

Wavell and his Accomplishments in the Middle East 1939-1941 - Part II

A Bibliographical Review

CAPTAIN HAROLD E RAUGH JR US ARMY

Biographical sketches of Wavell first appeared, expectely, in 1941, in the wake of his great victories in North Africa and Italian East Africa. Harvey Arthur DeWeerd (later Major Deweerd, United states Army, Associate Editor of *Infantry Journal* included a chapter on Wavell in his *Great Soldiers of the Two World Wars* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1941).. Though obviously written in the early years of World War II, DeWeerd was highly complimentary of Wavell, the only British general of World War II included in his book:

Wavell was the first British soldier of World War II to grasp the full lessons of the German campaigns in Poland and France and apply them to the conditions of desert fighting. He was the first British soldier in this war to coordinate effectively the full power of British sea, land, and air forces in a single campaign . . . The Libyan victories were the cheapest triumphs ever won by a British force against a European adversary - if not the cheapest in all British military history. (P.306).

Also in 1941 Wavell was among a select group when his biography was included in Rene Kraus' *The Men Around Churchill* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1941). There were only two soldiers included among those who were "working with him [Churchill] in his epochal battle for liberation and justice": "The king's First solider - Sir John Greer Dill", and "The General of the Desert - General Sir Archibald Wavell." This highly laudatory account emphasizes Wavell's qualities of generalship and ability to deceive the enemy. In commenting on the results of the British Libyan blitzkrieg, Kraus quotes Marshal keitel, Supreme Chief of the German High Command (*Oberkommando der wehrmacht*, or OKW) as saying "Wavell is the best general the British have, and he is very good" (P. 224). Both of these early short biographies are hagiographic in nature, but it is imperative to recollect public opinion at this time and the psychological effect of Wavell's victories in raising morale on the home front.

The first two volumes of the British official History *The Mediterranean and Middle East* (Volume I - "The Early Successes against Italy (to May 1941)" and Volume II- "The Germans come to the Help of their Ally (1941)," both London: Her Majesty's stationery office, 1954 and 1956, respectively), by

Major-general I.S.O Playfair, C.B., D.S.O, M.C, and others, provide an excellent overview of all of Wavell's campaigns in that theater, buttressed by the use of a multitude of official documents and detailed scholarly research.

After explaining Wavell's "transfer," Playfair lauds not only Wavell's accomplishments, but also his personal attributes and brilliant generalship. Wavell's charismatic leadership is further expounded upon in these pages, with Playfair adding that "a visit from the commander-in-chief [Wavell] was not a visitation but a tonic" (p. 246), and "He was essentially a soldier's soldier, and takes an assured place as one of the great commanders in military history" (P. 246).

Major-General H. Rowan-Robinson, C.B, C.M.G., D.S.O, in 1941 wrote *Wavell in the Middle East* (London: Hutchinson, n.d. (1941). Major-General Rowan-Robinson was cognizant of the fact it was basically impossible to write an authoritative account of events that had occurred only a short time before, but understood the value of

...contemporary accounts written hot upon the tread of events, amid the rise and fall of hopes and fears, and coloured [sic] with the recent personal experiences of participants, have now, as ever, a value in building up the more complete history of the future.
(Preface, p. 7).

This book starts with an overview of the situation in the Middle East upon the outbreak of war, when the British were numerically weak and inadequately-equipped. At that time, though the British strategic position was relatively strong, but it became quite precarious after the defeat of France and Italy's entry into the war. Major General Rowan-Robinson ably describes all of Wavell's campaigns in the Middle East, using information gleaned from official summaries and other reports, adding additional information from his own personal experiences as a soldier with service in the Middle East. In his conclusion, the author bemoans the lack of preparation for war: "The failure to prepare has been paid for in wasteful bloodshed and in defeat that verged on disaster" (P. 227); and the need for central military control manifested in a well-staffed Ministry of Defense.

The Campaigns of Wavell, by Donald Cowie, was published the following year (London: Chapman & Hall, 1942). In his preface, Cowie alerts readers that his book is not just a compilation of cold facts and figures, but is

...rather a most appetizing story of blood, murder, grand larceny, hunger, privation, thirst, arson, sabotage, cowardice and valour [sic], bound together by an account of how one British general, Archibald Wavell, redeemed his countrymen's martial reputation in the

best-planned and most remarkable series of campaigns since those of Wellesley in the Peninsula.(p. v.).

Cowie covers basically the same ground as Rowan-Robinson, but uses much more colorful language. He condemns the British expedition to Greece, and further states the evacuation of Crete was a tragedy, the result of ill-preparation on the part of the British. In summing up General Wavell's campaigns in the Middle East, Cowie states "he [Wavell] achieved all he set out to achieve - the conquest of Cyrenaica, Eritrea, Italian Somaliland, Abyssinia, Syria, Iraq, Iran and the reconquest of British Somaliland - to fail only in the tasks outside his original plan which had been forced upon him." 22

Written after a great deal of research and from a less emotional point of view, Robert Woollcombe's *The Campaigns of Wavell, 1939-1943* (London: Cassel, 1959), covers Wavell's campaigns in the Middle East as well as those in the Indian/Asian Theater. Woolcombe admirably chronicles all of these campaigns in an objective and detached manner. He posits that Wavell was beset with a multitude of difficulties that few commanders, before or since, have had to face, even in adversity. Infact the author gives Wavell the appellation of "Adversity's General." It is not meant in a pejorative manner, since Woolcombe apparently admires his subject:

The absence of Lord Wavell from the London Victory parade in 1946 was not publicly remarked. Yet he had been Commander-in-Chief in the British Empire for longer, and operationally responsible for wider theatres, than any other British soldier of either World War. For almost four years, an Arthurian figure, he was concerned with military problems of pure survival. With the same composed strength he had met triumph and disaster. He had directed the most extraordinary victory, and had weathered the most humiliating defeat, known to British arms.(p. 207).

In the Foreward to this book, Field-Marshal Lord Alanbrooke eloquently stated:

It is my fervent hope that the account of the campaigns of Wavell may be extensively read and deeply studied, so that the true stature of this very great man may be fully appreciated, and that adequate feelings of gratitude may be engendered for the immense services he rendered under conditions of appalling difficulty. (p. X).

This well-written, balanced account of Wavell's campaigns also includes an informative "Biographical Outline" of Wavell's life.

A number of studies have been written about Wavell's North African

campaigns, the first few books having been written by war correspondents who actually observed and/or took part in those campaigns. Though written in a more journalistic manner, they tend to capture the emotions and feelings prevalent at the time. Alexander Clifford, who spent more than thirty months in the Middle East as special correspondent of the *the Daily Mail*, wrote *Three against Rommel*, subtitled *The Campaigns of Wavell Auchinleck and Alexander* (London: George G. Harrap, 1943). The first third of the book pertains to all of Wavell's campaigns, not just those in North Africa, interspersed, through with the author's own personal experiences, observations, and opinions. As such, it does not possess the impartiality or accuracy of an official history, but the personal comments and perceptions are invaluable in their own right. Clifford stated he felt Wavell's removal to India was in the nature of a disgrace after the spring defeats. "But," Clifford continued, "we hoped not. For the curious thing was that, inspite of Greece, Crete, Cyrenaica, Wavell still retained the respect and affection and confidence of the troops in the Middle East." (p. 106). A recurrent theme running through all of the narratives of Wavell's campaigns is of Wavell's tireless concern for the welfare of his men and his charismatic leadership.

A companion of Clifford was Alexander Moorehead, correspondent of the London *Daily Express*, who wrote *The March to Tunis: The North African War 1940-1943* (British title: *African Trilogy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965). This book actually is a compilation of the three books: Moorehead asserts that the war in Africa and the Middle East fell into three twelve-month periods: the Wavell period, 1940-1941; the Auchinleck period, 1941-1942; and the Eisenhower, Alexander, Montgomery period, 1942-1943, with each of these three periods corresponding, respectively, to one of his three earlier-written, aforementioned books. Wavell himself wrote the foreword to the first edition of this book (1944), and lauds Moorehead for also writing about "the human factors [of war] that are so often overlooked when the cold, critical official histories come to be written." (p. 7). Moorehead was a perspicacious observer of people, places, and events. In his "An Additional Preface," Moorehead states he believes the "Greek adventure" was a mistake, and if Wavell's forces had not been diverted to Greece, there was a high probability they could have advanced to Tripoli.

Raoul Aglion, who served as attache at the French Legation in Cairo in 1939-1940, dedicated his book *War in the Desert: The Battle for Africa* (New York: Henry Holt, 1941), to "Sir Archibald Wavell, hero of the Desert, and to the glorious Army of the Nile." Although this book is more of an historical chronicle of conflict in the North African region, Aglion includes two chapters explaining in great detail the Italian colonization of Libya and East Africa region, Aglion includes two chapters explaining in great detail the

Italian colonization of Libya and East Africa, as well as two chapters about Wavell's Libyan offensive. The greatest contribution of this book is that it relates the 1940-1941 military events in North Africa and Syria from a Free French perspective. Aglion praises the Commander-in-Chief, Wavell, who was given the revered sobriquet of "The Foch of '41" by the Free French.

The Battle for North Africa (New York: Charles Scribner's sons, 1969), was written by John Strawson. He not only fought in the Middle East during World War II as a junior officer, but was a brigadier when he wrote this book. In Chapter I, Strawson relates that numerous books have been written on the North African campaigns, but unlike all the others, the purpose of his book is

not to summarize or reiterate previous accounts of the campaign either in general or particular, but rather, against a background of strategic and tactical development, to trace the changes in the way battles were conducted during the three years, 1940 to 1943, and to see from the viewpoint of those who did it what the fighting was actually like. (p .2).

Strawson ably accomplishes his mission, with Chapters 2 through 4 being devoted to Wavell's North African campaigns, including information on the distracting influences of his other, peripheral campaigns. Strawson has studied these operations for years, and his assessment of Wavell is quite laudatory, praising him for his prescience, unflagging spirit, unorthodoxy, breadth of vision, and "well- balanced strategic courage." At the same time, the author deprecates Churchill's incessant flow of telegrams to Wavell which not only urged Wavell to take the initiative and regain the offensive, but more often than not contained "minutely detailed tactical instructions." Strawson states

Wavell was one of the great commanders of history, and perhaps his greatest misfortune was that, whilst he was engaged in being a potential Marlborough, he was serving a man who, family connection aside, thought of himself as an actual one. (p. 68).

A much more scholarly and well-researched account of these same battles is found in W.G.F. Jackson's *The North African Campaign 1940-1943* (London: B.T Batsford, 1975) which includes a large numbers of highly-informative sketch maps. The intent of this book is "the study of human endeavour [sic] as men fought with inadequate resources to make good British and American military neglect." This book is insightfully and lucidly written, making use of numerous documents to include the journals and diaries of many of the leading military and political figures involved in these campaigns.

The first of the three sections of the book is entitled "British Imperialism," and included the entire period in which Wavell's campaigns were inextricably entwined, and all are chronicled in rich detail.

Jackson considers the decision to send a British expeditionary force to Greece to have been "the first British strategic misjudgment," and states Wavell made "several unfortunate decisions" in task-organizing all his forces in view of the requirement to send troops to Greece. On 19 February 1941 Wavell reversed his former position on the "Greek adventure," this time favoring action in the Balkans, constituting the "second strategic misjudgment." The third and fourth judgment errors were, according to Jackson, the British resolve to send a force to Greece after the Greeks failed to withdraw to their defensive line (the Aliakmon Line) in the face of an imminent German onslaught, and the failure to assess properly the ability of Rommel to initiate an offensive. This highly-detailed book is written from an omniscient point of view, including the synthesis of Italian/German perceptions and information, and its objectivity is juxtaposed with criticism when necessary. Although critical of Wavell at times, Jackson's overall assessment is that

Wavell was no dictator. Everyone liked and admired him. He was well suited to command a British major theatre at the outbreak of a great war, his calmness in adversity, his robust stability and his obvious honesty of purpose held men's loyalty however discouraging the outlook might be. His patient husbanding of resources, his careful allocation of those resources to the various commanders in his vast theatre, and his ability to improvise [sic] enabled him to achieve much while defeat and ruin faced Great Britain everywhere in the early years of the war. The conquest of Cyrenaica, Eritrea, Italian Somaliland and Abyssinia, and the reconquest of British Somaliland and Iraq were no mean feats. (p. 132). By virtue of his superb analyses of decisions and courses of action that effected all these campaigns, his flowing writing style, the excellent use of primary sources, and multitude of sketch maps, Jackson's book is definitely one of the better studies of this subject.

Correlli Barnett's *The Desert Generals* (1960; rpt. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), was a controversial book when originally published in 1960, and was significant because it was "the first serious attempt by an historian too young to have taken part in the desert battles to assess the causes of British failure and to sit in judgement on the merits of the various commanders."²³ The majority of the controversy surrounds Auchinleck's alleged preparations for El Alamein and Montgomery's generalship and failure to acknowledge Auchinleck's preparations—which is outside the purview of this

study. Barnett feels O'Connor did not receive adequate credit for his role in planning and commanding the forces for Operation "Compass." Barnett's overall treatment of Wavell is solid but not uncritical when necessary. In the second edition the author comments on Ultra intelligence, which "lends extra weight to the charge that Churchill's decision finally to sack Wavell because of the failure of *Battleaxe* was an 'amazing injustice.'" (p. 80).

Finally, *The North African Campaign 1940-1943*, by Major P.C. Bharucha (New Delhi: Combined Inter-Services Historical Section, 1956), a volume in the "Official History of the Indian Armed Forces in the second World War 1939-45" series is also a valuable reference, but expectedly emphasizes the role of Indian units in this campaign. This work, however, has a tendency to rely too much upon the official despatches.

There has not been a definitive and detailed history written of the British victories in capturing Italy's East African possessions and the recapture of Abyssinia and British Somaliland. One of the earliest books written on the subject, *The Abyssinian Campaigns: The official Story of the Conquest of Italian East Africa* (London: His Majesty's stationery Office, 1942), is nonetheless quite informative and interesting. Even though it contains a detailed and flowing narrative, this book is generally devoid of analysis, the result of being written from the perspective of the victor shortly after the successful conclusion of the campaign. One must also consider the effect of this book on morale on the homefront. A significant contribution of this small book is the large number of photographs and outstanding maps and sketches, giving one a true perspective and appreciation of the rugged terrain and logistical difficulties that the British had to overcome. In this book Wavell's use of his strategic reserve is noted in detail.

Undoubtably one of the better accounts is *East African Campaign 1940-1941*, edited by Bisheshwar Prasad (New Delhi: Combined Inter-services Historical Section, 1963), another volume in the "official History of the Indian Armed Forces in the second World War 1939-45" series. It is a superbly researched study, albeit with an emphasis on the role of the Indian Armed Forces in the campaign, which was significant. It contains a great amount of information, to include the topography of the region and orders of battle. In the conclusion it is stated that "by his [Wavell's] perseverance and ability he ensured British victory in this region." (p. 155).

A number of accounts have been written by participants in this campaign, including W.E. Crosskill's *The Two Thousand Mile War* (London: Robert Hale, 1980), and A.J. Barker's *Eritrea 1941* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966). These books are relatively complementary, each author emphasizing the role of the force of which he was a member. The former ac-

cents the operations of Cunningham attacking from the south, with the latter telling the story of Platt's invasion from the Sudan into Eritrea. Crosskill's account is much more personal in nature, including his own experiences and anecdotes. He writes "thank God also we had, in General Wavell, a commander of exceptional intelligence and moral and physical courage who would always stick to his guns - if he believed them to be the right ones - ignoring any risk to his personal position." (p. 79). Barker, a professional soldier, considers the attack from the north- "the hammer blow" - the most important, with Cunningham's forces providing the anvil. This book is more objectively written, with a greater amount of detail, including appendices of British and Italian orders of battle. The concept and execution of this campaign was, according to Barker, "a gamble but the undertaking of such gambles when coupled with careful calculation are one of the marks of a good general and Wavell had already demonstrated his ability to calculate risks." (p. 74). It is also worthwhile to note that General Platt wrote "The East African Forces in the War and Their Future," published in the *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution*, (August 1948).

South African forces played a significant role in this campaign, as Cunningham's three-division force included the 1st South African Division and the 1st South African Brigade of the 12th East African Division. Although emphasizing the role of the South African units and their contributions to the victory, the following two books are interesting and highly descriptive: Eric Rosenthal's *The Fall of Italian East Africa* (London: Hutchinson, n.d. (1941), and *Vanguard of Victory: A short Review of the South African Victories in East Africa - 1940-1941*, by Conrad Norton and Uya Krige (Pretoria, Union of South Africa: Government Printers, 1941).

The Greek campaign was, at the time of conception and execution, and remains to this day, the most controversial of Wavell's campaigns. The appreciations, meetings, and decisions leading up to the despatch of the British expedition are full of misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and innuendoes. Wavell's role in the early stages of this campaign is unclear, since he apparently was opposed, in January 1941, to sending a British force to Greece, and inexplicably changed his mind to favor an expedition a month later. The missing link in ascertaining Wavell's assessment of and true responsibility in the decision-making process of sending British troops to Greece may be in an appreciation of the Greek situation he apparently wrote "in Cairo late in January [1941], after Metaxas' death, and handed to Dill [CIGS], probably as he [Dill] left to return to the United Kingdom."²⁴ However, this appreciation cannot be located. A copy is believed to be among the Wavell papers still in the possession of the Wavell family, who unfortunately appear to be unwilling to permit historians access to research the Field-Marshal's papers.

Major-General Sir Francis de Guingand, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., who served as Montgomery's chief of staff at Eighth Army (1942-1943) and 21st Army Group (1944-1945), was a major serving at General Headquarters, Cairo, on the Inter-service Joint Planning Staff when Wavell was Commander-in-Chief, Middle East. As such, de Guingand was a member of the contingent which accompanied Wavell to the conference with King George of the Hellenes and General Papagos, Greek Commander-in-Chief, held near Athens on 22 February 1941. Shortly thereafter de Guingand conducted a reconnaissance, on Wavell's instructions, of the Aliakmon Line, the Greek defensive position in northern Greece. Based upon those experiences, and subsequent work on the Joint Planning Staff, de Guingand wrote *Operation Victory* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1947). In this book, de Guingand states "our strategy in Greece can be looked upon as a test case respecting the relationship between the political and the military factors." (p. 77) De Guingand is particularly critical of the role of Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden (later the Earl of Avon), in this situation, and contends "that from a military point of view an intervention in Greece never had any chance of success." (p. 79).

An indispensable source on the Greek campaign is *Greece 1940-1941* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1976), a volume in "The politics and strategy of the second World War" series. It is a study based on the thorough research of a multitude of documents and other official sources, including many hitherto unpublished, which originated from Germans as well as British sources. Other key books on Greece include Christopher Buckley's *Greece and Crete 1941* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1952), and *Greek Tragedy '41*, by Anthony Heckstall-Smith, D.S.C., and Vice-Admiral H.T. Baillie-Grohman, C.B., D.S.O., O.B.E. (London: Anthony Blond, 1961). Though the latter book is concerned mainly with operation "Demon," the British evacuation from Greece (Commanded by Baillie-Grohman), it gives fair and equal, in addition to insightful, treatment of the entire British expedition to Greece. In its Epilogue, a very balanced pro and con argument is given pertaining to the Greek campaign, stating "neither our statesmen nor our generals were blameless" (p. 228), but that

We were beaten in Greece for the same reason we were beaten in France and Norway. Because our pre-war policy of appeasement had left us totally unprepared for war, while, when the war began, our policy was to concentrate on the production of bombers rather than fighters. (p. 228)

In spite of the Greek campaign, the authors were convinced that "Wavell was our greatest army commander in the war." (p.224).

It is worthwhile to note that after the publication of De Guingand's *operation Victory* and General Papagos' *The Battle of Greece, 1940-41* (translated by Pat. Eliascos) (Athens: Scazakis, 1949), Eden and Wavell intended to collaborate on a book about the 1941 British expedition to Greece, in "which Wavell would contribute the military chapter and I [Eden] the political. Unfortunately his [Wavell's] death in 1950 put an end to this idea."²⁵ Eden's own memoirs, *The memoirs of Anthony Eden: The Reckoning* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), are an invaluable text revealing the political decisions and considerations at the highest levels which effected this campaign.

Even though the Eden-Wavell book was never written- the intent of which would have been to dispell "a number of legends and misunderstandings [which] have grown up around the Greek adventure"²⁶ and to counter the "somewhat one-sided history of events" contained in the Papagos and de Guingand accounts - Wavell wrote "The British Expedition to Greece, 1941" (his last published item), which appeared in the January 1950 issue of *Army Quarterly*. Again Wavell wanted to set the record straight:

At this stage I [Wavell] should correct two statements which have been widely spread:

- (a) that the military leaders were forced into the Greek commitment against their will for political reasons; and
- (b) that but for the Greek adventure our forces could have cleared up the North African coast for good and all.

Neither of these assumptions is true.²⁷

Wavell also elaborates on what he calls "the crux of the whole drama" (p. 181), the failure of General Papagos to issue the order to the Greek divisions in Macedonia and Albania to withdraw to the Aliakmon Line, to which Papagos allegedly agreed on 22 February 1941. Wavell's account, albeit only seven pages long, is quite illuminating. When summing up all the military activities in his command being conducted concurrently with the Greek campaign, Wavell modestly added "Those were busy days in the Middle East." (p. 184).

De Guingand later wrote *Generals at War* (London: Hodder and stoughton, 1964), in which he attempted to conduct "a sober and balanced reassessment" of Wavell. De Guingand is scathingly critical of Wavell's role in the Greek "debacle." It appears to be exceedingly presumptuous for de Guingand to conduct such a "reassessment" of Wavell, considering de Guingand had only been a major when he had been assigned to the Middle East

Joint Planning staff in December 1940. De Guingand obviously was not privy to many of the decisions effecting the Greek campaign, and admits in his earlier work, *Operation Victory*:

- "I don't claim to know the whole story by any means." (p. 44).
- "I would stress again that I don't know the whole story or the whole background to the decisions..." (p. 44).
- "We [members of the Joint Planning Staff] did not at that moment know anything of the high policy behind this decision [that the Greek campaign would have priority over all others]." (pp. 47-48).
- "To what extent she [Greece] genuinely wished us to send forces to Greece I do not know." (p. 50).
- "Discussions [between Eden, Dill, and Wavell, 19 February 1941] took place behind closed doors and we on the lower levels were all agog to know what was happening, and what decisions were being made." (pp. 54-55).
- "Being a very low form of life amongst the great constellations, I only took my place at the table during discussions [in Athens, 22 February 1941] which turned upon the purely military angle. I am therefore, not in a position to describe the whole scene, nor was I in a position to hear all the arguments used, both political and military, in favour [sic] of our policy." (p. 56).

The above six examples were found on only twelve pages of *Operation Victory*, and many more examples abound. Some of De Guingand's criticisms of Wavell in *Generals at War* seem justifiable, but de Guingand's "assessment has an intemperate quality which seems excessive in relation to the level of his position and the brevity of his experience."²⁸ De Guingand's second book seems to be an attempt to taint the reputation of Wavell, who "has never lost his colossal 1940 reputation" and "is perhaps the only great British soldier of the Second World War never to have his legend questioned by post-war criticism" (p. 15) and at the same time enhance the reputation of his "old war-time Chief, Field-Marshal Montgomery."

Martin van Creveld's "Prelude to Disaster: The British Decision to Aid Greece, 1940-1941," *Journal of Contemporary History*, (July 1974), pages 65-92 was published shortly after a number of the original documents pertaining to this affair held at the Public Record Office were declassified and opened to the public. In this enlightening article, Creveld contends that Wavell and Dill changed their minds between January and February 1941 to favor the dispatch of British troops to Greece, that recommendation being based more on political considerations than military, "in the hope that such aid would put 'a new heart' into Turkey and Yugoslavia and induce them to join in." (p. 80).

Crevelld also supports Papagos in not ordering the Greek division to withdraw to the Aliakmon Line, since "the decision to withdraw the Greek army from Thrace had been made in an exclusively *British* meeting." (P. 85) The author makes full use of all the documents available to him, and does not put any particular emphasis on Wavell's role, other than already mentioned, in the decision to send a British expeditionary force to Greece.

"Greece, March 1941: The politics of British Military Intervention," by Sheila Lawlor, was published in *The Historical Journal*, 25 (No.4, 1982), page 933-946. The intent of this article was "to concentrate on one three-day period - 5-7 March 1941 - in order to illustrate the way in which the 'Greek decision' was reached." (p. 934). Based primarily on cabinet minutes and correspondence, the author elucidates in great detail that, contrary to outward appearances of "political unanimity" in arriving at this decision, there was involved a dynamic combination of political, strategical, diplomatic, and personal considerations. Detracting from the overall effectiveness of this article is an obvious error on page 935, where 9 February 1941 is erroneously stated as the date Eden and Dill were dispatched to the Middle East, whereas the actual date was 12 February 1941. This is significant, since it reflects on the author's credibility. This article, however, is worthwhile in delineating the events of 5-7 March 1941 which led to the irrevocable decision to aid Greece with troops.

Of much greater overall interest, with more information on Wavell's role in this episode, is Robin Higham's "British Intervention in Greece 1940-1941: The Anatomy of a Grand Deception," *Balkan Studies*, 23 (1982), pages 101-126. This article apparently served as the embryo of Professor Higham's book *Diary of A Disaster :British Aid to Greece, 1940-1941* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1986). These are by far the most intriguing of the accounts listed in this review. Unlike most writers on the topic, Higham has actually walked the terrain in Greece he writes about, and his account also includes the important role of the Royal Air Force in supporting the Greeks. One factor generally overlooked in most narratives is the significance of logistics. Higham keenly writes about transportation shortages, lack of coal for fueling Greek locomotives, the gross inadequacy of ammunition stockpiles, and many other items - "all essential factors in understanding this complex scenario. Higham hypothesizes that even though neither the Chiefs of staff in London nor a "sometime lieutenant of Hussars, Winston Churchill" had a grand strategy for southeastern Europe and the eastern Mediterranean, Wavell did. Wavell was a master of deception and the unorthodox, and the author contends that Wavell apparently changed his mind about sending forces to Greece between 18 January and 19 February 1941 because he (Wavell)

... assessed the German threat to Greece as real and swift. He [Wavell] assumed that Dill, sensible soldier that he was, would be opposed and opt anyway for aid to Turkey. But he did his sums and decided that the best way to get London off his back was to agree to go to Greece, assuming that shipping delays would so hamper his movement that only a very small force would be in Hellas and need to be evacuated when the Germans attacked successfully as soon as the snow melted in the Bulgarian passes. Cairo was a hotbed of spies and so his cover plan [of sending 120,000 to 200,000 men to Greece] was the story we have been told and the deception he maintained until his death. (article, p. 114).

Higham substantiates this claim with a number of facts, and concludes that "two clear lessons and one intriguing speculation thus emerge from the British decision to aid Greece in 1940-1941." (article, pp. 122-123). These lessons according to the author, are that the British were not technically, tactically, nor mentally equipped for this task, and that the British decision-making process was faulty. The enigma that remains is: "why did Wavell go to Greece - who was he out to deceive? And was he successful in pulling off a grand - strategic deception?" (article, p. 123). The answers are not readily forthcoming, quite possibly enshrouded in the mystery that surrounds the Wavell family's inexplicable reluctance to permit anyone to have unrestricted access to research the Field-Marshal's papers.

In 1948 Wavell, who was serving as director for deBeers Diamonds, ran into de Guingand at a dinner in Johannesburg. Wavell just tapped de Guingand on the chest and remarked, "There was more in the Greek business than you know about."²⁹ The conundrum remains.

Notes:

22 "General Wavell's Campaigns- Armies and Leadership," review of *The campaigns of Wavell*, by Donald Cowie, (London) *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 July 1942, p. 327.

23 "What Happened in the Desert?," review of *The Desert Generals*, by Correlli Barnett, and *A Full Life*, by Sir Brian Horrocks, (London) *Times Literary Supplement*, 16 September 1960, p. 587.

24 Letter, Professor Robin Higham, Department of History, Kansas State University, to Captain Harold E. Rough, Jr, USA, 23 September 1986.

25 The Earl of Avon, *The Memoirs of Anthony Eden: The Reckoning* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), p. 235.

26 Field-Marshal Earl Wavell, "Draft Preface to a proposed Account of the Greek Campaign, 1941," as quoted by Avon, p. 655.

27 Field-Marshal Earl Wavell, G.C.B., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., K.C.B., C.M.G., M.C., "The British Expedition to Greece, 1941," *Army Quarterly*, January 1950, p. 179.

28 Ronald Lewin, *The Chief* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980), p. 64.

29 Lewin, p. 64