



WAVELL - SOLDIER AND STATESMAN

Victoria Schofield

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Archibald Wavell's life and career makes a marvelous subject. Not only did he reach the highest rank (Field Marshal) and become an Earl and Viceroy of India but his character was complex. He joined the Black Watch in 1901. He stood out during the Great War, quickly earning the Military Cross but losing an eye. He was at Versailles in 1918 but between the Wars his career advanced with Brigade and General commands notably in Palestine where he spotted Orde Wingate.

By the outbreak of war he was GOC-in-C Middle East. Early successes against the Italians turned into costly failures in Greece and Crete and Wavell lost the confidence of Churchill; their temperaments differed completely. Wavell was sent to India as C-in-C. After Pearl Harbor Wavell was made Supreme Allied Commander for the SW Pacific and bore responsibility for the humiliating loss of Singapore (he quickly recognized that it could not be held).

Problems in Burma tested Churchill's patience and he was removed from command to be Viceroy and Governor General of India. As civil unrest and demands for independence grew, in 1947 Prime Minister Attlee replaced Wavell with Mountbatten who oversaw Partition. Wavell died in 1950, after a life of huge achievement tempered with many reverses, most of which were not of his making.

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