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The Version of Record of this manuscript has been published and is available in the EUROPEAN REVIEW OF HISTORY: REVUE EUROPÉENE D'HISTOIRE vol. 27, no. 1-2 (6 March 2020), p. 176-198. http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/13507486.2019.1702626

The Free French and British Forces in the Desert War, 1942: The Learning Curve in Interallied Military Cooperation

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At the end of 1941, the 1st Free French Brigade, transported by a mix of French, British and American-made vehicles, undertook the hazardous but eagerly anticipated journey from its base in the Levant to Egypt, to begin its service under British Middle East Command. The Free French were, in fact, joining a multi-national, multi-ethnic, British-led coalition composed of units from Britain, its colonies and self-governing dominions, and, since late 1940, from its European allies – the governments-in-exile and national committees based in London and Cairo. Until now only a few of these small European exile units had actually been sent to the front, representing Britain's first, tentative steps towards interallied cooperation in the desert war. In 1942 the British would increase their use of Allied forces, a move which would be replete with benefits but also challenges. Thus, five months after the Free French joined this coalition, the Axis forces in Libya attacked the British Eighth Army's defensive positions known as the Gazala line. It was the French who held the southern anchor of this line at Bir Hakeim. Captain Edward Tomkins, a British liaison officer, was with them at this strategic position: 'This is where the important part of the French action in Libya took place because… they established, thanks to all the [British] liaison team, proper connections, proper relations with… the neighbouring [British] units, and they formed a properly integrated part of the defensive system'.[1] This was an unprecedented degree of Allied military cooperation, according to Tomkins, as previously foreign armies fighting in concert had 'tended to be much more autonomous'. Comparing Bir Hakeim to the Allied campaign in France in 1940, he pointed out that in 1940 'there was the French army and the British army and they had their own structures and their own lines of communication, [whereas] on this occasion it was an integrated force.'[2] Indeed, accounts from other liaison officers give the

impression that Franco-British cooperation and coordination in 1940 were so inadequate that it almost seems like the two allies were fighting separate wars.[3] Returning to Tomkins, during the Axis siege of Bir Hakeim he was captured and came face to face with General Erwin Rommel. He subsequently spent a year in a prisoner-of-war camp in Italy, before escaping and walking for 81 days to reach Allied forces in southern Italy. The Free French were more fortunate, after a 15-day defence which earned admiration throughout Eighth Army, they succeeded in evacuating 72 per cent of their soldiers from the position on the night of 10-11 June.[4]

Tomkins' testimony raises important questions about the British-led coalition campaign in the desert – a campaign which marked a milestone in the development of interallied cooperation since the debacle of 1940. How does the army of a leading Allied nation integrate foreign soldiers from minor allies, overcoming the differences of language, culture, training, equipment? In the era before the North Atlantic military alliance, ensuring close cooperation between troops of different nationalities could be a complex task. Even when armies shared a common language and close ties, such as between the British and Commonwealth forces in North Africa, cooperation could sometimes be problematic, requiring a degree of learning and compromising from both sides.[5] Similarly, the British-American alliance, which chose North Africa for its first joint ground offensive in late 1942, was not devoid of serious disagreements over strategy and command, even if it was rightly described by General George Marshall, the Chief of Staff of the US Army, as 'the most complete unification of military effort ever achieved by two Allied nations'.[6] Therefore, when we come to allies who are not even familiar with each others' languages and cultures, the scope for difficulties in interallied cooperation is magnified. Yet language was far from the most difficult obstacle. In the absence of a *common doctrine*, the British high command expected Allied units to follow British principles of organisation and operating procedures. This was unsurprising considering the relatively small Allied military contributions in comparison with the British war effort and the fact that Britain was hosting and equipping these Allied forces. However, it was also natural that imposing British norms on foreign soldiers accustomed to different standards could create interallied friction and resentment. Taking the Free French forces in the Libyan campaign as a case study, this article will examine the problems resulting from Allied units serving under British command and how they were resolved. In particular, it will focus on the work of the British military mission to

the Free French forces, known as the Spears Mission after its commander, General Edward Spears. The liaison officers of the Spears Mission represented French needs and problems to the British high command, while also having responsibility for ensuring that the French followed British procedures and orders. Managing Franco-British military relations was not an easy task and sometimes the Mission was the victim of both sides' frustration. Yet, this article will show that despite setbacks, or perhaps because of them, interallied military cooperation gradually improved during the 1942 Libyan campaign, which saw the deployment under British command of two French brigades, a Polish brigade, a Greek brigade and a Czechoslovakian battalion (discussed in another article in this issue by Paul Lenormand). This episode was not unique; other theatres displayed similar learning curves in interallied cooperation. For example, the rushed recruitment of Polish and Czech pilots into the Royal Air Force (RAF) during the battle of Britain in the summer of 1940 posed problems of communication, training and tactics, yet their contribution to that victory was vital: no. 303 Polish Fighter Squadron shot down three times the average RAF squadron score and incurred one third of the average casualties.[7] Nonetheless, the desert war carries particular importance because it acted as a precursor for larger and even more multinational land campaigns in Italy and northwest Europe.

Until recently, the historiography of the British war effort of 1939-45 has lacked research on the interlinked issues of the contribution of non-British forces and the work of interallied liaison. While historians have begun to grapple with the question of Britain's reliance on its empire,[8] there have been few studies of the contribution of European exile forces.[9] Similarly, the historiography of the Free French forces is relatively undeveloped: historians of France during the Second World War have focused much more attention on the Vichy regime and the resistance within France than on the external resistance represented by the Free French movement. The few historians working on the Free French have tended to concentrate on the politics surrounding General Charles de Gaulle, his intelligence service or the motives and personal experiences of Free French soldiers.[10] Recent work has also explored the movement's international networks and activities in Free French territories.[11] There has been even fewer studies of the participation of Free French forces in Allied campaigns before the movement's merger with the formerly Vichy forces of French North Africa in 1943.[12] The existing works on this subject have concentrated on battle narrative and are restricted to a purely French perspective since they have not examined military archives outside of France.[13]

This means that the practical questions of how Free French and other Allied units operated within a British-led army have been left unaddressed.

An outline of Free French-British military cooperation, 1940-1943

On 18 June 1940, two days after the new head of the French government Marshal Philippe Pétain announced that France would negotiate an armistice with Germany, General Charles de Gaulle, a French army officer, made an appeal to France from the BBC in London. He called on those French people who wanted to continue the war to join him in London. This was the beginning of the Free French forces. Winston Churchill, the British Prime Minister since 10 May 1940, gave vigorous support to de Gaulle's project despite scepticism from other members of his war cabinet. Unlike his Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, and the Lord President of the Council (and recent Prime Minister), Neville Chamberlain, Churchill believed that the alliance with France was essential to Britain's survival and eventual victory.[14] Pétain agreed an armistice with Hitler on 22 June, whereby Germany would occupy northern and western France and Pétain's government, based in Vichy, would control the remaining two-fifths of the country and its army would be limited to 100,000 men. Nevertheless, Churchill hoped that the French Empire would continue the war alongside Britain, especially French North Africa with its powerful armed forces. He was confident that de Gaulle was the man who could split the colonies from the metropole. Churchill's enthusiasm was not shared by the chiefs-of-staff of the British armed forces. In July 1940, he dismissed their reservations about French reliability, reminding them: 'It is the settled policy of His Majesty's Government to make good strong French contingents for land, sea and air service'.[15] Thus, British collaboration with de Gaulle took a definite shape with the signing of the agreement of 7 August 1940. In it the British committed to maintaining the French character of his force, to providing equipment and to lending money to finance it. De Gaulle was recognised as the supreme commander of this force but he agreed to follow directives from the British high command and that parts of his force could be put under British command.[16] This agreement gave the Free French the status of ally rather than simply a foreign unit incorporated into the British forces. Around the same time, the British also made a military agreement with the Polish government-in-exile in London, similar agreements were to follow in 1941 with the Czechoslovak, Belgian, Dutch and Norwegian exile forces based in Britain.

Initially, de Gaulle seemed poised to fulfil Churchill's expectations. By late September 1940 several colonies had rallied to his cause, including the French islands in the Pacific, Cameroon and French Equatorial Africa (except Gabon, seized by Gaullists in November). The Free French forces now numbered about 12,200 personnel.[17] Emboldened by this momentum, Churchill and de Gaulle dispatched a Franco-British expedition to Dakar to win over French West Africa. However, the operation failed, damaging Free French credibility. West Africa, North Africa and the rest of the Empire were unmoved by de Gaulle's appeal, preferring to stay loyal to the Vichy government. Consequently, Free French recruitment rapidly declined and Churchill was greatly disappointed. Nonetheless, by the end of 1940 de Gaulle had a substantial territorial base from which he increased his military strength to 35,000 soldiers.[18] This put the Free French in a somewhat stronger position than most of Britain's other allies: the Poles had about the same number of troops at this time but lacked the overseas territory and resources, the Dutch and Belgians on the other hand, possessed colonies but boasted much smaller armies.[19] The Free French thus developed the perception of being an important ally to the British which was exacerbated by two factors. Firstly, until the shock defeat of June 1940 France had been considered a great power and de Gaulle proclaimed it his mission to restore this status and to zealously protect French national interests in the interim. Secondly, owing to the close collaboration that emerged between Churchill and de Gaulle during the summer of 1940 (and despite relations subsequently deteriorating), the latter had the habit of going directly to the Prime Minister when he had a disagreement with the British high command. This behaviour contrasted with the other allies who were usually constrained to go through the normal military and diplomatic channels. Both Free French and British senior officers were aware of this difference of status and were influenced by it. Having said that, de Gaulle's autonomy as 'supreme commander' of the Free French forces was limited by the fact that he was entirely dependent on the British for equipment, logistics and financing and the British never involved him in decision-making about the strategic direction of the war.

What follows is a short summary of the Free French forces' involvement in Allied military campaigns, from the organisation's modest beginnings in 1940 until its fusion with the formerly Vichy forces of French North Africa in 1943.[20] Until 1942 the Free French

contribution was characterised by its small size or the short duration of its involvement (usually lasting one to three months). As a result of French soldiers rallying to the Free French cause in British-controlled Egypt, the 1st *Bataillon d'Infanterie de Marine* (BIM) was formed in August 1940. It was composed of French colonial infantry who had been stationed in Cyprus and others who had escaped from the pro-Vichy forces of the Levant (the French mandates of Syria and Lebanon). Two companies from this unit were attached to the British 7th Armoured Division and participated in the first British offensive against the Italian forces in Libya. They took part in the capture of the strategic port of Tobruk on 21 January 1941. Meanwhile, a small force commanded by General Phillippe Leclerc launched raids into southern Libya from Chad. Moreover, de Gaulle formed a *Brigade Française d'Orient* from the French troops who rallied to his side in Britain, mainly foreign legionnaires. The Brigade played a useful role in the British-led campaign to capture Italian East Africa from February to April 1941. After this victory the Brigade, the 1st BIM and newly raised infantry battalions from Equatorial Africa were assembled into a Free French division in Palestine. Alongside British, Australian, Indian and Czechoslovakian forces, the Free French invaded the pro-Vichy Levant (8 June – 14 July 1941) and won a hard-fought victory over fellow Frenchmen – a victory made more costly by the fact that the British were unable to provide sufficient transport or artillery to their ally. On the plus side, the Free French took possession of all French war material in the Levant and gained 4,100 recruits from the defeated Vichy forces.[21] In the aftermath the Free French forces were reorganised and in January 1942, the 1st Free French Brigade began what became an eleven-month deployment with British forces in Egypt and Libya. During the battle of Gazala (26 May – 15 June 1942), the Brigade became the centre of media attention for its 15-day defence of Bir Hakeim against repeated Italo-German assaults. On the night of 10 June, the Brigade was evacuated from its encircled position. During the summer it was completely re-equipped by the British and in its next engagement, the second battle of El Alamein (23 October – 11 November 1942), it failed to hold the ridge of Himeimat under difficult conditions. The 2nd Free French Brigade joined Eighth Army in April 1942. The unit lacked equipment and was mostly composed of colonial troops from Equatorial Africa, which the British command did not rate highly. The 2nd Brigade also fought at El Alamein, attached to the 50th British Division. Both Brigades were withdrawn from Eighth Army in late 1942 to form 'Force Larminat' which later became the 1st Free French Division. In May 1943, the force joined Eighth Army in Tunisia for the last round of fighting before the surrender of the Axis forces in North Africa. General Leclerc's column advancing through southern Libya also linked up with Eighth Army. By this stage the Vichy

garrison of French North Africa had joined the Allied camp, following the Allied landings in Morocco and Algeria in November 1942. After negotiations during the summer of 1943 between de Gaulle and General Henri Giraud, commanding French North Africa, their respective forces began the difficult process of unifying into one army.

The Free French join British Eighth Army: early problems

Following the agreements signed between Britain and its European allies during 1940-1941, the War Office outlined to senior British officers the principles governing the organisation and employment of Allied forces which were serving with the British army in Britain, notably: 'The organisation of Allied units is based generally on British War Establishments… Each Allied contingent will retain its own national character in respect of personnel, discipline, language, promotion and duties. Regimental colours, national distinctions of rank and badges may be retained… The Commander of each Allied contingent shall be responsible for the organisation, training, administration and discipline of his contingent.'[22] While this directive gave the impression that the idiosyncrasies of the Allied contingents would be respected, on active operations, such as in the Middle East where some Allied units were fighting with British Eighth Army, the reality was different.

By autumn 1941 the bulk of the Free French land forces had been concentrated in the Levant and were eager to participate in the British campaign in Libya. General Georges Catroux, based in Beirut, was the commander-in-chief of Free French forces in the Middle East. Yet much of his time was taken up with governing the Levant. The driving force behind military policy was General Edgard de Larminat, who before the armistice had been the chief-of-staff of the French Middle East theatre of operations. When the Free French later joined British Eighth Army, he became the commander of a small headquarters staff, designated French Forces in the Western Desert. Under his command would fall General Pierre Koenig commanding the 1st Free French Brigade and General Alfred Cazaud, commanding the 2nd Brigade. Animated by the same independent spirit cultivated by de Gaulle, de Larminat often bypassed the Spears Mission and dealt directly with the various British headquarters and departments. Free French senior officers tended to distrust General Spears. He was a veteran of Franco-British military liaison from the Great War and had been a strong advocate of the Free French cause in 1940 but had fallen out with de Gaulle after the Free French-British

conquest of the Levant. Spears was suspected of trying to take advantage of French weakness in order to seize the Levant for Britain. For his part, Spears accused de Gaulle of prioritising the safeguarding of French national interests over the military goal of winning the war.[23]

De Larminat and his staff had developed a distinctively French solution to the challenges of modern warfare which was to become a stumbling block to Free French participation in Eighth Army. Between August and September 1941, de Larminat had convened two meetings of all senior officers in the Levant to decide the future organisation and armaments of their units, based on the study of the lessons of the French defeat of 1940 and of subsequent campaigns involving the Free French forces. A consensus was reached that the Free French forces needed mobility and powerful anti-tank and anti-aircraft defences. The result was the 1st Light Division which had far more firepower than a French heavy division of 1940.[24] In negotiations over the deployment of a Free French force to Libya, British Middle East Command insisted that the Free French adapt the organisation of their 'Light Divisions' so that they corresponded to the nearest British equivalent, the Independent Brigade Group. The British believed the use of the word 'division' was motivated purely by political considerations, as in their opinion it was not justified by the small number of troops.[25] Therefore, to avoid confusion and difficulties both on and off the battlefield, the British wanted the Light Divisions designated, organised and equipped as British independent brigades. For General Koenig the Light Division title was justified, not by its troop strength but by its firepower which was far superior to that of an independent brigade, particularly in regard to the number of heavy anti-tank weapons. Nonetheless, the Free French made some last-minute adjustments to their organisation and accepted to be equipped according to the war establishment of an independent brigade. Unbeknownst to the Free French this was only the start of the British attempt to make the Free French units conform to British army norms.

Before the 1st Free French Brigade's deployment to Libya in early 1942, the British military authorities in Egypt agreed with Koenig a training programme in desert warfare for his officers and non-commissioned officers (NCO).[26] In his memoirs Koenig, a veteran of the Levant campaign, claimed that some aspects of the British method of training Allied armies was condescending. In his opinion, the British instructors (in fact mostly New Zealanders) regarded the Free French as new arrivals in 'their' desert who needed to be guided by the

hand like a 'child'. He admitted that the Free French needed to learn certain procedures that the British had perfected over two years of experience in the desert, such as navigation by day and night and tactical formation for bivouacs. However, according to Koenig, the British went further, giving lectures on the basics of soldiering, such as how to lead a patrol.[27] He concluded that 'our position as pupils… underlined with some cruelty the defeat of France and its diminishment.'[28] Koenig's memoirs are not an entirely reliable source, as shall be shown later, and no negative comments about the British instructors could be found in the accounts of several other Free French officers. Yet a British source does suggest that there was tension. A liaison officer attached to the 1st Brigade criticised the Free French attitude to training, claiming that few officers and no NCOs had sufficient competence in navigation: 'If lectures and courses are given officers stand about and do not really work. This state of affairs will continue until the Army commander issues an order to the French forces stating that every officer must pass an examination and practical test in navigation. No requests and polite hints will have the slightest effect'.[29] When the composition of the 1st Brigade is examined, a possible explanation emerges for why some Free French might have resented British training or simply found it uninteresting. There were five infantry battalions in the Brigade: four were battle-hardened and had experience of desert conditions. The two battalions from the Foreign Legion (and Koenig himself was from the Legion) were at home in the desert since before the war they were based and operated in French North Africa. The 1st BIM also had desert experience, having served previously in Libya and Syria. The 2nd *Bataillon de Marche* had served in Syria while the 1st *Bataillon du Pacifique* was a new unit. Besides the training provided by the British, another method to try to make the French conform to British norms was the attachment of a liaison team from the Spears Mission to the Brigade. The conflict between British expectations and Free French intentions was to grow once the Brigade deployed to the desert with this liaison team, leading to serious consequences later as we shall see.

The role of liaison officers

Liaison officers have, as General Spears pointed out, 'extremely difficult jobs'.[30] In February 1942, Middle East Command defined the liaison officer's first two tasks as assisting 'the Ally to whom they are accredited to understand and to comply with the British military system' and 'to promote understanding and goodwill between the British and the Ally.'[31] These were

easier said than done. Recalling his time as a Free French staff officer responsible for liaising between General de Larminat and Middle East Command, Paul Hucher described a 'wall of incomprehension rising up over the course of a meeting between British generals and my French superiors… and I often had the feeling that both sides were counting on me to explain to the other what they visibly had not understood or did not want to understand'.[32] This incomprehension was not simply a question of language but of different ways of conceptualising a problem deriving from different systems of education and military training. As Hucher pointed out,

> The mental mechanism of an Anglo-Saxon is not the same as that of a French person. Most of the problems relating to tactics in the common work comes from ignorance of this fact. In order to make our point of view understood to a British person, it is necessary to present it to him in the British way, following a process to which he is accustomed to… The mistake of the Frenchman is to believe that in reasoning in his way he is understood. In general he is not. The Englishman very often seeks to understand what we want. He rarely succeeds.[33]

The same problem could be seen in reverse: at the defence of Mechilli in January 1942, de Larminat commanded the 1st Free French Brigade and the Polish Carpathian Brigade. When he explained his plan to General Stanisław Kopański, who had been trained at the French *Ecole de Guerre*, Kopański exclaimed that it was the first time in a year that he received an order he easily understood. The problem, de Larminat believed, was not that the British command were unclear in their instructions but that "each [nationality] has their own tastes and habits. The alphabet can just as easily start at the letter z as at the letter a and what counts is the result".[34] Hucher had thoroughly absorbed this fundamental notion to interallied cooperation thanks to his previous posting: he had spent over a year in Britain, where he had improved his English and experienced the norms and customs of the British army, having commanded a Free French battalion within a British corps at Aldershot. One example of the cultural differences, which could lead to misunderstandings and serious friction was that, according to Hucher, a British soldier considers himself committed once he has given his word while for a Frenchman it is when he has signed a document.[35] Lieutenant-Colonel R. Knox, the chief British liaison officer to the Free French in Cairo, also observed these misunderstandings, complaining after a meeting between Free French and British senior officers: 'several people left the meeting with different ideas on the same subject. Of course,

it was the usual French case of saying "Yes, but" which means no, but which Englishmen think yes means yes.'[36]

Overcoming this mutual incomprehension took many months of working together to become familiar with each other's ways of thinking and operating. As the Spears Mission quickly realised, establishing personal relations between British and French commanders was essential to improving interallied understanding, overturning prejudices and building trust. Knox complained to his counterpart in London about the Francophobia of senior officers at Middle East Command: 'Every time a new senior officer comes into a post in this Headquarters, he has to be carefully educated on Free French matters. Carefully selected French officers have to be brought to him either over drinks, over a meal or in business, and then he realises that a Frenchman can be a good fellow and a good soldier. You have no conception of the prejudice that exists amongst regular soldiers. This prejudice dies quite quickly but it always exists to start with.'[37] This prejudice seems to have stemmed from the rapid collapse of the French army in June 1940 which called into question French fighting qualities in the minds of British generals.[38] Knox was adept at cultivating these personal relationships. For example, in late-1941 he arranged for Koenig to have lunch with the chief of the general staff (CGS), General Arthur Smith and other senior officers: 'This luncheon was a little difficult, as CGS's French is elementary, and Brigadier Temple (Head of GSD) and Brigadier Whiteley (DDO), have not a word. Nevertheless, a personal contact was made and when these officers meet Gen. Koenig, they always stop and talk for a moment.'[39] Koenig later described Smith as one of the most 'efficient' friends of the Free French, an impression echoed by General Spears.[40] More successful was a dinner Knox organised for four Free French officers and five British officers who all spoke French. Colonel Roger Peake, a staff officer responsible for operations, 'sat next to Gen. Koenig and they talked the whole evening.'[41] The importance of personal relationships was vividly illustrated in the case of Colonel Vautrin. He was an experienced French staff officer, who arrived in Cairo in February 1943 to become General de Larminat's new chief of staff. Vautrin had contacts in high places in Britain because he had carried out assignments there for the French general staff from 1939 to 1940.[42] According to Hucher, many doors which had remained closed to the Free French (including de Gaulle), opened for Vautrin: he was able to accelerate the delivery of 600 vehicles to the 1st Free French Division and secure a commitment from the British to use the Division in Tunisia.[43]

The relationships between Free French senior officers and decision-makers in Middle East Command were not the only ones that counted. In the field, a British liaison officer attached to the 2nd Free French Brigade was urged to make ‘continual personal contacts with the officers of British formations… He must then procure the maximum for his Ally, this can only be done by personal visits and correspondence should be avoided.’[44] Even more important still were the relations between the liaison officers themselves and the Free French: since all dealings between the Free French and the various headquarters and departments of the British army were meant to pass through the Spears Mission, the attitude of its chief liaison officer at Middle East Command, Colonel Knox, often determined whether cooperation ran smoothly or not. Knox was the son of a bank director from Belfast in the north of Ireland. After the outbreak of the First World War, he joined the Royal Irish Rifles and served in France, notably spending a year with the French 15 Corps on the frontier with Italy. Except for three years as a bank clerk in Northern Ireland following his demobilisation, Knox spent the interwar period living in France. He re-joined the British army in 1939 and was assigned to the Spears Mission upon its establishment in London in the summer of 1940. Knox acted as a liaison officer at the Free French camp at Camberley, before being transferred to the Cairo section of the Spears Mission in July 1941.[45] Hucher, who knew Knox since his time at Camberley, described him in the following terms:

> In his own way he really liked us, really wanted to help us but the problem is that he always took himself for the mentor charged with guiding our uncertain steps. In military terms, this produces strange results because he is not a career officer (he used to be a merchant on the cote d’Azur before the war).[46]

Hucher complained that Knox had preconceived ideas about how the Free French forces should be organised and equipped which sometimes conflicted with Free French ideas. Therefore, the Spears Mission was sometimes a ‘precious help’ and other times a ‘difficult obstacle to overcome’ in order to reach the official or the department dealing with a matter effecting the Free French.[47] From Knox’s perspective, the goal of the Spears Mission was to ensure that a well-equipped Free French unit joined Eighth Army and saw action against Axis forces, thereby inspiring the resistance in France.[48] In his view, this was most likely to happen if the French conformed to British concepts of desert warfare. He constantly criticised the lack of long-term planning by the Free French command, noting that they were slow to realise the necessity of supplying adequate numbers of ancillary troops (artillery crews,

wireless operators, drivers, mechanics) and artillery regiments to their formations, and that Middle East Command regarded these elements as essential requirements for effective frontline units .[49] In April 1943 Knox advocated the Free French idea of setting up a group headquarters for all their forces fighting with Eighth Army, explaining: 'It is the lack of such a Staff that has been the principal cause of Free French worries and it has been in trying to do their work that I have made myself so unpopular in the past two years.'[50] While Knox might be exaggerating his contribution to Free French staff work, at least two Free French officers noted that there forces had lacked experienced staff officers until Colonel Vautrin's arrival in 1943.[51]

The liaison crisis

The British liaison officer, aside from establishing personal relations and breaking down mental barriers between the Allies, was assigned two main tasks by Middle East Command which illustrated why the role was a delicate one. He was expected 'To assist the Ally to obtain his requirements' but also 'to keep GHQ [General Headquarters] informed of the Ally's progress in training, morale and fitness for war.'[52] This meant that on the one hand a liaison officer helped the Ally and tried to gain their trust, and on the other hand, he reported their activities to his superiors and might even have to directly intervene if the Allied unit violated a British regulation. As Middle East Command pointed out, the liaison officer

> will therefore have to exercise the greatest tact and judgement in all his dealings with the Ally. He must have the military knowledge to enable him to assist the Ally with advice when asked to do so; or on special occasions when he considers it his duty to do so, either in the interests of efficiency or on behalf of the British Command.

Since liaison teams were attached to different Allied units, their success in achieving these tasks varied considerably. For example, the small size of the Czechoslovakian contingent (never numbering more than about 2,000 personnel), meant that the kind of organisational and procedural questions that hindered Franco-British cooperation did not arise for the Czechoslovakians. Nor is there evidence that they resented being supervised by British liaison officers. On the contrary, a Middle East Command censorship summary of soldiers' letters reported that Czechoslovakian writers were delighted that the liaison staff had ensured the delivery of special ration scales which enabled them 'to cook their own national dishes'.[53]

The larger Free French contingent (about 9,000), on the other hand, was recovering from France's humiliating defeat at the hands of Germany, which precipitated the country's fall from major military power to minor ally. They perceived their mission as restoring French military honour and maintaining the traditions of the French army.[54] Therefore, while General de Larminat earnestly wanted the Free French forces under his command to fight with Eighth Army, he did not feel obliged to comply with all British procedures, an attitude reinforced by de Gaulle's behaviour towards the British. This created friction with the British liaison staff charged with integrating the 1st Free French Brigade into Eighth Army. Only one month after the Brigade's deployment to the desert, Knox was already exasperated by de Larminat's nonchalant attitude towards British regulations: 'I am sorry to say that the French have been breaking all the rules, and rather a row has arisen as a result.'[55] He reported three 'crimes' by the Free French. Firstly, on three occasions they ordered up reinforcements from the Levant without informing the headquarters of 13 Corps, Eighth Army or Middle East Command. Secondly, de Larminat used a long-range wireless set to communicate with General Catroux in Beirut, without authorisation. Finally, de Larminat sent five trucks back to Cairo to buy 20,000 oranges and fresh vegetables for his troops and asked that the British forward this by train in future. This happened during the Cyrenaica offensive in which the British were experiencing supply and transport difficulties. The result of these 'crimes', according to Knox, was that General Smith wrote a personal letter to de Larminat 'telling him that he simply must obey the rules, and remember that he is now a Brigade fighting in the British Army, and not somebody's follies.'[56] From de Larminat's perspective, he was acting reasonably under trying circumstances. Firstly, he and others complained about the cumbersome British chain of command. For example, to request material and men from Free French depots in the Levant, de Larminat was expected to send this request through several layers of command – divisional, corps, army and theatre headquarters. Even British Ninth Army, based in Palestine and the Levant, had to be consulted since such convoys would pass through its jurisdiction.[57] The result was unacceptably long delays for receiving reinforcements, as far as Free French commanders were concerned. De Larminat tried to bypass this logjam by communicating directly with the Free French command in Levant. Although it is also worth noting that on occasions Franco-British military cooperation was encumbered by the necessity of *both sides* referring decisions or disagreements back to General de Gaulle and Prime Minister Churchill, their respective political leaders in London.[58] Secondly, de Larminat sent trucks to Cairo to buy vegetables and fruit because he received reports that his Equatorial African troops were starting to fall ill owing to the lack of

fresh vegetables in British rations.[59] It appears that quick action was required in order to avoid a serious diminishment of Free French combat effectiveness.

At the same time, the Free French were becoming equally exasperated with Knox for the reasons outlined above but also because of an alleged indiscretion on his part. They believed he was actively collecting information that showed their forces in a bad light. Two officers claim that he wrote a report entitled 'Iniquities of the French'. De Larminat, who considered Knox a 'spy', asserts that this report recorded the 'wickedness and lack of manners' of the Free French, covering everything 'from murder and rape to holding one's fork in the right hand'.[60] Hucher writes that he was shown this 'unkind' report and other documents by Colonel J. Sherston, the chief liaison officer for all Allied forces in Middle East Command and a 'devout friend' of the Free French forces.[61] Hucher also claims that one of Knox's sources of information were certain Free French officers: in April 1942 he saw a letter on Knox's desk which revealed that an officer named 'de Guillebon' had talked to him at length about the cadres of the 4th *Bataillon de Marche* and that de Guillebon would send him a report. In fact, this unit was creating difficulties for the Free French: a month previously there had been a mutiny, apparently triggered by the soldiers' desire to be granted leave to visit their families in West Africa.[62] De Guillebon probably had no choice but to explain the situation to Knox and possibly ask for help from the Spears Mission. For his part, Hucher believed that Knox's motive was to justify the Mission's existence by demonstrating to his superiors how well he was able to monitor the Free French.[63] Whatever Knox's motives, his report on the 'Iniquities of the French' was not conducive to building trust between the two allies.

The growing tensions between Free French senior officers and the British liaison staff finally erupted into a full-blown crisis in June 1942. Koenig believed that the role of the liaison staff was to help the 1st Brigade get used to the British army's procedures. He informed de Larminat that after six months of service the Brigade had completed its 'apprenticeship' and that the presence of a full liaison staff was no longer justified.[64] He was more explicit with Major Snead-Cox, the senior liaison officer with the 1st Brigade. According to Snead-Cox, Koenig launched into a tirade, accusing the liaison officers of criticising his command. He gave the example of a liaison officer intervening when Colonel Amilakvari was about to burn

some enemy tanks, advising the latter that a divisional order forbade this. Snead-Cox believed the liaison officer was fulfilling his duty as defined by Middle East Command and that this could not be considered as a criticism. Koenig disagreed, declaring it had been a great mistake that the liaison staff had been brought into existence and that 'he could not continue to accept me [Snead-Cox], because any officer of my seniority would have ideas of his own and friction would result.'[65] Koenig insisted that for liaison he needed only one very junior officer to translate British documents into French. There may have been other motives behind Koenig's outburst. Snead-Cox noted that Koenig had been in a 'filthy temper' since the 1st Brigade's difficult evacuation from Bir Hakeim on the night of 10-11 June. Several sources state that Koenig lost his nerve in the final days at Bir Hakeim and that during the evacuation he reached the British lines in his own vehicle hours before his troops did.[66] Consequently, there was significant discontent within the Brigade and Snead-Cox believed Koenig was looking for a scapegoat. While this would explain Koenig's 'sudden change of attitude' towards the liaison staff after having previously complimented their work, Koenig – if his memoirs are to be believed – had already had the impression of being treated like a 'child' since the training given to his Brigade in January 1942.[67] Its seems possible that Koenig had been harbouring some resentment against the British liaison system since that time which finally exploded after Bir Hakeim. Moreover, there was also trouble in the 2nd Free French Brigade and Snead-Cox believed that its commander, General Cazaud, had discussed his complaints about liaison with de Larminat, commander of French Forces in the Western Desert, who had then passed them onto Koenig.

Knox visited the 2nd Brigade, which was guarding Gambut aerodrome in eastern Libya, on 10 June after the senior liaison officer, Major Garrick, reported difficulties with the headquarters staff. The Brigade's chief of staff, Major Boisseau, insisted that the liaison staff were purely interpreters and that they must, without question, follow the orders of General Cazaud. Knox stated that the source of the trouble was that the Free French denied the right of the liaison officers to check or query 'strength returns' – British army forms on which the Brigade declared the number of troops, vehicles and arms it possessed – and demands from the Brigade for food rations, ammunition and other supplies. However, the liaison staff had orders from Middle East Command to ensure that all demands from the Brigade were reasonable and necessary and that strength returns were accurate. The French claimed their staff did not need British supervision for this work but past experience had shown serious

deficiencies in their record-keeping.[68] 'The truth of the matter,' Knox concluded, 'is that the French do not like control and prefer to be able to send in whatever figures they like.'[69] As to Koenig's assertion that the 1st Brigade no longer needed a full liaison team in order to operate effectively under British command, Knox gave three examples from the recent fighting at Bir Hakeim where a full liaison staff was essential. Firstly, the 1st Brigade was attached to the British 7th Armoured Division and the latter demanded a liaison officer contact the Division by telephone at least once every half hour with a situation report. This was needed 24 hours a day requiring two liaison officers for the work. Secondly, the headquarters of 7th Division, 30 Corps and Eighth Army stated that they would not receive Free French officers who were not accompanied by a liaison officer. Finally, one liaison officer was always with French patrols to be the link with the British armoured car unit which was acting as a reconnaissance screen for the French and gave their reports in English. Knox urged his superiors that

> the time has come when the duties of liaison in the field should be laid down in unmistakeable terms and the French informed that the liaison staff is not there entirely for their benefit but to assist the Commander under whose orders they come.[70]

The attitude adopted by both brigades towards their liaison staff made cooperation impossible and required arbitration by Middle East Command to avoid a total breakdown of the liaison system. General Spears advocated a hard-line: the French should be made to realise that it is a 'great privilege' to collaborate with Britain and that other allies would desperately like to receive the equipment that Britain has given to the Free French. The precondition for this 'privileged' collaboration is that the French 'agree to conform to our military system. Those who do not accept this must understand that they are not wanted.'[71] He suggested that the liaison officers be withdrawn because the Free French had badly treated them and then the brigades be withdrawn from Eighth Army until the French reversed their position. Middle East Command opted for a more tactful solution. The brigades did withdraw from Eighth Army but this was to rest, train and refit rather than a punishment. Indeed, Eighth Army invited de Larminat to form a Free French mobile battle group to participate in future operations, 'in recognition of the excellent work done by 1st Free French Group at Bir Hakeim'.[72] The Liaison staff stayed in their posts although personnel changes occurred on both sides. In the 2nd Brigade, the Free French replaced General Cazaud and his chief-of-staff Major Boisseau with Lieutenant-Colonel Eugène Alessandri and Major Georges Baviere

respectively, who were considered more inclined to work smoothly with the British.[73] The Spears Mission removed three liaison officers in July and another three in August. Among them was Captain Dunnolly – previously described by de Larminat to Knox as 'an excellent officer but who had a filthy character and temper' – and Major Snead-Cox.[74] Knox admitted that both these officers were 'frequently tactless'.[75] In July Knox reported that liaison was working much better and that the changing of certain officers on both sides had assisted this. He also credited Colonel Sherston, who was well-regarded by the Free French, for his frank discussion with Koenig and de Larminat about their grievances.[76] It appears that Middle East Command firmly insisted that the French cooperate with the liaison staff in carrying out their duties for the British commander while at the same time reminding the liaison officers of the need for tact in their interactions with French officers.

The learning curve

In the aftermath of the liaison crisis both sides modified their approach to integration. For their part, the Free French softened their resistance to the British army's concepts and methods. For example, when their command decided in July 1942 to form a division, it decided to follow the British model. Hucher observed that

> de Larminat and Koenig had at last understood that in order to fight within the framework of a foreign army, the best is to adopt its organisation pure and simple, which does not exclude certain adjustments, where we can do better on certain points.[77]

While on the British side we see clear change in the revised orders issued to British military missions in September 1942. Still present was the requirement that Allied units comply with the British military system, but gone was the liaison officer's responsibility to give, on special occasions, unsolicited advice to the Ally 'in the interests of efficiency or on behalf of the British Command' – 'advice' which Koenig had perceived as criticism of his command. He was not alone. Evidence from censorship summaries of soldiers' letters suggests that while Polish, Czechoslovakian and Yugoslav units had good relations with their British hosts, frustration with the British liaison system existed within the 1st Greek Brigade. In September 1942, a British NCO with the liaison staff attached to this unit wrote: 'Whether the Greeks eventually go into action remains to be seen, but I hope to hell we are not with them. It has got to a stage now that they think they can do without a Mission'.[78] The Brigade had been under British command for over a year without seeing action and other censorship summaries

indicate that while morale was high, the troops were impatient to fight the German army in Libya.[79] Similar to the Free French situation, the behaviour of some liaison officers seems to have given Greek officers the impression of being tutored, which was naturally frustrating for the Allies, particularly if a liaison officer intervened with 'advice' after an Allied officer had given an order, thereby undermining his authority in front of the troops. To avoid this antagonism the new orders to liaison officers declared:

> It is impossible for harmony to exist if British officers are critical of Allied methods. If any action by the Ally appears to be irregular or not in accordance with British orders, the British officer concerned will NOT point this out to the Ally but will bring it to the notice of the OC section of the BMM under whom he is serving.[80]

This officer will normally bring the irregularity to the attention of the headquarters of the British formation in which the Allied unit is serving and it is the formation commander's responsibility to deal with the matter. In a further bid to preserve the integrity of the liaison system, Major-General Harding, Deputy Chief of Staff at Middle East Command, wrote a letter to British formation commanders confirming that the liaison officer was at the commander's disposal to inform him about the quality of the Allied unit 'but such weaknesses as he may disclose should not be repeated to any Ally as having been reported by the British liaison staff.'[81]

The practical effect of the revised orders was evident in the report for October 1942 of the senior liaison officer attached to the 2nd Free French Brigade. Major Garrick recounted that on several occasions the Brigade commander, Colonel Alessandri, had disobeyed orders from the commander of British 50th Division. The latter thought that it was the senior liaison officer's duty to see that the Division's orders were carried out, but Garrick explained to him that in fact his responsibility was to ensure that the orders were properly understood by Alessandri 'and that he [Garrick] should not attempt to influence any decision by the Brigade Commander'. Yet the 50th Division commander continued to issue rebukes to Garrick when his orders were disobeyed by Alessandri and he expected Garrick to pass them on verbally to Alessandri. Garrick complained: 'This is a thing which no L.O. [liaison officer] with an Allied formation should be asked to do as it prejudices his standing in the eyes of the Ally.' He wrote that serious admonishments must be sent in a signed letter by the commander to Alessandri or if this is not possible the commander or a senior staff officer must come to the

Brigade headquarters and issue the rebuke personally, with perhaps the liaison officer acting as interpreter. Nonetheless, Garrick felt obliged to pass on several rebukes 'as tactfully as possible'. He concluded that the source of the problem was cultural: 'Were the Brigade Commander British, the G.O.C. [General Officer Commanding] would have no hesitation in administering the rebuke himself, and in my opinion it is the innate shyness and embarrassment of an Englishman when confronted by a "foreigner" that prevents him speaking his mind.'[82] In spite of the learning curve, Franco-British military relations were still sometimes bedevilled by cultural differences.

The other role of the Spears Mission: the provision of training and equipment

Writing during the liaison crisis, Knox explained that he was not surprised that the dispute followed French success at Bir Hakeim:

> The French fully realise that they are the little heroes in the eyes of the British army at the present moment and they will not be slow to seize the opportunity to gain advantage for themselves, though this is a short-sighted policy as they little know how little they would have got without the Mission to assist them.[83]

So what had the Spears Mission done for the Free French? Since autumn 1941 the Mission had been concentrating its assistance in two main areas: training and equipment. There was a view in the Free French forces that the only job of the Spears Mission was to obtain material for them.[84] However, aside from providing day-to-day operational liaison between the Free French brigades and British headquarters and neighbouring units (a significant task in itself), the Spears Mission worked hard to address French deficiencies in training. They liaised with the relevant British departments to organise training for the Free French tank company and reconnaissance unit. They identified a shortage of wireless operators in the French brigades and they planned to set up a small Free French signals school under British supervision so that the Free French could learn British methods. This was essential if the Free French were to operate efficiently within British formations. Despite Koenig's initial resistance they succeeded in sending 40 soldiers to be trained by British signals officers in August 1942 and another 40 were trained in September.[85] In fulfilling its training Mission, the liaison staff was often frustrated with the Free French command's attitude to specialist training courses. In Knox's opinion, they viewed them as useful for officers during periods of inactivity but that

they should not 'interfere with any other type of work', resulting regularly in no officers being sent on courses or officers being withdrawn just before the start date.[86]

Turning to equipment, the Free French were continuously frustrated with the long delays in receiving material from the British, especially all-terrain vehicles which were needed to give their units mobility in the desert. For example, by late-1941 the 1st Brigade had received 200 vehicles but the 2nd Brigade was unable to join Eighth Army for months due to the difficulty of obtaining vehicles. Knox was keenly aware of this problem and lobbied hard on behalf of the Free French, urging Middle East Command to at least issue a training scale of various weapons if full allocations could not be made, as 'the fact remains that we as a nation did ask these people to come and fight, and we are under a moral obligation to give them the where-with-all to fight.'[87] There was, as Hucher pointed out, a series of factors beyond the Mission's control which created an equipment shortage *throughout* Eighth Army: the abnormal wear and tear of vehicles in desert conditions, the inability of the repair workshops (despite an enormous effort) to satisfy the Army's needs and the fact that the convoys bringing new material from the United States took six months to arrive in Egypt. The result was that the British army could not even meet its own needs for equipment, which meant the Free French were very far down the list of priorities.[88] Finally, from April 1942 onwards the trickle became a flow: the 2nd Brigade received 110 trucks and deployed to Libya, the tank company was issued nine tanks and the reconnaissance unit obtained 48 armoured cars. Unfortunately, in June the 1st Brigade lost 250 vehicles and 40 75mm cannons at Bir Hakeim and needed to be completely re-equipped by the British. However, according to Hucher, the Free French had obtained an advantage: 'Eighth Army now counted us among its best units'.[89] Certainly, Knox reported the positive impression the Free French defence of Bir Hakeim had left on senior British officers, including the new Eighth Army commander, General Bernard Montgomery, who requested the 1st Brigade for his upcoming offensive.[90] By October, the 1st and 2nd Brigades had been fully equipped and re-joined Eighth Army.

Conclusion

Though the British considered the Free French a minor ally, in comparison with Britain's other European allies they certainly had a more important status. In the Middle East in mid-1942, the British-led coalition included 1,607 Czechoslovakians, 1,906 Yugoslavians, 4,720

Poles and 12,191 Greeks[91] (joined a year later by 8,543 Belgian Congolese[92]). The Free French, in contrast, had 8,945 personnel serving with the British in Libya and Egypt, 23,483 regular and auxiliary troops protecting the Levant in case of a German descent from the Caucasus in southern Russia *and* their own territory in Africa, the Levant, India and the Pacific which ensured a supply of new recruits.[93] This gave the Gaullists some leverage with the British and explains why they were in no rush to abandon French army norms in favour of British ones: they saw themselves as an important ally fighting *together with* – and not *assimilating into* – the British army. The other allies, with less troops and no territory, had little choice but to conform to the British military system. Even when the Poles were able to form a corps of 50,000 men, thanks to Russia evacuating former prisoners-of-war to the Middle East, their total dependence on Britain constrained them to follow British organisation and doctrine.[94] Similarly, the Free French complained about the delay in receiving equipment from the British but the Greeks had an even lower priority, which is why they waited in frustration for over a year, before finally joining 8th Army at the battle of El Alamein.

The impressive integration of the 1st Free French Brigade into the British forces defending the Gazala line, that Tomkins had observed in May 1942, was not achieved without cost. It is clear that the previous six months of Free French participation in Eighth Army had been challenging but also a formative learning experience for both sides that led to changes in their respective approaches to integration. For their part, the Free French softened their resistance to the British army's concepts, acknowledging that a precondition for operating efficiently within a foreign army was to follow its principles of organisation. While on the British side flaws in their conduct of interallied liaison were addressed. The Spears Mission was indisputably right to devote much effort to cultivating personal relations between British and French commanders. Considering the ill-feeling created by the failed Allied campaign in France in 1940, this was essential to improving interallied understanding, overturning prejudices and building trust.[95] The problem lied in the contradiction between the liaison officers' orders to, on the one hand, help the Ally and gain their trust, and on the other hand, to directly intervene if the Allied unit violated a British regulation. This risked placing the liaison officer in the patronising role of 'babysitter', causing resentment among the Allied officers and imperilling the goodwill built up between the liaison team and the Ally. We see a changed attitude in the revised orders issued to British military missions in September 1942,

where Middle East Command acknowledged the limits to integration and the need to respect the Allied commander's executive authority over his unit. In spite of the learning curve, Franco-British military cooperation was still sometimes bedevilled by cultural differences. However, for the most part the Spears Mission succeeded in ensuring effective operational liaison between the Free French and British forces and in responding to French training needs. Ultimately, this experience of fighting a coalition war in the desert was important for the Allied war effort. The lessons that were learnt here helped the Allies when they launched larger multinational operations in Italy and northwest Europe.

Notes

[1] Institut National de l'Audiovisuel, Sir Edward Tomkins, interview by Pierre Haneuse, 25 August 2000, available from https://www.ina.fr/video/CPD04002927/sir-edward-tomkins-video.html (accessed 2 July 2017).
[2] *Ibid*. See also Philpott, "The Benefit of Experience?", 209-226.
[3] See Imperial War Museum, 6938, diary of O. A. Archdale for May-June 1940; Reid, *Last on the List*; 26-7, 29-30, 47; Spears, *Assignment to Catastrophe*, 148, 160; see report by Commandant Vautrin, French liaison officer, in Reynaud, *Au coeur de la melée : 1930-1945*, 551-3 .
[4] Vincent, *Les Forces Françaises Libres en Afrique*, 182.
[5] See Johnston, *The British Commonwealth and Victory*, chapters 14-16.
[6] Quoted in Barr, *Eisenhower's Armies*, 11.
[7] Zamoyski, *The Forgotten Few*, 92.
[8] See for example, Jackson, *The British Empire*; Johnston, *The British Commonwealth and Victory*; Fennell, *Combat and Morale in the North African Campaign*; Fennell, *Fighting the People's War*.
[9] See for example, Zamoyski, *The Forgotten Few*; Brown, *Airmen in Exile*; Conway and Gotovitch (eds.), *Europe in Exile*; Bennett and Latawski (eds.), *Exile Armies*. On foreign integration in the British armed forces, see O'Connor, *Irish Officers in the British Forces,* chapter five; O'Connor and Gutmann, "Under a foreign flag".
[10] See for example, Kersaudy, *Churchill and De Gaulle*, Crémieux-Brilhac, *La France Libre*, Albertelli, *Les services secrets*, Muracciole, *Les Français Libres*, Piketty (ed.), *Français en Résistance*; Bennett, *The RAF's French Foreign Legion, 1940–45*.
[11] See the special issue guest-edited by Charlotte Faucher and Laure Humbert, "Beyond de Gaulle and beyond London".
[12] Recent works have integrated the French into post-1942 Allied campaigns. See, for example, Le Gac, *Vaincre sans gloire* ; Miot, 'Sortir l'armée des ombres. Soldats de l'Empire, combattants de la Libération, armée de la Nation ? La première armée française, du débarquement en Provence à la capitulation allemande (1944-1945)'.
[13] Vincent, *Les Forces Françaises Libres en Afrique*; Comor, *La 13e Demi-Brigade*.
[14] Jenkins, *Churchill*, 600.
[15] National Archives of the United Kingdom (NA), Prime Minister's Office (PREM), 3/43, Churchill to Chiefs-of-Staff, 12 July 1940.
[16] For the terms of the agreement, see NA, Admiralty 116/4270.
[17] Muracciole, *Les Français Libres*, 137, 148.
[18] Clayton, "French Exile Armies 1940–44", 21.
[19] NA, War Cabinet Papers (CAB) 66/14/9, "Report on the Organisation of Allied Naval, Army and Air Contingents", 14 December 1940.
[20] This summary is derived mainly from Vincent, *Les Forces Françaises Libres en Afrique*.
[21] Muracciole, *Les Français Libres*, 148.
[22] NA, War Office (WO) 193/32, C. Lambert to Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, 23 June 1941.
[23] Diego Brosset gives a typical Free French view of Spears in his diary of July 1942, reproduced in Piketty, *Français en résistance*, 236. See also de Larminat, *Chroniques Irreverencieuses*, 217. For Spears's early career, see Spears, *Liaison, 1914*; for his disenchantment with de Gaulle, see Spears, *Fulfilment of a Mission*, 133-7.
[24] Service Historique de la Défense (SHD), GR 4 P 5, "Historique des F.F.L., Tome 4: Operations au Levant", 172-4; Koenig, *Bir-Hakeim*, 125-6.

[25] NA, WO 202/104, "Minutes of a meeting held at GHQ on 24 October 1941".
[26] Archives New Zealand (ANZ), R20108269, "Minutes of a conference held between Lt-Gen Holmes and Gen Koenig… to discuss the Training Policy of the Free French Bde.", 28 December 1941.
[27] Koenig, *Bir-Hakeim*, 120.
[28] Koenig, *Bir-Hakeim*, 124.
[29] NA, WO 201/971, Middle East Command to Eighth Army, 23 May 1942.
[30] Spears, *Fulfilment of a Mission*, 48.
[31] NA, WO 202/104, CGS [Chief of the General Staff, General Arthur Smith] to all British Military Missions, 28 February 1942.
[32] SHD, GR 1 KT 199, "Mémoires du général Hucher", 40.
[33] SHD, GR 1 K 940, box 2, undated note by Paul Hucher, "Souvenir du travail avec les Britanniques" [Recollection of the work with the British].
[34] De Larminat, *Chroniques irreverencieuses*, 337.
[35] *Ibid.*
[36] NA, WO 202/104, Knox to Archdale, 5 November 1941.
[37] NA, WO 202/104, Knox to Archdale, 6 March 1942.
[38] See General John Dill quoted in Bell, *A Certain Eventuality*, 197.
[39] NA, WO 202/104, Knox to Spears, 5 December 1941.
[40] Koenig, *Bir-Hakeim*, 400; Spears, *Fulfilment of a Mission*, 79.
[41] NA, WO 202/104, Knox to Spears, 5 December 1941.
[42] SHD, GR 1 KT 199, "Mémoires du général Hucher", 43. See also NA, WO 202/105, Archdale to Knox, 21 January 1943.
[43] SHD, GR 1 K 940, box 2, undated note by Paul Hucher, "Note sur le passage du Colonel Vautrin à la 1ère Division Française Libre".
[44] NA, WO 202/82, Report for March on liaison with Free French forces, Appendix A, Major M Garrick, "Monthly report by SLO FFF Syria and the Lebanon", 2.
[45] NA, WO 202/104, Knox to Archdale, 6 March 1942. See also https://northernbankwarmemorials.blogspot.co.uk/2013/02/knox-robert-kyle-junior.html (accessed 8 March 2018).
[46] SHD, GR 1 KT 199, "Mémoires du général Hucher", 33.
[47] *Ibid.* See also GR 1 KT 199, undated note by Paul Hucher, "Plan de l'étude des difficultés rencontrées dans le rééquipement de la 1re Brigade".
[48] NA, WO 202/104, Knox to Archdale, 7 May 1942.
[49] NA, WO 202/104, Knox to Archdale, 15 January, 28 January, 5 February 1942, 2 March 1943 and 19 April 1943.
[50] NA, WO 202/104, Knox to Archdale, 19 April 1943.
[51] SHD, GR 1 KT 200, Journal of Lieutenant Brunet de Sairigné, 42; GR 1 KT 199, "Mémoires du général Hucher", p. 43.
[52] NA, WO 202/104, CGS to all British Military Missions, 28 February 1942.
[53] Australian War Memorial, 54 883/2/97, Censorship Summary no. 21 (1-7 April 1942), 13.
[54] SHD, GR 1 KT 199, "Mémoires du général Hucher", 33.
[55] NA, WO 202/104, Knox to Archdale, 5 February 1942.
[56] *Ibid.*
[57] SHD, GR 1 KT 199, Journal of General Hucher, 8.
[58] Hucher was convinced that the Spears Mission's attitude to requests from the Free French command was dependent on whether there was a 'favourable or unfavourable wind blowing through British high politics, in other words the state of relations between Churchill and de Gaulle': SHD, GR 1 KT 199, "Mémoires du général Hucher", 40.
[59] SHD, GR 11 P 6, Lieutenant-Colonel de Roux to General de Larminat, 13 January 1942. Quartermaster General Souques had previously warned de Larminat that British rations were unsuitable for French colonial troops: Archives Nationales, 72AJ/1919, Souques to de Larminat, 11 September 1941.
[60] De Larminat, *Chroniques Irreverencieuses*, 284.
[61] SHD, GR 1 KT 199, Journal of General Hucher, 10; Koenig, *Bir-Hakeim*, 117.
[62] NA, WO 169/3981, "Report on B.M.4", 4 July 1942.
[63] SHD, GR 1 KT 199, Journal of General Hucher, 28.
[64] NA, WO 202/82, Report for June on liaison with Free French forces, Annexure C, Koenig to de Larminat, 14 June 1942.
[65] NA, WO 202/82, Report for June, Annexure B, Snead-Cox to Knox, 14 June 1942.

[66] SHD, GR 1 KT 199, "Mémoires du général Hucher", 41-2; NA, WO 202/104, Knox to Archdale, 17 July 1942.
[67] Koenig, *Bir-Hakeim*, 120.
[68] See NA, WO 202/82, Report for May, Appendices E and F: regarding supply accounting, liaison officer Captain D Fitch remarked that 'the first difficulty that jumps to my mind is the mentality of the Groupe d'Exploitation personnel (described by Lt.Col. Bouton as "illiterate Armenians")'. Moreover, Vincent asserts that the Free French used to deliberately inflate their equipment demands, see Vincent, *Les Forces Françaises Libres en Afrique*, 50.
[69] NA, WO 202/82, Report for June, Annexure A, undated memorandum by Colonel Knox, p. 2.
[70] *Ibid.*
[71] NA, WO 202/82, Report for June, Annexure F, Colonel Sherston, "Notes of a discussion at Beirut on 19 June 1942".
[72] NA, WO 202/82, Report for July, section 1.
[73] NA, WO 202/82, Report for July, Appendix C, "2 Bde. Gp.", 2.
[74] NA, WO 202/82, Report for June, Annexure E, Knox to Spears, 17 June 1942.
[75] NA, WO 202/104, Knox to Archdale, 10 August 1942.
[76] NA, WO 202/82, Report for July, Section VI.
[77] SHD, GR 1 KT 199, "Mémoires du général Hucher", 39.
[78] ANZ, R20111110, Censorship Summary no. 43 (3-9 September 1942), 20.
[79] See ANZ, R20111109, Censorship Summary no. 35 (8-14 July 1942), 28; Censorship Summary no. 46 (23-29 September 1942), 17.
[80] NA, WO 201/1944, "The Technique of Liaison", Appendix B, 2. Emphasis in original.
[81] NA, WO 201/1944, "The Technique of Liaison", Appendix A, General Harding, "Duties of BMMs with Allied Forces", 10 September 1942. Emphasis in original.
[82] NA, WO 202/82, Report for October 1942, Appendix B, Major Garrick, "Report by S.L.O., 2 F. French Bde.", 2.
[83] NA, WO 202/82, Report for June, Annexure E, Knox to Spears, 17 June 1942.
[84] NA, WO 202/104, Knox to Archdale, 2 March 1943.
[85] NA, WO 202/82, Report for August 1942, Appendix I, "Report by Royal Corps of Signals Liaison Officer", 1-2, 6-7 and Report for September 1942, Appendix B, "Monthly Report on F.F. Signals", 2.
[86] NA, WO 202/82, Report for March 1942, section 2. See also reports from April to August 1942.
[87] NA, WO 202/104, Knox to Archdale, 10 December 1941.
[88] SHD, GR 1 KT 199, "Mémoires du général Hucher", 36, 40.
[89] SHD, GR 1 KT 199, "Mémoires du général Hucher", 39.
[90] NA, WO 202/82, Report for September 1942, Appendix C, Colonel Knox, "Note on meeting between Gen Montgomery and Gen de Larminat on 19 Sept 42". See also WO 202/104, Knox to Archdale, 8 June 1942; Koenig, *Bir-Hakeim*, 398-401.
[91] NA, WO 201/2196, cable, "Mideast" to "Trooper", 5 August 1942; WO 201/1579, Captain GF Hatch, Report on the Royal Yugoslav Forces in the Middle East, 19 August 1942; figure for Polish troops calculated from WO 169/3981, Captain Quintin Hogg, Report on the 2nd Polish Carpathian Brigade, 29 June 1942 and WO 201/2196, Major Kirkwood to Colonel Sherston, 29 June 1942, appendix A. The figure excludes 20,000 former POWs newly arrived in Iran from Russia.
[92] NA, WO 201/1954, Major HM Robinson, 211 British Military Mission report for July 1943, appendix D.
[93] NA, WO 201/2196, 'Strengths Free French Units, Egypt and Western Desert', 29 June 1942; figure for the Levant is from WO 202/82, Report for June on liaison with Free French forces, annexure B, 28 June 1942.
[94] NA, WO 201/1395, General Pownall to General Anders, 30 April 1942.
[95] As early as mid-November 1939, Lieutenant Jamet remarked in his diary that 'Anglophobia seems to be almost universal in the French army.' This was followed in late-May by recriminations between British and French generals as the Allied strategy collapsed: Jamet, *Carnets de Déroute*, 44; Jackson, *The Fall of France*, 60-97.

Acknowledgements
I would like to thank Professor Guillaume Piketty for all his advice and help, as well as the anonymous reviewers for their comments on the first draft of this article.

Funding
This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Sklodowska-Curie grant agreement No 703854.

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