Civil War Americans in Egypt

By

Colonel Joseph P. Engelhardt, USA

The massive demobilization at the end of the American Civil War in 1865 saw huge reductions in the numbers of men in uniform. However, not all veterans were content to return to their civilian professions or to remain in the Regular Army at reduced rank. Some three dozen former Union and Confederate officers found an exotic outlet for their military ambitions in the Army of Ismail Pasha, Khedive of Egypt.

The charismatic Ismail had embarked on a program of modernization through which he hoped to gain autonomy for his impoverished country, which was a part of the Ottoman Empire. To develop skills then lacking in Egypt, he called on a variety of foreigners to participate. The French were preponderant in technical, education, and administrative efforts, while on the military side, Ismail invited the British and Americans to develop his army and lead the extension of Egyptian interests in Africa.

Ismail hired Thaddeus Mott, an ex-colonel in the Union cavalry, to recruit fellow veterans as advisors for the Egyptian Army. Promising a yearly salary of $2,500 in gold, Mott brought to Cairo a cadre of experienced American military men, among them six former generals.

Senior among these was General Charles P. Stone, a West Point graduate who had served in the Army of the Potomac. Stone arrived in 1870 and was appointed Chief of Staff of the Army of the Khedive. Other Americans trained Egyptian staff officers, and also mapped out unexplored areas in Egypt and the Sudan. Charles Chaille-Long, Erastus Purdy, R.E. Colston, W.W. Loring, and Alexander McComb Mason all achieved a degree of international recognition for their work.

Numerous frustrations faced these early advisors, and by the time Ismail's financial irresponsibility led to his deposition in 1879, almost all the American officers had returned home. General Stone, the last to leave, finally departed in 1883.

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U.S. and Egyptian Navies Cooperation for the Future

By

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The size of the Sea Forces Section of OMC, which reflects the relative size of the Egyptian Navy (EN) within the Egyptian defense establishment, consists of a single Navy Commander (O-5). The major challenge to this section is effective coordination and communication over distance.

The EN headquarters, and the vast majority of its fleet, is located at the Ras El Tin Naval Base in Alexandria (a three and one-half hour drive from Cairo). Telephone and facsimile machine communications with this base are unreliable at best and non-existent after about 1000 daily. The logistics problem is further complicated by the fact that the active cases include support for the EN Naval College at Abu Qir, the Harpoon Weapons Station at King Maryut, and the Torpedo Workshop on the south side of Alexandria. All of these sites are at least one hour's drive from Ras El Tin and from each other. Access control for all EN sites is centralized at Ras El Tin security. As an example, this means a trip to King Maryut must be preceded by a trip north to Ras El Tin to clear security, then the one hour drive back south to the Harpoon Weapons Station. Doing business with the EN involves not only the trips to Alexandria to visit the headquarters and the various sites, but visits to the Cairo offices of the Ministry of Defense (MOD) and the Egyptian Armament Authority (EAA), the organization which controls the purse strings.

In addition to the sites mentioned above, the EN controls facilities at Hurghada and Safaga on the Red Sea. The EN also controls the Egyptian Patrol Boat Brigade (the equivalent to the U.S. Coast Guard) and mans the mobile anti-ship missile facilities (SAMLET and OTTOMAT systems) along both the Red Sea and the Mediterranean coasts.

The EN is tasked with the security of Egypt's more than 1200 miles of coastline from infiltration and from attack. The major sea-borne threats are considered to be from submarines of unfriendly neighboring countries or from more distant enemies who are granted port rights by nearby unfriendly countries. The threat of mining of the Suez Canal approaches and of amphibious assault are also considered in Naval defense planning.

The EN has funded cases totaling nearly $1 billion. The major existing programs are (1) upgrade of the Naval College, (2) conversion of many of the systems on the Descubierta frigates to U.S. systems, (3) introduction and support of the Harpoon missile system (air, surface, and submarine launched variants), (4) modernization of the Chinese built Romeo submarines and support, and (5) modernization and improvements to the shipyard at the Naval Base.

Newly funded programs will establish a significant minehunting, minesweeping, and route survey capability, introduce a modern 12 ship coastal surveillance and defense fleet, introduce two Knox frigates to the EN inventory, including attendant weapons systems, and further improve the workshop capability at the Naval Base shipyard. A new, but as yet unfunded program would introduce and supply support for two newly constructed U.S.-built diesel submarines.

The EN has historically received a very small (less than 3%) allocation of the defense budget. The EN's reaction to this state of affairs has been to be more concerned with new equipment acquisition rather than with maintenance and support. It is only because the Knox frigates are leased and the recipient country is required to follow as closely as possible U.S. maintenance practices, that some small amount of progress has recently been made in the areas of

facilities upgrades and equipment follow-on support. In the most recent Five Year Defense Modernization plan, the EN was allocated less than one-half of one percent. The introduction and support of the Knox frigates and the possible new submarine acquisition and support will require a realignment of the defense priorities in favor of the EN.

The completion of the current and introduction of the new programs will result in a much more capable EN which will be more able to successfully cooperate with the U.S. and allied forces, as well as meet its national objectives. This improvement should result in increased stature of the EN in the eyes of the MOD and the EAA, and hopefully, a more realistic level of funding in support of the assigned EN responsibilities. Reasonable funding levels will also mean an improved capability to provide the required follow-on support to ensure that the newly introduced ships continue to properly function throughout their planned lifetime.

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