

# Lord Wavell

Archibald Percival Wavell, 1st Earl Wavell was a senior officer of the British Army, serving in many conflicts of the British Empire before serving as the Viceroy of India during the most crucial period of the Independence struggle.

This article will give further information about Lord Wavell within the context of the Civil Services Examination

## Early Life of Lord Wavell

Archibald Wavell was born on 5 May 1883 to Archibald Graham Wavell and Lillie Wavell. His initial schooling was at Summer Fields before graduating from Windsor College. Archibald Wavell completed his officer training course at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst after which he was commissioned into the British Army on May 8 1901.

Lord Wavell first saw action as a second lieutenant during the Second Boer War. Following the conclusion of the war in 1902, he served in India until 1909 when he attended the Staff College for further training.

Wavell was working as a staff officer in 1914 when World War I broke out. For his bravery at the Second Battle of Ypres, he won the Victoria Cross.

In March 1918 Wavell was made a temporary brigadier general and returned to Palestine where he served as the brigadier general of the General Staff, part of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force

Post World War I, he was offered many assignments by the British government which kept him busy during the interwar years.

When World War II broke out he was in command of the Middle-Eastern theatre where he played a crucial role in preventing the crucial oil fields of Iraq and Iran from falling into the hands of Axis powers-backed factions.

In January 1943, Wavell was promoted to field marshal and on 22 April he returned to London. On 4 May he had an audience with the King, before departing with Churchill for America, returning on 27 May.

## Viceroy of India

On 15 June 1943, Prime Minister Winston Churchill offered Lord Wavell the position of Viceroy of India, which he accepted. Upon his arrival in India, one of his first actions was to address the disastrous Bengal Famine which had killed millions of Indians.

He did this by ordering the army to distribute relief supply to the rural populations and attempting to increase the supply of rice by reducing its price. The latter action yielded mixed results.

He attempted with mixed success to increase the supplies of rice to reduce the prices. During his reign, Gandhi was leading the Quit India campaign, Mohammad Ali Jinnah was working for an independent state for the Muslims and Subhas Chandra Bose befriended Japan, who was steadily making a push towards the eastern borders of India.

Sympathetic to the Indian Independence Struggle, Lord Wavell convened the Shimla Conference and the Wavell Plan to bring the various factions together in order to set the tone for the future government of independent India. Both failed as the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League could not come to an agreement.

In any case, he received far less support from his government. Winston Churchill did not support him as he was against the idea of Indian Independence and the next Prime Minister Clement Atlee, felt Lord Wavell was making any headway in presenting a solution that was palatable to both the Congress and the League. Eventually, Atlee lost confidence in him and had Lord Wavell replaced with Lord Mountbatten in 1947

## Later Life and Legacy

In 1947 Wavell returned to England and was made High Steward of Colchester. The same year, he was created Earl Wavell and given the additional title of Viscount Keren of Eritrea and Winchester.

He had a great memory for poetry and often quoted it at length

Wavell died on 24 May 1950 after a relapse following abdominal surgery on 5 May. After his death, his body lay in state at the Tower of London where he had been Constable. A military funeral was held on 7 June 1950 with the funeral procession travelling along the Thames from the Tower to Westminster Pier and then to Westminster Abbey for the funeral service

Although as a military commander, he was viewed by some including Winston Churchill as being too cautious and indecisive during the Iraq crisis. But he was still rated highly by the erstwhile rivals he fought against in North Africa, one of them being the German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel.

To a certain extent, it can be said that it was Lord Wavell who did his best among all the Viceroys to preserve India's unity through his attempt to bring together the various factions of the independence movement. But his efforts were too little and too late to prevent the ultimate partition of India.

