
U. S. Military Personnel in Egypt: Security Assistance, Then and Now

By

Major Arnold Pleasant, USA

Egypt—the cradle of civilization—where the ancient Pharaohs established a great flourishing kingdom that extended as far north as Syria and south into Nubia (present-day Sudan). The magnificent structures of that kingdom are found in the Pyramids of Giza, the ancient ruins of Luxor, the great temple of Karnak, and the Valley of the Kings. Together with Egypt's lifeblood, the Nile River, these structures remain as a testament of a remarkable civilization.

A notable development of more modern Egyptian history that is not very well known is Egypt's initial military involvement with the United States of America. Dating back to the period following the U.S. Civil war, this U.S.-Egyptian relationship emerged as the first case of security assistance performed by Americans, albeit on a non-government basis.

During the late 1800s, Egypt was engaged in broad economic development and modernization programs, and was widely viewed throughout Europe as a potential economic powerhouse. With the opening of the 103-mile (166-km) long Suez Canal in 1869, and the much shorter trade route it provided from Europe to the Far East, Egypt positioned itself to become a major participant in the expansion of global trade that would mark 20th Century economics.

The end of the U.S. Civil War left the United States with a vast reservoir of highly trained and seasoned staff officers and combat commanders. A number of these American soldiers—both Union as well as Confederate—were unwilling to return to their former professions, and they also had no wish to remain in the Regular Army at reduced rank. The availability of such men at this time coincided with the demand for them in Egypt. Ismail Pasha, the Khedive [i.e., Viceroy] of Egypt, wished to transform the ancient land of the pharaohs into a modern nation. Seeking political and economic autonomy for his impoverished country from the Ottoman Empire, the Khedive looked to the West for assistance. From France he obtained the technical and administrative skills that proved successful in the construction of the Suez Canal. Similarly, the Khedive, who wished to extend Egypt's interests in Africa, turned to Britain and America as a source of military advisors to help in the development of an Egyptian Army.

Among the numerous foreign experts that the Khedive attracted to Egypt was a group of over 30 Americans, including six former generals. Thaddeus Mott, an ex-Colonel in the Union cavalry and the first American soldier to be hired by the Khedive, was tasked to find technical and tactical military experts. General William Tecumseh Sherman, who was then the head of the U.S. Army, recommended to Mott a cadre of former Union and Confederate servicemen to serve as advisors to the Egyptians. Many of the Union soldiers had served in General Sherman's own ranks, and the Confederates were recommended on the basis of their demonstrated merits in battle.

These Union and Confederate soldiers set aside their differences in providing assistance to Egypt. They were more than combat specialists; they were experts in frontier exploration and surveying, and in the building of forts, railroads, and dams. They were logisticians, engineers, skilled navigators, infantrymen, and artillerymen. For providing guidance and instruction in these varying skills, they were promised an annual salary of \$2,500 in gold. Although their assistance to Egypt was provided as quasi-independent military consultants to the Egyptian government,

their close association with the U.S. military is reflective of the relationship and services the U.S. now provides as security assistance throughout the world. Indeed, one might consider their efforts to be an early example, if not the first, of security assistance to allied and friendly governments in support of U.S. foreign policy and national security objectives. It is interesting to note that since 1987, Egypt has received over \$2.1 billion annually in grant military and economic assistance from the U.S. Government.

Heading the American group was General Charles P. Stone, who left the U.S. Army in disgrace following accusations of treason during a minor battle that he lost while serving in the Army of the Potomac. This assignment in Egypt provided him an opportunity to change how history would remember him. Then, there was General William W. Long, a battle-tested soldier of the Mexican and numerous Indian wars with a stellar record, whose subsequent frequent confrontations with General Stonewall Jackson (to whom he had been attached) prevented any further advancement of his career.

Their mission was to train and direct the armies of the Khedive Ismail. These pioneers faced numerous frustrations, particularly since their training and experience had not prepared them to serve as specialists in public relations or in international politics. They had no viable experience in dealing with people of different cultures or different religious backgrounds, and they sometimes found it impossible to communicate American concepts to the Egyptian personnel. By 1879 when the Khedive's financial problems led to his removal from office, most of the American officers had left Egypt. Although their military accomplishments were limited, they made significant contributions to Egyptian education, blazed trails into Central Africa, made numerous geographical and archeological discoveries, mapped thousands of miles of territory, and ultimately improved the infrastructure of this nation as it transitioned into modernity.

The efforts of these Americans served as the beginning of a legacy that still remains more than a century later, with thousands of Americans military advisors carrying knowledge, skill, and imagination to the far reaches of the world. Problems faced by the early U.S. cadre in Egypt still pose some hindrances, but their accomplishments as well as failures have provided us with the blue-prints of lessons learned that we apply to current U.S. security assistance programs.

The Office of Military Cooperation (OMC) located in Cairo, Egypt, is the second largest U.S. Security Assistance Organization in the world. The OMC was fully established in Egypt to help facilitate the peace and military cooperation that was achieved at the historic Camp David talks. In September 1978, U. S. President Jimmy Carter began meetings with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Premier Menahem Begin at Camp David, Maryland, to negotiate an agreement on the framework for peace between Israel and Egypt. Following a series of intensive meetings between the three leaders, the talks culminated on 26 March 1979 with the signing of an Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty that is still in effect today, nearly twenty years later.

The OMC serves as a key player on the Ambassador's country team, directing the sizeable U.S. security assistance and defense cooperation efforts in Egypt. The organization is composed of the following sections: Land Forces, Sea Forces, Aviation, Military Cooperation, Administration and Training. There are 27 U.S. military personnel assigned to the SAO (the level is established by Congress), plus 9 U.S. civilians and 18 Foreign Service Nationals. In addition, all of the U.S. Security Assistance Teams (SATs) working in Egypt fall under the authority of the Chief, OMC (currently, Major General William "Kip" Ward, USA) for unity of effort. OMC's goals are to facilitate the modernization and training of the Egyptian Armed Forces and to coordinate all aspects of military cooperation between Egypt and the United States. Some of the key defense programs are the M1A1 Tank Coproduction, HAWK air defense missile system, AH64A Apache helicopter, F-16 Aircraft, and Perry class Frigates. OMC personnel work hand-in-hand with their Egyptian counterparts thus ensuring complete understanding and cooperation with the program.

Currently, U.S. service members and their families are prepared for overseas travel through education and training to prevent them from encountering the types of problems our early American advisors faced. Security Assistance Management Overseas courses and classes such as Introduction to Security Assistance Organizations, Cross Cultural Communications and Personal Security Awareness are provided to DoD personnel at the Defense Institute of Security Management. This training better prepares service members for the difficult tasks that confront them.

Lastly, a team of four DISAM instructors embarked on a mission in March 1998 to provide security assistance instruction to senior level military officers in the Egyptian Ministry of Defense to give them the tools to better manage their complex Security Assistance programs. This first Security Assistance Management Mobile Education Team to Egypt was composed of Mr. Frank Campanell, Ms. Virginia Caudill, Mr. Greg Sutton, and the author, with classes conducted from 15–26 March 1998. Our goal was to provide a better understanding of the overall Security Assistance process, with an added emphasis in the areas of Security Assistance Organizations, logistics, and finance. This course was so successful that the Egyptian Government requested that DISAM provide this training to their defense personnel every two years, thus enabling the U.S. Government to continue an assistance program that started over a century ago.

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About the Author

Major Arnold Pleasant, USA, served on the DISAM faculty from March 1996 through June 1998 when he was reassigned to student status at the Air Command and Staff College at Maxwell Air Force Base, AL. An assistant professor at the time of his reassignment, Major Pleasant also is a graduate of the Army's Quartermaster Officer's Advanced Course and the Logistic Executive Development Course. In recent years he served as the Commander, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 13th Corps Support Command, Assistant G4, 13th Corps Support Command, and Supply officer, Apache Training Brigade at Fort Hood, Texas. Major Pleasant holds a BS degree in Business from Saint Paul's College, and a Master of Science in Logistics from the Florida Institute of Technology.