

IN EVERY PLACE - The RAF Armoured Cars in the Middle East 1921 - 1953 By Dr Nigel W.M. Warwick

Published by Forces & Corporate Publishing Ltd (ISBN: 978-0-9574725-2-5) and reviewed by Roger Green, Senior Reviewer, U K Defence Forum

This book is the author's second book about the RAF Regiment, far removed from his work as a lecturer at the School of Environmental and Rural Science in Australia. He was appointed the Corps Historian to the RAF Regiment in 2008 and has a consuming interest in the work of the RAF in Iraq and Jordan between the World Wars as well as the World War II campaigns in the Mediterranean, Middle East and South-East Asia.

This tome of 600+ pages is a historical work that will serve as an authoritative reference explaining in great detail all aspects of armoured car operations in the Middle East from the tactical to the highest strategic-political levels involved in their deployment. Also, it provides insights and the views of the crews that operated and supported them. It should be noted that the title refers to RAF armoured cars and not RAF Regiment armoured cars, as the RAF Armoured Car Companies did not become RAF Regiment Squadrons until 1946.

The story of armoured cars goes back to 1914 when Commander Samson of the Royal Navy Air Service was ordered to take his Mobile Air Squadron to Dunkirk there to establish an advanced air base in support of the French Army. He quickly realised that he had to provide a forward and aggressive air defence to support his operations and protect his airfields. Samson first experimented with 'armed motor cars' fitted with Maxim machine guns. These cars were then fitted with steel plates to protect the crews that operated in close co-operation with the aircraft that flew ahead to report on German military movements. So effective were these operations that the Admiralty ordered another '50 to 60' cars to send to France to ensure that 'aerial command' of the region was maintained. At this time, Winston Churchill was the First Lord of the Admiralty and his enthusiasm for this concept ensured that the 'armed motor cars' were developed into 'armoured cars'. So began the concept of air/ground integration and the crucial requirement for the ground defence of air assets that ultimately led to the formation of the RAF Regiment during the Second World War.

Warwick explains the events that subsequently had great importance arising out of the drastic

cuts that were imposed immediately post the First World War. So deep were these cuts and so great was the inter-Service rivalry for what funds were available, that it could have resulted in the nascent RAF being divided and its assets returned to the Navy and Army. However, Churchill, who was by now Secretary of State for War, gave considerable support to the maintenance and support of the RAF. In 1921 the cost of controlling the insurrection that had broken out in Iraq was causing the Cabinet consternation and Churchill was looking for a more effective method of control that would cost less than having large scale Army garrisons stationed in Iraq. Trenchard was invited to submit an RAF proposal and after much inter-Service argument over competing operational methods, Trenchard's bid for the RAF to take sole responsibility for the operation was given the go-ahead. The operation was such an outstanding and rapid success that the Cairo Conference in 1921 adopted the RAF Scheme of Control for control of Palestine, Transjordan and Iraq in support of the League of Nations Mandated territories. The concept of Air Control showed the way for the integrated use of aircraft, armoured cars and locally recruited levies and demonstrated that it was a sound and cost-effective method of policing the tribes and people of these territories. The operation of armoured cars by the RAF was then an established fact and the stories of their deployments form this record of British colonial involvement around the world in the second quarter of the 20th century.

The tasks of RAF armoured cars were many and varied. They protected RAF airfields and vehicle convoys, co-ordinated air/ground operations, patrolled mountains and deserts and other more mundane but no less important tasks. The range of their tactical capabilities expanded rapidly as the scale of their operations increased which meant that they were often called upon to suppress troublesome ethnic and tribal groups, to contain rebellions and invasions. It was these experiences that enabled them to make a major contribution in WW II in preventing Iraq and Syria falling into Axis hands.

Nigel Warwick has assembled a vast amount of first hand evidence from correspondence, official histories and photographs that has enabled him to reconstruct in great detail the deployment and operations of RAF armoured cars with their tactical successes and setbacks. He also provides a history of the technical development of armoured cars from the early Rolls Royces, the short-lived Lancias used in Palestine, the Humbers fighting in the desert campaigns during WW II, to the Crossleys, Fordsons and Alvis-Strausslers deployed to Aden. The deployment to Aden represented the longest continuous period of operations by the RAF of armoured cars from 1928 until 1952.

Although much of the book is taken up with the tactical detail of operations and the stories of the crews involved that will be of undoubted interest to those who have been associated with the RAF Regiment and armoured cars, there is another aspect of no less importance. Warwick has set his narrative in the context of the political imperatives of the day and described the

often-fierce debates at the Cabinet level of British politics that heavily influenced the developments and deployments of this capability. He relates how the strategy and operational policy was developed and how this was put into effect. The extent of Service in-fighting is laid bare when funds were at a premium as well as the entrenched positions that were at times adopted by the other Services to thwart their establishment and deployment. Above all, this book bears witness to the incalculable contribution armoured cars in the service of the RAF made to colonial and WW II operations. This book has recorded that fact for posterity.

This book is well referenced along with a comprehensive array of maps to help the reader follow the various campaigns and operations. It is an inestimable illustrated history that must be regarded as a major if not singular reference work on an area of RAF operations that has never achieved a high public profile. It records the importance of this capability to British overseas policy at critical points in our 20th century national history and to the operational successes of campaigns in which armoured cars were played their part.

Nigel Warwick also wrote *Constant Vigilance: The RAF Regiment in the Burma Campaign* published in 2007.