaign. The SD cap does much to alter his appearance, even with the wire stiffener removed; this cap was a limited issue to the Guards, CMP, MPSC, SASC and gunnery instructors, mounted units and musicians. It is worn here with the brass regimental badge, anti-gas goggles, and with the chinstrap over the crown. The issue khaki woollen pullover is worn over the tropical shirt with a wool scarf, KD shorts, hosetops, puttees and 'ammo' boots. Equipment is Pattern 37 web 'battle order' with small pack on the back, respirator on the left hip alongside the

No.1 (SMLE) bayonet scabbard, and the Mk II helmet slung on the right side over the water bottle. The rifle is the standard .303in SMLE No.1 Mk III*, with bayonet fixed.

A3: Subaltern, 9th Bn, King's Royal Rifle Corps, 1st Armoured Brigade; Greece, April 1941

As part of Operation 'Lustre' the 9th KRRC were shipped to Greece as support troops for 1st Armd Bde; the Rifle regiments - KRRC and Rifle Brigade - usually provided the 'motor' infantry battalions of armoured brigades, in keeping with their 150-year tradition as fast-moving light troops. The 9th's stay in Greece was to be very short, but during their fighting withdrawal they were to win battle honours for *Veve, Greece 1941* and *Crete*. This young lieutenant is typical of the rather regulation appearance of some units' officers. He wears full officer's Pattern 37 web 'pistol order' with belt, braces, brace attachments, compass pocket, ammunition pouch, pistol case, water bottle, haversack, and officer's valise. The woollen pullover is worn over a KD shirt, and KD rank slip-ons with black metal title and 'pips' are worn on the shirt epaulettes buttoned through slits in the pullover. KD trousers are worn loose over blackened officer's boots, and the helmet is the standard Mk II in desert finish.

B: 1941

B1: Private, 1st Bn, King's Own Royal Regiment (Lancaster); Iraq, June 1941

Patrolling after the armistice which ended Rashid Ali's revolt, this private of the battalion which had defended Habbaniya airfield wears light patrol order consisting of Pattern 37 belt, braces and ammunition carriers worn with tropical shirt, KD shorts and full length puttees. The unit had been deployed to Iraq from India, where issues of 1937 web equipment were incomplete, priority going to troops in Europe and North Africa. The 'pith hat' was well suited to the dry heat of Iraq.

B2: Officer, 60th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery; Sidi Rezegh, November 1941

The battle of Sidi Rezegh was the first major tank-vs.-tank battle of the North African campaign; the 7th Armd Div lost two-thirds of their tanks committed to battle, thus highlighting the British need to develop a doctrine for mobile warfare. The artillery also suffered heavily, with many guns

British infantry double across typical open desert terrain - probably a staged shot, given the abandoned PzKw III in the background. As part of Pattern 37 web equipment in 'battle order' they carry below the belt at the rear the 37 Pattern 'intrenching tool' (sic), which began to appear in the Western Desert from 1942.



being destroyed or running out of ammunition. Officers' dress in North Africa was caricatured by the cartoonist Jon's 'Two Types', and this gunner officer (rank invisible) typifies the relaxed attitude adopted by many. He wears privately tailored baratheia trousers based on BD, a woollen BD blouse, and a full length sheepskin 'Hebron' coat. The 'chukka' or 'desert' boots have suede uppers with crepe rubber soles; well suited to the terrain, they were very comfortable. The use of the RA coloured Field Service cap further exaggerates the individual approach to field dress.

B3: Private, 2nd Bn, Devonshire Regiment, 'Southern Infantry Brigade'; Malta, 1941

Under relentless Axis air attack infantrymen frequently found themselves supporting the vital anti-aircraft batteries, or helping the RAF by repairing bomb damage or even re-arming fighters. This soldier of the 2nd Devons seconded to RAF duties has been manually linking 20mm ammunition for the Hispano cannon of the defending Spitfires – hence the rubber-headed hammer. His uniform consists of a pair of well worn 'Trousers, Overall, Denim' held up by issue braces, an aertex tropical shirt with shortened sleeves, and a Mk II helmet with the applied black and sand camouflage unique to units serving in Malta. The strains and hardships endured by the defenders of Malta were reflected in the general laxity of uniform standards.

Inset A white Maltese Cross on a red shield was the fitting sign adopted by the 'Southern Infantry Brigade' (later to become 231st Independent Inf Bde); its units were the 2nd Devonshires, 1st Hampshires and 1st Dorsets.



C: 1941-42

C1: Corporal, Corps of Military Police; Beirut, Lebanon, August 1941

This mounted corporal of the Corps of Military Police sets a fine example to the occupying forces after the Convention of Acre. He wears a well starched cotton KD bush shirt, Indian-made tan whipcord riding breeches (these were also made in KD fabric), and full length woollen puttees with ammunition boots and spurs. His status is shown by the 'MP' brassard on his arm and the red-topped SD cap. Leather 03 Pattern pistol order and the long mounted troops' truncheon complete his equipment. Horse tack consists of the 1902 bridle with whitened halter, 1912 saddle, and leather frog for the truncheon.

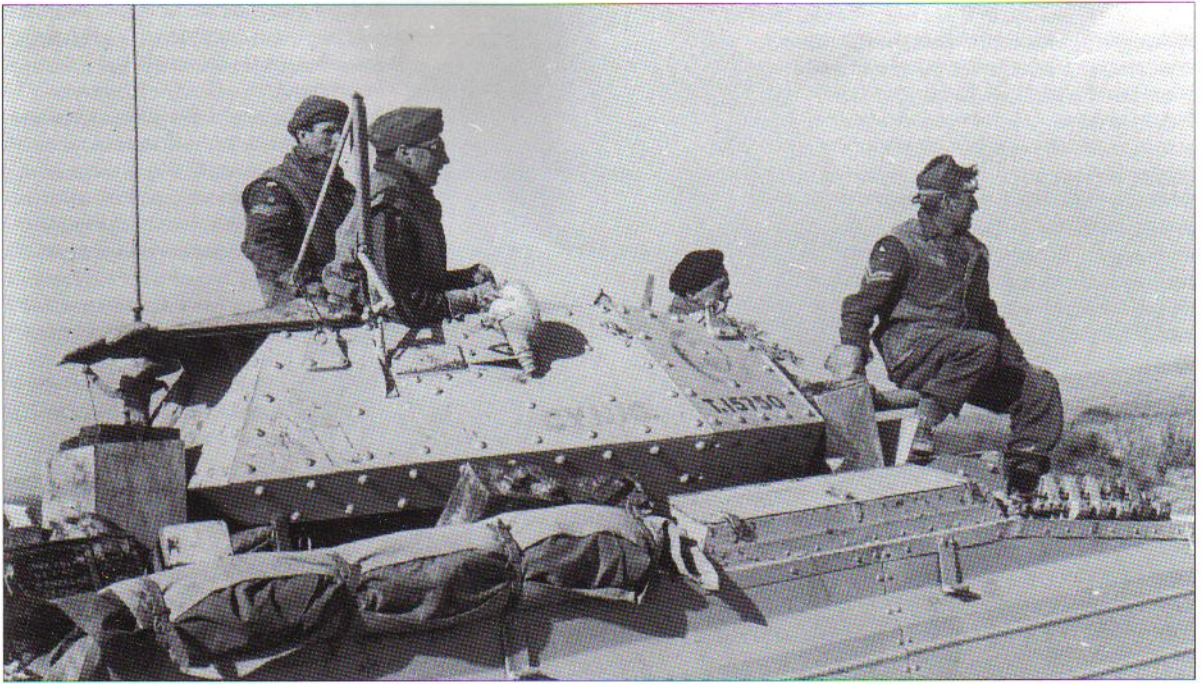
C2: Sherman commander, B Squadron, 5th Royal Tank Regiment, 7th Armoured Division; El Alamein, October 1942

This NCO commander of an American 'Lend-Lease' M4 Sherman from 22nd Armd Bde typifies the grubby appearance of many 'tankies'. The KD coveralls, a general issue for vehicle crews and mechanics, were hard wearing and well suited to duty in tanks; over them he wears a round-necked woollen pullover. The web equipment, consisting of a Pattern 37 belt with shoulder braces and brace attachments, seems somewhat pointless; it might be useful as an extraction harness for a casualty, but equally would tend to snag. An American 1942 tank crew helmet is worn with the British headset and microphone for the No.19 radio set; US tanks were supplied complete with full equipment sets including helmets. Like the other numbered tactical units of the Royal Tank Regiment, 5th RTR wore the black Royal Armoured Corps beret with the silver RTR cap badge.

C3: Trooper, 1st Special Air Service Regiment; Western Desert, November 1942

Formed in the Middle East from members of 'LAYFORCE' (Middle East Commando) in October 1941, the SAS undertook a number of long range sabotage operations behind enemy lines. Patrols attacked lines of communication, water and supply dumps as well as enemy airfields; these attacks destroyed a large number of Axis aircraft on the ground, and one SAS officer, Blair 'Paddy' Mayne, wrecked 47 aircraft in a single night. In October 1942 the official title was changed from 'L Detachment' to 1st SAS Regiment. This trooper cradles a jar of service issue rum, one of a pair that came in well protected wooden crates packed with loose cork. Despite the very limited space available in long range patrol vehicles, a niche for these was always found, and 'SRD' jars were included in the supply dumps of long range penetration groups such as the SAS and LRDG; a 'tot' was found to be invaluable in warding off the cold of the desert night. Typical of the 'mix and match' approach to uniform,

The American M3 Stuart ('Honey') and M3 Grant tanks came complete with first pattern US tank helmets, with full circumference leather bumper and fabric side curtains. Both this and the pattern shown in Plate C2 were uncomfortable in the heat of the desert, and were often discarded in favour of standard Mk II steel helmets. This is the commander of 'Cresta Run', a Stuart Mk I of 8th King's Royal Irish Hussars in late 1941. He has disconnected the jacks for his headset and throat microphones; and wears the issue khaki wool pullover over the tropical shirt. (IWM E6291)



A tank commanders' conference atop 'Cynic', a Crusader I of C Sqn, 10th Hussars in February 1942. This is the desert, in daytime; yet they wear BD, leather jerkins and wool scarves; headgear includes two khaki FS caps, a rolled-up balaclava and a black Royal Armoured Corps beret. At the top of their sleeves two NCOs wear the white-rhino-on-black-oval sign of 1st Armd Div; the light spot above the chevrons of the sergeant at left is the regimental NCOs' brass sleeve badge, the Prince of Wales' plumes and scroll on a shaped red cloth backing. A range of such badges were regulation in the cavalry, although often discarded from combat uniforms. (IWM E8076)



this soldier wears BD Serge trousers with KD shirt tucked in, an issue leather jerkin, and woollen socks with leather sandals. His headdress is the practical Arab *shemagh*, worn by some SAS and LRDG personnel as sun and dust protection. His belt supports a holstered pistol and a first pattern Fairbairn Sykes fighting knife in its leather sheath.

D: 1942-43

D1: Company Sergeant Major, 1/5th Bn, Queen's Royal Regiment, 7th Armoured Division; Tobruk, November 1942

Marching into the liberated port of Tobruk during the advance after El Alamein, this WO Class II serves – most unusually – with a brigade entirely made up of battalions of his regiment: 131st Bde, the lorried infantry of the 7th Armd Div 'Desert Rats', comprised 1/5th, 1/6th and 1/7th Queen's. His uniform is fairly typical of the 8th Army infantryman, although it was unusual to see 'Bombay bloomers' this late in the campaign – never particularly popular, most had been shortened by this time. A standard 'aertex' shirt, Mk II helmet, hosetops and puttees are worn with 1937 web equipment, a second belt being used to support the 'Bombays'. The only insignia

visible is his wreathed crown warrant badge worn on a leather wristlet – more practical than the forearm, given that sleeves were usually worn rolled. His weapon is the .45in Thompson M1928A1, widely issued in these campaigns, although by 1944 the Sten was beginning to appear in Italy in limited numbers.

Inset The cap badge of the Queen's Royal Regiment.

D2: Lieutenant, No.1 Commando; Algiers, November 1942

For the 'Torch' landings the Eastern Task Force assaulting Algiers consisted of the American 39th & 168th Regimental Combat Teams, the British 11th and 36th Inf Bdes, and Nos.1 & 6 Commandos. No.1 Cdo was tasked with silencing the batteries covering the bay of Algiers from Sidi Feruch and Cape Matifou. Sidi Feruch was surrendered without a shot, but at Cape Matifou the nearby stronghold of Fort d'Estrées put up stiff resistance and inflicted a number of casualties among the commandos. This lieutenant wears the 'Overall, Denim' version of Battledress, bearing the Combined Operations insignia at both shoulders and his rank on the epaulettes, and a woollen 'cap, comforter'. The original photograph shows his shirt and detachable collar in

mismatched shades of khaki – an oversight, or a fashion statement? Pattern 37 web equipment consists of a belt and shoulder braces, a single basic pouch for grenades, a single brace attachment alongside a pistol holster and an officer's valise. All webbing has been scrubbed and whitened, a tactic first employed during the St Nazaire raid: at night friendly troops could readily be recognised at close 'killing' range, reducing the 'friendly fire' incidents which were a high risk during commando operations. At any greater distance it merged into the darkness well enough not to betray a stealthy assault; but under a searchlight or at dawn and dusk it was highly visible, particularly during movement. A toggle rope is worn around the waist, passed through a carabiner worn at the junction of the brace attachment and belt. Web anklets and rubber-soled commando boots complete his ensemble.

Inset Combined Operations adopted an insignia representative of their tri-service activities: an anchor, Thompson 'machine carbine' and RAF eagle, all in red on a dark blue backing, at first of 'tombstone' shape and later circular.

D3: Private, 1/6th Bn, Queen's Royal Regiment, 7th Armoured Division; Djebel Tarhuna, Libya, January 1943

During the night of 21/22 January 1943 the men of 1/6th and 1/5th Queen's from 131st Bde were instrumental in securing the road from the village of Tarhuna through the Djebel Tarhuna pass and onto the Tripoli plain, opening the way for the 7th Armoured Division to continue its pursuit into Tunisia. This Bren gun 'No.1' wears KD trousers without web anklets or puttees, and a tropical shirt with epaulettes buttoned through the slits in the woollen pullover. Being a lorried infantryman he is lightly equipped, wearing only basic web equipment of belt, braces, universal pouches and water bottle; the Bren spare parts wallet is slung over his shoulder.

E: 1943

E1: Trooper, B Squadron, 11th Hussars, 7th Armoured Division; Tripoli, Libya, January 1943

The winter storms which lashed the Libyan coast during January 1943 not only brought cold weather, but devastated facilities in the ports of Tobruk and Benghazi, so reducing the 8th Army's ability to push on into Tunisia. The capture of Tripoli – the only other deep-water port in more than 630 miles of coastline – was a great boost. The first Allied soldiers to enter Tripoli were the armoured car crews of B Sqn, 11th Hussars – the reconnaissance regiment of 7th Armd Div – who drove in before dawn on 23 January. This trooper is wrapped



A rare study of a commando of the Raiding Support Regt, formed in 1943 to provide heavy weapons support – MMGs, mortars, A/Tk and AA artillery – to other raiding forces such as the SBS and Greek Sacred Sqn operating in the Aegean. Based in the Italian Dalmatian Islands, they were involved in operations in the Dodecanese and in support of Tito's Yugoslavian partisans. He appears to wear the SAS beige beret with the badge of this regiment – not the similar badge of the Royal Scots Greys, as might at first appear.

up against the early morning chill in a cavalry pattern greatcoat (shorter than the general service issue); KD trousers over his BD trousers; a scarf; and a BD blouse draped over his shoulder – note the halved yellow/red Royal Armoured Corps arm-of-service strip. His headgear is the unique brown and 'cherry' regimental beret worn unbadged by the 'Cherry Pickers', harking back to the glory of their uniform at the Charge of the Light Brigade. The proud grin recalls the fact that the 11th were not only first into

Tripoli but also into Tobruk and Benghazi.

E2: Captain, 5th Bn, Cameron Highlanders, 51st (Highland) Infantry Division; Wadi Zigzaou, Tunisia, March 1943

The Mareth Line had been built before the war by the French in anticipation of possible attack by Italian forces from neighbouring Tripolitania. It was flanked by the sea and the Matmata Hills; to its front was the Wadi Zigzaou, which had to be crossed before any major assault on the line could be delivered. The *wadi* was still waterlogged from the winter rains, but the British sappers managed to create gaps which infantry and tanks exploited. The 5th Camerons from 152nd Bde of the 51st Inf Div gained battle honours both for *Wadi Zigzaou* and *Mareth Line* in separate actions. This company commander wears 'Battledress Serge', the tam o' shanter bonnet with regimental cap badge on a tartan backing patch, and Pattern 37 pistol order with officer's valise; his helmet is slung on his right hip. On the sleeve of his BD blouse he wears the 51st (Highland) Division's 'HD' sign, above the single infantry-red arm-of-service strip of the senior brigade, and the regimental flash – an oblong of Cameron of Erracht tartan. The cravat worn under the open blouse collar is strictly personal.

Inset The red 'HD' within a red circle on a blue square was used as the sign of 51st Div after it was reconstituted in the UK in September 1940, the original formation having been destroyed with the BEF in France. Both formations were composed of Regular and Territorial battalions of the Highland regiments.

E3: Private, 2/4th Bn, King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, 46th Infantry Division; Mine de Sedjenane, Tunisia, March 1943

The 46th Inf Div landed in Tunisia in time to take part in the final defeat of the Axis forces in North Africa. The capture of Mine de Sedjenane was achieved under the driving rain typical of the Tunisian spring; most troops fought in wool Battledress, although a few soldiered on in a mix of BD and KD. This Bren gun 'No.2' wears a pre-war 'BD, Serge' blouse, KD shorts, web anklets and web equipment in battle order. The pair of 'Pouches, Utility' which he has slung over his right shoulder carried extra magazines for the Bren, and he carries its spare barrel. On his epaulettes he wears an old black-on-khaki slip-on title, 'KOYLI'; on his sleeves, the oak tree sign of 46th Div, above the two red arm-of-service strips indicating the division's intermediate brigade, 138th Brigade. **Inset** The 'Sherwood Forest Oak' set on a black square was adopted as the sign of 46th Inf Division, which was composed of Territorial units from the North Midlands.

F: 1943

F1: Captain, Field Survey Company, Royal Engineers, HQ 8th Army; Tunisia, 1943

The Royal Engineers provided invaluable support to the 8th Army's advance across North Africa and later in Italy; they mapped the terrain, cleared the numerous minefields, marked safe lanes, repaired roads and bridges, as well as spanning *wadis* and other natural obstacles. This sapper officer wears clothing privately purchased from a tailor in Egypt and well suited to the desert campaign. The cap is in a fine light khaki barathia, with brown leather chinstrap and bronze RE badge. The 'bush jacket' and trousers are both made not from cotton KD but from heavyweight corduroy – a fabric that was harder-wearing and warmer for the winter. Note his suede 'chukka boots', popular among officers. Equipment consists of the web belt with compass pocket, ammunition pouch and pistol case, and a large map board. Being in frequent use the compass, rather than the pistol, is attached to the lanyard worn around his neck.

Inset Originally the Army of the Nile, the 8th Army adopted the insignia of a white crusader shield with yellow cross on a blue ground after their first operation, 'Crusader'. The yellow cross was adopted instead of the true red cross of the medieval crusaders to avoid any confusion with the Geneva red cross device.

F2: Corporal, 1st Provost Company CMP, 1st Infantry Division; Pantelleria, June 1943

This island commanding the straits between Tunisia and Sicily was heavily defended, with 16 coastal batteries and a large garrison. To remove this threat to the Sicilian invasion, over the period 8 May–11 June some 6,200 tons of bombs were dropped during 5,285 sorties, destroying 11 and damaging 54 of the 80 guns. The Italian garrison surrendered

A denim-clad sapper works on clearance of an obstacle using a compressed air power hammer. The support provided by the Royal Engineers included modern equipment, although in its absence there was no substitute for hard labour. The RE were considered a combat arm as their role was in close support of the infantry and armour, who frequently needed them to clear minefields and remove or bridge obstacles.

before the assault units stepped ashore. This MP was one of the detachment which rounded up and searched the 11,000 Italian POWs. He wears US-made 'War Aid' KD trousers and a WA bush shirt in HBT fabric; a stiff SD cap with cut peak; the 'MP' brassard, and web equipment in 'musketry order'. He is armed with a .45in Thompson gun, officially termed a 'machine carbine' in British use.

Inset The white triangle divisional sign of 1st Div; divisional artillery wore it set centrally on a red-and-blue RA diamond, and Royal Signals units on a blue diamond.

F3: Corporal, 1st Bn, Black Watch, 51st (Highland) Infantry Division; Sicily, 1943

This veteran 'Jock' of a pre-war Regular battalion, photographed boarding a troop transport, had already seen action with the BEF; 154th Bde, holding the port of Le Havre in June 1940, escaped while the rest of the 51st Div was captured. The division arrived in North Africa in August 1942, fighting at El Alamein, Medinine, Mareth, Wadi Akarit, Enfidaville, Tunis and on Sicily before receiving orders to return to the UK, where this battle-hardened division was required for the planned assault on 'Fortress Europe'. This section commander wears no badges of rank, but the machete and Thompson identify an NCO. He wears a tropical shirt and 1941 pattern KD shorts, a sleeveless woollen pullover, hosetops and puttees. The Black Watch's regimental red feather hackle has been removed from the Highland tam o'shanter; since it took the place of a cap badge when in the field, the bonnet is now plain. For





British POWs tend an orchard somewhere in mainland Italy. Their British issue uniforms have been removed and replaced by denim work trousers, white shirts, and round caps similar to the US Navy 'gob' cap. This group seem happy enough in their labours; while there were instances of inhumanity, most POWs in Italian captivity were well treated.

embarkation the web equipment is full marching order with large pack, blanket roll, lightweight respirator and machete in its leather sheath. Around his waist and beneath the webbing is an inflatable life preserver.

G: 1943-44

G1: Fusilier, 6th Bn, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, 78th Infantry Division; Catenanuova, Sicily, July 1943

Marching through this recently captured town, the 6th 'Skins' from 38th (Irish) Bde would soon be involved in heavy fighting against infantry and armour from the 'Hermann Göring' Division for the key hilltop position of Centuripe (to the Tommies, 'Cherry Ripe') on 31 July-3 August. In the heat of the Sicilian summer a combination of KD bush shirts loose over woollen BD trousers is worn, the BD being harder-wearing than KD trousers. This private is armed with the .303in Lee Enfield No.4 rifle, although other members of his section had a mix of SMLEs and No.4s; for most soldiers serving in the Mediterranean the SMLE was to remain standard - the 2nd Army in NW Europe had priority for the No.4, although some examples had been in limited use in North Africa since 1942. He also carries triple bomb tubes for the platoon HQ's PIAT anti-tank weapon. The lightweight respirator haversack is worn over his left hip; this first appeared in quantity in 1943, although it was rarely seen carried that early.

G2: Corporal stretcher-bearer, 1st Bn, London Scottish, 56th Division; Monte Camino, Italy, December 1943

The winter fighting for Monte Camino was particularly harsh, against dogged enemy resistance. Supplies had to be transported by pack mule or by hand; the wounded were brought back down rocky mule tracks by stretcher-bearers struggling for a foothold in the mud and wet rock. The trip up the mountain to the Regimental Aid Post took three hours, the return to the Advanced Dressing Station another three. This

SB of the 1st London Scottish from 168th Bde shows the strain of the weather and terrain, his rain-sodden BD and leather jerkin leaving him cold and adding to his exhaustion. Many troops on Camino wore the anti-gas cape to protect them from the weather; the drawbacks were its fragility, and its tendency to trap moisture and heat during strenuous activity - this made its use by SBs as unpleasant as suffering the driving rain uncovered. This soldier wears corporal's chevrons on both upper arms, with the SB brassard on the left. Over his shoulder is slung the web shell dressing bag, and he holds the GS stretcher folded for the trek up the mountain. **Inset** A black cat on red, symbolising Dick Whittington's cat, was adopted by the 56th (London) Division. The division saw service in Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Tunisia and Italy, fighting in both the Salerno and Anzio beachheads. Below is the regimental flash of the London Scottish - a dark blue thistle on a patch of the 'hodden grey' colour used for their kilts by this senior Territorial unit.

G3: Corporal, 1/6th Bn, East Surrey Regiment, 4th Infantry Division; Cassino, Italy, May 1944

Uniformity of dress had by this time given way to a situation where each soldier wore what suited him best; most wore BD trousers but a variety of KD, British and US wool shirts as well as pullovers were used, the BD blouse being little in evidence during the heat of the day. This section leader has a US War Aid HBT bush shirt tucked into BD serge trousers, and 'musketry order' with entrenching tool; as was normal, he is armed with a Thompson. The 4th Division saw hard fighting against the German paratroopers of 1.Fallschirmjäger-Division during the final battle for Cassino town, establishing bridgeheads across the Rapido River close under the looming Monastery Hill.

Inset The shamrock sign of 38th (Irish) Bde was sometimes worn instead of, but normally below, the divisional sign; the extra red triangle identifies 2nd Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. Below is the first 'quadrant' pattern of the 4th Division sign, as worn in spring 1944.

H: 1944-45

H1: Trooper, 2nd Special Air Service Regiment; Castino, Italy, April 1945

Men of the 2nd SAS were parachuted into the area of Castino, south of Turin, in support of the Italian partisans who were playing a major part in the liberation of the northern cities. They provided specialist skills and manpower, as well as heavy weapons support – here in the shape of a .303in Vickers medium machine gun. The SAS troopers wore a mixture of uniform items to personal preference, ranging from camouflage windproof smocks to heavy duty woollen pullovers. Festooned with belts of .303in ammunition, this heavily loaded man has an issue woollen pullover, serge 'Trousers, Parachutist', and rubber-soled commando boots. His equipment is also a mixture, of US and British items: the US M36 pistol belt, M3 fighting knife in M8 scabbard, and M1911A1 pistol with leather M1916 holster, with British-made web compass pocket and twin magazine pouch – this took clips for both the 9mm Browning HP and .45in M1911A1.

H2: Private, 2nd Independent Parachute Brigade, 1st Airborne Task Force; Le Muy, France, August 1944

On 15 August a combined American/British airborne task force was dropped at key locations along the coast of southern France between Cannes and Toulon in support of the amphibious landings. This trooper wears a Denison smock (displaying his 'jump wings' on the right shoulder) over a KD shirt, 'Trousers, Overall, Denim' and leather 'ammo' boots with web anklets. His equipment is Pattern 37 musketry order, .303in No.4 rifle, and third pattern airborne helmet with web strapping – the web straps were widely issued from mid-1944, but both leather and web types remained in use until the end of the war. For Operation 'Draught' in Provence all Allied troops wore national flag insignia on the upper arm, to identify them as friendly to the surprised French who found them scattered through their fields and villages.

Inset Bellerophon astride Pegasus in pale blue on a maroon ground, and worn above the 'Airborne' title in the same colours, was the insignia worn by both the 1st and 6th Airborne Divisions. The blue and 'claret' were the pre-war racing colours of Maj.Gen.Frederick ('Boy') Browning, who commanded Airborne Forces when these formations were being organised.

H3: Bombardier, 138th Field Regiment Royal Artillery, 78th Infantry Division; Naples, spring 1945

For this convalescing bombardier, sick leave has brought the chance of some R&R in Naples. The city, one of the main centres for leave, offered visits to Vesuvius (which had erupted in March 1944), the sights of Pompeii, or the many bars, cafes and racier establishments which flourished on the income from the Allied troops. He presents a smart and astonishingly officer-like appearance. His US-made War Aid BD is of finer fabric than British items, and also has the fly front as found on the BD Serge and 1940 pattern blouses. The officer's pattern SD cap is a fashion accessory; by this date many soldiers in the Mediterranean theatre were purchasing officer-quality caps complete with officer's pattern chinstraps. The wearing of such items was against regulations, but they were *de rigueur* for the fashion-



At first glance this fine portrait of a DAK soldier shows typical German tropical uniform. However, the helmet is a British Wolseley pattern; even more bizarrely, the tunic is captured KD Service Dress modified with pebbled buttons, and removable shoulder boards in place of the fixed epaulettes of the SD. The German breast eagle, Iron Cross ribbon and national sports badge complete the illusion. (R.F.Stedman Collection)

conscious Tommy who intended to cut a dash with the ladies. (Some Other Ranks purchased well-tailored SD in the bazaars of Egypt, presenting an officer-like appearance which infuriated commissioned ranks and – perhaps even more so – the RSM.) On the sleeves of his BD are the red-on-blue Royal Artillery shoulder title, 78th Div sign and RA arm-of-service strip, above the bombardier's badges of rank. His medal ribbons are those of the 1939-45 Star, Africa Star with 1st Army numeral, and Italy Star; and note the wound stripe above his left cuff.

Inset The 78th Division's yellow battleaxe on black. Formed in May 1942, the division saw action as part of the 1st Army in Tunisia, later fighting with the 8th Army in Sicily and throughout the Italian campaign before finishing the war in Austria as part of the occupation forces.

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ISBN 1-84176-237-7



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B82/1b2
2002