

Air Ministry News Service

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ABSORPTION OF EASTERN AIR COMMAND

Air Marshal Sir William Welsh, K.C.B., D.S.C., A.F.C., Air Officer Commanding Eastern Air Command, has issued the following message:-

"Eastern Air Command, as such, will shortly cease to exist. Its units will remain intact but will be absorbed by a new and bigger organisation, about which you have heard. The Command has had a short life but a successful one. It was formed for one purpose, together with other forces of Great Britain and the U.S.A. to invade North Africa so that the Mediterranean could be reopened and that bases could be secured for operations against Axis forces on the Continent.

"When we started from England, we were engaged in the biggest amphibian operation ever undertaken, one fraught with danger, and one in which great risks were taken. But it was successful. It was successful because it was boldly carried out and because every man engaged in it had faith in the ultimate result and applied himself to his task.

"Every one of you of all ranks and trades can be proud of what you have done. Although the enemy has not yet been driven off African soil, you have helped to secure a long stretch of coast-line to enable a big army and air force to be built up. You have helped to beat the submarine and defend convoys and ports, and you have shared in the hard work of the First Army. Before you came here, Axis air forces were free to operate in the Western Mediterranean. This you have denied him. The severe losses you have made him suffer in the air have forced him to draw heavily on his already fully extended air force.

"Now, with the great victory of the forces from Egypt and with our original purpose completed, a new phase opens. There is a regrouping of armies and air forces. In the new organisation, you will be serving under commanders of great experience in this type of warfare who will lead you to the final defeat of the Axis in Africa. I want not only to thank you for the help you have given me, and the readiness with which you have answered my many calls, but to congratulate you one and all on the magnificent work you have done. Goodbye and good luck."
