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# British Commanders of World War II



Ian Sumner • Illustrated by Malcolm McGregor

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## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my wife, and Roy Wilson and Hugh Witherow for all their help. Photos are reproduced courtesy of the Trustees of the Imperial War Museum.

## Abbreviations

ACAS	Assistant Chief of Air Staff
ADC	Aide-de-camp
AFC	Air Force Cross
AOC	Air Officer Commanding
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
BOAC	British Overseas Airways Corporation
CB	Commander of the (Order of the) Bath – a British title
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
C-in-C	Commander-in-Chief
CO	Commanding Officer
DFC	Distinguished Flying Cross
DSO	Distinguished Service Order
GCB	(Knight) Grand Cross of the Bath – a British title
GOC(-in-C)	General Officer Commanding(-in-chief)
GSO	General Staff Officer
HQ	Headquarters
KCB	Knight Commander of the Bath – a British title
KBE	Knight (Commander of the Order) of the British Empire – a British title
MC	Military Cross
MP	Member of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
OTC	Officer Training Corps
RAF	Royal Air Force
RCAF	Royal Canadian Air Force
RFC	Royal Flying Corps
RMC	Royal Military College
RTC	Royal Tank Corps
TAF	Tactical Air Force
VC	Victoria Cross
VHF R/T	Very High Frequency Radio Transmission

## Artist's note

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Malcolm McGregor

# BRITISH COMMANDERS OF WORLD WAR II

## INTRODUCTION

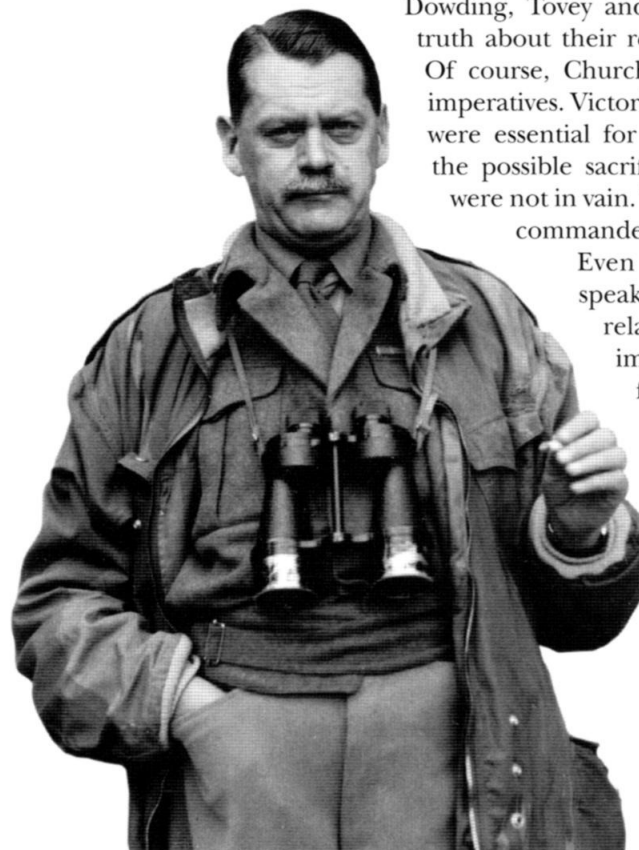
**T**HE KEY TO THE CAREER of every British commander of World War II was his relationship with the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill. In forming his cabinet, Churchill had also assumed the office of Minister of Defence, which gave him direct access to the three service ministries. In addition to his keen interest in the conduct of operations, he was also concerned to see that command was exercised properly, as he saw it.

Churchill was at heart a romantic, and frequently saw war in those terms. Perhaps influenced by his biography of his ancestor the Duke of Marlborough, he instinctively approved of commanders who were personally courageous (Alexander, Freyberg, Gort, Gott and Wingate) or dashing (Alexander again, Mountbatten), who for him could do little wrong.

He was less sympathetic to those who contradicted him. Auchinleck, Dowding, Tovey and Wavell all chose to tell Churchill the military truth about their respective situations, but were not thanked for it. Of course, Churchill was also at the mercy of domestic political imperatives. Victories, or at least a sense of advance and achievement, were essential for raising public morale, in order to prepare for the possible sacrifices ahead and to make certain that past ones were not in vain. These differing priorities meant that the two sides, commander and politician, did not always see eye to eye.

Even a distinguished commander but forthright speaker, like Andrew Cunningham, enjoyed only a cool relationship with Churchill. Away from Churchill's immediate orbit, Slim also suffered, for he was frequently tarred with the same wide brush that Churchill applied to the whole of the Army in India. It was only slowly that Churchill came to appreciate the value of his man.

**Major-General Richard Gale (1896–1985), the commander of 6th Airborne Division, Normandy, June 1944. He commanded the Army's first airborne formation from its creation in 1942, and was able to train its men most thoroughly in their role. He insisted that his men be dropped as near to their objective as possible, and that they should train to remain in the line for as long as possible. Both these ideas were proved realistic, as the division was not relieved until September 1944. In a distinguished career, he was Deputy Supreme Allied Commander, Europe from 1958 to 1960. (IWM B5352)**



## THE COMMANDERS

### General Sir Harold Alexander (1891–1969)

The Hon. Harold Rupert Leofric George Alexander was born in London on 10 December 1891, the son of the fourth Lord Caledon. Educated at Harrow and Sandhurst, he joined the Irish Guards as a second lieutenant, and spent most of World War I with his regiment, rising to command the 2nd Battalion in 1917. In 1918 he left to take temporary command of 4th Guards Brigade, while 1919 saw him in Poland with the Allied Relief Commission, in command of the Baltic Landeswehr.

Alexander returned to his regiment as Commanding Officer (CO) of the 1st Battalion. A staff appointment followed, then in 1932 he was promoted to command the Nowshera Brigade in India. Six years later, by now a major-general, he took command of 1st Division in the UK, accompanying it to France as part of the BEF in 1940. In the fighting for the Dunkirk perimeter, he commanded I Corps. It was here that he made his reputation – Churchill was impressed by his air of cool control when all around was chaos.

In December 1940, he was promoted again to lieutenant-general and made GOC-in-C Southern Command, where he stayed for 18 months before his departure for the Far East to take command of the Army in Burma. In the long term, he could have done nothing to prevent the loss of Burma to better equipped and trained Japanese forces. However,

his command was saved from the consequences of some of his decisions only by the competence of his junior commanders, such as William Slim (qv).

#### RANKS IN THE THREE SERVICES

Royal Navy	Army	Royal Air Force
Admiral of the Fleet	Field Marshal	Marshal of the Royal Air Force
Admiral	General	Air Chief Marshal
Vice Admiral	Lieutenant-General	Air Marshal
Rear Admiral	Major-General	Air Vice Marshal
Commodore 1st Class	Brigadier	Air Commodore



General Alexander reviews men from his own regiment, the Irish Guards, in North Africa. Although a tall man himself, Alexander is almost dwarfed by the officers behind him. (IWM NA6092)



General Sir John Dill (1881–1944), appointed CIGS in May 1940, and then Head of the British Joint Staff Mission in Washington. His period of tenure as CIGS was a trying one, and he never succeeded in establishing a good rapport with the Prime Minister. In Washington, however, representing Britain to the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, and to General Marshall in particular, he made an incalculable contribution to Anglo-American relations. (IWM H5070)

in Churchill's last government and an earl. He was not happy in politics, and resigned in October 1954.

Alexander's command of I Corps at Dunkirk so impressed Churchill that it guaranteed his further employment. The burden of disapproval following the disastrous Burma campaign fell not on him, as commander, but on his subordinates, although many of the worst decisions, such as holding on to Rangoon in the face of overwhelming odds, had in fact been Alexander's own. As Allied commander in Sicily, and again in Italy, Alexander failed to exercise 'grip' over his admittedly difficult subordinates, Montgomery and the Americans Mark Clark and George Patton.

Liddell Hart later commented that Alexander was 'a born leader, not a made one. He won men's confidence at first sight ... yet [was] self-effacing to the point of handicapping his own powers.' He went on to say that Alexander, although highly intelligent, was fundamentally lazy: success had come so easily and so quickly that he had never needed to exert himself. Admiral Andrew Cunningham (qv), who had served with Alexander in the Mediterranean, was less complimentary, and, characteristically caustic, thought Alexander 'a mountebank ... not fit to be a Supreme Commander. He had no opinions of his own that he was not prepared to change ... no knowledge of the sea and little of the air.'

### General Sir Claude Auchinleck (1884–1981)

Claude John Eyre Auchinleck was born in Aldershot on 21 June 1884, the son of a colonel in the Royal Artillery. He was educated at Wellington College and Sandhurst, where he passed out 45th in his class, thus

making him eligible for the Indian Army. He joined the 62nd Punjabis in 1904, serving with his regiment in Mesopotamia during World War I.

After a period on the staff during operations in Kurdistan in 1919, he returned to regimental soldiering, and, promoted to colonel in 1929, was appointed CO of 1/1st Punjabis (successors to the 62nd). In 1938 he was given command of Meerut District, a position he enjoyed for two years, before his recall to the UK in January 1940 to command IV Corps, with the rank of lieutenant-general.

Four months later he was appointed GOC-in-C Northern Norway, during the ill-fated Norway Expedition. On his return to England in June, he resumed a corps command, moving on to V Corps. Only one month later, he was created GOC-in-C Southern Command. In November 1940, he was on the move again, this time taking over as C-in-C India, as a full general.

Following the dismissal of Wavell (qv) as C-in-C Middle East in 1941, Auchinleck was selected to replace him, and he arrived in Egypt in June. In November, he launched the Crusader offensive, which cleared Rommel from Cyrenaica and relieved the besieged port of Tobruk. However, success was short-lived. Within months, Rommel counter-attacked, and the 8th Army was forced back, firstly to the Gazala line, and then to the El Alamein line.

Throughout this period, Churchill pressed Auchinleck to continue the offensive and drive the Germans out of North Africa, but he refused to be hurried. Reinforcements needed time to become acclimatised, he argued; new equipment had to be adapted for desert conditions. He and the 8th Army commander, Neil Ritchie, were also seeking a more flexible organisation for the Army, but did not have time to implement their reforms fully before the Germans attacked. After the retreat from Gazala, he was forced to dismiss Ritchie, taking personal command. At the first battle of El

Alamein, in July 1942, his dispositions first checked Rommel's attack, and then drove him back. This success was not enough to save him in Churchill's eyes. He was dismissed and replaced by Alexander (qv) as C-in-C Middle East, while command of the 8th Army went to William Gott. Gott, however, died soon after in a plane crash, and was replaced in his turn by Bernard Montgomery (qv).

Auchinleck returned to India without a post, intending to write up his dispatches. In June 1943, however, he was once again asked to resume his role as C-in-C India. This did not involve a field command, but he played an important role in mobilising the resources of that vast country to support the war effort, be it organising supplies for South-East Asia Command or the Chinese, or training the forces that would subsequently go on to victory.

Promoted to field marshal in 1946, his last official duties were to divide up the old Indian Army that he loved so much, to form the armies of the new states of India and Pakistan.

Auchinleck was the complete professional, and a highly talented soldier. He believed in total

General Claude Auchinleck, photographed in the UK in 1940. (IWM H3681)



General Sir John Gort VC (1886–1946), CIGS 1937–39 and C-in-C BEF 1939–40, shakes hands with Leslie Hore-Belisha MP, Minister of War 1937–40. Hore-Belisha was responsible for setting in motion the last-minute modernisation of the Army in the late-1930s. Gort was a courageous and loyal soldier, who was able to do little to stem the German advance in 1940. Later a popular Governor of Malta during the siege of the island, he bolstered its inhabitants with his fortitude and cheerfulness in adversity. (IWM O575)

honesty, and insisted on making decisions for purely military rather than political reasons. This led him to resist Churchill's pressure for new offensives in the Western Desert before his men were completely ready for battle, dooming him in the eyes of the Prime Minister. It is ironic that while Churchill criticised him for a lack of enterprise, it was in fact Auchinleck who authorised the formation of the Special Air Service, hardly the most conventional of forces. Montgomery too did nothing to further Auchinleck's cause, and later career, by his tendentious account of Auchinleck's future plans for the 8th Army in North Africa after the first battle of El Alamein, irrevocably portraying him as an indecisive defensive general, utterly inadequate for the demands of the post.

#### **Air Commodore Donald Bennett (1910–86)**

Donald Bennett was born in Queensland in 1910, the son of a farmer. He joined the Royal Australian Air Force in 1930, and after his initial training came to the UK to serve with 29 (Fighter) Squadron, and 210 (Flying-Boat) Squadron where he came under the command of Arthur Harris (qv). When he left the service in 1935, he had logged hours on 21 different types, and become a fine advanced navigator.

Bennett joined Imperial Airways, soon to become BOAC, working first on European flights and then on the South African run. In July 1940, he was asked to join the Atlantic Ferry Organisation, responsible for flying Canadian- and US-built aircraft across the Atlantic to the UK. Although the organisation was successful, it was taken over by the RAF and RCAF in 1941, and Bennett found himself temporarily unemployed.

He was offered a commission as acting wing commander in the RAF. Here, although grossly over-qualified by virtue of his extensive long-distance flying experience, he was appointed second-in-command of an elementary air navigation school. He next joined 77 Squadron, then engaged in night bombing operations, flying obsolescent Whitleys.

Flying over Germany, Bennett became convinced that navigation was one of Bomber Command's weak points. Targets were being missed, and he pressed the RAF's Directorate of Bombing Operations for



Air Vice Marshal Donald Bennett (right) is pictured with one of his Master Bombers, Group Captain Searby. (IWM CH20628)

improvements. His idea was that a number of the best crews, including excellent navigators, should fly ahead of the main bomber stream, to mark the intended target precisely, thus giving the remainder of the bombers an exact point to aim for. Posted to the command of 10 Squadron in 1942, he was shot down during a raid on the German battleship *Tirpitz* in Norway. With his wireless operator, he managed to escape across country to Sweden, where he was interned for a short time before returning to the UK.

On his return, he found that his ideas on target-

finding and marking had gained the support of the Air Ministry. He was summoned to Bomber Command headquarters and given command of a new target-finding force. Harris had been reluctant to allocate men and aircraft to the project, but at least recognised that Bennett was the best man for the job. Starting from scratch, the newly christened Pathfinder Force (quickly upgraded to the status of a Group within Bomber Command) did not bring immediate results. However, the development of the H2S and Oboe navigation systems, and enhancements in communication and target-marking systems in 1943, improved the accuracy and the target-finding ability of Britain's bombers.

Harris remained a reluctant supporter of the Pathfinder concept, and at times appeared more than willing to dilute the Force by transferring experienced crews into Air Vice Marshal Cochrane's 5 Group and replacing them with inexperienced men. Harris later commented that Bennett, 'underrated experience and over-rated knowledge' – suggesting that Harris mistrusted Bennett's youth. Bennett remained the only group commander without a knighthood at the end of the war. Yet Bennett's contribution was critical: efficient target marking was the keystone of an effective Bomber Offensive, truly able to strike at the heart of the Third Reich.

#### General Sir Alan Brooke (1883–1963)

Alan Brooke was born in Bagnères-de-Bigorre, in France, on 23 July 1883, the youngest son of an Ulster baronet. He was commissioned into the Royal Artillery in 1902, and served in Ireland and India. In 1909, he was appointed to the Eagle Troop, Royal Horse Artillery, and in 1914 accompanied them to France. From 1915 onwards he served in a variety of staff positions, including the Artillery Staffs of the Canadian Corps, and of 1st Army.



Churchill is pictured here with Brooke and Montgomery. (IWM B5360)

In the post-war period he was first a student, and then an instructor, at the Staff College, before his appointment, by now a brigadier, as Commandant of the School of Artillery in 1929. In 1935 he was promoted to major-general and made Inspector of Artillery. A number of appointments followed, first as Director of Military Training (1936), then as the commander of the Mobile Division (1937), Anti-Aircraft Corps (1938), and Southern Command (1939). On the outbreak of war, he was placed in command of II Corps of the BEF, which he led with distinction during the German attacks.

On his return from France, he was promoted to full general, and made Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces. In December of the following year, he was appointed Chief of the Imperial General Staff, the professional head of the British Army, a post which he held until January 1946, when, a field marshal and viscount, he retired.

Despite his achievements in France in 1940, it is for his period as CIGS that Brooke is chiefly remembered. It was fortunate for Great Britain that Brooke and Churchill complemented each other, even if they did not always see eye to eye. Churchill's was a wide-ranging vision of conducting war, concentrating on the struggle in Europe; it was left to Brooke to add the detail, to point out the constraints in men and equipment, and in so doing, to curb some of Churchill's wilder flights of fancy (for example, his repeated desire to invade Norway, or to mount an amphibious expedition to the Baltic).

Lieutenant-General Alan Cunningham (1887–1983) welcomes Emperor Haile Selassie back to his capital, Addis Ababa, after its reconquest by Allied forces in 1941. Cunningham, the brother of Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, conducted an admirable campaign in difficult terrain, employing troops from a number of Imperial countries, to oust the Italians. Promoted to the command of 8th Army in the same year, he was to prove sadly out of his depth, and was sacked. (IWM E3035)



As the professional head of the Army, Brooke played a vital role in the development of strategy. Together with the First Sea Lord and the Chief of the Air Staff, Brooke met regularly with Churchill in the Chief of Staffs Committee, to determine British war strategy. He also acted as a cushion between Churchill and his theatre and army commanders, insulating them as much as possible from the Prime Minister's tendency to meddle in the details of their command. The nearest the two men came to an irretrievable break was in 1944 over strategy in the Far East. Brooke preferred the purely military option, concentrating all British forces in an Allied assault on the Japanese home islands, and bypassing Japanese-occupied territory; Churchill, with an eye to the future of the British Empire, preferred the route through Burma and Malaya, in order to re-establish British prestige in the area. The atomic bomb, however, rendered the argument moot. The greatest CIGS of them all, Brooke was an excellent strategist and a man of utter honesty and integrity.

**Air Vice Marshal Arthur Coningham (1895-1948)**

Arthur Coningham was born in Brisbane, Australia, on 19 January 1895, the son of a chemist. Not long after his birth, his parents moved to New Zealand, and their son was educated at Wellington College. He joined up in 1914, serving with the Canterbury Mounted Rifles in Samoa and at Gallipoli. In August 1916, he transferred to the Royal Flying Corps, serving first with 32 Squadron, and then with 92 Squadron as their commanding officer. He won the DSO and the MC for gallantry. His New Zealand upbringing earned him the nickname 'Maori', which, corrupted as 'Mary', followed him throughout his career.

After the war, he was granted a permanent commission as a flight lieutenant in the RAF. He served with 55 Squadron in Iraq, as well as spending periods on the staff, and was awarded an AFC for his role in leading a flight across Central Africa. Promoted to wing commander, he commanded an RAF detachment in the Sudan. Back in the UK, as a group captain, he commanded the flying-boat base at Calshot.



An RAF Mediterranean trio – from left to right Air Marshal 'Mary' Coningham, AOC Tactical Air Force; Air Chief Marshal Tedder, AOC-in-C Mediterranean; and Air Vice Marshal Park. (IWM CNA2166)

Air Chief Marshal Sir Philip Joubert de la Ferté (1887-1965), AOC-in-C of Coastal Command between 1941 and 1943, with a Royal Navy liaison officer. It was Joubert's misfortune to be moved just as the equipment, long-range aircraft in particular, became available which would prove decisive in the war against the U-boats. (IWM CH5819)



Just before the outbreak of war in 1939, he was promoted to air commodore and given command of 4 (Bomber) Group, based in Yorkshire. For the next two years, his squadrons were engaged in long-range operations over Germany. In 1941, he was selected to command the Desert Air Force in the Western Desert. Towards the end of that campaign, in February 1943, his command was extended to encompass British and American squadrons, as leader of 1st Allied (North African) Tactical Air Force. This gave him responsibility for the air component of the campaigns in Tunisia and in Sicily.

In January 1944, he returned to the UK to take command of 2nd Tactical Air Force for the invasion of North-West Europe, a post he held until the end of hostilities. After the war, he took command of RAF Flying Training Command, but retired at his own request in 1947. He died in an aircraft accident, lost somewhere between the Azores and Bermuda, on 30 January 1948.

'Mary' Coningham was responsible both for devising a system of army-air force co-operation from scratch, and for putting it into operation. It was so effective that it became standard practice for the 8th Army and Desert Air Force, and for the Allied Armies and Tactical Air Forces in Europe. Such close and timely air support, against enemy front-line positions and lines of communication, made the Allied advance that bit easier. It is perhaps significant that the one operation where 2nd TAF was not permitted to participate fully, Operation Market Garden, was a defeat. The operation was planned not by the experienced 21st Army Group in Belgium, but by 1st Allied Airborne Army in England, who restricted 2nd TAF's operations over the battlefield. Coningham was a good commander in the field, knowing when to leave detail to his subordinates, and when to take a lead; he was a good judge of his commanders; and above all, had an undoubted flair for air operations.



### Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham (1883–1963)

Andrew Browne Cunningham was born in Dublin on 7 January 1883, the son of a professor of anatomy at Trinity College. Educated at Edinburgh Academy and HMS *Britannia*, he was serving on the Cape Station when the Boer War broke out, and saw action ashore with the Naval Brigade. On passing for sub-lieutenant in 1903, his first posting was to the battleship HMS *Implacable*, but it was on his transfer aboard the destroyer HMS *Locust* that he found his true niche. He developed as an efficient and able 'taut hand' with little tolerance for those who did not meet his own high standards. After some service on board cruisers, he was given his first command in 1908, the torpedo boat No. 14.

Three years later, he was appointed to the new destroyer HMS *Scorpion*, serving in the Mediterranean and at Gallipoli, where he was promoted to commander and awarded the DSO. Moved to the English Channel, he took part in the Zeebrugge Raid, where he was given a bar to his DSO. He was promoted to captain in 1919, and received a second bar for his services in the Baltic in that year.

He continued his career in destroyers during the 1920s, and was rewarded with an appointment in 1926 as chief staff officer to the C-in-C North America and West Indies. After a year at the Imperial Defence College, he was given command of the new battleship HMS *Rodney*. This was followed by a spell as commodore of the Royal Naval Barracks, Chatham. In 1932, he was promoted to flag rank and made ADC to the King, to be followed by his ideal appointment, as Rear Admiral (Destroyers) in the Mediterranean.

He had been promoted to vice admiral in 1936, when a sudden vacancy permitted his appointment as commander of the Battle Cruiser Squadron and second-in-command of the Mediterranean Fleet. In 1938, he returned to London as deputy Chief of the Naval Staff.

The following year, he returned to the Mediterranean as commander-in-chief, and was promoted KCB.

On the outbreak of war, Cunningham's immediate aim was to restore and maintain Britain's naval supremacy in the Mediterranean, insisting that both Alexandria and Malta remain as bases. In the summer of 1940, he was ordered to seize the French fleet then in Alexandria. Although negotiations became very tense after news of the bombardment at Oran, he obtained a French surrender and avoided bloodshed. Only the powerful Italian fleet now remained to challenge him. The first engagement with the enemy came on 9 July 1940, off Cape Spartivento, when Cunningham was protecting an important convoy from Malta to Alexandria. Units of the Italian fleet were also at sea, covering one of their own convoys bound for Libya. Although the Italians outranged all but one of his ships, and were faster into the bargain, Cunningham immediately engaged the enemy. His boldness had its reward when a British shell from HMS *Warspite*, fired at maximum range, scored a

Admiral Andrew Cunningham. Before the Battle of Cape Matapan, one officer recalled: 'He would pace one side of the Admiral's bridge, always the side nearest the enemy; the speed of the battleship was never fast enough for him and every second was grudged when a turn from the main line of advance was required for operating aircraft. This mood was known colloquially ... as the "caged tiger act" and we adjusted our actions accordingly.' (IWM A15702)

direct hit on the battleship *Cesare*. The Italian ships ran for harbour, trying to lure the British into range of their land-based bombers; Cunningham called off the pursuit, but the action established a moral superiority over the Italian Navy that would not be relinquished.

On 11–12 November 1940, the Mediterranean Fleet transformed this into a material superiority as well, when a night attack by carrier-borne Swordfish aircraft on the harbour at Taranto put half the Italian battleships out of action: the remainder were moved out of danger (but also out of easy range of British convoy routes) to Naples.

In March 1941, Cunningham again engaged the Italians. An Italian fleet had left harbour to try to intercept convoys then ferrying British troops to Greece. British aircraft spotted them almost immediately, and shadowed them. By this time, Cunningham was at sea and closing on the Italian ships. Their progress had been slowed by air attacks launched from the carrier HMS *Formidable*, and by dusk, now off Cape Matapan, the Italians were appearing on British radar screens. The Italian ships, however, were not equipped with radar, so Cunningham's three battleships were allowed to approach within two miles in the dark. The British ships waited until they had a visual sighting before they opened fire at point blank range. Three Italian heavy cruisers and two destroyers were sunk, with British losses restricted to one aircraft. Although some Italian ships escaped, their fleet would never again be a threat. Cunningham's reward was promotion to GCB.

The next 12 months proved much more difficult. During the withdrawal from Greece and Crete, and the continuing convoy battles, German aircraft inflicted grievous losses in terms of ships and men, but Cunningham refused to give in. He spent a short time in Washington (when he was presented with a baronetcy) before returning to the Mediterranean as Allied Naval Commander for Operation Torch. Resuming his role as C-in-C Mediterranean in January 1943, and promoted to admiral of the fleet, he was able to direct his ships to cut Axis supply lines to Tunisia, issuing his famous order, 'Sink, burn and



Rear Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten (1900–79). A bold destroyer captain, he was made Head of Combined Operations, and then Supreme Commander South East Asia, in spite of his inexperience. His flair for publicity did not always endear him to his fellow commanders. (IWM H21735)

destroy. Let nothing pass.' In October of the same year, he became First Sea Lord, succeeding Sir Dudley Pound. In January 1945, he was made a Knight of the Thistle, and in September 1945, was ennobled as Baron Cunningham of Hyndhope. He was advanced to a viscountcy in the following year and appointed to the Order of Merit on his retirement.

He was no relation of Admiral Sir John Cunningham, who succeeded him in 1943 in the Mediterranean, and again in 1946 as First Sea Lord. His elder brother John served with the Indian Medical Service, rising to the rank of lieutenant-colonel; his younger brother Alan was also a soldier, and completed the reconquest of Abyssinia in 1941, before commanding 8th Army for a short time in 1942.

Andrew Cunningham was a fine fighting sailor in the best traditions of the service. His calm and optimistic disposition saw him through setback and triumph alike. As he himself admitted, however, sitting behind a Whitehall desk was not his strong suit. Some of his opinions were rather reactionary: he disapproved of ships' amenities such as canteen messing and laundries, arguing that the Navy had done very well without them for hundreds of years! As First Sea Lord, his main strategic concern was the direction of the future campaign in the Far East. Cunningham wished to use the Fleet, now freed from major commitments in Europe, directly against the Japanese Navy, in concert with the Americans. Churchill wished to use it in support of land operations against Japanese-held territory in the East Indies. Arguments were inevitable, not only with Churchill, but also with that inveterate Anglophobe US Admiral Ernest J. King, who resolutely opposed the deployment of British vessels in the Pacific.

#### **Air Vice Marshal Hugh Dowding (1882-1970)**

Hugh Caswall Tremenheere Dowding was born at Moffat, Scotland, on 24 April 1882, the son of a schoolmaster. He was educated at Winchester, Sandhurst and Woolwich, and joined the Royal Garrison Artillery, serving in the colonies, and later, after transferring to mountain artillery, in India. He developed an interest in aviation, and obtained a pilot's licence in 1913.

In 1914, he joined the Royal Flying Corps and served in France, where his quiet, rather austere approach to flying duties earned him the nickname 'Stuffy'. By 1917, he was a brigadier, serving with a training formation in the UK. In 1918, it was only with some difficulty that he obtained a commission in the peacetime RAF (he had made an enemy of the commander, Hugh Trenchard).

In the inter-war period, which saw his reconciliation with Trenchard, he served both at home and in the Middle East. In 1930, he joined the Air Council as the member for supply and research. Almost immediately, he sought to use the experience gained in designing high-speed monoplane aircraft for the Schneider Trophy competition to produce the modern aircraft types that the RAF desperately needed, types that would become the Hurricane, Spitfire and Stirling. He also promoted the development of radar. Dowding's practical nature, and his grasp of aircrew requirements often led him into conflict with those of more orthodox opinions. The proof of his effectiveness in office was seen not only in the triumph of the monoplane over the biplane, but also in the provision of self-sealing fuel tanks and bullet-proof cockpit glass.

In 1936, he was appointed to lead the newly created Fighter Command. Once in post, he insisted on a number of practical innovations, among them secure land-line communications between his airfields and headquarters, the introduction of operations rooms, the improvement of VHF R/T, and the completion of the chain of radar stations around the south and east coasts.

The part played by Fighter Command in the Battle of Britain is well known, and needs no repetition here. Yet in November 1940, the victor in one of the key campaigns of the war, Dowding was relieved of his command. He had been threatened with the sack no less than five times between 1938 and 1940, and finally the blow had come. It seemed remarkable then, and no less so now, that no suitable post could be found for a man of his experience, or that he could not simply have been promoted and then retired. Dowding's misfortune was to be identified with a wholeheartedly defensive attitude, considered out of place at a time when the RAF was seeking to go onto the offensive. His stubbornness in upholding his point of view, even when it ran counter to the current orthodoxy, had perhaps earned him a few enemies in the Air Ministry, and certainly there were those amongst his subordinates (such as Leigh Mallory and Sholto Douglas) who took every opportunity to denigrate Dowding's reputation



**Wing Commander James 'Johnnie' Johnson DSO and three bars, DFC and two bars (1915-2001), the highest-scoring RAF fighter pilot, with 34 individual kills and a further four shared. (IWM CH13129)**



**Air Chief Marshal Dowding chats to a number of fighter pilots, including Douglas Bader and a New Zealand pilot. (IWM CH16283)**



Vice Admiral Bruce Fraser, when serving with the Home Fleet. (IWM A15345)

to their own advantage. Yet the victory of the summer of 1940 was a striking vindication of his work during the 1930s, and of his leadership of Fighter Command.

**Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser (1888–1981)**

Bruce Austin Fraser was born on 5 February 1888, in Acton, London, the son of a general. He entered HMS *Britannia* in 1902. On passing out, he served in a number of ships before opting to specialise as a gunnery officer, finishing top of his course at HMS *Excellent*. He served on a cruiser at Gallipoli, but was posted as an instructor at *Excellent* in 1916, thus missing Jutland. He returned to sea in 1917 aboard the battleship HMS *Resolution*.

In 1920, he volunteered to serve with the White Russian fleet against the Bolsheviks, but was captured and spent time in a Russian jail. On his return home, he spent more time at *Excellent*, before working on new fire-control systems, and becoming a captain in the Admiralty tactical division (1926–29). His first sea-going command was the cruiser HMS *Effingham* in the East Indies, but he returned to Whitehall as Director of Naval Ordnance in 1933. In 1938, he became a rear admiral and chief of staff to the C-in-C Mediterranean, Sir Dudley Pound.

The outbreak of war found him back at the Admiralty, by now Third Sea Lord and Controller of the Navy, with responsibility, amongst his other

duties, for the Navy's shipbuilding programme. Here, he introduced the corvette, the vessel that was to be the mainstay of the convoy escort; he played an important role in the development of warship radar; and he was instrumental in the development of the successful 'Hedgehog' anti-submarine device, in the face of opposition from the Admiralty's own scientists. He was appointed CB in 1939, and KBE in 1941.

His time at the Admiralty won him the confidence of Churchill, and he was appointed C-in-C Home Fleet in succession to Sir John Tovey (qv) in June 1942. The role he inherited had changed little from Tovey's day – guarding the Arctic convoys, and at the same time preventing German ships from breaking out westwards. But the wider strategic situation was changing. Russian advances after Stalingrad had diminished the importance of the Arctic convoys, and it seemed less likely that the Germans would hazard their capital ships against them. Yet as long as these continued as viable fighting units, the danger remained.

On 19 December 1943, Ultra decrypts revealed that the battlecruiser *Scharnhorst* was about to make a sortie from its Norwegian base against Convoy JW55B. Flying his flag in HMS *Duke of York*, Fraser put sea to intercept the German vessel. Searching by radar in heavy Arctic weather and poor visibility, a cruiser force consisting of HM ships *Belfast* and *Sheffield* made contact off the North Cape of Norway. They opened fire,



Captain Frederic 'Johnny' Walker (1896–1944) directing operations against a U-boat from the bridge of HMS *Starling*. Walker had taken the unfashionable career route into anti-submarine warfare in the 1930s, but was able to reap the benefits during the war. He developed a series of tactics for convoy escort groups that considerably increased the number of enemy boats sunk, one of the decisive features of the campaign. He drove himself to the limit, and worn out by the strain, met a premature death in 1944. (IWM A21988)

and immediately tried to close the range, but the *Scharnhorst* turned and gave them the slip. The German vessel was now hurrying to the safety of her home port, but Fraser managed to place his ships across the *Scharnhorst's* path. Salvoes were exchanged briefly before the German turned away again. Engaging at maximum range, a shell from the *Duke of York* entered one of the *Scharnhorst's* boiler rooms, and cut her speed to a mere eight knots. Rapidly closing, Fraser was able to finish the *Scharnhorst* off with a combination of gunfire and torpedoes. The other German ship in the area, the *Tirpitz*, had been badly disabled by air raids, and was unable to put to sea in her intended role.

Strategic attention now shifted to the invasion of Europe and much of the Home Fleet's strength was transferred elsewhere. Fraser was promoted GCB, and struck his flag on 16 June 1944, to be appointed first C-in-C Eastern Fleet, responsible for the Indian Ocean, and then C-in-C Pacific Fleet in November of the same year.

The Pacific Fleet represented Churchill's attempt to ensure that Britain had its say in the post-war Far East. The theatre was dominated by the US Navy, which had no real need of the small contribution offered by the Royal Navy, and which remained highly suspicious of British motives. Nevertheless, Fraser's friendliness and competence ensured an amicable working relationship, and the British Pacific Fleet was able to play its part in Allied bombing and anti-shipping offensives against Japan. Fraser signed the Japanese surrender document as British representative on 2 September 1945.

After the war, Fraser, by now Baron Fraser of North Cape, was appointed C-in-C Portsmouth in 1947, and First Sea Lord in the following year, with a promotion to admiral of the fleet. He retired in 1952.

Fraser's contribution to victory came in three distinct stages: his period as Controller of the Navy, his command of the Home Fleet and the sinking of the *Scharnhorst*, and his command of the Pacific Fleet. The first saw him produce the ships and equipment that were vital for victory in the Battle of the Atlantic; the second saw the removal of a major German surface threat; and the third he crowned with success in spite of the operational and logistical obstacles in his path.



**Lieutenant-General Bernard Freyberg VC (1889–1963)**

Bernard Cyril Freyberg was born on 21 March 1889 in Surrey, the son of a surveyor, and two years later moved with his family to New Zealand. Although a dentist by profession, he had a taste for adventure. Qualifying as a ship's stoker, he took passage for the United States, and then for Mexico, where he is alleged to have served with Pancho Villa. On the outbreak of war in 1914, he left Mexico for England, where he accosted Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, in the street. The result – a commission in the Hood Battalion of the Royal Naval Division.

In April 1915, the division was sent to the Dardanelles. Freyberg, a powerful swimmer, was entrusted with staging a diversionary landing to draw attention away from the main affair. This he did almost single-handed, and was rewarded with the DSO. By August, he was in command of his battalion, and accompanied it to France. The division did not see action until the end of the Somme offensive, during the battle of the Ancre. Here, wounded four times, Freyberg's valiant leadership earned him the Victoria Cross. Returning to his unit, he was given a brigade, but continued to lead from the front: he was wounded again during the third battle of Ypres

At the attempted crossing of the River Sangro, December 1943, 'Tiny' Freyberg surveys the ground ahead from the bonnet of his Jeep. (IWM NA9245)



Lieutenant-Colonel Peter Stirling, one of the founders of the SAS. The regiment was formed in 1941 as a small-scale raiding unit, and, after initial setbacks, was most successful at harassing the Afrika Korps' open southern flank. Stirling was captured in Tunisia in 1943, and spent the remainder of the war in Colditz, but was instrumental in ensuring his creation's post-war existence. (IWM E21339)

(in fact, he was to be wounded no less than nine times during the course of the conflict), and won two bars to his DSO, the second on 11 November 1918.

After the war, he decided to become a professional soldier, serving with the Grenadier Guards, and then, as lieutenant-colonel, the Manchester Regiment. From 1931, he was employed on staff duties in Southern Command and at Whitehall. In 1937, by now a major-general, a move to a District command in India was halted when a heart murmur was detected, and he was declared medically unfit. This came as an enormous shock to a man who prided himself on his fitness – he had tried to swim the English Channel twice during the 1920s – and he retired from the Army.

Fit or not, he was nevertheless recalled on the outbreak of war in 1939, and he offered his services to the New Zealand government. They responded by offering him command of the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force, a single division strong. The division finally assembled in Egypt in March 1941, and almost immediately set off for Greece.

On the fall of Greece, Freyberg, with two New Zealand brigades, was evacuated to Crete, the Germans' next objective. Freyberg was placed in command of all Allied forces on the island, and was given responsibility for its defence. He made his initial dispositions to counteract a conventional, largely seaborne, landing. In fact, the Germans were planning an airborne assault. Freyberg learned of this from Ultra decrypts, but was still unable to alter his dispositions, for fear of revealing the extent of Allied intelligence gathering. As a result, he could not recover from a faulty deployment, and the island was lost.

Restored to full strength, his division developed into a tough fighting formation, amply demonstrated during the relief of Tobruk and the



Malta 1943: on the left is Air Vice Marshal Keith Park, AOC Malta, and in the centre, Lord Gort, Governor of Malta. Park was a New Zealander who successfully commanded 11 Group of Fighter Command during the Battle of Britain. Like his chief, Dowding, he was relieved and posted on with almost indecent haste, becoming AOC Flying Training Command. After a short spell in Egypt, he took command of RAF Malta during the most dangerous days of the siege of 1942, where he was able to bring to bear all of his experience in the aerial defence of the island. After returning to Egypt, he was made air commander in South-East Asia under Mountbatten in 1945. (IWM CNA2303).

Battle of El Alamein. After some debate in New Zealand political circles, the division was kept in the Mediterranean Theatre, and took part in the Italian campaign, where it once again established a fine reputation. Freyberg, although promoted to lieutenant-general in 1942, expressed no wish for further promotion, and remained in command of the division until the end of the war.

Freyberg was an old-style fighting general, who led from the front but also inspired confidence in his men, and knew how to get the best out of them. His career was not without controversy. Although officially cleared, he was held responsible by many for the debacle in Crete; he was also named by General Mark Clark, anxious to avoid blame, as the commander who had insisted on the bombing of the monastery at Monte Cassino in 1944.

**Air Chief Marshal Arthur Harris (standing, left) attends the debriefing of a crew from the Dambusters mission. He had spent the night at 5 Group headquarters at Grantham, before leaving for Scampton in the early morning to greet the crews as they returned. He is accompanied by Air Vice Marshal the Hon. Ralph Cochrane, the Group AOC. Cochrane believed that any well-trained crew could bomb with accuracy, and championed the efforts of his own crews against Bennett's Pathfinder Group. (IWM 9683).**

### **Air Chief Marshal Arthur Harris (1892–1984)**

Arthur Travers Harris was born on 13 April 1892 at Cheltenham, the son of an engineer in the Indian Civil Service, and was educated at All Hallows School, Devon. In 1909, he went to farm in Rhodesia. On the outbreak of war, he became a bugler in the 1st Rhodesian Regiment, serving with his regiment on campaign in German South-West Africa. The regiment was disbanded at the end of the campaign, so he returned to England to enlist.

He joined the Royal Flying Corps, and after 30 minutes' tuition, qualified as a civilian pilot. In 1915, he received his commission. Serving in fighter squadrons in both France and the UK, he finished the war in command of 44 Squadron, a night-fighter unit in England, and was awarded the AFC.

In 1919, he was offered a permanent commission in the RAF, with the rank of squadron leader.

Although his wartime experience had been with fighter squadrons, almost all his squadron experience in the 1920s was with bombers. He was also heavily involved in training, especially night training. In the 1930s, he was posted to the Air Ministry, as Deputy Director of Operations and Intelligence (1933), and then as Deputy Director of Plans (1934–37), where he gave his support to the concept of a four-engined heavy bomber. In 1937, he was given command of 4 (Bomber) Group, and was promoted to air commodore. But he served in the post for only a



year before going to the United States to study aircraft production, where he was able to recommend the purchase of two aircraft that were to serve most successfully in the RAF – the Hudson reconnaissance aircraft and the Harvard trainer. His next appointment was as AOC Palestine and Transjordan. He was promoted again, to air vice marshal, but was obliged to return to the UK due to ill health.

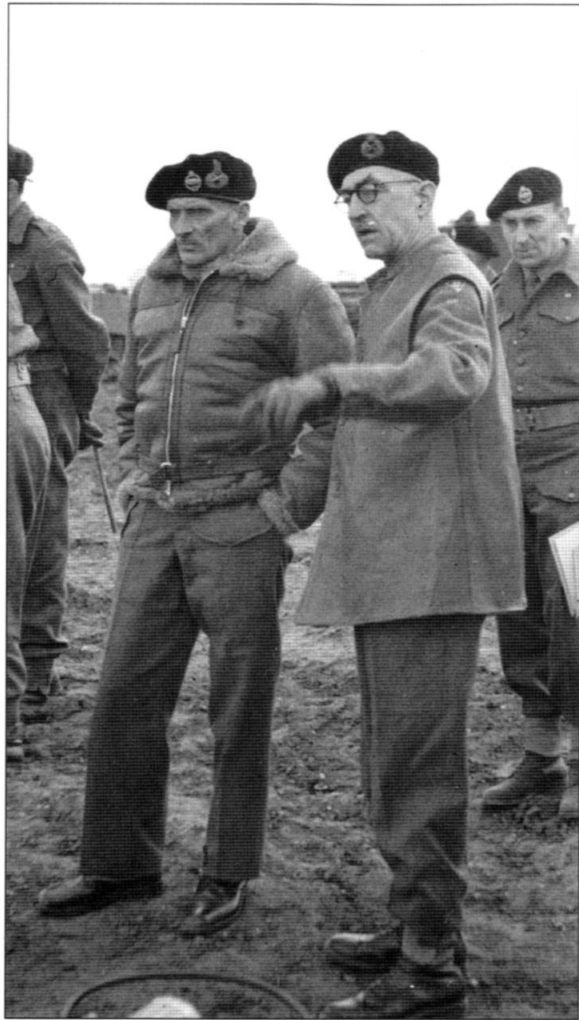
Returning to duty just before the outbreak of war, he was given command of 5 (Bomber) Group, largely equipped with Hampdens. These proved unsuitable for daylight operations, and so were confined to night work. Even so, Harris secured a number of improvements in the aircraft as well as introducing advanced training for their crews. He was appointed as CB for his work, and selected to serve as Deputy Chief of Air Staff under Charles Portal (qv). After six months, Harris was sent to America once more, to expedite purchasing and production. He stayed in the USA until 1942, when he was recalled to become AOC-in-C of Bomber Command, remaining there until the end of the war. He was promoted air chief marshal in 1943.

Harris's reputation has often been caught up with, and obscured by, the moral arguments for and against the Bomber Offensive against Germany. Bomber Command was the only means of striking continuously at the enemy. The primacy of the bomber in all offensive operations had first been voiced by the former commander of the RAF Sir Hugh Trenchard in the 1920s, and this position was widely held by all the senior officers of the service. Harris regarded the Offensive as the quickest means of ending the war, and strongly resented, almost to the point of insubordination, any diversion of bombers from that task. Stubborn and single-minded, never a man to court popularity for its own sake, Harris nevertheless inspired the trust and loyalty of the men and women under his command. He was by no means insensitive to the casualties suffered by his crews: for over three years, he constantly strove to make his command more efficient, for in efficiency, he judged, lay their best chance of survival.

### **Major-General Sir Percy Hobart (1885–1957)**

Percy Cleghorn Hobart (nicknamed in later life 'Hobo') was born in India on 14 June 1885, the son of a member of the Indian Civil Service. He was commissioned into the Royal Engineers in 1906, and posted to the 1st Bengal Sappers and Miners. He went to France with his regiment, but from September 1915 served on the staff in France, Mesopotamia and Palestine. In 1923, whilst serving as an instructor at the Staff College at Quetta, he took an immense gamble, and transferred to the newly formed Royal Tank Corps.

During his time at Quetta, he began to develop theories of armoured warfare, which he was able to put into practice in 1931, when he took command of 2nd Battalion, Royal Tank Corps. His period of command was so exceptional that he was promoted to brigadier in 1933, and made Inspector of the RTC; in the following year, he became commander of the new 1st Tank Brigade, and, in 1937, by now a major-general, he was appointed Director of Military Training. In both these posts he had argued forcefully for the value of tanks – too forcefully for many – and in 1938, he was moved to Egypt, in command of the Mobile Division. Even here, he was thought too headstrong to obey orders. He was



'Hobo' Hobart makes a point to his Army Group commander (and, incidentally, his brother-in-law, for Montgomery had married Hobart's sister) at a 79th Armoured Division demonstration in East Anglia before D-Day. (IWM H36631)

relieved of his command the following year, and retired from the Army in 1940.

In 1941, Hobart was brought back at Churchill's insistence. The Prime Minister commented, 'we cannot afford to confine Army appointments to persons who have excited no hostile comment in their career'. Although Hobart wanted the command of the Royal Armoured Corps, he had to settle for 11th Armoured Division. Even then, he was unable to steer clear of controversy, and he was removed from his post before the division left for Tunisia in 1942.

In March 1943, Hobart was finally given command of 79th Armoured Division with a brief to develop and train a modern 'siege train' of armoured vehicles to break into, and break through, Hitler's Atlantic Wall. Here, at last, Hobart had found his niche, a place where his energy and imagination could be applied to best effect. Everything from the design of the vehicles to their tactical employment had to be planned from scratch. This specialised armour – 'Hobart's Funnies' – proved its value on D-Day, when deep penetrations were made inland on the British and Canadian beaches. The Americans, always doubtful of their value, refused to use many of the 79th's inventions, particularly the amphibious DD Tank, and achieved no more than an initial toehold on the French coast. The value of these specialised vehicles was seen again in the Walcheren fighting, and in the crossing of the Rhine. Hobart retired in 1946.

Characterised as 'the rudest man in the Army', Hobart was a man of strong opinions, forcefully expressed. He was the champion of an arm that lacked wholehearted support within the Army, and the frustrations of his situation caused him to boil over more than once. He was an enthusiastic supporter of an all-tank formation, and would brook no contradiction. Yet the experiences of war would show that his view was incorrect, and that a balanced all-arm formation achieved the best results. He was however a most thorough trainer of men, as evidenced by the excellent standards achieved by the armoured divisions he led – the 7th (the wartime successor of the Mobile Division), the 11th and the 79th.

#### **Admiral Sir Max Horton (1883–1951)**

Max Kennedy Horton was born on Anglesey on 29 November 1883, the son of a stockbroker, and joined HMS *Britannia* in 1898. Whilst still a midshipman, he was attracted to the new submarine branch, and at the age of only 22 was given the command of the experimental boat *A.1*, followed by *C.8*. After a brief spell in a cruiser, he returned to submarines, where he showed himself to be a daring commander.

On the outbreak of war, he was in command of *E.9*. He manoeuvred his vessel inside the fortified harbour of Heligoland, and, patrolling outside the harbour's entrance, sank the protected cruiser *Hela*, the first ship to be torpedoed by a British submarine. He followed this up by sinking an enemy destroyer, and was appointed to the DSO for his achievements. Promoted commander at the end of 1914, he took *E.9* into the Baltic, where he sank three enemy ships, and helped to disrupt the German iron ore trade with Sweden. In 1917, he received a bar to his DSO, and in the same year, took command of the new, but ultimately unsuccessful, submarine-monitor *M.1*.

Returning to the Baltic in 1920, he operated in support of the newly independent states against the Bolsheviks. For his services, he was promoted to captain, and awarded a second bar to his DSO. In 1922, he was appointed commander of a flotilla of K-class submarines, which he brought to a high pitch of efficiency, all the more noteworthy in these clumsy, dangerous boats. After spells of service at the Admiralty and in the Mediterranean, he was promoted to rear admiral and made second-in-command of the Home Fleet. He was appointed CB in 1934, and returned to the Mediterranean the following year, in command of the 1st Cruiser Squadron. Promoted vice admiral in 1936, he next took command of the Reserve Fleet, which consisted of some 140 ships of all types in varying states of readiness and repair. By mid-1939 Horton had them all ready to sail.

On the outbreak of war, Horton, promoted KCB at the beginning of the year, was given command of the Northern Patrol, enforcing the distant blockade against Germany. In January 1940, he jumped at the chance to return to his first love, and was appointed Flag Officer, Submarines. Here, he anticipated the German invasion of Norway, concentrating all his boats in the southern approaches to the



Admiral Max Horton in his office at Western Approaches Headquarters in Liverpool. From his office he could observe the giant situation map placed on the opposite wall. (IWM A17424)

Norwegian coast, where they sank two cruisers and 21 transports and supply ships, and severely damaged the pocket battleship *Gneisenau*. In October 1940, he was offered the command of the Home Fleet, but he turned it down, largely because of what he saw as the dearth of suitable air support. He urged that the RAF should share responsibility for anti-submarine defence with the Navy, and that both services should be trained in air/sea co-operation, and in the use of the latest weapons. His opinions fell on deaf ears in the Air Ministry, for whom the heavy bomber remained the decisive weapon. Horton continued to demonstrate the power of the submarine in the Mediterranean, where Axis transport routes to Africa were continually disrupted.

In November 1942, at the height of the Battle of the Atlantic, Horton was appointed C-in-C Western Approaches, based in Liverpool, with responsibility for the safe passage of the Atlantic convoys. During World War I, the commander of the Grand Fleet had been characterised as the one man who, if defeated, could lose the war in a single day. Horton's role was of similar importance, for the convoys not only brought food for Britain, but also the men and *matériel* needed to open the Second Front. Horton immediately took the chance to push forward his views about the importance of aircraft, particularly long-range aircraft able to patrol the mid-Atlantic and thus provide cover for convoys during the whole of their passage. He persuaded the Admiralty that some vessels should be withdrawn from escort work, and allocated to new Support Groups. These were to travel separately from the convoys, and would have the time to hunt down and destroy U-boats without the distraction of escorting convoy vessels. Horton insisted that the groups were thoroughly trained, and to this end set up a joint sea/air anti-submarine school in Northern Ireland.

He launched his anti-submarine offensive in April 1943. The Support Groups and long-range aircraft covered the Atlantic, while shorter-range aircraft attacked enemy bases in France and U-boats travelling on the surface in the Bay of Biscay. The plan was immediately successful, and by the end of May, U-boats were withdrawn from the mid-Atlantic. They were not yet completely defeated, but they would never again pose the threat they formed in 1942.

Horton retired at his own request in 1945, and was appointed GCB. He died in 1951 from an illness brought on by the strain of the war. As an ex-submariner, he was able to use his first-hand knowledge against the U-boats. A determined, energetic man, he was a strong exponent of training, and of inter-service co-operation, both of which were key elements in eventual victory, and had the strength of personality to see his views carried into practice. He was undoubtedly helped by the quality of the men in the escort vessels, and by signals intelligence. Yet by themselves these factors were insufficient to achieve victory. The role of the commander was to apply them to maximum advantage – and Horton did just that.

#### **Field Marshal Sir Bernard Montgomery (1887–1976)**

Bernard Law Montgomery was born on 17 November 1887, and educated at St Paul's School, London, and at Sandhurst. He was commissioned into the Royal Warwickshire Regiment in 1908, and served with the regiment's 1st Battalion in India and England.

Montgomery (second from the right) with some of his desert commanders – lieutenant-generals Oliver Leese (XXX Corps), Herbert Lumsden (X Corps), and Brian Horrocks (XIII Corps). Leese succeeded Montgomery in command of 8th Army, but was able to emerge from the shadow of his illustrious predecessor to lead his forces successfully in a difficult campaign. Promoted to Land C-in-C under Mountbatten in South-East Asia, he was sacked soon afterwards. (IWM E19697)



Montgomery again, wearing his many-badged hat. Every general, he explained, should have 'a hat', allowing him to be easily recognised by his men. (IWM E17685)



On the outbreak of war, the battalion was sent immediately to France, where Montgomery was wounded during the first battle of Ypres. Although he was promoted to captain and awarded the DSO, his wound prevented him from returning to front-line duty, and he spent the remainder of the war in a variety of staff positions.

Between the wars he served as instructor at the staff colleges at Camberley (1926–29) and at Quetta (1934–37), before resuming regimental duty in command of his regiment's 1st Battalion in Palestine and Egypt. In 1938, he was given a brigade command in the UK, before returning to Palestine the following year, serving as GOC 8th Division until illness forced a return to the UK just before the outbreak of war.

In August 1939, he was appointed to the command of 3rd Division, which was part of the BEF in France, serving under General Alan Brooke (qv) in II Corps. He used the period of the 'Phoney War' to bring his division up to a very high standard of training and discipline – a



One of Montgomery's favourite portraits of himself, taken in North-West Europe in 1945. The original caption claims that he is wearing corduroy trousers and a 'tweed battledress of his own design'. (IWM B15621)

Near Nijmegen, 1944: a meeting of commanders from 21st Army Group - no two of them wearing exactly the same uniform! From left to right: Neil Ritchie (1897-1983) (XII Corps), Miles Graham (50th Division), Montgomery and Gerald Verney (7th Armoured Division). Plucked from Auchinleck's staff, Ritchie had briefly commanded 8th Army in the Western Desert, but had been replaced after the disastrous Battle of Gazala; after over a year's inactivity, he was given XII Corps, which he commanded until the end of the war. (IWM B10387)



policy that reaped immediate rewards when operations began.

On his return from France, he resisted attempts to make his division part of a static defensive line, preferring a mobile counter-attack role. To make sure he got what he wanted, he was quite willing to go outside the chain of command, even as far as Churchill himself. This was greatly to the annoyance of General Auchinleck (qv), his corps commander (whom Montgomery was later to succeed). Montgomery was correct in his emphasis on training and good morale; but it is unlikely that an unsupported infantry division, even one led by Montgomery, would have been able to mount anything other than a local counter-attack.

Nevertheless, his excellence as a trainer and his energy made him the ideal choice to take over 8th Army in 1942, again succeeding Auchinleck. Old enmities died hard, for Montgomery was quick to criticise his predecessor, and criticise him unfairly. But Montgomery quickly energised his new command with his self-confidence, and was able to halt a German advance at Alam Halfa in September (although using in essence Auchinleck's plan). He then began an intensive training programme in preparation for the action he planned to be the decisive battle against Rommel.

General Miles Dempsey (1896-1969), commander of 2nd Army in North-West Europe, with Montgomery. Dempsey had been plucked from a staff position by Montgomery to command XIII Corps after El Alamein - a post he also held in Sicily and Italy. Because Montgomery occupied such a dominant position, frequently treating Dempsey as no more than a corps commander, his contribution remains difficult to assess. He was certainly liked and respected by his subordinates. (IWM B7405)



The Battle of El Alamein was indeed one of the key actions of the war, ending all German hopes of capturing the Nile delta. Montgomery followed up his victory by expelling all Axis forces from Africa. The subsequent campaign in Sicily and in Italy did not show Montgomery at his best. Nevertheless, as Britain's leading field commander, it was natural that he should be selected to command the Allied ground forces on D-Day.

He threw himself into the task with his customary vigour and attention to detail, revising many of the original plans in the light of his experience in Sicily. Despite his later claims to the contrary, the landings and subsequent breakout campaign did not go exactly according to plan, but they were successful, and by August 1944, the Allies were irreversibly established on French soil.

Montgomery and Eisenhower did not see eye to eye about the advance across France into Germany. Eisenhower favoured a broad-front policy; Montgomery championed a single axis of advance, arguing that a broad front risked dissipating its impetus in a series of divergent thrusts. Eisenhower, however, was not to be persuaded. Had he accepted Montgomery's strategy, then 21st Army Group would have been allocated the task of clearing the Channel ports and the Scheldt estuary, a subsidiary role acceptable to neither Montgomery nor Churchill,

**General Richard McCreery (1898–1967), the commander of 8th Army, leaves an Italian café under the indifferent gaze of some Americans. Appointed to command X Corps in Italy, he achieved several notable successes, including the opposed crossing of the Garigliano, before taking command of 8th Army in succession to Leese. (IWM NA25297)**



while the failure of Operation Market Garden also revealed the dangers inherent in a narrow-front strategy.

Promoted to field marshal in September 1944, Montgomery was created Viscount Montgomery of Alamein in 1946, six months before he was made CIGS. In 1948, he became chairman of the Western Union Chiefs of Staff Committee, and three years later, Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe. He finally retired in 1958.

Some critics have accused Montgomery of being cautious when he should have been bold (the breakout from the El Alamein position) and bold when he should have been cautious (Arnhem). He was by no means perfect. His strengths lay firstly in his efforts in training and morale building, which gave his men the confidence to engage the enemy, and engage him successfully. Secondly, his plans were extremely detailed and thoroughly prepared. Thirdly, when things went wrong, as did happen, even at El Alamein and in Normandy, he remained clear-headed and flexible, renewing the offensive in another sector, time and again if necessary, until the enemy's reserves were exhausted, and he was left open for Montgomery's 'almighty crack', the decisive battle-winning thrust.

Montgomery's self-confidence transmitted itself quickly to all the men under his command, vital in the case of the 8th Army, where he succeeded in raising morale and confidence at a critical time. However, his self-belief too often strayed over the line of overweening arrogance. This happened frequently in his dealings with the Americans, and he was a difficult and frustrating subordinate for Eisenhower, and an awkward colleague for Bradley, Patton, and even the British Tedder (qv). His tendency to diminish, and even to belittle,

the roles of others, evident in his attitude to Auchinleck (qv) and, to a lesser extent, Coningham (qv) and the Desert Air Force, made him few friends at the time, and fewer still when he published his memoirs in the 1950s.

Nevertheless, Montgomery was not involved in a popularity contest. He had the backing of Churchill and of Brooke (qv) because he kept on winning.

#### **Lieutenant-General Richard O'Connor (1889–1981)**

Richard Nugent O'Connor was born on 21 August 1889, the son of a major in the Royal Irish Fusiliers, and was educated at Wellington College and Sandhurst. Commissioned into the Cameronians in 1909, he served with his battalion on the Western Front. In 1917, he was given command of 1st Battalion, Honourable Artillery Company, and led them at Passchendaele and in Italy.

He spent much of the 1920s and early 1930s with his regiment in India, commanding his battalion briefly before his appointment as commander of the Peshawar Brigade in 1936. Two years later, promoted to major-general, he moved to Palestine as GOC 7th Division and Military Governor of Jerusalem.

In June 1940, he was summoned to take command of Western Desert Force (later XIII Corps), only two divisions strong – 7th Armoured and 4th Indian. His role was to protect Egypt from the sizeable Italian force then massing on the Libyan border – five divisions on the frontier itself, with the equivalent of four more in reserve.

The Italian advance, when it came, stopped after covering a distance of 50 miles. The troops then dug in, expecting a British counter-attack. What they did not anticipate was that the counter-attack would



**The Prime Minister visited Normandy not long after the D-Day landings, and is seen here at 2nd Army headquarters. From left to right: Dempsey (2nd Army), Brooke (CIGS), Churchill, Montgomery and O'Connor (VIII Corps). (IWM B5367)**

approach from the direction of Libya, in their rear! Moving in secret, the British outflanked the Italian positions, which were soon overwhelmed. O'Connor was quick to follow up this success, advancing towards and then beyond the frontier. A brief check followed when the experienced 4th Indian Division was withdrawn and sent to Greece, to be replaced by the raw 6th Australian Division. However, within 12 days Tobruk had fallen and 25,000 prisoners had been taken.

O'Connor was determined not to let the remaining Italian forces escape. Whilst they took the coast road through Benghazi, he sent 4th Armoured Brigade across the desert to cut off their retreat. The subsequent Battle of Beda Fomm (6 February 1941) was, from the British point of view, a close-run thing, since they were low on water, food, petrol and ammunition; but the Italians were unaware of this. Despite some vigorous attacks, they could not break through the blocking force, and surrendered en masse. During the ten-week operation, over 130,000 Italian and Libyan soldiers had been captured, along with nearly 400 tanks and 845 guns. By comparison, Allied losses were relatively light – 500 British and Australian soldiers killed and 1,373 wounded.

British involvement in Greece, and the battering taken by all its vehicles meant that XIII Corps was forced to halt at El Agheila. In a stroke of ill-luck, O'Connor was in hospital at the very moment when the newly arrived Afrika Korps counter-attacked. Driving back to the front, he was captured by a German patrol, and was held in captivity in Italy until September 1943, when the Italian armistice allowed him to escape and rejoin the Allied forces.

Briefly considered for 8th Army, he was given command of VIII Corps in the Normandy campaign, a post he held until January 1945. Promoted to full general, he was next made C-in-C Eastern Command in India, and then of North Western Army. On his return to the UK in 1946, he was made Adjutant-General.

O'Connor was a man of principle, and twice resigned his post – once as commander of VIII Corps, over Montgomery's treatment of one his (American) subordinates, and again, in 1948 when Adjutant-General (Montgomery was by now CIGS), over an Army Council decision to reduce the numbers of demobilised men returning from the Far East. He then retired from the Army.

O'Connor's principal achievement was Operation Compass, the counter-attack of December 1940, and its crowning glory at Beda Fomm. He did not merely defeat the Italian 10th Army, but destroyed it completely, removing it from the enemy order of battle. How would O'Connor have fared against Rommel, had he been in charge of 8th Army instead of Cunningham, Ritchie or Auchinleck? Had he succeeded, and gone on, perhaps, to command 21st Army Group, how would he have fared in comparison with Montgomery? At the very least, he would have enjoyed better relations with his American colleagues.

#### **Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Portal (1893–1971)**

Charles Frederick Algernon Portal (known as 'Peter' to his friends) was born on 21 May 1893 at Hungerford, the son of a former barrister, and was educated at Winchester and Oxford, where he studied law.



Air Chief Marshals Portal (left) and Tedder (right), standing to either side of General Eisenhower, at the Casablanca Conference, 1943. (IWM CNA 2158)

However, on the outbreak of war in 1914, he volunteered for the Royal Engineers as a dispatch rider, and was sent to France immediately.

He received his commission at the end of September, and in 1915, transferred to the Royal Flying Corps, rising to the command of No.16 Squadron. Whilst in France he was awarded the MC and DSO and bar. In 1919, he was given a permanent commission in the RAF as a squadron leader.

Despite two successful years in command of No.7 (Bomber) Squadron, he spent most of the inter-war years in staff positions, in operations and intelligence, and in planning. In 1934, he took command of British forces in Aden, where he was able to demonstrate the role of the RAF in maintaining law and order amongst the desert tribes. On leaving this posting in 1937, he was promoted from air commodore to air vice marshal, and made Director of Organisation at the Air Ministry. As such, he was responsible for implementing the various Expansion Plans for the RAF, which saw the development of several new heavy bombers, such as the Stirling and the Halifax, as well as a large number of main and satellite stations in the UK. In 1939, he joined the Air Council as Air Member for Personnel, in charge of recruitment, training and manning. Here, he laid the groundwork for the Empire Air Training Scheme, which eventually produced so many aircrew during the course of the war.

In March 1940, he was appointed as AOC-in-C of Bomber Command. Here he found the dictum 'the bomber would always get through' sadly misguided. In fact, many of the Command's existing aircraft – the Battles, Blenheims, Hampdens and Whitleys – were unsuitable for daylight missions. His thoughts turned increasingly to night bombing as a means of striking back at German industry. However, he never had the chance to engage in that campaign directly, for in October of the same year, he was promoted once more, this time to Chief of Air Staff, the professional head of the service.

Portal ably represented the RAF at the highest level, and was one of the few men able to stand up to Churchill and get away with it. He

Squadron Leader Douglas Bader (1910–82) (centre) at the presentation of his DSO. He is standing between P/O Willie McKnight and Acting Flight Lieutenant Eric Ball, both of 242 Squadron. His views on the use of large formations were very persuasive in changing Fighter Command tactics after the Battle of Britain. He is credited with 20 victories, but above all he was famous for his courage in refusing to allow the loss of both legs to hinder his flying career. (IWM CHI342)



was capable of deploying reasoned arguments, supported by a wide range of facts (if necessary quoting the Prime Minister back at himself), to counter Churchill's more capricious demands. Within the first two weeks of Portal's appointment, Churchill had insisted that the tonnage of bombs dropped on Germany was 'pitiful'. Portal was obliged to point out that nothing could be done without trained crews, and that bomber crews had been diverted to Fighter Command during the Battle of Britain. Almost a year later, Churchill then complained that bombing by itself was not a decisive weapon. This time Portal noted several memoranda from the Prime Minister that had previously urged the expansion of the bomber force as a vital strategic weapon. Portal's balance, his determination and integrity, and his thorough knowledge of his service made him an excellent Chief of Air Staff.

**Admiral Bertram Ramsay (1883–1945)**

Bertram Home Ramsay was born on 20 January 1883 at Hampton Court Palace, the son of an officer in the 4th (Queen's Own) Hussars. He began his naval life at HMS *Britannia* in 1898, passing out in 1899, and joined HMS *Crescent* as a midshipman. He subsequently served in a number of ships, as well as in a naval brigade during the Somaliland Expedition of 1903–04, before specialising as a signals officer. Thus qualified, he served as a flag lieutenant in the Atlantic and Mediterranean fleets. He qualified as a staff officer in 1913, and was serving with the 4th Battle Squadron of the Grand Fleet on the outbreak of war in 1914. His first command was the monitor *M.25*, stationed at Dover; his second, the destroyer HMS *Broke*, was also part of the famous Dover Patrol.

He spent the inter-war period either at sea, in command or as flag captain, or as an instructor at the Royal Naval War College and the Imperial Defence College. He was promoted to flag rank in 1935, when

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THE UNITED KINGDOM, 1940–43

- 1: General Sir Alan Brooke, Casablanca 1943
- 2: Air Chief Marshal Hugh Dowding, Fighter Command HQ, UK 1940
- 3: Admiral Sir John Tovey, HMS *King George V*, at sea 1941



NORTH AFRICA, 1940-42

- 1: General Sir Archibald Wavell, Cairo 1941
- 2: Lieutenant-General Richard O'Connor, Barda, Libya 1940
- 3: Air Vice Marshal Arthur Coningham, Western Desert 1942



THE MEDITERRANEAN

- 1: General Sir Harold Alexander, Italy 1944
- 2: Lieutenant-General Bernard Freyberg VC, Italy 1944
- 3: Admiral Andrew Cunningham, 1941



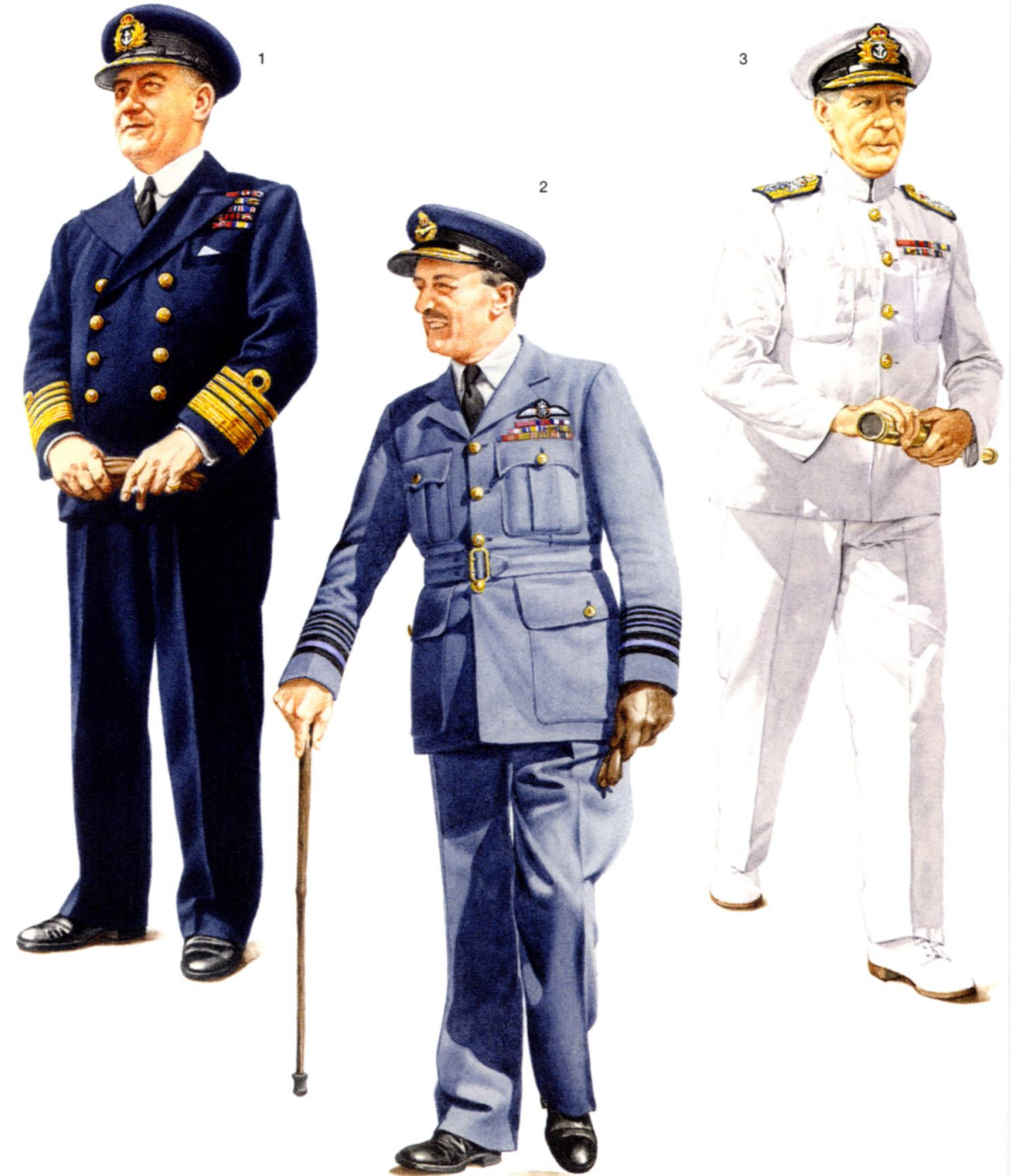
THE ROYAL AIR FORCE, UK 1944

- 1: Air Vice Marshal Arthur Harris, UK 1944
- 2: Air Commodore Donald Bennett, UK 1944
- 3: Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Portal, UK 1944



THE ROYAL NAVY, UK 1942-43

- 1: Admiral Sir Max Horton, HQ Western Approaches, Liverpool 1943
- 2: Air Marshal Sir John Slessor, Coastal Command HQ, 1943
- 3: Vice Admiral Sir James Somerville, HMS *Renown*, at sea 1942



NORTH-WEST EUROPE, 1944-45

- 1: Air Vice Marshal Tedder, SHAEF 1944
- 2: Admiral Bertram Ramsay, SHAEF 1944
- 3: General Sir Bernard Montgomery, Netherlands 1945



NORTH-WEST EUROPE, 1944

- 1: Major-General Percy Hobart, D-Day beaches
- 2: Lieutenant-General Guy Simonds, Netherlands
- 3: Major-General Robert Urquhart, Arnhem



THE FAR EAST, 1945

- 1: General Sir Claude Auchinleck, India
- 2: Lieutenant-General Sir William Slim, Burma
- 3: Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser, USS *Missouri*, Tokyo Bay



he was appointed as flag captain and chief of staff to the C-in-C Home Fleet, Sir Roger Backhouse. Ramsay believed in a decentralised staff system, those at the top controlling essentials only. However, Backhouse was an arch-centraliser, refusing to delegate anything of importance to anyone, even his chief of staff. Relations between the two men deteriorated steadily, until Ramsay asked to be relieved in December 1935. He was appointed CB and placed on the retired list the following year.

The worsening international situation led to his recall, and he was appointed Flag Officer, Dover in August 1939, responsible for denying the Straits to enemy vessels and for convoy protection. In May 1940, Ramsay was given control of Operation Dynamo, the evacuation from Dunkirk. The pressure on Ramsay and his staff was immense, but his firm control and the efficiency of his staff ensured that this perilous operation went as smoothly as circumstances permitted. For his efforts, Ramsay was made a KCB.

Over the next two years, he continued his efforts to keep the Channel free of enemy activity, in the face of air attack, raids by coastal forces and long-range bombardment. His success was such that convoys were rarely halted because of German pressure. In April 1942, Ramsay was appointed as naval commander-in-chief for Operation Torch, the landings in North Africa. However, some objected to his appointment, questioning the decision to place such a large naval force under the command of a rear admiral on the retired list, and Ramsay eventually was made deputy to Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham (qv).

The following year, Ramsay continued his work under Cunningham, this time preparing for the invasion of Sicily: Ramsay was appointed naval commander, Eastern Task Force, in command of the British landings. His reward for all his good work was not only a KBE, but also reinstatement on the active list as vice admiral, followed immediately by promotion to admiral. He served as Allied Naval Commander-in-Chief for Operation Overlord, but was killed in January 1945, when the aircraft in which he was travelling crashed on take-off.

The Naval plan for Overlord was immensely complex. The Allied navies were required not only to transport the assault and reinforcement divisions, but also to provide minesweeping, bombardment of the shore, protection against attack from hostile air or naval units, and the clearance of ports formerly held by the enemy. It involved the movement of over 4,000 vessels of all types, as well as the components for the Mulberry harbours. The smooth delivery of men and equipment to the beachhead was a signal

Vice Admiral Bertram Ramsay attending one of the Second Front conferences, 'somewhere in England', in 1943. (IWM A14108)



factor in the success of the whole operation. That it was such a triumph was due in no small part to Ramsay's common sense, tact and team spirit.

**Lieutenant-General Guy Simonds (1904-74)**

Guy Granville Simonds was born in the UK, but his family later emigrated to Canada. On graduating from the Royal Military College in 1925, he joined the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery. He became interested in armoured warfare, and published a number of articles on the subject in the late-1930s, when he was an instructor at the RMC.

On the outbreak of war in 1939, he was appointed as an officer on the staff of 1st Canadian Infantry Division, which was sent to the UK. In April 1943, he took command of the division, serving in Sicily and Italy with 8th Army, but in October of that year, he was transferred to the newly arrived 5th Canadian Armoured Division.

His stay with the 5th was short, for in January 1944, he was promoted to lieutenant-general, and given command of II Canadian Corps, which he led throughout the Normandy campaign. Apart from a period in temporary command of First Canadian Army during the Scheldt battles in late 1944, he continued with II Corps until the end of the war.

His post-war career saw him become Commandant of the National Defence College, and Chief of the Canadian General Staff.

General Crerar, the commander of First Canadian Army, did not get on well with Montgomery, but Simonds was something of a Montgomery protégé, dating from their time with 8th Army. Yet Simonds still contrived to remain his own man and succeeded on his own terms as well.

Simonds was consistently innovative as a commander. Faced with the problem of how to move his infantry across ground dominated by



General Guy Simonds: a photograph taken in Sicily, when Simonds was in command of 1st Canadian Division. On the left is General Dempsey. (IWM NA5915)



General Bernard Paget (1887-1961) (left) during a demonstration at the School of Infantry, Barnard Castle. After conducting a number of skilful rearguard actions during the Norwegian campaign, Paget was made GOC South Eastern Command in 1941, and then C-in-C Home Forces in 1942. He established the School of Infantry and divisional battle schools, becoming the best trainer of men since Sir John Moore. His plan, Operation Skyscraper, provided a blueprint for Overlord, but Paget was to be disappointed when the command of 21st Army Group went to Montgomery. Paget became GOC Middle East Forces in 1944. (IWM H34011)

enemy small arms fire, he had the idea of removing the gun from surplus M8 Priests, and accommodating a section of infantry in the empty hull – the first use of an armoured personnel carrier on the Allied side. When the number of available Priests ran out, the bodies of the Canadian-built Ram tank, were used instead, and two complete carrier regiments, one Canadian, one British, were formed during the campaign in North-West Europe.

However, some of Simonds' battle plans were rather too complicated for his inexperienced troops to execute successfully. In Normandy, during Operation Totalize, Simonds devised a novel plan of attack, designed to nullify the enemy's defence in depth. He authorised a night attack with little artillery preparation to ensure maximum surprise. Radio beams, searchlights and tracer bullets were used to keep his troops on track, but the complications that can always beset a night attack were too great. Some troops lost their way in the darkness, taking power out of the attack, and after some initial successes, the battle degenerated into the kind of slogging match that Simonds had hoped to avoid.

Simonds' reputation has suffered in recent years. Criticised as a man who commanded, rather than led, his men, the level of casualties suffered by some of the units under his command have contributed to the image of a callous butcher. However, the campaigns in North-West Europe were difficult for all those involved, and his concern for his men is surely borne out by his introduction of the Kangaroo carrier. Simonds remains the best commander that his country has produced.

**Air Marshal Sir John Slessor (1897-1979)**

John Cotesworth Slessor was born in Ranikhet, India, on 3 June 1897, the son of an officer in the Sherwood Foresters. He was educated at Haileybury, but an attack of polio as a child left him lame in both legs, and his attempts to join up in 1914 were frustrated by an Army medical board. A family friend responsible for the selection of officers

Air Vice Marshal John Slessor (right) with Air Vice Marshal Leonard Slatter at Coastal Command HQ, at Northwood, Middlesex. Slatter (1894–1961) had commanded RAF squadrons in the Sudan against the Italians; here, in 1943, he was AOC 15 Group in Coastal Command, and would eventually succeed as AOC-in-C Coastal Command in 1945. (IWM CH9297)



for the Royal Flying Corps circumvented the rules, and he was commissioned in 1915.

He was posted to 17 Squadron in the Middle East, where he was awarded the MC. After a short period as an instructor, he went to France in May 1917 as a flight commander with 5 Squadron. He returned to the UK once more in June 1918, as an instructor at, and briefly commander of, the Central Flying School. He was given the permanent rank of flight lieutenant in the peacetime RAF, but an argument with a senior officer caused him to resign his commission.

After only two months in civilian life in 1920, he took a short service commission, serving in India with 20 Squadron. From 1925 to 1928 he commanded 4 (Army Co-operation) Squadron, and from here was posted to the Air Ministry's Directorate of Operations and Intelligence. Although his previous experience had been largely in army co-operation, his time at the Air Ministry saw him convert to a true Trenchardian position over the supremacy of the bomber as a war-winning weapon. Slessor spent a second tour of duty in India, where he won a DSO commanding a wing in operations in Waziristan, then returned to the UK, where he published his book *Air Power and Armies*, and lectured at the Army's Staff College. He was made Director of Plans at the Air Ministry in 1937, a post he was to hold until 1940.

After a short spell in Washington, Slessor took command of 5 Group of Bomber Command, whose main role was the bombing of Germany. This experience stood him in good stead in April 1942, when he was appointed Assistant Chief of Air Staff (Policy), where his responsibilities included the development of the combined air offensive against Germany.

In February 1943, Slessor was appointed C-in-C of Coastal Command, taking over just after the Casablanca Conference had declared that the defeat of the U-boat was the first priority for the Allies. His predecessor, Joubert de la Ferté, had laid the foundations for success with a number of innovations: the Very Long Range Liberator aircraft, which would close the gap in air cover in mid-Atlantic; the ASV III radar set, which



Air Vice Marshal Trafford Leigh-Mallory (1892–1944). Commander of 12 Fighter Group during the Battle of Britain, he espoused 'big wing' tactics, large formations of fighters designed to meet the large German formations on somewhere near equal or better terms. Based in the Midlands and East Anglia, his squadrons had the extra time to assemble denied those of 11 Group; even so, he continued to urge the adoption of big wings in the corridors of the Air Ministry. (IWM CH5214)

permitted the sighting of U-boats travelling on the surface; and a planned maintenance programme, which helped to make best use of the Command's limited resources. Slessor continued to build on these developments, introducing new depth charge attack methods for his aircraft, so increasing their effectiveness: in February 1943, seven U-boats were sunk by Coastal Command's aircraft, but in May, the new methods of attack had increased this to 14, with a further 13 damaged. May 1943 also saw the introduction of the Mark 24 acoustic homing torpedo. Victory over the U-boats could not be claimed by Coastal Command alone, of course, but the sudden rise in losses in the spring of 1943 certainly influenced the decision to call off the campaign against the convoys.

In January 1944, Slessor was appointed as C-in-C Middle East, succeeding Tedder (qv), and as deputy air commander in that theatre. He served in that post until March 1945, when he returned to London as Air Member for Personnel, with responsibility for the successful demobilisation of the immense wartime air force. He was promoted to air chief marshal in 1946. After a period as commandant of the Imperial Defence College, he succeeded Tedder once more, as Chief of Air Staff, and was promoted to Marshal of the Royal Air Force. He retired in 1953.

As Director of Plans and as ACAS (Policy), Slessor played a significant role in the formulation of the bomber offensive. For him, the role of Coastal Command was largely defensive; the successful conclusion of the Battle of the Atlantic would simply free crews and aircraft to concentrate on the main bomber offensive. As a man of his time and of his service, he never questioned the pre-eminent role of the heavy bomber – a given of air strategy since Trenchard's day. This preoccupation does his command something of a disservice. The role of Coastal Command was not defensive, but offensive: it sought out enemy submarines, whether in the Atlantic or in the Bay of Biscay, and sank them wherever they were to be found. Its aircraft and crews took the fight to the enemy, and played a critical, and successful, role in one of the crucial battles of the war.

### General William Slim (1891–1970)

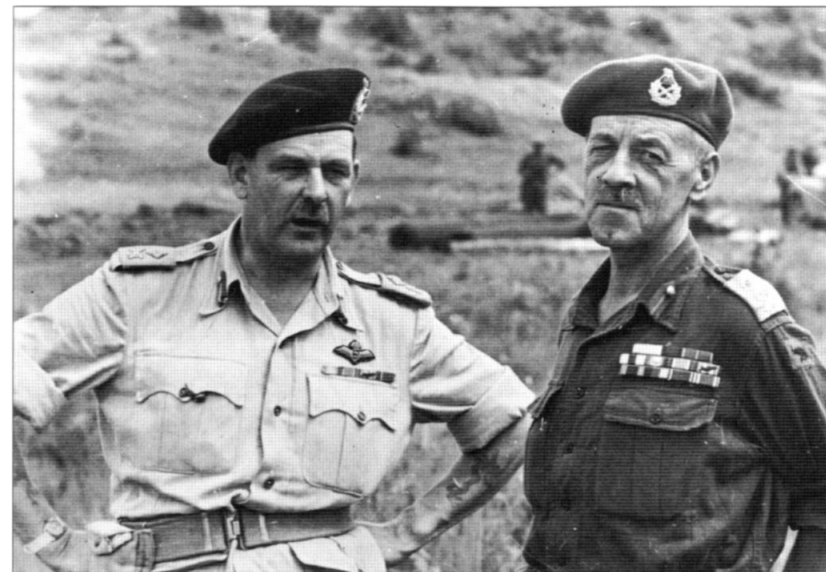
William Joseph Slim was unique amongst British generals of World War II, in that he was not a product of the public schools and Sandhurst. He was born in Bristol on 6 August 1891, the son of an iron merchant. A junior clerk in an engineering company before World War I, he joined up in August 1914, and because of his experience with Birmingham University OTC, was given a commission in the 9th (Service) Battalion, Royal Warwickshire Regiment. He served first at Gallipoli, then in Mesopotamia, and finished the war in a staff post. At the end of the war, he transferred to the Indian Army, becoming adjutant of the 6th Gurkhas in 1920, and, after a number of further staff appointments, lieutenant-colonel and commanding officer of 2/7th Gurkhas in 1938.

On the outbreak of war in 1939, he became a brigadier and took command of 10th Indian Brigade, which saw action in the reconquest of Abyssinia, where he was wounded. On his recovery, he was promoted to acting major-general, commanding 10th Indian Division in Syria, Iran and Iraq. In March 1942, now promoted to lieutenant-general, he was given command of Burma Corps. He immediately found himself in a most difficult strategic position. His men were already in full retreat before the superior Japanese forces, but Slim managed to extricate many of his troops to India. Nevertheless he was held by many to be responsible for the defeat. Under something of a cloud, he was given command of XV Corps, which was committed to the Arakan offensive of April 1942. Once again, he found himself fighting an unwinnable battle, which did little to enhance his reputation with his superiors.

However, a new supreme commander in South-East Asia, Lord Louis Mountbatten, recognised Slim's abilities, and appointed him to command Eastern Army (soon renamed 14th Army) in October 1943. Initial plans for an offensive against the Japanese in the Arakan and in central Burma were checked by spoiling counter-attacks in both theatres. Slim took calm control, insisting that formations should stay



General William Slim (centre), with one of his divisional commanders, Pete Rees, of 19th Indian Division, and the Governor of Bengal, after the liberation of Mandalay, March 1945. (IWM SE3532)



Lieutenant-General Geoffrey Scoones (1893–1975), GOC IV Corps, the defender of Imphal and Kohima (right) with Major-General Lushington, on Mountbatten's staff. Scoones' Army commander, Slim, was later to comment, 'it needed a tough, cool, and well-balanced commander to meet, week after week, this strain [i.e. of fighting the battle]. Luckily Scoones was tough, cool and well-balanced.' (IWM IND3690)

where they were. In the Arakan, he resupplied the beleaguered garrison of the 'Admin Box' by air, ensuring its continued resistance, so that the Japanese attack ran out of steam. Further north, around Imphal and Kohima, it was a close-run thing, but the Japanese attacks were also beaten off.

Slim planned Operation Capital to cross the River Irrawaddy and destroy the Japanese defenders. But the Japanese withdrew before the attack went in. Swiftly recasting his plans into Operation Extended Capital, Slim switched the point of attack to trap the Japanese before they could withdraw any further southwards, and to capture Mandalay. Wrongfooted by this move, the enemy were bundled out of one position after another; Slim continued the pursuit to Rangoon, which fell on 4 May 1945.

Slim was promoted to full general in July 1945, and made C-in-C Allied Land Forces South-East Asia the following month. After the war, he became CIGS in 1948, and was promoted to field marshal the following year. On retiring from the Army, he became Governor General of Australia.

Slim was one of the outstanding soldiers of World War II. Yet for many years, his contribution remained undervalued, partly because Burma was so distant from the UK, and partly because the modest Slim did not court publicity and was thus outshone by those who did. His conduct of the retreat in Burma in 1942 showed his qualities in adversity; his revitalisation of his multi-national army showed his abilities as a leader of men; and his campaign of 1945 showed him to be a flexible and imaginative offensive commander.

### Vice Admiral Sir James Somerville (1882–1949)

James Fownes Somerville was born in Weybridge on 17 July 1882. He joined HMS *Britannia* as a cadet in 1897, becoming a lieutenant in 1904, and qualifying as a torpedo specialist three years later. At that time, the Torpedo Branch included signals officers, and Somerville was soon engaged on research into long-range wireless systems for the ships of



Vice Admiral Somerville (right) on the bridge of his flagship, HMS *Malaya*, at Gibraltar, November 1941. On the left is Captain N.J.W. William-Powlett, his chief of staff. (IWM A6259)

the Fleet. During World War I, he served as fleet wireless officer to five different flag officers, gaining promotion to commander in 1915, and a DSO in the following year. At that time he was engaged in installing wireless fire control throughout the Grand Fleet.

He was promoted to captain in 1921, and over the next few years served as flag captain to the C-in-C Mediterranean, as well as director of the Admiralty's Signal Department. From 1929 to 1931 he was at the Imperial Defence College before his appointment as commodore, Royal Naval Barracks, Portsmouth, where he set up many schemes for the benefit of sailors and their families. Promoted to rear admiral in 1933, he became Director of Personnel Services at the Admiralty in 1934, and served there for two years. His next command gave him charge of the Mediterranean destroyer flotillas, at a time of great international tension in Spain, Africa and the Middle East, and in 1937 he was promoted to vice admiral. In the following year, he hoisted his flag as C-in-C East Indies, but illness forced his return home in 1939, and compulsory retirement and a KCB followed.

He was recalled on the outbreak of war, and was at first engaged in the development and production of radar. He volunteered to serve under Admiral Ramsay during the evacuation of Dunkirk, and soon after, was selected to command Force H at Gibraltar. Covering the western entrance to the Mediterranean, this was a most important strategic role. Somerville's first task in his new post was to prevent the French fleet at Mers-el-Kebir from falling into German hands. This he achieved on 3 July 1940, after long and painful negotiations, but only by bombarding the ships in harbour.

Thereafter, Force H was involved in a number of actions in the western Mediterranean, covering the Malta convoys, and even on

Rear Admiral Sir Philip Vian (1894–1968) (left) on the command ship HMS *Hillary* off the coast of Sicily. He first rose to prominence when he rescued many of the British merchant seamen whose ships had been sunk by the *Graf Spee* in February 1940: he entered the then neutral Norwegian territorial waters to board the German merchant ship *Altmark* to free them. He then commanded a cruiser squadron in the Mediterranean, the Eastern Task Force on D-Day, and a squadron of aircraft carriers in the Pacific. His was a complex character, outwardly abrasive, but friendly to those who took the trouble to get to know him. More importantly, he was a fighting officer in the best traditions of the service. (IWM A17969)



occasion playing an offensive role – bombarding the port of Genoa, and launching an air attack on the port of Livorno. Somerville's ships were also employed in the North Atlantic, particularly in the hunt for the *Bismarck*. For his contributions to the successful conclusion of that operation, Somerville was appointed KBE.

In March 1942, following the loss of HM ships *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* to Japanese aircraft, Somerville was appointed as C-in-C Eastern Fleet, based at Colombo, and in April was promoted to admiral on the retired list. His command was a hastily organised collection of ships, unable to engage the Japanese fleet in a surface action, nor provided with sufficient aircraft cover to reply to a Japanese air attack. This forced Somerville to adopt a largely defensive strategy, much to the annoyance of Churchill, who had not yet fully grasped the new, decisive role of airpower at sea.



One of the Royal Navy's main objectives in the Mediterranean was to cut off the Axis supply route between Italy and Tunisia, an effort that fell almost entirely to submarines. One of the most successful of the submarine commanders was Roger Wanklyn (second from left). Wanklyn was awarded the VC for his exploits in HMS *Upholder* in 1941. He was lost when the *Upholder* failed to return in 1942. (IWM A7295)

In August 1944, Somerville was reinstated onto the active list, promoted to GCB, and sent to Washington as head of the Admiralty delegation. His promotion was partly a just reward for past services, partly a response to his new post, which needed an officer of some seniority, and partly a reflection of his inability to get on with Mountbatten, the newly appointed Supreme Commander in South-East Asia. He was promoted to admiral of the fleet in May 1945, and retired in December of the same year.

Somerville was a quick-thinking and decisive commander, with little time for those who would not keep up. His dislike of pomposity was instinctive, and endeared him greatly to the lower decks, particularly when allied to his salty sense of humour. His time as Director of Signals gave him a keen appreciation of new technical developments in radar and aviation. He was a calculating leader, and would not risk the ships under his command except when he saw corresponding benefit; however, when in action, he was as much a fighting commander as any of his peers.

**Air Vice Marshal Tedder (1890–1967)**

Arthur William Tedder was born on 11 July 1890 at Glenguin, Scotland, the son of a senior civil servant. He was educated at the Whitgift School, Croydon, and at Cambridge University, before joining the Colonial Service. He joined up in 1914, but a knee injury rendered him unfit for duty. He transferred to the Royal Flying Corps, rising quickly to



Montgomery is pictured here with the Supreme Commander, General Dwight Eisenhower, on the left, and the Deputy Supreme Commander, Tedder, on the right. (IWM B5562)

the command of 70 Squadron. After a year he was posted home to a training unit, and he remained in training, in the UK and in Egypt, until the end of the war. In 1919, he received a permanent commission in the RAF as a squadron leader.

He continued to specialise in training, and by 1934, now a group captain, was Director of Training in the Air Ministry. After two years, he was appointed AOC Far East, based in Singapore, and was promoted to air vice marshal in 1937. In 1938, he was recalled to London and appointed to the newly created post of Director General of Research and Development. Here, he was responsible for the further development and production of the new weapons – modern monoplane fighters, radar, improved guns and bombs – that the Service so desperately needed. He continued this work into 1940, as part of the Ministry of Aircraft Production, but clashed over the respective responsibilities of the Ministry and the RAF with the Minister, Lord Beaverbrook, who did not hesitate to paint Tedder to Churchill as an obstructionist.

At the request of the RAF commander in the Middle East, Air Marshal Longmore, Churchill reluctantly made Tedder deputy commander, and Tedder later succeeded as RAF C-in-C Middle East in June 1941. In the Mediterranean, Tedder struggled to keep the RAF free from Army or Navy control, whilst remaining responsive to the air power needs of the campaign. He created the Desert Air Force under Arthur Coningham (qv) for the land campaign, continued to attack the Axis

**Air Chief Marshal Joubert with his group commanders at Northwood, March 1942. Left to right: Air Vice Marshal (AVM) B.E. Baker (AOC designate 16 Group), Air Commodore A.H. Primrose (Iceland), AVM J.M. Robb (15 Group), AVM A. Durston (18 Group), Air Commodore S.P. Simpson (Gibraltar), Joubert, AVM G.R. Bromet (19 Group), Air Commodore I.T. Lloyd (16 Group) and Air Commodore H.G. Smart (17 Group). (IWM CH5230)**





**Squadron Leader Guy Gibson VC (1918–44), the famous commander of 617 Squadron, the 'Dambusters'. One of his lasting contributions to the Air War was the 'Master Bomber' concept, where one aircraft continuously circled the target directing and encouraging the bomber stream to release their bombs onto the correct markers. He was killed after one such mission, when his aircraft crashed in the Netherlands. (IWM CH11047)**

supply chain across the Mediterranean, and also built up a strong technical and administrative base. He was promoted to air marshal in 1941, and to air chief marshal in the following year.

In February 1943, he became commander-in-chief of Mediterranean Air Command under General Eisenhower, with responsibility for all Allied Air Forces. When Eisenhower took command of the invasion of France, he brought Tedder with him as deputy supreme commander, with special additional responsibilities as air commander. During Operation Overlord, and the subsequent campaigns in France, the Low Countries and Germany, Tedder successfully managed all his air resources towards a succession of tasks, for example isolating the battle area from enemy support, or

using heavy bombers in the close support of land operations (the so-called 'Tedder Carpet').

He was promoted to marshal of the Royal Air Force in September 1945, and was appointed Chief of the Air Staff from 1 January 1946, when he was also created Baron Tedder. He retired from that post in 1949, but was persuaded to serve as chairman of the British Joint Services Mission in Washington, and as British representative on NATO. He finally retired in 1951.

Tedder's style was diplomatic and unobtrusive, and he achieved more in this way than other, more extrovert, commanders. He was also aided by his thorough understanding of Eisenhower, and his commander's complete trust in him.

#### **Admiral Sir John Tovey (1885–1971)**

John Cronyn Tovey was born on 7 March 1885 at Rochester, the son of a colonel in the Royal Engineers. He joined HMS *Britannia* in 1900, and served in a number of ships in the Channel and on the North America and West Indies Station until 1915, when he was given his first command, the destroyer HMS *Jackal*. He moved to the new destroyer HMS *Onslow* in May 1916, just in time to take part in the Battle of Jutland, where his bravery in attacking the enemy was noted. He was appointed to the DSO in 1919, and given a special promotion to commander for his gallant behaviour.

He spent the 1920s in a variety of appointments, both on shore and at sea, but his early promotion to captain in 1923, when only 38, marked him out as an officer of great promise. In 1932, he was given command of the battleship HMS *Rodney*, and in 1935 appointed as commodore, Royal Naval Barracks, Chatham. His promotion to rear admiral (and his CB) came only seven months later. In March 1938, he

was appointed Rear Admiral (Destroyers) in the Mediterranean, serving under another former destroyer man, Admiral Cunningham (qv).

In June 1940, Tovey became Cunningham's second-in-command, with command over all light forces in the Mediterranean. His ships were magnificently handled during the action off Cape Spartimento, and ten days later, Tovey crowned this success with the sinking of an Italian cruiser.

His reward was a promotion to acting admiral, and a transfer to the Home Fleet as C-in-C. His main concern was to keep the convoy routes open and free from interference by German surface units such as the *Scharnhorst*, *Gneisenau* and *Bismarck*. In May 1941, the *Bismarck* attempted to break out into the North Atlantic. Tovey disposed his ships to cover the Denmark Strait, but at such a distance from his home ports, fuel consumption was always going to be a problem. The first British ships to make contact with the *Bismarck* were the cruisers *Suffolk* and *Norfolk*, later reinforced by the battlecruiser *Hood* and the battleship *Prince of Wales*. In the ensuing action, *Hood* was sunk and *Prince of Wales* damaged; the *Bismarck*, although hit, escaped. Tovey was forced to rely on carrier-borne aircraft to locate the enemy warship, and, with his ships rapidly approaching the hunting ground of U-boats and Luftwaffe, to slow her down. Nevertheless, they succeeded, and Tovey, flying his flag in HMS *King George V*, sunk the German vessel in the ensuing battle. Tovey was promoted KCB for his part in the action.

The actions of Admiral Wake-Walker, on *Prince of Wales*, in breaking off the original engagement, aroused Churchill's wrath, but Tovey defended him stoutly, emphasising the lack of air cover provided for his ships. As a result, Churchill thought Tovey difficult and obstinate, an opinion that was only reinforced when Tovey opposed the dispatch of *Prince of Wales* to the Far East, considering the protection of convoys against German surface ships of more long-term strategic value.

As C-in-C Home Fleet, Tovey was also responsible for the Arctic convoys making their way to Russia. They presented him with exceptional difficulties: not only was he obliged to protect them as they went eastwards past the hostile coast of Norway, but he also had to guard against another breakout westwards by German surface units. Committing his ships to one area might easily leave him vulnerable in another. Nor was he helped in his decision-making by the tendency of the Admiralty to interfere with his dispositions. Tovey was no diplomat, but he was an

**Admiral Tovey on the quarterdeck of his flagship, HMS *King George V*. (IWM A14841)**



officer of utter integrity and courage. In July 1943, he struck his flag and became C-in-C Nore. Although promoted to admiral of the fleet and advanced to GCB, this was a retirement post, and he never saw active command again. He was raised to the peerage as Baron Tovey in 1946.

**Major-General Robert Urquhart (1901–88)**

Robert Elliott 'Roy' Urquhart was born in Shepperton-on-Thames on 28 November 1901, the son of a physician. He was educated at St Paul's School and Sandhurst, and joined the Highland Light Infantry in 1920. Most of his early career was spent in India, either with his battalion or in one of a number of staff positions, and by 1939 he was Deputy Adjutant and Quartermaster General at Army Headquarters in India.

On the outbreak of war, he pressed for a posting in the UK, and in October 1940, joined the staff of 3rd Division, serving in V Corps under Montgomery (qv). In March 1941, he was posted to the command of 2nd Battalion, Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry. Also part of Montgomery's Corps, it seems likely that the corps commander had selected Urquhart for the task of revitalising the battalion. The job was presumably completed to Montgomery's satisfaction, for in April 1942, Urquhart was posted as GSO1 in 51st (Highland) Division, about to leave for North Africa. The division, led by their charismatic commander Major-General Douglas Wimberley, took part in the campaign to clear the Axis forces out of North Africa. Wimberley led from the front, often from a Forward Tactical Headquarters with the leading battalions, so much of the burden of the day-to-day running of the division fell on Urquhart.

In May 1943, he was promoted to acting brigadier and given command of 231st Brigade Group, at that time stationed in Malta.



General Urquhart outside his headquarters, the Hartenstein Hotel, at Arnhem. Beside him is his divisional pennant with its Pegasus badge. (IWM B41136)

In the centre, General Orde Wingate (1903–44), the commander of the 'Chindit' Long Range Penetration Groups in Burma. Wingate and his contribution remain controversial to this day. Many contemporaries disliked seeing their best men siphoned off to join his columns; they all suffered heavy casualties, and many of the men who did return were unfit for further operations. How much the columns succeeded in their objective to divert Japanese attentions from the front line is also open to question. (IWM SE7904)



Sometimes serving with the 51st Division, and sometimes with 1st Canadian Division, the 231st endured some hard fighting in Sicily. Urquhart, taking a leaf from his former divisional commander's book, led from the front, coolly deploying and encouraging his men, actions that would earn him a DSO. Landing next on the toe of Italy, the formation advanced rapidly in the face of stern opposition until, in



Lieutenant-Colonel Simon, 17th Lord Lovat DSO, MC (1911–95) (right foreground, wearing the uniform of the Lovat Scouts, including a beret and trousers with a dark blue stripe). He was appointed to command No.4 Commando, serving with distinction at Dieppe. In the following year, he was given command of 1st Special Service Brigade. Landing on D-Day, Lovat led the brigade through some stiff engagements before he was wounded and hospitalised. (IWM H31032)



**Lieutenant-General Brian Horrocks (1895–1985), commanding XXX Corps, addresses officers of the 51st (Highland) Division in Rees, Germany, 1945. He was one of Montgomery's protégés from his time as a battalion commander in 3rd Division in May 1940. His corps took the lead, not only in the breakout from Normandy, but also in the ill-starred drive towards Arnhem, and in the Reichswald. He was a popular commander, who respected his men and was respected by them. (IWM BU2411)**

despite a bout of malaria, Urquhart succeeded in gaining the confidence of his men.

The story of the battle of Arnhem is well known. Urquhart's plans went awry almost from the first. Few radios worked and, cut off from his leading battalions, Urquhart gave in to his instincts, going himself to try to re-establish contact. Laudable in many ways, his adventures behind German lines also put him out of contact with his headquarters for over 24 hours, and he was presumed dead or captured. The communications breakdown, the unexpected presence of SS troops, the poor planning that restricted the support given by 2nd Tactical Air Force, and mistakes in resupply all helped to doom the operation, without even considering the failure of XXX Corps to reach the landing grounds.

After Arnhem, he was appointed CB, and commanded an ad hoc formation, still entitled 1st Airborne Division, which was sent to Norway in 1945. He served in various senior positions in the UK after the war, including Director Territorial Army and Cadet Force, and GOC Lowland District, before his appointment as GOC Malaya in 1950. Throughout his tour of duty, his principal concern was to quell the ongoing Communist insurrection. In 1952, he became GOC British Troops Austria, a post he held until his retirement from the Army in 1955.

Although the operation for which Urquhart is principally remembered was a failure, his conduct during the battle (indeed, in all his battles, both in World War II and in Malaya), his imperturbability and his bravery are unquestioned.

**Lieutenant-General Sir Archibald Wavell (1883–1950)**

Archibald Percival Wavell was born in Colchester on 5 May 1883, and educated at Winchester and Sandhurst. Commissioned into the Black Watch in 1901, he served with his regiment in India and South Africa,

September, the decision was taken to break up the 231st. Urquhart was made Brigadier-General Staff in XII Corps in the UK, preparing for the invasion of Europe.

Only three months later, he was moved from that post, and given command of 1st Airborne Division. The man behind the appointment was almost certainly Montgomery, who had been impressed by Urquhart's command of 231st Brigade Group. He was initially regarded with some suspicion by the senior officers of the division because he was an outsider, untrained in airborne operations. Yet

before entering the Staff College in 1909. On graduation, he moved into military intelligence, specialising in Russian military affairs. In 1914, he was selected as intelligence officer to IV Corps, but succeeded in obtaining an appointment as Brigade Major to 9th Infantry Brigade. He was wounded in 1915, losing the sight of his left eye, and served for the remainder of the war in a number of staff positions in France and Palestine.

In 1926, he was appointed GSO1 of 3rd Division. This gave him the opportunity to work with the experimental mechanised force attached to that division, and in the years that followed Wavell acquired a keen appreciation of the value of mobility and flexibility in an infantry force, as well as the value of air power.

A further short spell in Palestine, as GOC, was followed in 1938 by his return to the UK as a lieutenant-general to take over as GOC Southern Command. His stay here was also short-lived. In July 1939 he moved again, to become GOC Middle East, with war-time responsibilities that covered Egypt, Palestine, Transjordan, Cyprus, Ethiopia, British Somaliland, Aden, Iraq and the Persian Gulf. The total forces under his command numbered 90,000, only one-third of whom were based in Egypt.

Resources were scarce and, like his successor Auchinleck (qv), Wavell was determined to wait before committing his forces to action. He demanded time to assemble the men and the *matériel* he needed, and time to ensure their acclimatisation and adaptation to local conditions. This earned him the distrust of Churchill, ever impatient for immediate action, but when Wavell did finally make his move, dispatching O'Connor's (qv) Western Desert Force into Libya, and Lieutenant-



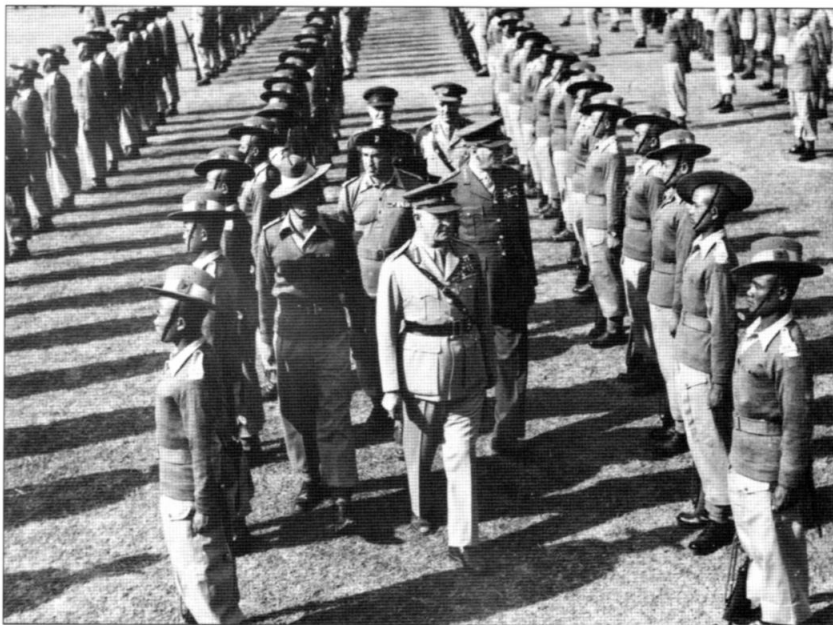
**Generals Alexander (left) and Wavell (second from left) at a meeting with Chinese officers in Burma. (IWM IND859)**

General Alan Cunningham into Italian Somaliland and Abyssinia, victory was speedy and decisive.

These successes marked the high point of Wavell's time in the Middle East. The German invasion of Greece and subsequent capture of Crete, the German riposte in Cyrenaica, as well as a pro-German revolt in Iraq all forced the British onto the defensive, and after the failure of the Brevity/Battleaxe operations on the Egyptian frontier during May and June 1941, Wavell was dismissed and sent to India as Commander-in-Chief.

If it was intended to relegate him to a quiet backwater, then his posting to India backfired. Immediately, Wavell found himself faced with the Japanese declaration of war, and, from an HQ on Java, was appointed Supreme Commander of all Allied forces (American, British, Dutch and Australian) in Burma, Singapore, Malaya, the Dutch East Indies, the Philippines, and even north-west Australia. There was little Wavell could do to stem the enemy advance, given his lack of resources, the difficulty of communication over such a wide area, and the intractable nature of some of his Chinese and American allies. The failure of a counter-offensive, Anakim, in the Arakan was the final straw for Churchill. In September 1943, Wavell, by now a field marshal, was offered, and accepted, the post of Viceroy of India. In his new role, he was no more successful in getting on with either Churchill or his successor, Attlee, and was rather peremptorily dismissed in February 1947.

Wavell's was a most disconcerting personality. He became legendary for his silences, presenting an almost impenetrable mask that provoked suspicion, even hostility, amongst politicians, particularly Churchill, who liked a good argument. Wavell further dismayed the Prime Minister by refusing to go onto the offensive in Libya or East Africa until his men were both acclimatised and fully equipped. The success of both offensives proved Wavell's point, and stood in sharp contrast to the later course of events in Greece, Libya, and later in Burma, when to some extent, he paid the price for an Army's poor equipment and



Wavell (centre, wearing khaki drill) and Auchinleck (behind Wavell to the right) inspect 8th Gurkhas. (IWM IND4977)

out-of-date outlook. He also underestimated the capabilities of the Japanese, although in this he was by no means alone. Yet he was liked and respected by those who served under him and, in contrast to his rather stolid demeanour, he was always willing to encourage the unorthodox: the Chindits and the intelligence-gathering V Force both owed their existence to Wavell.

## FURTHER READING

The literature of World War II is full of references to commanders, good, bad or indifferent. Few works, however, deal with them as a group. Honourable exceptions are John Keegan's *Churchill's Generals* (London, 1991) and Stephen Roskill's *Churchill and the Admirals* (London, 1977). Regrettably, no similar work discusses the senior officers of the Royal Air Force.

Much of the material published in the immediate aftermath of the war suffered through its inability to draw fully on archive material. Subsequently, many careers have had to be reassessed in the light of newly released material. Of those men discussed in this book, Ramsey, Slessor and Tovey have yet to find their biographers, while no modern work assesses the contributions of Alexander, Dowding, Hobart, Horton, Somerville or Tedder. Limitations of space allows only one work on each man to be quoted.

**Alexander:** Nicolson, Nigel *Alex: the Life of Field Marshal Earl Alexander of Tunis* (London, 1973)

**Auchinleck:** Warner, Philip *Auchinleck, the Lonely Soldier* (London, 1981)

**Bennett:** Jackson, A.S. *Pathfinder Bennett, Airman Extraordinary* (Lavenham, 1991)

**Brooke:** Fraser, David *Alanbrooke* (London, 1982)

**Coningham:** Orange, Vincent *Coningham* (London, 1990)

**Cunningham:** Winton, John *Cunningham: the Greatest Admiral since Nelson* (London, 1998)

**Dowding:** Collier, Basil *Leader of the Few* (London, 1957)

**Fraser:** Humble, Richard *Fraser of North Cape* (London, 1983)

**Freyberg:** Freyberg, Paul *Bernard Freyberg VC* (London, 1991)

**Harris:** Probert, Henry *Bomber Harris: His Life and Times* (London, 2001)

**Hobart:** Macksey, Kenneth *Armoured Crusader* (London, 1967)

**Horton:** Chalmers, W.S. *Max Horton and the Western Approaches* (London, 1954)

**Montgomery:** Hamilton, Nigel *Monty* (three volumes, London, 1981-86)

**O'Connor:** Baynes, John *The Forgotten Victor* (London, 1989)

**Portal:** Richards, Denis *Portal of Hungerford* (London, 1977)

**Simonds:** Graham, Dominick *The Price of Command* (Toronto, 1993)

**Slessor:** Slessor, Sir John *The Central Blue* (London, 1956)

**Slim:** Lewin, Ronald *Slim the Standardbearer* (London, 1976)

**Somerville:** MacIntyre, Donald *Fighting Admiral* (London, 1961)

**Tedder:** Owen, Roderic *Tedder* (London, 1952)

**Urquhart:** Baynes, John *Urquhart of Arnhem* (London, 1993)

**Wavell:** Lewin, Ronald *The Chief* (London, 1980)



Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound (1877-1943), First Sea Lord. Pound was something of a stopgap appointment when he was promoted to the post in June 1939. He had a tendency to issue detailed orders to individual commanders (for the Admiralty, unlike the War Office or Air Ministry, was an operational as well as an administrative headquarters), even when that commander had a better appreciation of the immediate situation. Ill as he was for much of the war, he was not always able to stand up to Churchill. Even so, no-one in the Navy of the early war period could have done better. (IWM A20791)

## THE COLOUR PLATES

### A: THE UNITED KINGDOM, 1940-43

#### 1. General Sir Alan Brooke, Casablanca 1943

The newly appointed CIGS is wearing standard officer's service dress, unchanged since its introduction in the early years of the century. The pattern had been slightly modified in the previous year due to a shortage of material, but this did not affect existing wearers. In addition to their badges of rank, worn on the shoulder straps, general officers were also distinguished by the gorget patches on the collar, and by their cap badges.

#### 2. Air Chief Marshal Hugh Dowding, Fighter Command HQ, UK 1940

The Royal Air Force Home Service uniform was a single-breasted jacket with an open collar, introduced in 1919. It was similar in appearance to that worn in the Army, differing principally in having its own cloth belt. Rank was indicated by a number of rings of braid, black silk with a pale blue line, around the cuff. Officers of air rank, i.e. air commodore and above, were distinguished by the two rows of oak leaves embroidered in gold bullion wire on the peaks of their caps, and by a different cap badge. This consisted of the RAF eagle in gilt metal placed across a gold bullion wire laurel wreath.

#### 3. Admiral Sir John Tovey, HMS King George V, at sea 1941

The conservative traditions of the Royal Navy permitted few deviations from the Dress Regulations. All officers serving in Home Waters were obliged to wear the uniform here, known in the regulations as No.5 Undress. The jacket (known as a 'monkey jacket') had first been introduced in 1889, and is still worn today. Rank was indicated by the rings of gold lace around the cuff. In summer, during peacetime, the cap had been worn with a white cover, but this was abolished on the outbreak of war. The peaks of the caps worn by flag officers (i.e. admirals of the fleet, admirals, vice and rear admirals) and commodores 1st class were decorated with two lines of oak leaves embroidered in gold bullion wire.

### B: NORTH AFRICA, 1940-42

#### 1. General Sir Archibald Wavell, Cairo 1941

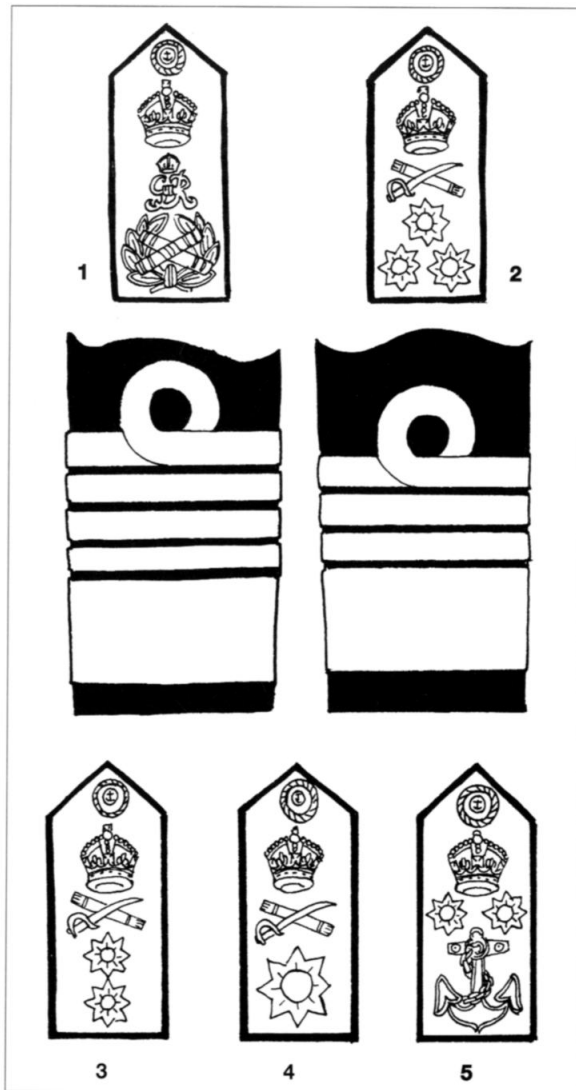
Wavell wears the tropical version of officer's service dress. This was basically the same uniform as that worn by Sir Alan Brooke in A1, but in a lighter material. The gorget patches are held on by studs or by hooks and eyes. Wavell's Sam Browne belt bears a whistle on the shoulder strap, a regimental pattern from his own regiment, the Black Watch.

#### 2. Lieutenant-General Richard O'Connor, Barda, Libya 1940

Once away from headquarters, many senior officers took a rather relaxed attitude to dress regulations. O'Connor here wears his service dress cap with a private purchase jacket, a tartan scarf, corduroy trousers and suede boots. Such a casual approach was to become a particular characteristic of the Army in the Western Desert.

#### 3. Air Vice Marshal Arthur Coningham, Western Desert 1942

The RAF introduced a khaki drill Tropical Dress in 1936. Initially it was no more than the Home Service uniform in a different material. However, contact with the Army, especially the 8th Army in the Western Desert, saw the unofficial



introduction of bush shirts and shorts (the tunic was not formally replaced until 1944). Here, however, Coningham wears a New Zealand pattern battledress blouse, with KD trousers, his rank lace sewn onto a loop around each shoulder strap. Headgear remained the same as the Home Service uniform. The Field Service cap for Air Officers, shown here with its line of light blue piping, was introduced in 1940.

### C: THE MEDITERRANEAN

#### 1. General Sir Harold Alexander, Italy 1944

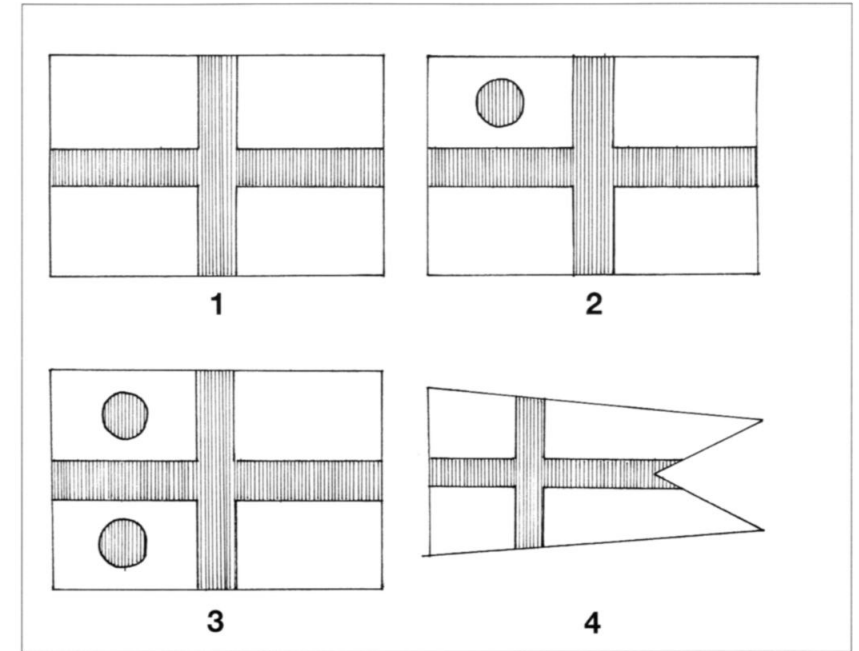
Alexander served with anti-Bolshevik forces in 1919-20, and from them adopted the Russian Army style he favoured for his Service Dress cap, worn with the front pushed up almost vertically, and the sides crushed down.

#### 2. Lieutenant-General Bernard Freyberg VC, Italy 1944

The New Zealand version of battledress was distinguished by the button loop at the collar. Freyberg does not wear a divisional flash, but has a national title sewn onto a loop

OPPOSITE Royal Navy rank badges: the cuffs and shoulder straps of an admiral of the fleet (1), admiral (2); the shoulder straps of vice admiral (3), rear admiral (4), and commodore (5). All shoulder strap devices are in silver. Other cuff details and RN cap badges can be found in Elite 79: *The Royal Navy 1939-45*.

RIGHT Royal Navy rank flags, flown at the mast of the flagship: admiral (1), vice admiral (2), rear admiral (3) and commodore (4). All flags are white with red devices.



around the shoulder strap. His nationality is also shown on his beret, where, having taken a leaf out of Montgomery's book, he wears two badges. The first is the conventional general officer's badge; the second is that of the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force.

#### 3. Admiral Andrew Cunningham, 1941

Dressed for the Mediterranean winter, Cunningham wears the same basic uniform shown in A3, but with the lighter cap from the hot weather uniform.

### D: THE ROYAL AIR FORCE, UK 1944

#### 1. Air Vice Marshal Arthur Harris, UK 1944

Nothing distinguishes Harris's uniform from that of any other senior RAF officer from 1919 onwards. Unlike the Royal Navy or the Army, the Royal Air Force was unable to draw on hundreds of years of tradition to create a new uniform. Nor, perhaps, did it want to, for the very absence of badges and insignia may have been a distinction in itself. The result was that RAF uniforms presented a rather austere appearance in comparison with the other two services.

#### 2. Air Commodore Donald Bennett, UK 1944

Bennet too wears the uniform of a senior RAF officer. Despite the traditions of the service, he introduced a special badge for the elite crews of his command. The distinguishing badge of the Pathfinder squadrons, introduced on 8 November 1942, was a gilt eagle, similar to that worn in the centre of the RAF badge, and was worn over the left breast pocket.

#### 3. Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Portal, UK 1944

The greatcoat was based on Army patterns. The main difference between those worn by officers and those worn by airmen lay in the number of rows of buttons (officers had five, airmen four). Officers' coats also had their own belt, with a gilt buckle. They were made from a woollen fleece material until 1942, when, for austerity reasons, they were replaced by a pattern in Melton cloth. Rank was borne on the shoulder straps.

### E: THE ROYAL NAVY, UK 1942-43

#### 1. Admiral Sir Max Horton, HQ Western Approaches, Liverpool 1943

In peacetime, officers' distinction lace extended all the way around the cuff. However, in 1941, the lines were restricted to the outside of the cuff only. Then, from 1944, they were no longer to be made from gold wire but gold braid. Such measures would only apply to new garments, and so many officers managed to evade their effect, at least for a time.

#### 2. Air Marshal Sir John Slessor, Coastal Command HQ 1943

Like Harris, Slessor wears the uniform of a senior RAF officer. His childhood polio left him in need of the stick shown here.

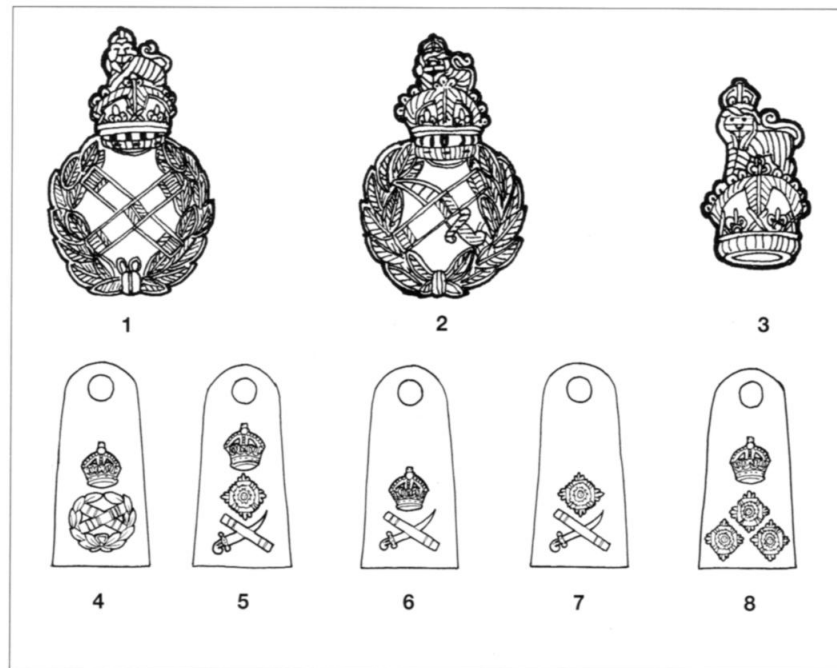
#### 3. Vice Admiral Sir James Somerville, HMS Renown, at sea 1942

No.10 White Undress was the equivalent to No.5 Undress for wear in 'Hot Climates'. For all that it was intended for hot weather wear, this uniform was even more formal, with its upright collar, fastened by hooks and eyes. The single-breasted tunic was made of drill material. Rank was borne not on the cuff, but on navy blue shoulder boards, faced with gold lace, carrying the badges of rank (a series of stars) in silver. Officers from the Engineer, Medical and Accountant branches wore shoulder boards in their distinctive colour (purple, scarlet and white respectively) instead of navy blue. The cap was similar in style to that worn in Home Waters, but the crown was made of white drill.

### F: NORTH-WEST EUROPE, 1944-45

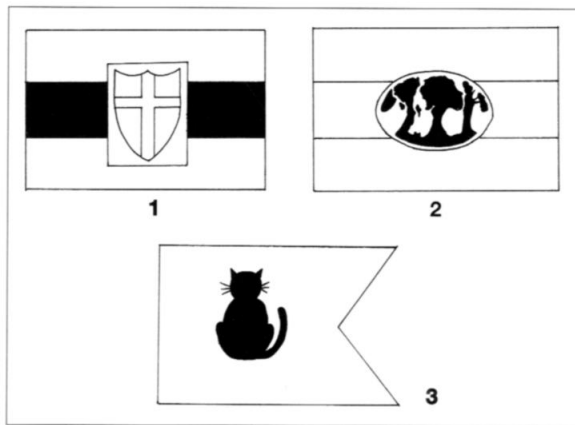
#### 1. Air Vice Marshal Tedder, SHAEF 1944.

Based on photographs taken during the Normandy Landings, Tedder wears War Service Dress with an Irvine flying jacket. The Royal Air Force had introduced a blue-grey version of Army battledress in 1940, under the name Suits, Aircrew. Renamed War Service Dress, its use



Top row: the cap badges of a field marshal (1), general (2) and brigadier (3).  
Bottom row: the shoulder strap badges of a field marshal (4), general (5), lieutenant-general (6), major-general (7) and brigadier (8).

BELOW British Army rank flags; each bore the formation badge in the centre. Here, an Army (1 - 8th Army), red with a black central stripe; a Corps (2 - XII Corps) red with a white central stripe; a Division (3 - 56th Division), red and swallow-tailed. Montgomery, as commander-in-chief in North-West Europe, flew a Union Flag on his car.



#### G NORTH-WEST EUROPE, 1944

##### 1. Major-General Percy Hobart, D-Day beaches 1944

Based on photographs taken on the Normandy beaches, Hobart wears a duffel coat over his Army battledress.

##### 2. Lieutenant-General Guy Simonds, Netherlands

Based on photographs taken in the Netherlands, Simonds wears a coat based on the US-issue mackinaw, but with a much deeper fur collar. Canadian battledress was different in colour, a darker bronze green, to the British version. It was also made of a much better quality fabric than British patterns, and so was highly sought after by British soldiers. Moreover, it was only ever produced in the original version; that is, without the austerity measures eventually seen in British-made uniforms, such as exposed buttons and pockets without the central box pleat.

##### 3. Major-General Robert Urquhart, Arnhem

Urquhart wears ordinary battledress with small gorget

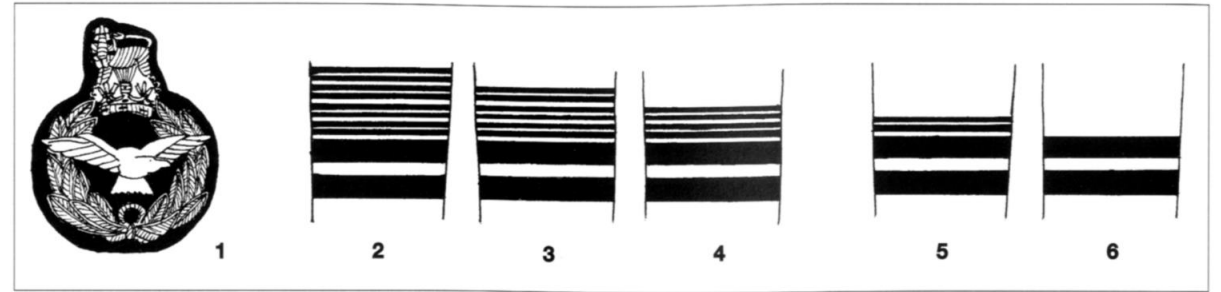
was extended throughout the service in 1943. Like Royal Navy No.5A Dress (see F2 below), it was intended solely as a working uniform, and was not intended for wear outside RAF stations. War Service Dress was similar to the earlier Aircrew Suit, but differed in two respects: it did not have extra pockets on the front of the trouser legs, and did not have the ankle tabs intended for wear with anklets.

#### 2. Admiral Bertram Ramsey, SHAEF, 1944

From 1942 onwards, a number of junior naval officers adopted the practical Army battledress, dyeing it dark blue, as day-to-day wear on board ship, in preference to the rather formal No.5 Dress. The practice was immediately banned; but the Admiralty later relented, and a similar uniform was brought into service in 1943 as No.5A Working Dress (the word 'battledress' was, however, specifically prohibited). It was to be worn only on-board ship. The naval version differed principally in that it had bright gilt buttons down the front and on the breast pockets of the blouse, instead of the concealed metal or composition version worn by the Army. Rank was shown on the shoulder straps instead of the cuffs. The trousers were ordinary straight-legged uniform trousers, and were not intended for wear with anklets.

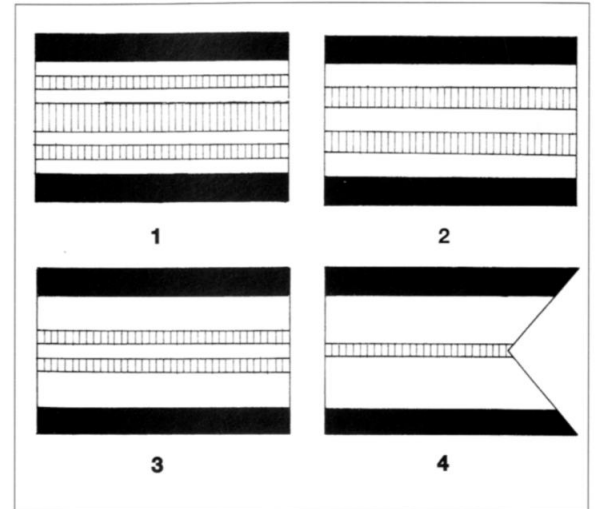
#### 3. General Sir Bernard Montgomery, Netherlands 1945

Montgomery was made colonel commandant of the new Parachute Regiment, and wore this uniform to a regimental function. The beret, complete with two badges, once belonged to Major-General G.F. Hopkinson, the commander of 1st Airborne Division during the invasion of Sicily, who had been killed early in the Italian campaign. Montgomery wears a paratrooper's Denison smock, with a cravat made from US camouflaged parachute silk.



The cap badge (1) and rank distinction lace of RAF officers: (2) Marshal of the Royal Air Force, (3) Air Chief Marshal, (4) Air Marshal, (5) Air Vice Marshal, (6) Air Commodore.

RIGHT Rank flags of the RAF. Intended to be flown at RAF stations, they were also used as car flags. Marshal of the Royal Air Force (1), Air Chief Marshal (2), Air Marshal (not shown) had one central stripe, Air Vice Marshal (3), Air Commodore (4). The flags are light blue with dark blue edges and red stripes.



patches on the collars, and the Airborne Forces red beret. He never qualified as a parachutist, so does not wear any qualification wings.

#### H: THE FAR EAST, 1945

##### 1. General Sir Claude Auchinleck, India

Uniforms in a new jungle green material were introduced into the British and Indian Armies in the Far East during 1944. The uniform consisted simply of a bush shirt and trousers. The General is wearing the Indian General Service Cap, an unloved pancake-like garment, introduced into the Indian Army at the same time.

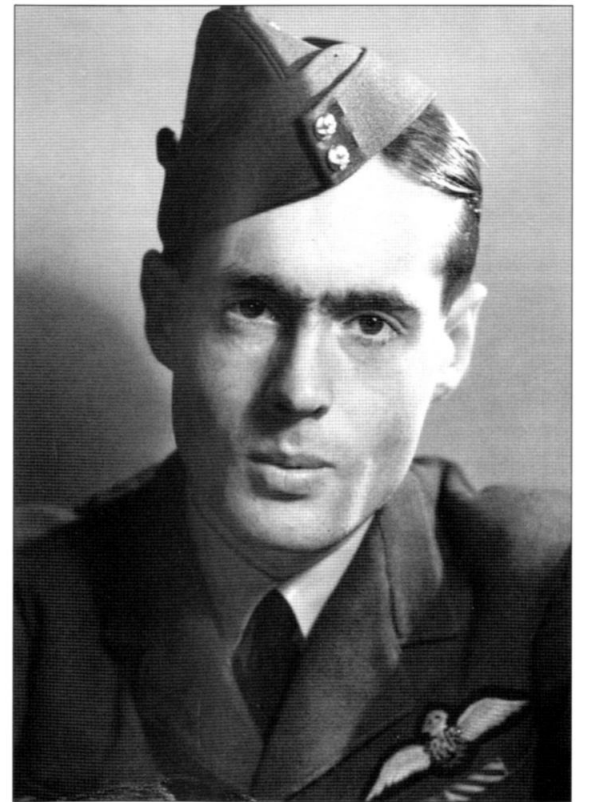
##### 2. Lieutenant-General Sir William Slim, Burma

Just as Montgomery could always be recognised by his beret, so Slim could always be distinguished by his slouch hat. That Slim had served with both 6th and 7th Gurkha Rifles can perhaps be seen in the stiffness of the hat, and the angle at which it was worn.

##### 3. Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser, USS *Missouri*, Tokyo Bay

For more informal occasions, and at the discretion of the senior officer, Royal Naval officers could wear No.13, Tropical Dress, which comprised an open-necked, short-sleeved cotton shirt and shorts, as shown here. It was usually worn for non-ceremonial occasions, but Fraser chose to wear this rig for the Japanese surrender ceremony on board the USS *Missouri*, in Tokyo Bay, on 2 September 1945. Here, at 0914, he signed the surrender document on behalf of the British Government. Cunningham, typically, did not approve of Fraser's choice, but would have worn the more formal white tunic and trousers of No.10 Dress.

Group Captain Leonard Cheshire VC (1917-92). Cheshire was an outstanding flyer who first commanded 76 Squadron, and then the famous 617 Squadron after Gibson's death. He served as Master Bomber on a number of successful raids, on several occasions marking the targets at a very low level. (IWM CH12667)



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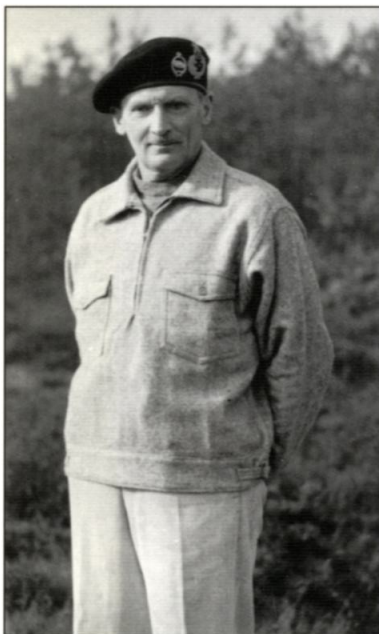
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