

MIDDLE EAST AIR FORCE

THE Middle East sphere of influence covers an area which stretches from Libya in the west to India in the east, and from the Caspian Sea to the southern tips of Mozambique and Madagascar. This vast domain, in which the Middle East Air Force plays a major part in support of British foreign policy, guards the right flank of NATO and is the gateway to the African Continent.

The main focus of my Command is therefore the support of the Baghdad Pact, the maintenance of internal security in British colonies and protected territories and the safeguarding of the air and sea routes which run through the area. To meet these commitments my headquarters, which is located at Episkopi in Cyprus, is supported by two subordinate formations. In the north, A.V.-M. W. J. Crisham, C.B., C.B.E., the Air Officer Commanding Levant, has his headquarters at Nicosia, Cyprus. In the south, A.V.-M. L. F. Sinclair, G.C., C.B., D.S.O., who is Commander of all the British Forces in the Arabian Peninsula, has his headquarters in Aden.

The forces in the northern group include light bomber squadrons capable of carrying nuclear weapons; high-speed photographic reconnaissance aircraft; long-range transport aircraft; and interceptor fighters. The main task of these forces is to support the Baghdad Pact, but they stand ready to operate over any part of the theatre in emergency. They did, of course, play a vital part in the recent Suez operations.

In the south the R.A.F. Commander has a joint air/land headquarters and his forces include fighter/ground attack, transport, and long-range armed reconnaissance aircraft, as well as British Army and local ground forces. The main day-to-day preoccupation is the preservation of internal security in the Aden Protectorates and their protection against external aggression. The area of responsibility includes East Africa and the rich oil-producing region of the Persian Gulf from which comes 20 per cent of the world's oil.

The great area of the Middle East Air Command with its many nations of all sizes and widely differing civilizations imposes diverse responsibilities on the Middle East Air Force, and calls for the utmost flexibility in operation techniques to satisfy the requirements of local police action and limited war in addition to those of all-out global war. Although smaller numerically than a few years ago, the Middle East Air Force is developing into a modern, streamlined, well-balanced force with tremendous hitting power. I am confident that we shall continue to make a major contribution to the defence and stability of what must be one of the most sensitive areas in the world today.



From Air Marshal
Sir Hubert Patch, K.C.B., C.B.E.,
Commander-in-Chief

NOTABLE features of the present Middle East Air Force are the unusualness of its structure and the vastness of the area over which its activities range. Its two centres of command, in Cyprus and in Aden, are separated by the huge distance of the Saudi Arabian peninsula and the countries bordering the Eastern Mediterranean seaboard; its physical links are widely dispersed staging posts; and though at both centres of command there is a similarity about current operations—the maintenance of internal security, in other respects their policies are completely dissimilar.

M.E.A.F. owes its unusual structure to the pressure of post-war political events which have now closed a large portion of the Middle East to British military aircraft. Routes taken from the Mediterranean to the Far East and Aden by Transport Command

Comets and M.E.A.F. Hastings should serve to illustrate this. Comets of No. 216 Sqn. on their schedules to Singapore and Australia fly to Turkey after leaving El Adem, follow the Turkish airways and then turn southwards over Iraq, crossing Kirkuk and Baghdad on their way to land at Bahrain. Hastings of No. 70 Sqn. on their schedules from Nicosia to Aden fly to El Adem and then due south, skirting the Egyptian border with Libya before turning south-eastwards for Asmara. On their return journey they fly direct from Aden to Khartoum, then to El Adem. These roundabout routes, compared with the days when Egypt, Jordan and Israel were still open to R.A.F. aircraft, indicate one of the major problems of M.E.A.F.—the huge “no man’s land” which lies between its two centres of command. The same sort of difficulty faces signals traffic. For example, a signal sent from Bahrain to Cyprus has to travel *via* Malta and the U.K. to reach its destination; and when the A.O.C. Levant, A.V.-M. W. J. Crisham, recently attended ceremonies marking the handing-over of Mafraq airfield to the Iraqi Air Force he had to fly there *via* Turkey instead of the short direct distance from Cyprus.

Thus it can be seen that the Middle East Air Force, whose Commander-in-Chief is Air Marshal Sir Hubert Patch, has an unusual organization with a variety of problems of which not the least are geographical ones; and there would seem to be almost a case for the division of M.E.A.F. into two separate Commands. Air Marshal Patch has his headquarters at Episkopi on Cyprus. (This is the first time in post-war years that H.Q. M.E.A.F., which moved from the Canal Zone in 1954, has been housed together as a single unit; and it is now exclusively a policy and planning headquarters.) One of the C-in-C.’s subordinate commanders, A.V.-M. W. J. Crisham, the A.O.C. Levant (which is so called, rather incongruously, because it has taken over the functions of the former A.H.Q. at Habbaniya) has his headquarters only a few miles away at Nicosia; but the other—A.V.-M.



The M.E.A.F. operational area, showing R.A.F. stations and staging posts, and Khartoum and Asmara where the R.A.F. has landing rights.